

**FERGUSON TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, APRIL 12, 2021
6:00 PM**

ATTENDANCE

The Planning Commission held its first meeting of the month on Monday, April 12, 2021, as a virtual meeting. In attendance:

Commission:

Jeremie Thompson – Chair
Jerry Binney – Vice Chair
Rob Crassweller - Secretary
Shannon Holliday
Bill Keough
Dr. Ellen Taricani
Lewis Steinberg - Alternate
Ralph Wheland
Qian Zhang - Alternate

Staff:

Jenna Wargo, Planning & Zoning Director
Kristina Aneckstein, Community Planner
Jeff Ressler, Zoning Administrator

Others in attendance: Rhonda Demchak, Recording Secretary; Wes Glebe, Ferguson Township Resident

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Thompson called the Ferguson Township Planning Commission's regular meeting to order on Monday, April 12, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. Mr. Thompson noted that the Planning Commission meeting had been advertised in accordance to the PA Sunshine Act as a virtual meeting via Zoom. There was also an audio conference bridge that was accessible by dialing the Ferguson Township's main line at 814-238-4651 and then dialing extension 3799. Persons attending the meeting as members of the public and wanted to participate were asked to enter their name, municipality, and topic by utilizing the Q&A bubble at the bottom of the screen. C-NET is recording as well.

Ms. Wargo took roll call and the Planning Commission had a quorum.

II. APPROVAL OF REGULAR MEETING MINUTES MARCH 22, 2021

Dr. Taricani moved that the Planning Commission **approve** the minutes of March 22, 2021. Mr. Crassweller seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

III. CITIZEN INPUT

None.

IV. COMMUNITY PLANNING

A. Post-COVID-19 Observations

Ms. Aneckstein presented a PowerPoint that outlined observations, goals, and objections. History has shown that pandemics inevitably bring about significant changes in land use and social. The Bubonic Plague brought on the Industrial age; Cholera led to indoor plumbing and sewer systems; and the 1918 flu led people from urban areas and created suburbs. Pandemics will reinforce and accelerate existing trends such as Amazon, Uber Eats, Instacart, Grubhub, etc. Since the pandemic started, people have

changed by utilizing Zoom, working from home/school, online shopping, curbside pick-up and deliver, increased sanitation practices, social distancing, and increased outdoor activities. Ms. Aneckstein reviewed the Temporary COVID-19 Resolution from July 2020. The Township updated the Zoning Ordinance to accommodate in-home childcare providers in residential districts. The following questions were posed to the Planning Commission:

- Should temporary suspensions continue longer?
- Should the Commission revise Zoning Regulations?
- Is there anything as a municipality to ease the burden of economic impact to the Township/Residents?
- Are there other unforeseen impacts of the pandemic?
- Mobility changes? Should the Township have dedicated bike/pedestrian lane?
- Will the public be hesitant to return to "normal"?
- Will the public want to keep the new trends? For example, outdoor dining in the winter.

Ms. Aneckstein noted that since online shopping has increased this has decreased parking needs and how would parking be calculated in the future. Also, working from home was at 5% pre-pandemic, but the predicted post pandemic is being estimated at 22%. The housing industry has changed due to people being able to work from home. They are moving from urban areas to less-dense, rural areas where houses are less expensive. Ms. Aneckstein stated that there have been technology and constraints due to internet connectivity and the need for more cell towers. Ms. Aneckstein noted that perhaps a survey could be sent to the community asking for their wants/needs. Ms. Aneckstein reviewed the following considerations:

- Mobility and connectivity of shared-use pedestrian and bike paths
- Encourage Eco-tourism
- Park expansion
- Shop locally

Discussion

Mr. Binney noted that traffic has increased over the last few months. Mr. Binney stated that he approves of extending any type of flexibility to restaurants for expanded outside use and pick-up. Mr. Binney noted that the Planning Commission should endorse picnic tables at the Municipal Building for their employees.

Dr. Taricani noted that it may be helpful to send a survey/questionnaire to restaurants and businesses to inquire what would help them to get back to full capacity.

Mr. Thompson noted that the Township will be receiving approximately \$2 million from the American Rescue Plan Act.

Mr. Wheland suggested responding quicker to request for exemptions and modifications.

