

MINUTES OF MEETING
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
Tuesday, February 19, 2019

The Springfield Township Planning Commission (PC) held its monthly meeting on the date noted above. Amanda Helwig, acting chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM with the following members of the commission present: Dave Sands, Mandy Helwig, Angela Murray, Joe Devine, and Michael Bruce. Bob Gutowski, Stacey Blankin, George Schaefer and James Mascaro were unable to attend tonight's meeting. Commissioner Baird Standish and Staff liaison Robert Dunlop represented the Township and Community Planner Julia Detwiler participated on behalf of the MCPC.

Minutes

Minutes of the December 18, 2018 meeting were read. After minor revisions to the text; a motion to approve was made by Angela Murray and seconded by Dave Sands. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote, with Mike Bruce abstaining. Ms. Helwig introduced Mr. Bruce to the PC as the commission's newest member. Mr. Bruce stated that he was pleased to be selected by the BOC to the PC and hoped to use his experience as a professional engineer for the betterment of the community.

Bamboo Control Ordinance

Mr. Dunlop introduced the draft ordinance under consideration for control of bamboo in the Township. Most municipalities in the area have an ordinance that addresses bamboo specifically because of its known ability to spread from property to property and cause a nuisance for homeowners. Ms. Detwiler agreed and stated that the ordinance under consideration was consistent with legislative controls that have been enacted by many other communities in Montgomery County. Mr. Dunlop asked Ms. Detwiler if the definitions provided for bamboo include all possible species that could be encountered. Ms. Detwiler said that the definition was adequate. Ms. Helwig asked if anybody in attendance had a question, or statement regarding the proposed ordinance.

Emily Hunsicker, 1000 Preston Rd., Erdenheim, stated that she lives next to a property with bamboo and wanted to know if the new ordinance would require the homeowner to control its spread. Ms. Detwiler replied that the ordinance requires a homeowner to control bamboo wherever it has been, or will be planted.

Denise Foley, 528 Kingston Rd., Orelan, inquired if existing bamboo was grandfathered. Ms. Detwiler reiterated that all bamboo must be maintained that is now planted. It must be kept at least 20 feet from any road, or sidewalk; and not allowed to encroach on any neighboring property.

Danielle McCormack, 1201 Malinda Rd., Orelan, asked about possible penalties for non-compliance. Mr. Dunlop explained the process from notification of a possible violation to citation to possible fines being imposed by District Court. Mr. Dunlop emphasized that in cases of this type the Township is overwhelmingly interested in removing the violation and not imposing fines.

At the end of the discussion, Ms. Helwig made a motion to recommend that the BOC proceed with enactment of the ordinance. This motion was seconded by Dave Sands and approved unanimously.

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Historic Preservation Ordinance

Ms. Helwig stated that the Historic Preservation Ordinance that had been developed by the Historic Preservation Sub-Committee had been returned from the Township Solicitor's office after a complete review. She stated that she felt that the sub-committee should look at the Solicitor's comments before the PC as a whole examines those comments. After the PC agreed with her point, she made a motion that the ordinance be reviewed by the Historic Preservation sub-committee before the PC looks at it. This motion was seconded by Joe Devine and approved unanimously.

Sandy McBride, former owner of 8400 Montgomery Ave., Wyndmoor asked if the ordinance under consideration would have prevented demolition of her former home. Mr. Dunlop answered that if the ordinance had been enacted before 2018 it is possible that it could have delayed demolition, but only if the house was included on the historic resource inventory. Since the house was built in the 1950's it may not have met the criteria for inclusion – although it might have been if it was considered a notable example of architecture and/or historic construction techniques.

Susan Candrell, 7807 Elm Ave., Wyndmoor inquired if it is known if there are any other historic structures in danger of demolition in the Township. Mr. Dunlop stated that he was not aware of any. Com. Standish replied that the nineteenth-century schoolhouse at 1400 E. Willow Grove Ave. might have been in danger, but it is now being converted into 8 apartments. He believes that the actions of the BOC and Zoning Board were instrumental in preserving the building by allowing an alternate use for the building and property. Ms. Candrell stated that she was glad to hear of this, and thinks that the Historic Preservation Ordinance should include heavy fines on anyone who damages an historic building.

