

BERKS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
BERKS COUNTY SERVICES CENTER
633 COURT STREET, 14TH FLOOR
READING, PA 19601-4309

July 12, 2023

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Jodi L. Gauker called the Public Meeting for the Leesport Borough and Ontelaunee Township County Comprehensive Plan Amendment Request public meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was held on Wednesday, July 12, 2023.

The following members were present:

Jodi L. Gauker, Chairwoman
Christopher J. Spohn, Vice Chair
Lisa J. Weaver, Secretary
Glenn R. Knoblauch
Lee C. Olsen, AIA, NCARB
James McCarthy, P.E.
Thomas C. Mckeon, AICP, CEcD
Miguel A. Herrera

Also Attending:

David Peris, Assistant County Solicitor
David N. Hunter, Sr., AICP, Executive Director
Cheryl Auchenbach, Planner III
Beth Burkovich, GIS Analyst
Shanice Ellison, Planner I
Michelle Franklin, Planner III
Michael D. Golembiewski, Transportation Modeler
Taylor Lawrence, Planner II
Matt McGough, Transportation Planner III
Laura Mursch, Intergovernmental Planner III
Alan D. Piper, Transportation Planner III
Richard L. Royer, Design Planner
Devon Hain, Transportation Planner II
Amanda Timochenko, Transportation Planner II
Christopher Hartman, Solicitor Leesport Borough, and Ontelaunee Township
Emily Wangolo, Executive Director, Berks County Department of Agriculture
Pamela Shupp Menet, Executive Director, Berks County Dept. of Community & Economic Development
Derek Harris, Berks County Dept. of Community & Economic Development
Jaime Perez, Housing Planner, Berks County Redevelopment Auth.

To begin the public meeting, Chairwoman Gauker invited Executive Director, David Hunter to begin his presentation. Mr. Hunter stated that the purpose of the public meeting was to review the formal request from Leesport Borough and Ontelaunee Township to amend the County's Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use map. Specifically, the municipalities requested that the parcels south of Ida Red Road/Adams Road in Ontelaunee Township be changed to Rural Conservation rather than their current designation of Future Growth. The Parcels in question are approximately 256.69 acres. Mr. Hunter shared a power point presentation which provided several facts about the parcels in question.

The facts include the following: Staff provided reviews for a Zoning Ordinance Change, an Agricultural Security Area Review and a Joint Comprehensive Plan review. All of the staff reviews stated that the change to rural conservation and agriculture zoning were inconsistent with the County Comprehensive Plan's Future Growth designation for the subject parcels. Mr. Hunter then explained that staff prepared a memorandum dated July 7, 2023 which provides "due cause" why this County Comprehensive Plan map amendment request should not be approved. Staff findings included the following:

- There are limited growth areas within the County and this map change would decrease the amount of area designated for growth;
- The request does not abide by Smart Growth Planning principles; and
- The County contributed to enhancements made to the existing municipal sewer system.

The Municipalities Planning Code Sections 302 (a.1), (b) and (d) outlines the process for amending a county comprehensive plan. Subsection (d) states that "the County must accept (proposed) amendments ***unless good cause for their refusal is established.***"

The Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update designates the subject parcels south of Ida Red Road/Adams Road as Future Growth. The Comprehensive Plan characterizes Future Growth Areas as follows:

Developable land that is open, unoccupied or currently farmed, and due to its location is appropriate for future urban high density and suburban median density development requiring a full range of public services and facilities.

The Solicitor for the municipalities, Christopher Hartman, then spoke. Mr. Hartman began his statement by discussing the motivations of the municipalities to seek this request of change to the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that there has been tremendous commercial and industrial growth along the Route 61 corridor. Additionally, the municipalities would like to retain a balance of development and agriculture. Mr. Hartman noted that the municipalities feel the preservation of these parcels will provide a buffer for the development which has occurred along the route 61 corridor. Mr. Hartman also gave comments contrary to Mr. Hunter's statement about how improvements to Pump Station #7 were strictly for exiting properties or projects and not the subject parcels. In fact, Mr. Hartman stated that if additional development were to occur the Pump Station would need to be updated again. In closing, Mr. Hartman urged the Board to be flexible.

