

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Tom McKeon called the monthly meeting of the Berks County Planning Commission to order at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was held on Wednesday, November 10, 2021 as a virtual meeting using the platform Microsoft Teams.

The following members were present:

Thomas C. McKeon, Chair
Jodi L. Gauker, Vice-Chair
James A. Adams, Secretary
Glenn R. Knoblauch
James C. McCarthy
Lee C. Olsen, AIA, NCARB
Douglas P. Rauch, Esq.
Christopher J. Spohn
David H. Turner

Also Attending:

Heidi B. Masano, Solicitor
Cheryl A. Auchenbach, Planner III
Beth Burkovich, GIS Analyst
Michelle D. Franklin, Subdivision Planner III
Michael D. Golembiewski, Trans. Modeler
David N. Hunter, Sr., AICP, Executive Director
Matthew F. McGough, Intergovernmental Planner
Alan D. Piper, Transportation Planner III
Ashley J. Showers, Assistant Director
Amanda M. Timochenko, Planner II
Pauline R. Klopp, Office Support IV
Heather Berger, IS
Information System Production
Lisa Weaver, Penn State Berks/Penn State Health St. Joseph
David Myers, Berks Alliance
Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

3. REPORTS OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

A. Executive Director's Report

David Hunter thanked Douglas Rauch for his years of service. Mr. Rauch is being replaced by Lisa Weaver, Penn State Berks/Penn State Health St. Joseph, with her term starting in January 2022.

Mr. Hunter mentioned the 2022 BCPC Meeting Schedule contained on the Consent Agenda. He had discussed this with Chairman Tom McKeon and Vice-Chair Jodi Gauker, and it was decided to keep meeting virtually. He mentioned that we will review this policy later next year and issue additional guidance should there be a return to in-person meetings.

Mr. Hunter informed the Commission that he will be presenting Muhlenberg Township with an APA award for Jim Dietrich Park.

Mr. Hunter mentioned that Pam Shupp Menet will be attending the December meeting to update the Commission on Imagine Berks.

Jodi Gauker mentioned that BARN is hosting a Farm Tour on November 20-21. Information can be found on BerksAg.net and/or BerksAg.org.

4. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes of October 13, 2021

B. Ratification of Letter of Compliance – PennDOT Multimodal Transportation Fund Grant Application – Coral Aviation/Quest Facility – Bern Township

On October 15, 2021, the Berks County Planning Commission received a request for a letter of compliance from Coral Aviation Group for the above application to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) Multimodal Transportation Fund. These letters are required to be submitted with the applications which are due to PennDOT by November 5, 2021. Since the Planning Commission meeting is held on November 10th, a letter of compliance with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan was signed by David Hunter, Executive Director, for Tom McKeon, Chairman, on October 22, 2021 and returned to the applicant. The Board is being asked to ratify sending the letter at today's meeting.

The proposed project consists of building a 50,000 square foot, state of the art hangar with 20,000 square feet of office and support facilities. A full motion Pilatus simulator training center will also be built, which will be open to the public and companies seeking their FAA required pilot training. Another addition at the Reading Regional Airport (RRA) through this proposed project will be a state of the art, self-serve capable fuel farm consisting of two 12,000-gallon jet tanks and one 10,000 avgas tank. Multiple mobile refuelers will be purchased to support fuel sales that will also be open to the public. Coral Aviation Group is requesting a \$3 million grant in support of these improvements.

The proposed facilities will allow Coral Aviation to operate more efficiently and better support their growing business, offer full maintenance and avionics services to the public, attract aircraft, pilots, and owners to the area bringing a positive economic impact. Coral Aviation employs fifty people at the existing operation at RRA with an average salary of \$75,000 with the intent of hiring up to an additional 20 employees over the next two years.

Currently the closest Pilatus training facilities are located in Florida and Texas. Owners and pilots throughout the northeast will be attracted to this proposed training facility with training taking place up to five days.

Coral Aviation currently flies 34 routes per night utilizing 10 specimen aircraft for Quest from Reading Regional Airport. This results in approximately 66,000 specimens flying per night. A Quest patient service center is being seriously considered to be collocated at the proposed facility. This would also include a Rapid Response Lab. The Rapid Response Lab would streamline the logistics of blood specimens as it would allow specimens to be offloaded directly from the aircraft to the lab. The specimens are currently offloaded and then transported to Quest labs in Collegeville. The potential addition of this Rapid Response Lab would bring additional high paying, high skilled jobs to the area.

The Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 identifies the majority of this area as an Existing Development Area in Bern Township. Within this area, the plan notes that:

“A variety of reinvestment, rehabilitation, and revitalization efforts will be promoted to take advantage of the extensive infrastructure network in place, to improve the tax base of the urban centers, and keep our older urban areas vibrant. Municipalities are encouraged to create public/private partnerships that jointly support a community-driven comprehensive strategy to revitalize, stabilize and grow older neighborhoods.”

Additionally, the Plan’s Transportation Goal is to “provide and maintain a balanced, multimodal transportation system that will safely and efficiently move people and goods.” This goal is supported by policies that encourage redevelopment in existing developed areas that incorporate design elements that include appropriate bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

C. Ratification of Letter of Compliance for Upward Broadband’s Application to DCED’s Pennsylvania Unserved High-Speed Broadband Funding Program

The Berks County Planning Commission received correspondence from Paradise Energy Solutions, LLC dba Upward Broadband seeking a letter of compliance for their application to the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Pennsylvania Unserved High-Speed Broadband funding program. It is the understanding of Staff that they are applying to the program to establish a high speed fixed wireless network throughout Berks, Dauphin, Lebanon, Lancaster, and Schuylkill counties.

Paradise Energy Solutions, LLC dba Upward Broadband is seeking funding to deploy qualifying broadband service to additional households in Bethel Township, Berks County.

