

April 6, 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	Karen Lowery, Secretary
Dave DeNicholas	
Carl Kuhl	

MINUTES

On the motion of Mr. DeNicholas, and seconded by Mr. Page, and by unanimous vote of the members it was duly RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the March 2, 2016 regular meeting.

CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Stoner had provided a map of the Agriculture Security Areas and Agricultural Easements within Monroe Township.

Mr. Kuhl had provided a handout of the 17 Disappearing Middle Class Jobs. He stated this can be reviewed next month when businesses are discussed. Mr. Page asked what new jobs will be coming.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION - None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Lamar Ruppert Poultry Operation – Land Development Plan

Bert Nye with Red Barn Consulting was present along with Lamar Ruppert. Mr. Nye stated that this would be a broiler poultry operation. Bell and Evans would own the birds and Mr. Ruppert would take care of the birds. The barns would be 63' x 500', which is a standard size for Bell and Evans operation, and would have a concrete floor. The barn has an automatic ventilation system and is temperature controlled. The exhaust fans would be located at the north side of the facility to take advantage of the prevailing winds and keep away from the neighbors. The closest neighbors to the north would be about 1,000 feet away. Neighbors are closer on the west side, 300 – 400 feet away, but there is a visual barrier of trees and vegetation. The truck traffic on Stoner Road would average to be 1 truck per day. There would be 36,000 birds in the barn during a flock cycle of 6 weeks. When the birds are removed at the end of the 6 week cycle

there would be 2 to 3 weeks that there would be no birds in the barn to allow for cleaning and applying the manure to the fields. Mr. Nye explained that the requirements for a commercial nutrient management plan are 2.0 animals per acre and Mr. Ruppert will be under the threshold of a commercial operation.

Mr. Kuhl asked if the land is owned by Mr. Ruppert or leased. Mr. Nye said the Mr. Ruppert owns 145 acres and has farmed the leased land for the past 28 years. Mr. Pykosh clarified that if the leased land was not in the picture and we were just focusing on Mr. Ruppert's owned land, he would still fall within the range to not need a Nutrient Management Plan. Mr. Nye provided the calculations and stated that he would fall below the requirements. He classifies this as a General Agriculture Operation because it falls below all of the thresholds.

Mr. Nye said that poultry operations are allowing the next generation of farmers to keep the family farms. Two poultry barns is equivalent to a part time job. Adding a 3rd barn allows them to stay on the farm. The overall plan is for 3 barns, so that Mr. Ruppert does not go through this process again. Bell and Evans starts the process with 2 barns to make sure everything goes well and usually within a year they will build the 3rd barn. The overall operation can be maintained from the front of the barns on the gravel pad that will be installed. He added that if there are mortalities they will be placed in a compost facility with saw dust and manure to decompose.

Mr. Kuhl asked if there is a written agreement for the rental properties for compliance. This could be a burden of proof for the property owner. And would there be notifications to threshold changes to the county or township? Mr. Nye said that the farmer must notify the proper offices if there are any changes. The conservation district has been performing inspections and enforcing the rules. Mr. Ruppert is willing to keep the township updated.

Mr. Brymesser said that a majority of the time farms are leased under a written contract and if a farmer anticipates losing acreage they will search for other ground.

Mr. DeNicholas asked where the rental property is located. Mr. Nye showed this on the map. Mr. DeNicholas asked where the steers are located. Mr. Ruppert said that there are 50 steers at the home farm.

Mr. Kuhl asked if Mr. Ruppert anticipates any nuisance or noise complaints with his proximity to development. Mr. Ruppert doesn't expect any complaints. They have been farming this at this location for almost 30 years and the neighbors seem to be used to the cows and the country smell. He stated he has also applied chicken manure in the past.

Mr. Pykosh asked if the land was in agriculture security. Mr. Ruppert said they are in agriculture security, but not agricultural preservation.

Mr. DeNicholas asked if there is enough land to spread the manure. Mr. Ruppert said he has enough acres to apply the manure. Mr. Nye said that there would be no problem getting rid of the manure if he couldn't spread it, mulch companies are always looking for chicken manure.

Mr. DeNicholas asked what happens during the winter months when you can't spread the manure. Mr. Ruppert said it would be stock piled.

Mr. Kuhl asked how much the trucks would weigh. He is concerned that there could be damage to the edge of the road when going into the dirt/stone driveway. Mr. Ruppert was willing to pave the end of the driveway to meet up with the road to help eliminate damage. Mr. Bruening will send the specs to Mr. Nye about this matter and it will need to be shown on the plan.

