

Planning Commission

MINUTES

May 7, 2025

Meeting Held at Passer Community Center

Members Present: Dave Long, Bruce Whitesell, Travis Pantaleo, Dawn Nicholson, Neil O'Brien and Nicole Zane (by phone).

Members Not in Attendance: Angela Kelly

Additional Attendees Present: Bob Carson

Mr. Long called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance. He acknowledged the members present.

OLD BUSINESS

Scenic Overlay District – Mr. Long reported that Bucks County planners had no background, data or information on how Springfield's scenic roads were developed or the utility of the scenic overlay. Nockamixon Township was reportedly hesitant to pursue scenic overlays due to their subjective nature and enforcement difficulty.

Mr. Whitesell mentioned a former Township Manager also had no knowledge of its origin.

The discussion centered on whether to improve the existing ordinance to make it more objective, or to remove it. A rationale would be needed for removal. The current ordinance's definition (properties adjacent to and visible from scenic roads) and term like "scenic character" were deemed subjective and hard to enforce. The zoning map's dotted lines for the overlay were noted as imprecise. Mr. Long read from the ordinance, outlining requirements like scenic resource mapping, visual analysis (before/after sketches), minimizing disturbance views, preserving tree lines, and considering views into historic villages.

To encourage land use compatible with rural character, protect scenic values (character, entrances to historic villages, vistas), and encourage orderly, landscape-sensitive development. The cell tower proposal at the Township building was the main instance where the overlay was a significant factor. Mr. Whitesell argued that restrictive ordinances might deter desirable development, impacting the tax base needed for amenities. It was suggested that the consultants for the Municipal Assistance Program (MAP) grant, who will be reviewing zoning, might provide recommendations on the scenic overlay.

The Board of Supervisors has asked the Planning Commission to review this. A lead volunteer was suggested to take point. General sentiment was that the current state of the ordinance (subjective but requiring compliance) is problematic. A review of the designated scenic roads themselves was also suggested to assess their current scenic value (e.g. Drifting Drive views diminished by tree growth, a "junkyard" on another scenic road). Mr. Whitesell mentioned his previous research into Durham Township's ordinance (also subjective) and identified Springfield's scenic roads from the Cooks Creek map at this time.

DISCUSSION

Wastewater Treatment Consultant – Mr. Long announced that a meeting with Jennifer Kintzer, a consultant for small-scale wastewater treatment facilities, has been scheduled for **May 21, 2025** to be held at the Passer Community Center.

ADU (accessory Dwelling Unit) Discussion – Mr. Long reported that the Bucks County Commission requested another 30 days to review the ADU ordinance, with feedback expected next month.

Motion made by Mr. Long, seconded by Ms. Nicholson and unanimously carried to table the ADU discussion until the next appropriate meeting, pending county feedback.

Planning Commission Project Reports and Comments

Reliable Power Options – Mr. O'Brien summarized his initial report covering solar, backup generators, battery backup, wind, hydroelectric, fuel cells and geothermal (noting Spear Products). The current focus is on Cold Climate Heat Pumps (CCHPs), with input from Mr. Carson. New, more efficient refrigerants are replacing R410A. Discussion included the improved efficiency of modern heat pumps in cold climates compared to older models, cost effectiveness versus propane, and the primary energy sources for electricity (often natural gas). Long-term prospects like nuclear fusion (2035 forecast) and the restart of Three Mile Island with improved safety were mentioned. Mr. Pantaleo brought up "Project PELE" involving small offshore nuclear reactors.

Resilient Building, Stormwater Infrastructure and Capacity – Mr. Long noted this is also within the scope of the MAP grant. Mr. Carson mentioned emailing Rich Pursell (Public Works) who identified problem stormwater areas including Pleasant Valley Rd, Mine Rd, Slifer Valley Rd, Haupts Bridge Rd and "Class Center St". Another grant (Cooks Creek Watershed Association / Princeton Hydro) is looking at erosion/stormwater but is awaiting a new scientist. Springtown Water Authority is seeking a grant for system upgrades and an emergency generator at the fire company.

Wastewater Infrastructure and Capacity – The May 21st meeting with Jennifer Kintzer is the first step. This is also within the MAP grant scope. Mr. Long expressed an opinion that new studies might repeat findings of previous plans (537 Plan, 309 Corridor Study, Springtown Study) as land use and zoning haven't significantly changed. The MAP grant results are not expected until next year at the earliest, focusing on villages and the Rt 309 corridor.

Local Road Network – Ms. Nicholson is looking into this, referencing discussions with Rich Pursell about problem road areas. The narrowness and condition of Haupts Bridge Rd were discussed. A PEMA (Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency) discussion point about diminishing liquid tax fuels tax revenue (due to fuel efficiency/EVs) and the new EV tax was mentioned. A tangent discussion occurred on the trend of companies recalling employees to the office after the work-from-home period during COVID.

Expand, Connect, and Fund Multimodal Network (Off-Road Trails & On-Road Park Routes) – Awaiting bike route mapping. Mr. Carson submitted an 18-mile "One Room Schoolhouse Bike Route" (eastern end of the district) to Frank Hollenbach.

Financially Accessible Housing & Mixed-Use Development in Villages – Ties into the MAP grant and the tables ADU discussion. No new updates.

Protect Natural Ecosystems, Resources, Air Quality, Water Quality, Forests, Wildlife – Mr. O'Brien believes the Township's ordinances are generally good but are often superseded by state regulations. A specific issue raised was the timber harvesting ordinance: if a property owner harvests the allowed percentage, and then sells, can the new owner immediately harvest a percentage of the remainder? This could lead to significant deforestation over time.

The potential Quarry's impact on air quality and wetlands (referencing Dr. Schmidt's assessment of more wetlands than mapped) was noted as largely out of local control if state permits are issued.

Invasive species were discussed as an ongoing, dynamic issue that requires the relevant ordinance to be a "living document".

The general lack of public awareness and enforcement of various ordinances (e.g. timber harvesting permits, swimming pool permits, shed permits) was a concern.

Protect High-Quality Soils from Development – Previously discussed assigning this to the Agricultural Security Area Advisory Committee, but the current membership of that committee is unknown.

Historic Preservation within the Township & Historic Overlay District – Awaiting formation of the Historic Commission.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Modifications to the minutes from the March 20th meeting were presented. Motion made by Mr. Whitesell, seconded by Ms. Zane and unanimously carried to adopt the March 20, 2025 minutes as presented.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The regular Planning Commission meeting scheduled for Thursday, May 15, 2025, is cancelled.

It is being replaced by a special meeting on Wednesday, May 21, 2025, at 6:00PM held at the Passer Community Center for the discussion with wastewater consultant, Jennifer Kinser.

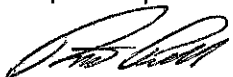
PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Whitesell inquired if the Township has ordinances regarding rental properties (inspections, registration). Mr. Long did not believe so.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr. Long, seconded by Ms. Nicholson and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:19 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Rich Pursell
Township Manager