

May 5, 2016
7:00 PM

The regular meeting of the Monroe Township Planning Commission was called to order by Chairperson Nelson. The Pledge of Allegiance was said by all.

ATTENDANCE

Sharon Nelson, Chairperson	Mike Pykosh, Solicitor
Sheldon Brymesser, Vice-Chairman	Mark Bruening, Engineer
Gary Page, Secretary	Holly Wood, Recording Secretary
Dave DeNicholas	
Carl Kuhl	

MINUTES

Chairperson Nelson commented that she felt the minutes were a very good summary of a very long meeting, and hopes to see the same continue into the future.

On the motion of Mr. DeNicholas, and seconded by Mr. Kuhl, and by unanimous vote of the members it was duly RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the April 6, 2016 regular meeting with minor grammatical changes.

CORRESPONDENCE

Chairperson Nelson read a memo from the Board of Supervisors dated April 28, 2016 with regard to reviewing the current Zoning Ordinance to make changes to better manage intensive agricultural uses that may come up in the future.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION - None

Chairperson Nelson announced that they would be moving New Business before Unfinished Business on tonight's agenda to address new business prior to Ms. Kuna's presentation.

NEW BUSINESS

Helen E. Beamer – Final Subdivision Plan (expires 8/2/16)

Eric Diffenbaugh of C.W. Junkins & Associates, Inc. presented the plan as 3 lot subdivision creating 1 existing residential lot, 1 existing commercial lot, and 1 residual 4 acre lot that will be zoned highway commercial. He has received and reviewed Mr. Bruening comments

dated May 4 and has no issues with any of the comments. Mr. Diffenbaugh is requesting a waiver of the stormwater management plan requirement due to the fact that there is no land development planned at this point. He feels that the stormwater management plan would be better completed when development on the residual lot is planned.

Mr. Diffenbaugh questioned if it would be appropriate to request a waiver for the wetland study due to the fact that there is no signs of any wetlands present on the proposed subdivision area. Mr. Bruening said it would be appropriate to request a wetland study waiver when submitting the revised plan.

Mr. Brymesser questioned what the plan would be if an HOP cannot be obtained for access off of Trindle Road, would there be the ability to provide access from Clouser Road? Mr. Diffenbaugh is very confident in getting the HOP for Trindle road access with no issues, sight distance and such are all good, but access from Clouser Road could be a secondary option.

Mr. Kuhl stated that the size of the residential lot seems small. What about the on-lot septic system, is there any issues, and what is the plan if there are issues? Mr. Diffenbaugh stated that the residential lot is small, and there is no known issues with the septic system. There is a plan in place for a replacement system if the need would arise. They are also working on a sewage planning module to address the septic requirements.

On the motion of Mr. Brymesser, and seconded by Mr. Kuhl, and by unanimous vote of the members it was duly RESOLVED to approve the waiver requests as listed on the township engineer's comments dated May 4, 2016, and to approve the wetlands study waiver request to be submitted with the revised plan addressing the township engineer's comments.

On the motion of Mr. Kuhl, and seconded by Mr. DeNicholas, and by unanimous vote of the members it was duly RESOLVED to recommend approval of the Helen E. Beamer Final Subdivision Plan contingent on the township engineer's comments dated May 4, 2016.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Comprehensive Plan Review – Speaker, Mary Kuna of CAEDC

Ms. Kuna handed out information packets to address the question of “What is Economic Development?” According to the International Economic Development Council, Economic Development is a program, group of policies or activity that seeks to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for a community, by creating and/or retaining jobs that facilitate growth and provide a stable tax base. Ms. Kuna's job is to “help bring business to an area and help grow business in the area.” Ms. Kuna stated that they have recently completed their portion of County Comprehensive Plan which focused on Economic Development and business attraction.

CAEDC is focusing on 6 areas for business attraction. Those areas are food-based Agro-business, tourism, health care, manufacturing, transportation and warehousing, and professional services.

CAEDC has tools available to assist municipalities with attracting and planning, and small business prospects with establishing and maintaining businesses in a community. Handouts from some of their resources were provided that give a snapshot of Monroe Township and Site Selection Criteria used by various business types that are looking to develop or expand into any given area. Ms. Kuna also noted the www.cumberlandcountysites.com and www.cumberlandbusiness.com websites as useful tools in helping to move economic development forward.

Ms. Kuna stated that economic gardening is becoming popular with many municipalities. Economic gardening is basically focused on small secondary business establishment on a person's property. With proper enticement and guidance to programs, such as USDA, Small Business Administration and Department of Agriculture, these small business are good for economic growth within an area.

Ms. Kuna explained that grant money is becoming a thing of the past. There is a move in government to be more fiscally responsible when managing tax payer's money, so grants are being replaced with low interest financing options.

Ms. Kuna said that to successfully grow and promote business within a municipality; the municipality must decide what they want, then set their zoning to match.

Chairperson Nelson suggested that Monroe Township create and maintain a webpage, host community events, and continually provide information in the quarterly newsletter to gather information from residents on what they would like to see in the township, as well as provide guidance for those looking to establish a business within the township.

Mr. Kuhl asked where to find businesses that would be interested in expanding, Ms. Kuna referenced the cumberlandcountysites.com as a reference site. Mr. Kuhl then asked if there is anybody "doing it right" with regard to agrobusiness that could share their experiences, the response was that there are no real complete successes yet. Every situation tends to be unique, making a one stop fits all approach not practical.

When asked about Model Ordinance Language, Mr. Stoner stated that the County has some that it can share.