Barbara Morgan, 524 Wyndmoor Ave., Wyndmoor stated that she would like to see more multi-family housing become available in Springfield to provide housing for seniors and other people who no longer wish to maintain a house and yard.

Ms. Helwig noted that Richard Snowden had contacted the PC to let them know that he would be able to get to the meeting at approximately 8:45 PM. Noting the large number of residents here for the discussion of the issue of multi-family conversion of existing dwellings, she wondered if anybody could provide some background on the issue. Com. Standish answered that the BOC had been approached by several residents of Wyndmoor who are worried about the possible sale of some the larger properties that might lead to the older home being demolished to make way for several new homes. They felt strongly that this trend diminishes the neighborhood – Wyndmoor would by this process start to lose part of its charm. So the BOC discussed the issue and directed me to reach out to the PC to see if they had any ideas about how to stop this trend. The BOC also feels strongly that any change to allow multi-family use should not result in an increase in overall density of dwelling units per acre.

Mr. Dunlop extended these remarks by noting that the zoning code already has a section dealing with conversion of dwellings to multi-family use when the existing house is considered to have little economic value as a single-family dwelling. This process for what were known as "white elephants" involves making an application to the Zoning Board for such a conversion. Mr. Dunlop explained that he thought this section might serve a starting point for a discussion of how the zoning code could be changed to provide relief to homeowners that wished to divide large houses into several units rather than selling the property for demolition and subdivision. Mr. Dunlop agreed with Mr. Standish that no increase in housing

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density for any lot under consideration for multi-family conversion should be one of the guiding principles for any change in Township Code in this area.

At 8:50 PM Mr. Snowden arrived and Ms. Helwig turned the floor over to him. Mr. Snowden stated that he had been active as a developer of historic properties in Chestnut Hill for the past 40 years. The first time he was involved in a land development was in opposition to plans to develop the Griffith tract at the southeast corner of Paper Mill Rd and Bethlehem Pike. Various plans including a shopping center were proposed for the property which happened to be adjacent to his grandmother's home on Montgomery Ave. Through many years of plans for the property the final result was an 8 house subdivision surrounded by 18 acres of land preserved by Natural Lands Trust. This first experience has since been reinforced by many others – the only way to control development is to become a developer.

This principle can extend to municipalities also – you will not be able to eliminate development, but rather find ways for the right kind of development to occur. Historic Buildings and properties need to have viable uses connected with them if they are to be preserved and maintained in the future. The Anglecott property at the corner of Evergreen and Stenton Ave is a good example of a property in danger that was maintained by dividing the existing house into 8 dwelling units. Without this conversion the property was going to be slated for demolition, with the construction of new apartment buildings like you find further down Stenton Ave. The St. Martin's section of Chestnut Hill is a great example of how allowing some multi-family conversions had led to the preservation of the old houses and the preservation of the feel and charm of the community. The overall lesson is that if development through preservation is to be possible the Township needs to keep requirements for parking and other development work low in order to make it possible.

Mr. Snowden also wanted it to be made known that the Chestnut Hill Historical Society has an easement program that can offer homeowners money for not subdividing. They also have a façade easement program that will pay property owners to maintain existing historic properties.

Ms. Helwig thanked Mr. Snowden for his remarks and asked if there were any questions for the audience.

Joan Parsons, 37 Hawkswell Circle, Oreland, asked Mr. Snowden if he was here tonight because he wanted to see a change in Township code that impacted a development that he was interested in. Mr. Snowden stated that he was not interested in any properties in Springfield currently. He is still active in Chestnut Hill though, but if the property at the Institutes for Human Potential became available he might look into it because the original house on the property had been built by his great-uncle.

Jennifer Brotman, 228 Plymouth Ave., Oreland voiced her concern over the potential for increased housing density to disrupt the community if any changes are made regarding multi-family dwelling conversions. Com. Standish re-stated his former comments that he believes strongly that any change in this area of Township code should not result in any increases in housing density.

There being no further business on the agenda, or requests to introduce new business, Ms. Murray made a motion to adjourn. This motion was seconded by David Sands and approved unanimously at 9:40 PM.

R. Dunlop