

PALMER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC MEETING - TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2023 - 7:00 PM
PALMER TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL MEETING ROOM, LOWER LEVEL, 3 WELLER
PLACE, PALMER PA 18045

The October meeting of the Palmer Township Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, October 10, 2023 at 7:00 PM with the following in attendance Chairman, Chuck Diefenderfer, Vice Chairman, Jeff Kicska, Robert Walker, Richard Wilkins, Robin Aydelotte and Tom Grube. Also in attendance were Solicitor Will Oetinger, Kent Baird, Director of Planning and Craig Beaver, Assistant Planning Director.

1. Minutes of the August 8, 2023 Planning Commission Meeting

Approve/ Disapprove the Minutes from the August 8, 2023 Planning Commission Meeting

Motion: Approve, Moved by Robert Walker, Seconded by Tom Grube. Passed. 4-0. Commission Members voting Ayes: Diefenderfer, Grube, Kicska, Walker

Commission Members voting Abstain: Aydelotte, Wilkins Commission Members Absent: Ruch

OLD BUSINESS

2. Minutes of September 12, 2023 Planning Commission Meeting

DISCUSSION

Approve/ Disapprove the Minutes from the September 12, 2023 Planning Commission Meeting.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Jeff Kicska, Seconded by Tom Grube. Passed. 5-0. Commission Members voting Ayes: Diefenderfer, Grube, Kicska, Walker, Wilkins

Commission Members voting Abstain: Aydelotte Commission Members Absent: Ruch

3. Zoning Ordinance - Public Meeting

DISCUSSION

Diefenderfer said they would be reviewing the proposed new zoning ordinance. He said this is the initial stage of review where both the public and the commission can ask questions.

There will also be a special meeting on Oct.26th to discuss the ordinance further and the Planning Commission can then make a recommendation to move the ordinance for approval.

Beavers gave a PowerPoint presentation giving an overview of the ordinance

and what it includes.

Beavers introduced a possible timeline for the ordinance. He said that tonight's meeting would be for feedback and any questions. October 26th will be the public meeting to finalize a recommendation. On November 1st, the ordinance will be sent to the Board of Supervisors. The next day it will be sent to the LVPC where they have a 45-day review period. The LVPC will provide comments and then the Board of Supervisors will hold a public hearing. Depending on what happens at the public hearing the Board of Supervisors may vote on the ordinance that evening or they may choose to wait for another meeting.

Diefenderfer mentioned one of the main changes was the base districts. Some of the uses and districts have changed. In some cases, the overlay districts gave more flexibility to uses of the property.

Diefenderfer mentioned some of the initial changes. The Conservation and Recreation district was removed from base zoning districts. Things have either reverted back to their initial zone or uses have transferred to other areas.

Diefenderfer said he had some concerns about switching areas around the school to high density residential because they are already in high traffic areas. He feels some of the areas around 25th St. are going to be a problem.

He was concerned about the cemeteries in the NC district and MDR where the Green Pond Cemetery is . He mentioned those areas would have to be grandfathered in.

Baird and Oetinger recommended the Conservation/Recreation District come out because the parcels identified as such were inappropriately connected to the district. They included municipal parks and they were connected to properties that were not Conservation/Recreation. The school district properties were also part of that. Generally, the school district would fall into the zoning immediately surrounding it, which would give it a fair market value appraisal.

Wilkins asked if the school district had input.

Baird said he believes they initially did.

Beavers said they had some conversation with the school district while touring the elementary school. They indicated that they have plans to redevelop that site for the high school and they have no current intention of leaving the site.

Diefenderfer said his main concern is the 2 cemeteries.

Beavers said it could be put under the parks and recreation overlay.

Baird said we will make cemeteries a priority.

Wilkins was concerned that the High School could sell the land and the area around 25th St. could become more congested depending on what would go there.

Baird said they are planning to put together a transportation corridor study for

25th St.

