

PALMER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC MEETING - TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2021 - 7:00 PM
PALMER TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL MEETING ROOM, 3 WELLER PLACE (LOWER
LEVEL), PALMER PA 18045

The November 2021 meeting of the Palmer Township Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, November 9, 2021 at 7:00 PM with the following in attendance: Chairman Robert Blanchfield, Richard Wilkins, Robert Walker, Michael Brett, and Chuck Diefenderfer. Also in attendance were Solicitor Charles Bruno, Ron Gawlik of The Pidcock Company, Planning Director Cynthia Carman Kramer, and Supervisor Jeff Young. Member Robert Lammi joined the meeting late.

1. Minutes of October 2021 Public Meeting

Motion: Approve, Moved by Richard Wilkins, Seconded by Robert Walker. Passed. 5-0. Commission Members voting Ayes: Blanchfield, Brett, Diefenderfer, Walker, Wilkins
Commission Members Absent: Kicska, Lammi

OLD BUSINESS

2. Discussion of Zoning Ordinance

DISCUSSION

Blanchfield provided background on drafting the new Zoning Ordinance, stating that the Township has been working on this for 18 months and that the time frame has been impacted by Covid-19. Meetings were held on a monthly basis with a consultant and a dedicated committee. Blanchfield listed each of the members on this committee and stated that the consultant is Environmental Planning and Design. The new Zoning Ordinance will replace any pre-existing Palmer Township Zoning Ordinance. Blanchfield explained the process for how the new Zoning Ordinance will eventually reach approval. Carolyn Yagle of Environmental Planning and Design was present via Zoom to present an overview of the draft ordinance changes to the Planning Commission and answer questions.

Yagle explained that the information provided included a "quick view" summary for each zoning district, as well as a zoning base map and an overlay map. She listed the names of each zoning district, noted the different kinds of land use types and density, and the shift in regional land use patterns. She commented on the non-residential focus in the northern portion of the Township and the change in conservation and recreation within the mid-region and southern portion mostly due to the addition of parks and open spaces dedicated as parts of different developments. She also commented on the neighborhood commercial district, the planned office district and the retail activity/scale.

Brett and Yagle discussed why the school district and municipal government properties are included as part of the conservation and recreation district as

opposed to an institutional zoning. Yagle explained the focus on a minimal use impact with resource management as a focal point.

Diefenderfer commented that he would suggest making some uses that are listed as principal conditional uses as accessory conditional uses instead in some of the zones. He would also like to include the Schoeneck Creek, along with the Lehigh River and Bushkill Creek, in the purpose description on the quick view page for the Conservation and Recreation district. Yagle discussed the way the creek bodies are incorporated into the riparian buffer overlay. The riparian buffer is primarily in the northern part of the Township with tributaries in the southern portion.

Yagle listed the six proposed overlay districts. Kramer explained the Eastern Gateway overlay district is located on the south side of William Penn Highway across the street from Easton Area High School. This area currently contains large older industrial properties. Yagle explained the Township wants to ensure that if there is an opportunity for redevelopment, it would complement the surrounding area and neighborhoods and contain appropriate roadway access. Yagle explained that the overlay districts take into account the scale and level of activity from a transportation standpoint – consolidation of smaller parcels and the safety of ingress and egress is a focus. Also, discussion of the best potential land use in the primarily residential surrounding area and what will best complement the neighborhoods.

Kramer clarified that the William Penn and Route 248 overlay districts are existing and the new Freemansburg Avenue overlays would be a continuation of the same concept, allowing for re-use of some of the previous residential property into some small-scale office or commercial uses over time. Yagle discussed the need for safety, maintaining the neighborhood scale, capture where there is market interest, and keeping balance.

Blanchfield explained that the Eastern Gateway overlay was a very heavy industrial use area at one time. If/when the opportunity for redevelopment occurs, the new permitted uses for this area need to be determined through this zoning ordinance. Yagle explained there would be other types of uses associated with this overlay. Young questioned if this area was previously zoned as Heavy Industrial. Blanchfield confirmed this, but under the proposed zoning it would be zoned as Light Industrial with some other uses. Walker questioned if this area is currently multiple owners. Blanchfield confirmed.