Mr. Kehoe said that in some states the trucks hauling poultry are required to be cleaned and sanitized after delivery, he would like to know if this will be required. Mr. Nye said this is called bio-security so that diseases aren't carried from one farm to another. Mr. Swartz from the Penn State Agriculture Extension office said that this is not a law or state requirement.

Mr. Kehoe said the Manure Management Plan shows no winter application, but it was mentioned that they could apply the manure. Mr. Nye said the Manure Management Plan is not necessary, but both options are in there to be safe. Mr. Kehoe asked if the manure would be stockpiled in the field. Mr. Ruppert said it would be stockpiled if it couldn't be applied to the land.

Mr. Kehoe asked if the Township is required to notify residents in the area. Mr. Pykosh said there is no requirement to notify residents. Mr. Ruppert said he has talked to a few neighbors about the poultry operation.

Mr. Kehoe mentioned the waste plan is below the threshold, is there some type of enforcement for over applying waste. Mr. Swartz said the plan is rewritten every 3 years, soil tests are needed to show phosphorus levels from manure application.

Mr. Nye explained that the storm water would be contained with an infiltration basin. There will not be any gutters on the barns. There will be a rock splash pad, to swales, to the infiltration basin to hold the rain water. There will be no increase in any storm water to the north.

Mr. Bruening reviewed all of the items on his plan review letter dated April 1, 2016. Mr. Nye was in agreeance with all of the items. He added that most of the comments have already been addressed. He will add the paving of the end of the driveway and will add more detail regarding the basin discharge pipe and riser pipes being encased in concrete.

Mr. DeNicholas asked if there is a concern with air borne diseases. Mr. Nye said operating a clean facility will be the largest management of diseases. Mr. Kuhl asked if residents with chickens were at risk and what the distance would be. Mr. Nye said that the poultry operation is a controlled environment and they would be more likely to be contaminated. Mr. Swartz added that if the avian flu would happen there is a 5 mile quarantine area. The poultry

would be killed on site to limit the spread of the disease. Mr. Ruppert added that Bell and Evans has an emergency plan in place, if needed.

On the motion of Mr. Brymesser, and seconded by Mr. DeNicholas, and by unanimous vote of the members it was duly RESOLVED to recommend that the 7 waivers requested and listed in Mr. Broening's plan review dated April 1, 2016 be approved.

On the motion of Mr. Brymesser, and seconded by Ms. Nelson, and by unanimous vote of the members it was duly RESOLVED to recommend approval to the Board of Supervisors contingent upon all outstanding issues being addressed.

Comprehensive Plan Review – David Swartz Speaker

David Swartz with the Penn State Agriculture and Science, Cumberland County Extension Office, was present to discuss the counties agriculture situation and then relate it to Monroe Township.

Mr. Swartz said there are 1,400 farms in Cumberland County, 154,000 acres in agriculture production and a value of the production was \$200 million. There are 3 food system services: production, processing and retail. There are a lot of processors in the county.

Mr. Swartz said that of the 1,400 farms, only about a quarter of the farms make over \$100,000 in sales. Most farms have sales around \$10,000. There are 500 to 600 farms that make a living off of the sales. And of the top food production counties in the state, Cumberland is listed at #8. In the previous Comprehensive Plan Cumberland County was listed at #10. This proves that even with the increasing population and expanding developments along the interstates, the agriculture sector is still growing. There is nowhere else in the U.S. like this. Cumberland County and Monroe Township have some of the best soils. Mr. Swartz provided a list of soil types in Pennsylvania. Soil type 1 has the most potential for growing good crops. Why has Monroe Township been primarily agriculture in scope and why have the farmers thrived here, it's mainly because of the natural resources and tremendous world class soils and this should not be taken for granted in the Comprehensive Plan. He added that the Penn State did an economic analysis of all the industries of the county and CAEDC wrote a strategic plan based on the information and voted to make food processing the number 1 industry to attract to the county. Mr. Swartz provided a copy of an article from the Central PA Business Journal about the work CAEDC has done. He feels this article would be help with reviewing Monroe's Comprehensive Plan.

As a final thought, Mr. Swartz said that in the production operation we have farms that continue to grow large and produce commodity products at basically world prices. The Brymesser farm produces milk and the price they receive is based on how much milk supply there is in the world. The poultry farm that was presented tonight is the same type of business. The other side of production is the locally produced food that goes from the farm to the consumer with minimal processing. Both sides of the food production in Monroe Township are very well balanced. The base of the agriculture in the township is very much updated and ready

to move forward for future economic growth. Based on the tremendous soils and industry structure there is a very bright future to emphasis for the local economy.

