

PALMER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC MEETING - TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2022 - 7:00 PM
PALMER TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL MEETING ROOM, 3 WELLER PLACE (LOWER
LEVEL), PALMER PA 18045
WORKSHOP MEETING

The March 2022 workshop meeting of the Palmer Township Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 7:00 PM with the following in attendance: Chairman Robert Blanchfield, Vice-Chairman Chuck Diefenderfer, Jeff Kicska, and Robert Walker. Also in attendance were Planning Director Cynthia Carman Kramer and consultant Carolyn Yagle of Environmental Planning & Design.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Review and Discussion of Zoning Ordinance

DISCUSSION

Blanchfield began by giving a background on the Zoning Ordinance update process up to now.

Yagle explained that there had been some minor changes since the Commission last discussed the ordinance in November. The most significant change was discussion of whether or not there should be creation of a separate Civic district for uses such as schools and municipal buildings, or whether such uses should stay as conditional uses in the Conservation & Recreation district. Yagle explained that discussion on this had taken place before the Board of Supervisors but they didn't give a definite direction one way or another. Blanchfield said he liked the idea of a separate district. Diefenderfer stated he didn't see what we would gain from a separate district. A conditional use in the CR district would provide more protection from these uses for neighboring residential properties than allowing them by right in a separate district. Kicska asked what good a separate district would do. Walker agreed.

Next, Yagle led the Commission members through a table regarding conditional uses. For every use that is being proposed as a new conditional use, the table indicated what types of conditions would be applied to that use.

Diefenderfer asked about the short-term rental use. Yagle explained that this refers to a residential building being rented out through AirBnB or something similar. Unlike other residential uses, this would be a regulation on the type of activity or use rather than the type of building. Diefenderfer asked if we could limit the number of people, maybe by limiting the number of unrelated persons, to prevent houses from being rented out for parties. Yagle said she would look into this.

Kramer stated that for non-family residential we need to make sure that there is a density calculation provided. Current regulations for lifecare centers have the requirement that four beds equals one dwelling unit. Diefenderfer stated that

there needs to be a parking requirement for visitors and care providers and for a delivery/pickup space. Blanchfield noted that for a transitional dwelling there also needs to be an adequate parking requirement.

Blanchfield questioned the large brewery use. He asked how far we need to go with conditions if there are other standards that already cover these, such as parking. Yagle noted that for the limited winery use, they included bufferyard/screening and access as conditions because of the visitor element, these may also apply to brewery or limited distillery. Diefenderfer noted that environmental quality may also be a consideration due to disposal of waste materials and odors.

Diefenderfer suggested adding noise as a condition for convenience stores because of the issues that happen with cars congregating and revving their engines. Blanchfield also suggested character and dumpsters.

Yagle explained that a medical marijuana dispensary is treated the same as a pharmacy. We can only limit them to the extent of the criteria they must meet to obtain and keep their State license. Blanchfield asked why ingress/egress would be a condition. Yagle explained this would control the number of in and out points to the property. By contrast, Yagle explained that a medical marijuana grower/processor would be comparable to a manufacturing use and recommended that buffering be added for this.

Kramer suggested that a truck stop use should have conditions for signage.

Kramer noted that under utility uses, we listed geothermal, solar and wind energy, but we should also include something for the fuel cell energy use that we have recently reviewed. Kicska suggested there should be buffering required for a solar energy use. Diefenderfer suggested proximity should also be a requirement.

Yagle explained the category of "Comparable uses not specifically listed" would cover any new uses that should arise or that are not mentioned. Diefenderfer suggested lighting, noise, environmental and buffering should all be conditions on these as these are the things that are most often of concern. Walker agreed.

Yagle then explained that she had provided them a list of definitions that were new or had been revised from the current ordinance. She asked if there was anything the Commission members had noticed coming up during review of applications that needs to be addressed. For distribution centers, Diefenderfer suggested that the words "short period of time" should be replaced with something more concrete such as "not to exceed 30 days." Kramer questioned what a "just in time" operation was. Yagle explained that would describe time-sensitive delivery services such as UPS. Yagle noted that for manufacturing use, we included separate definitions for light and heavy manufacturing. Kramer suggested that the Commission read through all the definitions in detail and be prepared to come back with any questions or comments at the next workshop.

PLANNING DIRECTOR COMMENTS

Kramer noted the next workshop meeting would be Tuesday, April 19.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tim Fisher, 68 Moor Drive, asked about warehouses vs distribution centers and whether there was a condition for noise for manufacturing uses. For truck stops, he suggested there should be conditions for hours and noise. Kramer replied yes for noise but we wouldn't want to limit the hours because one of the primary purposes of a truck stop is to provide somewhere for the trucks to go during their required rest hours. Fisher asked about objective standards and measures for air quality and noise. Yagle replied that air quality is always difficult to address because it is a challenge to measure if and how any additional standards are being met. Fisher asked about standards and definitions for berms, acoustical walls or screenings as buffers for noise. Diefenderfer suggested we should address the height of the wall relative to elevation.

Bill Hartin, 1375 Van Buren Road, suggested we should set a future date by which all trucks going to these facilities would meet clean air standards or be electric. Yagle stated that would be difficult to enforce because that would be a regulation on vehicles not on the land use. Hartin recommended that the Township be as transparent as possible with this process and distill things down to people's common level of understanding.

Carol Pundiak, 3321 Sherwood Road, asked if the new ordinance would prevent creation of separate rental units in a single-family dwelling. Kramer and Yagle confirmed that there are regulations restricting "conversion apartments" but that we will still allow "units for relative care" under specific conditions.

Harry Graack, 1380 Van Buren Road, asked if there were regulations written for the proposed Civic district. Yagle replied no, they had only shown it conceptually on the map. Graack stated he didn't think schools and municipal buildings belonged in Conservation & Recreation and asked how other places handled these. Yagle explained that schools are often allowed in strictly residential districts or in strictly non-residential districts. The scale of these uses is much different than in the past, there is now usually an element of recreational use involved with schools and interconnection with each other. Graack said that makes sense. Graack stated that he agreed with Hartin about making this process as transparent as possible.

Greg Chrin, 3333 Fischer Road, stated his family has had a long involvement in this Township and we have definitely come a long way.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 PM.