

FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes – Nov. 20, 2024

Commissioners in attendance:

Dennis Robinson, Dale Graves, Eric Miller, JR Crushong, Gary Deardorff, Jed Fetter, James McDannell, Kathleen Reilly

Others in attendance:

Dominic Picarelli, KPI Technology, Lynda Beckwith, PMCA

CALL TO ORDER

- Meeting called to order by Dennis Robinson, Chairman, at 7:00pm.

APPROVAL OF OCTOBER MINUTES

- **MOTION to *APPROVE October 2024 minutes*, by Jim McDannell, seconded by JR Crushong.**
 - **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

SKETCH PLANS

- None

PLANS

465 Ragged Edge – Sewage Planning Module

- The Planning Commission reviewed a sewage planning module for a property at **465E Ragged Edge Road** involving a proposed subdivision to split the property into two parcels. The module pertained to establishing a primary and backup septic system for a potential new dwelling on the subdivided land.
1. **Purpose of the Module:**
 - The sewage planning module exemption was presented, indicating that primary and backup septic areas had been tested and confirmed suitable. This exemption avoided the need for a full planning module process.
 - The module was associated with a proposed new single-family dwelling as part of a subdivision, rather than merely adding to an existing structure.
 2. **Testing Requirements:**
 - Members questioned why additional testing was necessary given the existing septic system on the property. It was explained that for subdivisions, state regulations require both a primary and backup septic area to be verified for each lot, even if an existing system is in use.
 3. **Existing Septic Systems:**

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- It was noted that the property already had a septic system in place, including one for a trailer. However, members were unsure if the system for the trailer had been permitted at the time of installation.
- The discussion highlighted the challenge of verifying older septic systems and how lack of documentation often necessitates retesting to comply with current standards.

4. Historical Context and Property Use:

- The property, described as an older farmhouse, likely had a septic system installed many decades ago under different regulatory standards. This raised the likelihood that current permitting requirements would mandate retesting to ensure compliance.

5. Procedural Clarification:

- The non-building waiver, which restricts development until proper systems are in place, was also addressed. Members clarified the distinction between a waiver (prohibiting building) and the exemption (ensuring existing conditions meet requirements).

- **MOTION:** The Planning Commission **RECOMMENDS APPROVAL** of the sewage planning module, by Eric Miller, seconded by Gary Deardorff.
 - **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

2408 Chambersburg Road – Conditional Use – Solar Energy Facility

- The Planning Commission reviewed a conditional use application for a solar energy system proposed on agricultural (AG) zoned land. The applicant presented revised plans following a prior meeting where concerns had been raised regarding setbacks and compliance with zoning ordinances.

1. Project Overview:

- The solar array was relocated to comply with setback requirements, particularly along the western property line adjacent to railroad tracks.
- The plan includes grading, stormwater management, and a landscaping buffer in compliance with township codes. The buffer was shown on the submitted plans.

2. Site Features:

- The solar facility will utilize an existing gravel driveway off Lincoln Highway, which will be widened and paved to meet code requirements.
- Stormwater management facilities include four low-lying areas designed to handle runoff, with calculations accounting for impervious surfaces from the solar panels.

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3. Landscaping and Buffering:

- A landscape plan was presented, including vegetation to screen the array from nearby properties, Seven Stars Road, and residences.
- The applicant noted that the buffer aligns with code requirements and considers input from neighboring property owners.

4. Wetland Considerations:

- A wetland crossing on the property was identified, requiring permitting. The applicant expressed confidence that this would not impede project approval.

5. Regulatory Compliance:

- The application referenced the township's solar energy ordinance (adopted in 2021), which allows primary solar systems by conditional use in AG zones.
- Township officials clarified that compliance with current regulations, not proposed future zoning updates, governs the review.

6. Concerns About Enforcement:

- Members raised concerns about ensuring all conditions of approval, such as landscaping and stormwater facilities, are implemented before the project becomes operational.
- Financial security and bonding requirements were discussed as mechanisms to enforce compliance. The applicant assured the Commission that no electricity generation would begin without final inspections and certificates of use.

7. Slope and Grading Adjustments:

- The ordinance limits solar panels on slopes greater than 15%. The applicant committed to submitting a detailed survey to confirm grading compliance, calculating affected areas as impervious for stormwater purposes.

8. Electricity Generation and Distribution:

- The applicant explained that the electricity generated would feed into the local grid. Members acknowledged that while the township cannot ensure local use of the energy, it is typically consumed near its generation point.
- Renewable energy credits from the project will be purchased by external entities, such as the City of Philadelphia.

9. Broader Zoning Context:

- The Commission debated the implications of approving this project, given ongoing discussions about revising zoning rules to limit solar arrays in AG zones. Some members expressed concern about setting precedents that might conflict with future zoning changes.

10. Next Steps and Timeline:

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- The conditional use hearing is scheduled for January 6th, 2024. The Planning Commission must finalize its recommendation before this date.
- Members acknowledged they could table the decision to the next meeting (December 18th) to allow further review. However, a motion was made and passed to recommend approval of the conditional use application.
- The discussion highlighted the tension between approving a project under existing regulations and anticipating potential future zoning conflicts. While concerns about enforcement and compliance were addressed, the applicant's adherence to current rules led to the Commission's recommendation for approval.
- **MOTION: The Planning Commission *RECOMMENDS APPROVAL* of a conditional use for the Solar Energy Facility, by Jed Fetter, seconded by Gary Deardorff.**
 - **MOTION APPROVED by a 6-1 vote.**

OLD BUSINESS

- None

NEW BUSINESS

- None

GUESTS

ADJOURN

- Meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm by Dennis Robinson, Chairman.