Regarding the school property, we shouldn't down value the property. He said they are trying to advocate for any redevelopment to be a place where people are excited to walk to shops, restaurants, and businesses.

Oetinger added that on the Conservation District properties it felt as if the zoning was superimposed on top of that rather than "undeveloped" conservation properties which turned into public uses.

Diefenderfer added that he was ok with the High School to have a residential area as an underlying district just not high density residential.

Beavers added the eastern gateway overlay is designated for that area which is intended to be the highest density in the Township.

Grube asked if the eastern gateway area was also across the street from the high school.

Diefenderfer said he was concerned about high density by the high school.

Baird said they can discuss what other districts may work.

Grube asked what the difference between Medium and High density is.

Beavers responded the lot size and area regulation. He said high density can have some things with conditional use and twins.

Diefenderfer said he always considers worst case scenario.

Baird added that they could consider it further before the next meeting.

Diefenderfer mentioned that the new zoning on the Taylor Wharton property is for something that it's not. It seems like a major change going to neighborhood commercial.

Baird said they would review that whole area.

Beavers said if they put in light industrial/ mixed use, it opens it up for more industrial uses to be allowed there.

Diefenderfer said the current owners may not want something different.

Baird said they would take a look at the area around the eastern gateway block.

Baird reminded the Commission they are working with the LVPC regarding a transportation study for the 25th St. area and how the transportation study could affect the zoning.

Beavers discussed how the bus routes recently established are beneficial for reducing traffic in the area.

Aydelotte was concerned that if the Dixie Cup building becomes a high-density development it will add to the congestion in the area.

Baird discussed how they re-organized the document to make more sense and removed redundant language.

Grube said it was easier to go through.

Diefenderfer said he was ok with the reorganization of the document.

Wilkins asked the major differences made to the document from the previous draft.

Baird and Beavers said they added definitions that were missing and expanded on definitions to make them more accurate. They added regulations for historic preservation and a new overlay. Floodplain regulations were strengthened.

Oetinger added they tried to get away from a practice where any zoning provision that was restrictive was subject to conditional use.

Diefenderfer had concerns with page 53 regarding housing of one or more horses shall be considered an accessory use with the definition urban keeping of livestock.

Beavers added there would be setback restrictions.

Diefenderfer said it should just be allowed in rural districts.

Grube added that if someone wanted to buy a horse, they would still have to meet other zoning regulations that would be more restrictive.

Beavers reviewed the current regulation and offered to make the setbacks more restrictive specific to large animals.

There was discussion regarding adding more language and specifications for small, medium, and large livestock and where they are allowed.

Baird and Beavers discussed the process of identifying redundancies in the language for different districts and the reasoning for the changes in the T1 and T2 districts to the North End Business District.

Wilkins asked if we must have an RA district.

Baird said yes.

There was discussion regarding farming being allowed in other areas of the Township, but RA was designated for specifics such as farm ponds and farm camps.

Kicska asked if there was anything in RA that says you need to have access to those properties.

Baird said for a parcel being in RA, in zoning, that is not a consideration. An owner can work privately to gain access or there may be access through a different city/area.

Baird reminded the Commission about creating an ordinance for transferable development rights in the future.

Diefenderfer questioned if there were too many things that fell under RA.

Oetinger explained that the law says you must provide for it whether the land is developed or not. We don't have a duty to provide more vacant land, we must provide for the use.

Wilkins asked about Nazareth and zoning in the area.

Baird said Nazareth has the planning commission on the zoning re-write for some light industrial next to the school that is next to the RA district.

Grube asked if we should pro-actively cover something regarding hydro-energy, because of some interest shown in Easton.

Beavers said it might fall into a use that is comparable but not specifically listed.

Kicska asked about the historic overlay.

Baird said there was nothing in the previous draft that supported historic preservation. He and Oetinger recommended this overlay district earlier this year based on past experience.

