

**BIRMINGHAM TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES**

March 11, 2008

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order by Chairman, Nick DiMarino at 7:30 p.m. at the Birmingham Township Building. The following Township Officials were in attendance:

Nick DiMarino	Chairman, Planning Commission
Chris Bailey	Member, Planning Commission
Scott Boorse	Member, Planning Commission
Janet Decaestecker	Member, Planning Commission
Eric Hawkins	Vice Chairman Planning Commission
Debbie Hineman	Planning Commission Member,
Douglas Marshall	Planning Commission Member,
Andrew McReynolds	Solicitor, Planning Commission
Karen McFadden	Secretary, Planning Commission
Al Bush	Supervisor, Birmingham Township

Absent were Planning Commission Members, Peter Davenport and Scott Towler

APPROVAL OF January 8, 2008 MINUTES

Mr. DiMarino explained that the regular meeting of the Planning Commission that was scheduled for Tuesday February 12, 2008 had been cancelled due to inclement weather. Therefore the first order of business was review of the January 8, 2008 minutes from the previous meeting. Mr. DiMarino suggested that on page three in the second paragraph under the areas that would be considered as part of the review of zoning districts that the second and third bullet points could be combined to read:

Matrix of uses in zoning districts.

Also in the same section for the next bullet point Mr. DiMarino suggested that Roundelay Drive be added to Rondelay Estate under Institutional District and be revised to read:

Institutional District – Rondelay Estate and Roundelay Drive

Ms. Hineman motioned that the minutes from the January 8, 2008 meeting be approved with the aforementioned revisions. The motion was seconded, and approved all in favor.

WEST CHESTER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION UPDATE

Mr. Scott Boorse reported that he had attended recent meetings of the WCRPC and had been elected treasurer for the organization. Senya Isayeff of East Goshen Township was elected Chairman and Jim Lees of Westtown Township will serve as Vice Chair. Mr. Boorse went on to explain that the Commission was involved in looking at Landscapes II, which is the county initiative to look at affordable housing in Chester County. Scott went on to explain the Chester County point of view, which looks to Delaware County

and notes that property values have declined in certain areas. The county holds that there is little housing available to mid income groups. They would be over burdened by cost when 30% or more of their income goes toward the cost of their home. In Chester County over recent years this average cost moved from 25% to 32%. Housing is the #1 issue for Chester County Planning Commission when you look at www.landscapes2.org. Birmingham Township will not be affected because the township is already built. The concern at the county level is that without a plan for affordable housing the stability of neighborhoods is weakened and opportunities for mid income earners are limited. Nick DiMarino stated that he doesn't necessarily agree with the premise and using Delaware County as an example is not a good comparison. Scott Boorse stated that there is an opportunity for Birmingham Township to be involved, we can express our opinion as a member of the West Chester Regional Planning Commission, housing needs to be affordable where people work. Scott mentioned that the immediate consideration is the fact that Chester County is managing a countywide review of affordable housing. Does a separate review of the West Chester Region also need to be done?

Shane a West Chester University Student whose parents live on Heritage drive in Birmingham Township stated that his understanding of Landscapes 2 was that it was an attempt to densify housing and prevent developers from building huge homes with inflated property value. It would point development into already developed areas. He mentioned the situation in Downingtown where teachers can not afford to live in the district where they teach.

Eric Hawkins noted that new construction is only 20% - 30% occupied and the asking price has dropped from a high of \$850,000 to about \$575,000. In a subdivision west of Coatesville they are moving toward townhouses and more compact development.

Scott asked the group for their input on the needs assessment that is being proposed. Should we support the countywide assessment as well as an assessment just for the West Chester region? Nick DiMarino noted that if West Chester did their own it would likely take at least 18 months and a countywide assessment would probably take longer. He also thought it important to consider the level of detail in the countywide assessment and if it would be as detailed as an assessment that would focus exclusively on the West Chester Region. Eric Hawkins expressed concern that the countywide assessment would not be meaningful for the individual municipalities. If it was done on a regional level you would have a more accurate representation that would allow you to plan within your region. If you look at West Chester and West Goshen as a region we may well meet the requirement. Birmingham Township has done their fair share with townhouses and Knolls of Birmingham; we have planned residential development. But it is a moot point because there are no other open areas for development.

Scott Boorse would like to take feedback from the Birmingham Township Planning Commission to the Regional Planning Commission. Doug Marshall stated that he would let the county go first. Chris Bailey felt with the limited information that it was difficult to make a decision. Eric Hawkins suggested that we request additional information. Nick DiMarino asked Scott Boorse if we could get more information on the county

affordability plan. Scott Boorse mentioned that Kathy McCarthy from the Chester County Planning Commission had addressed the group but did not mention the study. Scott further reported that two of the townships that had previously been members of the WCRPC were no longer involved. Pocopson is participating in Kennett instead and West Goshen has not sent a representative. The commission includes East Goshen, East Bradford, West Whiteland, Thornbury and of course Birmingham Township.

ZONING ORDINANCE AMMENDMENTS FOR FENCES

Mr. DiMarino reminded the group that we had sent two zoning revisions to the supervisors for fences and also side yard projections. They sent back to the Planning Commission asking if we could combine the two. Frone Crawford sent back our combined version and all of changes were accepted. Frone Crawford had incorporated our comments and Kristen Camp's into the current revised version. Much discussion ensued regarding the need to comply with revised ordinance if more than 50% of the fence needs to be repaired due to damage and also the addition of verbiage regarding retaining walls. Scott Boorse was especially concerned that at 3foot in height a retaining wall, under the new ordinance would require an engineering review. The thought was that this is an undue burden on the property owner and how did they arrive at the height of 3 feet for requiring this extra burden. Mr. DiMarino requested a motion from the floor explaining that there were three options: recommend as is, study it further and work on it some more, or recommend with revisions. Ms. Deb Hineman motioned that the Planning Commission recommends that the revisions to the zoning ordinance be accepted with a careful review of the height requirement for a retaining wall to have an engineering review. The motion was seconded by Chris Bailey and approved all in favor with Scott Boorse abstaining.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. DiMarino mentioned that East Bradford had submitted a revised map for PC review; however with the cancellation of the February meeting, group input was impossible given the quick turnaround that was required. The changes were mostly administrative. It was the same map with more documentation and identification of easements. No impact on Birmingham Township was identified.

With no further discussion Mr. DiMarino called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Hineman so motioned and the meeting was adjourned at 8:52(ND)

Respectfully submitted,

Karen McFadden
Secretary, Birmingham Township
Planning Commission