Chairperson Nelson referenced a map that Mr. Brymesser provided with regard to the large amount of working farm land in Monroe Township, and Mr. Bruening asked if there are any Ag Security or Ag Preservation restrictions. Mr. Stoner said that there are restrictions with regard to Ag Preservation, but Ag Security is more open.

Ms. Kuna stated that marketing of agribusinesses can be a challenge, but there is help out there for these small business. She referenced the PA Preferred program as just one of the agencies willing to help with agrobusiness marketing in particular.

Mr. Kuhl asked about attracting professional services to the area. Ms. Kuna said that the office market is pretty stagnant right now. Parking tends to be an issue, especially in the event that there are no public parking lots in the area. Chairperson Nelson asked if agreements with churches and such for parking work. Ms. Kuna and Mr. Stoner both said shared parking agreements are becoming more popular.

Mr. Kuhl asked what are some good zoning practices and how can we put a welcome mat out for new businesses. Mr. Stoner said that loosening up the agricultural and residential zoning requirements would help, and Ms. Kuna suggested running an article in the newspapers or business journal letting people know you are open to talking has shown some success in other areas. Mr. Kuhl expressed that there has been resistance to opening up in the past, and that the township has a history of “beds and barns” that people do not want to let go. It was agreed that mild media attention in the form of the newsletter and survey on what the community wants would be a place to start.

Chairperson Nelson questioned if contacting the operating home businesses within the township would be helpful in defining what the township needs to be more enticing. She also questioned whether a tax incentive or abatement would help. Ms. Kuna said that tax abatement are only used when absolutely necessary. They are complicated and must have the school district on board when established. She would not recommend that as an enticement option.

Mr. Brymesser questioned why “mini malls” seem to fail everywhere. Ms. Kuna stated that retail rent is relatively cheap and leases are normally 2-5 years. Once the lease runs out, and if there is a lack of large anchor store or there is lack of upkeep or such, the retail lessee will just move on to a new location.

Chairperson Nelson asked if internet sales are affecting local business. Ms. Kuna said yes.

Mr. Stoner suggests looking at zoning changes over the years to move some conditional uses to permitted uses. Mr. Pykosh said that conditional use allows for more township control to limit worst case scenarios. Mr. Stoner noted that the township will give up some control if making the move to adding conditional uses to permitted uses in the zoning ordinance. Mr. Kuhl stated he would like to see invitation and allow diversification while protecting.

Chairperson Nelson asked about start-up assistance. Ms. Kuna said there is assistance available for the purchase of land and construction in the form of low interest financing, but nothing for straight out capital money. Mr. Bruening asked if there is money available for utility extension, and again Ms. Kuna said yes, in the form of financing.

Mr. DeNicholas stated that he feels the township should focus on value-added agrobusiness and home businesses for now. He feels we should maximize what we have now in the areas of small and home-based businesses. Mr. DeNicholas feels success breeds success, if we can get a few successful small or home-based businesses to come forward, more will follow.

Mr. Page shared his experiences with his wife's home-based chiropractic business, both in Monroe Township and in another township. He stated that Monroe has been a lot easier and friendlier to work with than the previous township and that is one of the reasons they moved here. He is not sure his wife would want to share a lot because of the bad experience they had in another municipality; but if she could see that this kind of business is welcome here, she would surely share her success and promote the idea.

Chairperson Nelson offered to assist with updating the township website to include links and such for those people interested in bringing a business to Monroe Township. She also noted that when looking at some of the resources made available by CAEDC, she noticed that Monroe Township is much smaller, population wise, than a lot of its neighbors. However when you compare businesses within municipalities of similar population size, we are right in line.

Mr. Brymesser expressed that he feels the problems of growing our small and home-based businesses could be bigger than just our little community. There are state regulations and such that must be meant as well. Monroe's changes may not be enough. Mr. Pykosh said he has a client that has an internet based home business making and shipping fudge. His client is required to have a Department of Health inspection, and even though the state requirements are out of our hand, we can point people in the right direction.

Mr. Kuhl volunteered to draft a newsletter article/survey idea for both farm-based and home-based businesses. Chairperson Nelson will contact the PA Preferred program to set up a speaker for the July meeting

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION - None

STAFF COMMENTS

Mr. Kuhl asked Mr. Stoner to give a brief update on the Leidigh Bridge replacement project. Mr. Stoner said that the project has been awarded and work is scheduled to begin around June 15 due to stream restriction and be finalized by September 30 when another stream restriction begins. Unfortunately, the cost is a little higher than they had hoped for, but with the amount of work available right now the higher cost was to be expected.

Chairperson Nelson read a brief passage from The Journal of Joshua Gilpin from 1809 documenting his travels across Pennsylvania, in his passage he described his trip through Monroe Township noting the beauty and abundance of the farm land and its rich soils.

Mr. Kuhl made mention of the loss of a pre-1800 home that was part of the original Trindle Farms due to disrepair. Discussion ensued on preservation and incentives to save these historic structures. Mr. Pykosh questioned whether it is fair to tell these such property owners what they can and cannot do with these properties, especially in the event the property is in disrepair. Mr. Kuhl asked if there is a way to be more aware of such properties in the township. Chairperson Nelson said that may be a question for next month's speakers from the PA Historical Museum Commission.

ADJOURN

On the motion of Mr. Kuhl, and seconded by Mr. DeNicholas, and by unanimous vote of the members it was duly RESOLVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Holly S. Wood
Administrative Assistant