He said Beavers found over 100 properties that go back over 100 years. We want to send the message that we don't disregard the history of the area.

There was more discussion on some of the individual properties on the list compiled by Beavers from the state historic preservation office and the Northampton County Assessor's office.

Kicska said that we need something about lighting from properties spilling over to other properties.

Baird said they could add that.

Wilkins asked about a lighting map.

Baird and Beavers said they could look into it. There was some discussion about lighting problems, what the ordinance currently says, and what could be done.

The Planning Commission thanked those that worked on the document for all their hard work.

PLANNING DIRECTOR COMMENTS

Baird said tonight was meant to be more of a workshop. They would address some of concerns brought up and hope to have a document that can be recommended to the Supervisors on October 26th.

Beavers added the next meeting will be publicly advertised. He said we hope to see more people at that meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tim Fisher - 68 Moor Dr. - (In PO/B)On page 26 it mentions non-family residential type 1 and non-family residential type 2. He said he doesn't understand why one is allowed as conditional use and the other is not.

He also asked if "planned development" was the same as "PUD".

Beavers said PUD refers to residential.

Fisher said what you don't have is PO/B is conditional use for apartments. He said they would love to have that.

He said they do like it the way it is, and they like the improvements made.

Harry Graack - 1380 Van Buren Rd.- He complimented Planning on their efforts. He is concerned that the latest draft has his property as PO/B. He said he has no intention of building anything huge and obstructive but everything around him has gone that way. He was willing to go RA, but it has changed. He wants to eventually live in Palmer and is concerned for the future of his property.

Baird told Graack he requested it not be RA at the December 2022 meeting. He said he requested it go back to PI/C. Baird said he asked for it to fall out of Conservation/Recreation.

He said he is still able to do a conservation easement or sell for conservation purposes.

Graack said that was not the issue. He is looking out for his land now and after he is gone.

He said he doesn't like that his property is being zoned PO/B without his involvement.

He asked why it was zoned PO/B.

Baird said PI/C is not on the new ordinance. He said PO/B is near to PI/C which is not in use going forward. Apartments are not allowed in PO/B. We felt the apartments added to the concern Graack has had regarding traffic and congestion. Baird said no one on the commission wants to exclude him from conversation.

Baird said Graack's concerns point him towards Conservation/ Recreation or RA which he opted out of.

Graack feels the IOC would be more beneficial to him due to what is zoned across the Township line.

Baird said this is the first time he has mentioned this concern to the Township.

Graack said he is mentioning it now.

Baird asked to have a conversation with him to better understand what he is really looking for.

Graack said he wants to retain the zoning on his property as IOC.

Diefenderfer mentioned to Graack that at one time he had concerns of having Schoeneck Creek area 2 separate sections. He asked if he wanted to do something on one side of it.

Graack said he wanted a residence on one side and commercial interests on the other.

Baird asked if Graack could send his explanation/requests in writing.

Tom Beauduy - Chrin Organization - 400 S Greenwood.

Beauduy said they also requested IOC for the triangular property of 8 acres at the of Newlins Mill Rd. He said it was requested under the previous draft of the zoning ordinance with the previous Planner. He wants it consistent with what is zoned there now. He feels the IOC more closely resembles the the PIC than the POB.

Baird asked them to send a letter on how they review the IOC and the old PIC so they can review.

Beauduy said they would do that.

Beauduy said they had not gotten notice of the update to the change to the draft zoning ordinance. He said if they had, they would have participated in any meetings. He asked if we notified all landowners subject to change from the draft ordinance originally proposed a few years ago.

Oetinger said we do everything that is required by law.

Diefenderfer asked if there were any other comments from the public.

There were none.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:19pm.

Motion: Adjourn, Moved by Tom Grube, Seconded by Robert Walker. Passed. 6-0. Commission Members voting Ayes: Aydelotte, Diefenderfer, Grube, Kicska, Walker, Wilkins
Commission Members Absent: Ruch