Mr. Keough thanked Ms. Wargo and the Planning Staff for the webinars that were included in the agenda packet and encouraged other members to watch. Mr. Keough inquired about the differences or possible conflicts between ordinance definitions with home-based business versus working from home and perhaps when the agenda is light, talk about this at a future meeting. Also, Mr. Keough asked if there have been communications sent to businesses during the pandemic. Ms. Wargo stated there was a survey sent out summer 2020 but will follow-up with Ms. Centrice Martin regarding other communications. Mr. Keough commented that he would like to look into the regulations

with outdoor dining for modifications that could possibly be done. Mr. Keough expressed concern with store front vacancies in the Township as a result of the pandemic and should the Township take a more active role with economic development. Mr. Keough noted that cul-de-sacs could give the Township opportunities for neighborhoods to use them in a certain way such as providing a picnic area with tables.

Ms. Zhang inquired about the paths in the parks if they could be widened for social distancing.

Mr. Keough asked Ms. Rittenhouse about the housing market with regards to the pandemic. Ms. Rittenhouse stated that the real estate market in the area is very active but not seeing the number of listings prior to the pandemic. Ms. Rittenhouse noted that three weeks ago there were 27 active listings and 79 pending listings. Active listings were over 200 prior to the pandemic and Ms. Rittenhouse stated it is a very tough market to be in. Ms. Rittenhouse stated that a push is needed to get approvals for new developments in all of State College. Ms. Rittenhouse did a quick query and stated there are only 35 homes listed in the State College area for sale with 116 pending. Ms. Rittenhouse stated that there needs to be new construction because selling is limited. Mr. Keough asked if the condos/apartments environment have room to grow in the Township. Ms. Rittenhouse stated there are several apartment complexes on the market and one is being flipped into a condo.

Mr. Thompson expressed concerns with the cost of construction materials.

Mr. Keough and Ms. Rittenhouse stated that affordable housing is a major issue. Dr. Taricani suggested converting the rentals in the TSD area into single living units for homeowners. Ms. Rittenhouse stated that converting a building into a condo is possible. Ms. Holliday asked what would happen to the current tenants of a building if it were to be converted. Ms. Rittenhouse noted that the owner could buy the tenants out of their lease and will accommodate them as each unit slowing transitions. With regards to zoning regulations with converting rental units into condos, Mr. Keough asked Mr. Ressler if there are restrictions. Mr. Ressler stated that rental units and condos are interrupted the same.

Ms. Holliday serves on the Outreach and Development Committee of the State College Community Land Trust and noted they purchase homes in the Borough. The land trust will purchase the land, but not the home. Ms. Holliday asked if something similar as the land trust could be done in Ferguson Township. Ms. Rittenhouse stated she was not aware of anything outside of the land trust.

Mr. Keough inquired about businesses who acquired special COVID-19 permits and what happens when the emergency order is over. Ms. Wargo noted that the permits will still be active 30 days after the emergency order is lifted. Mr. Ressler noted that after the 30 days business will go back to their normal operating procedures. Mr. Keough asked for a list of businesses with permits that will expire and perhaps make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors for flexibility/extensions. Mr. Ressler and Ms. Wargo will prepare a list. Mr. Binney concurred with Mr. Keough on allowing flexibility with businesses.

Staff will prepare a questionnaire to be sent to the Planning Commission to identify topics that they would like to have further discussions on.

V. OFFICIAL REPORTS AND CORRESPONDENCES

A. Board of Supervisors

Ms. Wargo reported that the Board adopted the Tree Preservation Ordinance. The Board reviewed and approved the final State College Borough Water Authority Land Development Plan; approved the modification/waiver for the West College Student Housing Preliminary Land Development Plan; the Board granted the Wright's their modification/waiver; the two modification/waiver for Wasson and the Wasson Preliminary Plan was approved.

B. CRPC Report

Dr. Taricani reported that they had a joint meeting with the Transportation and Land Use and the Public Service and Environmental Committee. They reviewed development plans in the region. There was discussion around water use and upcoming water use. The odor coming from the sewage plant near Dr. Taricani has been eliminated. May is bicycle month. There were 30 solar panels installed over the last year.

C. Land Development Plans

Ms. Aneckstein reported the Board approved the State College Borough Water Authority Kocher Water Pumping Improvements Land Development Plan; West College Student Housing Preliminary Plan was approved pending outstanding comments; Wasson was approved pending outstanding comments.

D. Staff Updates

Ms. Wargo reported that the Township building is open Monday – Thursday 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. and Friday's from 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Some staff are working remotely and meeting in person by appointment only.

II. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Binney made a motion to adjourn the April 12, 2021 Planning Commission meeting at 7:28 p.m. Mr. Keough seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,



Rob Crassweller, Secretary
For the Planning Commission