Vice Chair Christopher Spohn asked the question is it the wish of the Adams family to stop future development? The proposed change and future preservation will limit any future owner's economic growth potential if permanently preserved. Chairwoman Gauker pointed to the fact that the Joint Comprehensive Plan for the municipalities has not been updated since 1996. Ms. Gauker questioned why the municipalities hadn't thought to go through that process rather than addressing one area of the Township. Board Member Glenn Knoblauch questioned whether the family or municipalities provided comment during the January 2020 comprehensive plan update. Additionally, Mr. Knoblauch suggested the other available easement programs within the County through Berks Nature or Natural Lands Trust. Chairwoman Gauker then posed the question, "What precedent does this set?" Executive Director David Hunter stated, "on behalf of Staff this is a very negative precedent being set if the proposed change to the County Comprehensive Plan is adopted." Additionally, Mr. Hunter noted in January of 2025 the Staff proposes to begin the update to the County Comprehensive Plan. Member Tom McKeon stated that the market and development of the land proved that the Comprehensive Plan Future Growth designation was correct. By redesignating to Rural Conservation, smart growth principles would be abandoned.

To conclude the public meeting, Vice Chairman Christopher Spohn ***Motioned*** to accept the Staff Memorandum dated July 7, 2023. The motion was ***Seconded*** by Tom McKeon. Additionally, Lee Olsen ***Motioned*** to put the requested amendment out for 45 day public review and comment and to forward the staff memorandum and municipal request to the County Commissioners. Glenn Knoblauch ***Seconded*** the motion.

2. CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Jodi L. Gauker called the monthly meeting of the Berks County Planning Commission to order at 3:49 p.m. The meeting was held on Wednesday, July 12, 2023.

3. REPORT OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

A. Executive Director's Report

David Hunter began his report by providing the Board with the agendas of the August and September Board meetings. Specifically, Mr. Hunter informed the Board that a presentation will be given from Executive Director, Ken Pick from the County Redevelopment Authority as well as Jaime Perez the recently hired Housing planner. These presentations will be directly related to the upcoming annual report out for Imagine Berks scheduled for August 22nd. In addition, there will be a discussion of the proposed County Solar Policy. Finally, the September meeting of the Board is tentatively scheduled for a presentation from Michael Golembiewski on the 2020 census.

4. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of June 14, 2023, Minutes

B. Reports for Approval

- Land Development & Subdivision Activity Report/Summary
- Endorsed Land Development & Subdivision Activity

MOTION: Lisa Weaver made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Lee Olsen and passed unanimously.

5. STAFF, STAKEHOLDER AND BOARD MEMBERS REPORTS

A. Subdivision Planner Michelle Franklin discussed several plans the office recently received and reviewed. Specifically, a plan in Spring Township which proposed demolition of an existing apartment complex and then rebuilding 3 10-unit buildings. The proposal is along Route 724. The second proposal was in Wyomissing Borough along Park Road and the railroad. Ms. Franklin explained the proposal identified a driveway was proposed coming onto Park Road at the bottom of the hill and that staff made several comments regarding the traffic concerns of the proposal. Ms. Franklin closed her discussion with reviewing a Commercial/Industrial proposal in Perry Township along the intersection of Route 662 and 61. There will be 4 lots, 2 of which propose building 2 warehouses at 150,000 square feet each.

B. David Hunter invited the Board to conduct discussion regarding the recent severe flooding in the County. Additionally, Mr. Hunter discussed his earlier comment of beginning the update to the County Comprehensive Plan in early 2025. Mr. Hunter posed several questions to the Board including, what will the role of the Board Members be, and will more staff be hired or shall a consultant be brought in. Discussion ensued regarding what the new Comprehensive plan would be. Specifically, Tom McKeon stated the plan should be strategic in nature. Glenn Knoblauch noted that in years past outreach during the planning process has been poor and unsuccessful and that a consultant could help achieve better outreach results. Chris Spohn suggested that the plan may take a regional approach rather than a city focused or overall county approach.

6. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Lisa Weaver made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:23p.m. The motion was seconded by Lee Olsen.

Jodi L. Gauker, Chairwoman

Lisa Weaver, Secretary

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