Wilkins questioned the Riparian Buffer overlay. Kramer explained it is to limit what can be done within a certain area on either side of the waterway in order to protect and preserve the waterway. Yagle explained that the Riparian Buffer overlay is a requirement, whereas the Eastern Gateway overlay is an option.

Kramer listed the zoning districts that are being eliminated or combined. HDR and HDR-2 are combining to be one HDR district. General Commercial and Planned Commercial are combining into General Commercial. Planned Industrial/Commercial and Planned Office/Industrial Park will now be called Industrial/Office/Commercial. Two new districts are being created: LI-2, which is

the base of the Eastern Gateway overlay, and a Neighborhood Commercial district, which is mainly along Freemansburg Avenue between the two sections of overlay. The other two NC district areas are near LaBarre Park and another near Penns Grant.

Yagle went through and explained the Quick View summary pages for each of the Zoning Districts.

Diefenderfer commented that he would like group care facility, nursing home, and personal care home or center as principal conditional uses to be removed from the High-Density Residential district. He would only like to see this in Planned Office/Business and not mix residential and commercial uses in HDR.

Blanchfield questioned if lot size would determine how big of a sit-down restaurant would be allowed in a Neighborhood Commercial district. Yagle explained that a maximum lot size has not been specified. Lammi commented that placing a maximum lot size might be restrictive in the case of strip malls. Brett feels that the Neighborhood Commercial district includes very different locations and needs more discussion. Kramer confirmed with Yagle that this district only includes sit-down restaurants, not drive-thru restaurants.

Diefenderfer requested that billboards are removed as a principal conditional use in the General Commercial district. Blanchfield questioned what areas they are currently allowed in. Kramer stated they are currently allowed in GC, NEB, LI, PO/IP, and PI/C.

Wilkins questioned if there are existing rules for food trucks. Yagle will forward information on this to Kramer to assist in future discussion.

Diefenderfer would like to see warehouses and distribution centers be listed as accessory conditional uses instead of principal conditional uses in the Industrial/Office/Commercial district and Light Industrial 1 district. Lammi is concerned about tractor trailer traffic issues and hazards related to a few of the principal conditional uses listed. He would like to remove tank farm and truck stops from the LI-1 district. Lammi and Diefenderfer would like distribution center, type 2 listed as an accessory conditional use instead of a principal conditional use in the Light Industrial 2/Mixed Use district. Diefenderfer would like tank farm, warehouse, and distribution center, type 2 listed as an accessory conditional use instead of a principal conditional use in the Heavy Industrial/Mixed Use district.

Wilkins mentioned the problem with truck parking along Main Street. Kramer indicated there will be language in the ordinance that distribution/trucking facilities will to have provide parking spaces on site for truck queuing. Yagle mentioned that parking along a right-of-way will not be an option. Lammi stated that language should also be included in the ordinance stating that facilities must follow Act 124 of 2008 to limit the time that diesel-powered trucks can idle. Lammi also mentioned the requirement of warehouse/distribution centers to provide a place inside their facilities for drivers to utilize, possibly with vending machines.

Brett would like to have future discussions in regards to the uses listed in the Freemansburg Avenue overlay. He would like to look for additional space and opportunities for the Conservation and Recreation district and would like to support and promote local farming in the Rural Agricultural district.

Blanchfield requested that everyone send their comments to Kramer by the end of next week so that they can be discussed at the next committee meeting. Drafts of these quick views and maps that were discussed by the Planning Commission are available to the public and can be requested by contacting Kramer.

Bill Harkins, 1375 Van Buren Road, clarified that the draft can be received by calling or emailing Kramer to request it.

Harry Graack, 1380 Van Buren Road, questioned if dates have been scheduled for public meetings. Kramer stated the dates will be advertised before the meetings.

PLANNING DIRECTOR COMMENTS

None.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Motion: Adjourn, Moved by Robert Lammi, Seconded by Richard Wilkins. Passed. 6-0. Commission Members voting Ayes: Blanchfield, Brett, Diefenderfer, Lammi, Walker, Wilkins

Commission Members Absent: Kicska