Specifically, the project would provide reliable internet to businesses and residences in the proposed service area of Bethel Township, Berks County along with a portion of Lebanon County. The proposed service area would cover 2,900 unserved households and 1500 businesses.

The project intends to utilize existing tower sites in addition to one new tower which will need to be built.

Staff prepared a letter of compliance with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan, which was signed by David Hunter, Executive Director, for Tom McKeon, Chairman and returned to the applicant. The Board is being asked to ratify sending the letter at today's meeting.

D. Ratification of Letter of Compliance – PennDOT Multimodal Transportation Fund – Gibraltar Road Sidewalk Project – Exeter Township

On November 4, 2021, the Berks County Planning Commission received a request for a letter of compliance from Exeter Township for the above application to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) Multimodal Transportation Fund. These letters are required to be submitted with the applications which are due to PennDOT by November 5, 2021. Since the Planning Commission meeting is held on November 10th, a letter of compliance with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan was signed by Ashley Showers, Assistant Director, for Tom McKeon, Chairman, and returned to the applicant. The Board is being asked to ratify sending the letter at today's meeting.

The proposed project consists of pedestrian improvements along Gibraltar Road. This includes curbing, two ADA ramps, and a five-foot-wide concrete sidewalk running from Demoss Drive to Estates Drive along the northwest side of Gibraltar Road. The proposed project would fill in a gap of sidewalk that was identified as a potential project in the Berks County Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan 2020. The sidewalk would connect at least five communities to the Exeter Medical Center and to a major commercial corridor within Exeter Township. Providing this connection would follow multiple Berks County Bicycle and Transportation Plan 2020 system improvements and concepts, especially to "Provide bicycle and pedestrian connections to schools, retail centers, recreation areas and employment opportunities." A portion of the proposed sidewalk also runs through the Reading Country Club, a recreation area that is held by Exeter Township. Exeter Township is requesting a \$214,000 grant in support of these improvements.

The Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 identifies a portion of this area as an Existing Development Area in Exeter Township. Within this area, the plan notes that:

"A variety of reinvestment, rehabilitation, and revitalization efforts will be promoted to take advantage of the extensive infrastructure network in place, to improve the tax base of the urban centers, and keep our older urban areas vibrant. Municipalities are encouraged to create public/private partnerships that jointly support a community-driven comprehensive strategy to revitalize, stabilize and grow older neighborhoods."

Additionally, the Plan's Transportation Goal is to "provide and maintain a balanced, multimodal transportation system that will safely and efficiently move people and goods." This goal is supported by policies that encourage redevelopment in existing developed areas that incorporate design elements that include appropriate bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

The Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update also identifies the remaining area as Permanent Open Space and Recreation in Exeter Township. Within this area, the plan advocates:

"A countywide greenway system interconnecting the county's major park, recreation and open space resources through a network of open space corridors and linear parks and trails."

Additionally, the Plan's Improved Connections and Choices Goal is to "Give travelers a variety of well-designed transportation choices that are in good condition." This goal is supported by policies that encourage expansion of the trail and sidewalk networks.

E. Reports for Approval

- Land Development & Subdivision Activity Report & Summary

Mr. McKeon had asked to see the Land Development Plan, Furnace Hill in Robesonia Borough which consists of 40 semis and 48 apartments on 16 acres by Grande. Michelle Franklin briefly went over the plan. She mentioned that the plan states that it is to be an 80% occupancy for age restriction (55 and older). There will be a Homeowners Assoc. (HOA) which will do an annual report on how they are maintaining that 80% age restricted occupancies.

Mr. McKeon mentioned that the report shows that the County is up by about 100 residential units this year which is good to see.

- Endorsed Land Development & Subdivision Activity Report
- BCPC 2022 Meeting Schedule

MOTION: Jim McCarthy made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Doug Rauch and passed unanimously.

5. Staff and Stakeholder Reports

A. City of Reading Downtown Plus Plan Discussion

Lee Olsen was not able to access the meeting through Microsoft Teams, so it hampered his ability to share his information on the Downtown Plus Plan. He had to call into the meeting. Mr. Hunter stated that it would be best to postpone this discussion until next month.

Mr. Hunter shared a historical photo of 5th & Penn Streets that showed a traffic circle. He mentioned that the consultant for the Downtown Plus Plan is proposing putting in a traffic circle for that intersection again.

Mr. Olsen then gave a brief overview of his review that will be discussed next month. Mr. Hunter stated that he would share Mr. Olsen's slides ahead of next month's meeting.

Chris Spohn, mentioned how Christ Episcopal Church at 5th & Court Streets is taking a six to nine month approach at how can they be key players in implementing the plan so that it is not a plan that would just sit on a shelf.

Mr. Spohn then mentioned the Ricktown Arts District Plan. Mr. Olsen stated that his firm did that plan and the plan was never adopted by Reading's City Council. He said that he would get a digital copy of the plan to the board.

Mr. Hunter asked if the Planning Commission members had any meeting topics for the new year.

Mr. Spohn then offered holding one of the Planning Commission's monthly board meetings at Albright College at the Science Research Institute at Rockland Center. He stated that if you want to see economic growth through innovation and entrepreneurship, we have to teach our young people to think as innovators and entrepreneurs and that is currently being done at Albright College.

Mr. McKeon stated that we need to talk about housing and the Smart Growth Alliance. He mentioned how he's been stating that a housing planner is needed in Planning Commission for a number of years. He also mentioned discussing topics such as issues in Agriculture.

Mr. Hunter mentioned the topic of countywide broadband. He then stated that his vision for the board is that we be visionaries.

6. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Jodi Gauker made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:55 p.m.

Thomas C. McKeon, Chairman

James A. Adams, Secretary