Mr. Kuhl asked if Cumberland County farmers can compete with the mid-west farmers based on labor and taxes. Mr. Swartz said not in every commodity, but in many we are competitive. He added that many wonder why we have all of these major food processors in Central PA. Initially it was the natural resources that brought industry, but today because of the transportation infrastructure we feed the east coast. Within a 12 hour drive of Central PA food can be put in front of half the U.S. population. We do have higher taxes and because of climate we have to build more expensive barns.

Mr. Kuhl said going forward will we be able to stay competitive with family farms being bought out, bigger tractors and higher speeds. Mr. Swartz reflected back to his comments of where agriculture is going these days. There are smaller operations that are billing direct to the consumer. Because they cut out the middle man they charge a higher price and are able to make a living on less volume, which is perfect for this kind of area.

Mr. DeNicholas asked what crops do well here. Mr. Swartz said the major product produced in Cumberland County is dairy, but we increase yearly the amount of small vegetable and fruits that are grown, such as strawberries, tomatoes, peppers and other vegetables.

Mr. Kuhl said without sounding negative, he knows there is a concern with corn/soybean farmers versus black plastic farmers in regards to erosion and runoff. Is black plastic farming detrimental to the soil? Mr. Swartz in order to improve soil quality and health many farmers have gone to a no till production. The soils are not disturbed when planting takes place which allows the top of the soil to become nutrient rich. Vegetable farmers still plow, but they are transitioning to no till farming. Mr. Kuhl asked if the reboot will push us into no till farming. Mr. Swartz said it already has. Many feel EPA is using models to tell us if we are polluting the bay, they are not out testing the water. The models are not giving credit to the agriculture community for the no till work that is being done. Mr. Kehoe asked if the state has looked at the economic model of farming as it is today, if the pressure of the Chesapeake Bay compliance fall upon it what would happen with the cost of compliance? Mr. Swartz said there is active data gathering of the practices being done by farmers and this is being evaluated by a 3rd party company to then take back to Washington.

Mr. Kuhl asked if there is a concern in the future about the number of animals versus crops. Mr. Swartz said Cumberland County and Monroe Township are nowhere near approaching that scenario, so it's not a concern.

Mr. Kuhl asked if we should try to have buffers near the Yellow Breeches. Mr. Swartz said that concern has already been addressed at the state level.

Mr. Kuhl asked if there is anything else we can do to protect our farmers. Mr. Swartz said Monroe allows agriculture security areas, which is a great help by somewhat shielding farmers from certain things. Monroe has 10 – 12% in agriculture preservation at this time. As a

result of that, there is designated open space dedicated to agriculture production. Cumberland County is interested in preserving farms that are connected to other farms to build blocks and help keep the high quality soils. Understanding the trends in food production is very important, so making sure the zoning rules allows for processing items produced on the farm.

Mr. Brymesser said being a lifetime farmer there have been tremendous strides made in conservation. He added that they sold their plow 6 years ago, now using no till or minimum till procedures to keep the soil there. Farmers who want to apply for any subsidy must go to the FSA planning committee that reviews every acre, buffers must be met. He mentioned the nutrient plan and that they analysis every field by doing soil testing and keeping records of where and when manure is applied. They try not to apply more nutrients than what the crop will use to help eliminate any nutrients being washed away into the Chesapeake Bay, which is a good situation for the farmer and the Chesapeake Bay. He also feels the government has failed by not updating their standards of how much nutrient is being used by the crop versus the amount of yield coming off of the field. Crops yielding more bushels are drawing more nutrients than what is to be applied. Mr. Swartz agreed and said that last year Pennsylvania set a new record in corn production, the last 2 years the nation set a new record in corn production and last year the nation set a new record in soy bean production.

The Board thanked Mr. Swartz for attending the meeting.

Ms. Nelson stated that next month Mary Kuna from the Cumberland Area Economic Development Committee will be joining us to discuss business and economics, which will tie into what was discussed tonight. She has learned somethings about the way she thinks about agriculture and it is a business. As we look at ways to make the township friendlier for business, the agricultural community is the primary business we need to serve.

Mr. Brymesser added that the farming in Monroe Township, or in the world, there is a gold mine with farming since it is renewable year after year because they can produce a new economy every year, unlike, for example, oil wells that run dry.

Ms. Nelson added that we may need to expand business opportunities that farmers are permitted to have on their land to expand their source of income.

NEW BUSINESS - None

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Mr. Kehoe thanked the Board for indulging his questions.

STAFF COMMENTS

Mr. Kuhl stated that Holly Wood has been offered a full-time position and will start taking the minutes for the Planning Commission in May. Mr. Kehoe added that there would be a level of interchangeability to help take the pressure off.

ADJOURN

On the motion of Mr. DeNicholas, and seconded by Mr. Kuhl, and by unanimous vote of the members it was duly RESOLVED to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen M. Lowery
Administrative Assistant