

**RICE TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
RICE TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL BUILDING
3000 CHUCH ROAD
MOUNTAIN TOP, PA 18707**

**MINUTES
October 28, 2015**

The regular monthly meeting of the Rice Township Planning Commission was held on Wednesday, October 28, 2015.

ROLL CALL:
Tom Romanyshyn--Present
Ann Kijek--Present
Kevin Rogan--Absent
Ray Fedor--Present
Bob Smith--Present

Also in attendance were: Jack Varaly, Marcia Thomas, Dennis Kijek, Secretary Alicia Stier, Solicitor Jack Dean, Andrew Austin

Chairperson, Ray Fedor, calls meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

MOTION TO ACCEPT MINUTES OF LAST MEETING (June 2015):

MOTION by Bob Smith, second by Tom Romanyshyn.

All in favor.

MOTION CARRIED.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Dave Coleman Sewage Plan--No action. Solicitor Dean stated that his office sent Mr. Coleman a letter and there will be action at the Board of Supervisor's meeting.

2. Matt McGowan, Woodberry Phase III Sketch Plan--No action, as it was an informal discussion.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Polonia Estates request to release Phase III Bond--Solicitor Dean stated that a letter will be sent to their counsel denying the release of the Bond at this time. Engineer Pasonick provided the Township with a detailed report on the issue.

2. Jack Varaly--Rice Township Comprehensive Plan--Mr. Varaly discussed the previous attempt to update the Comprehensive Plan (2009), which was never acted upon by the Board of Supervisors. Rice Township received a Community Development Grant for Planning in the amount of \$20,000 and the Board decided to utilize those funds to finalize the Township Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Varaly stated that there is a lot of data that will be changing in the draft plan. The plan utilizes census data from 2000, and the population has since increased by about 1/3 and 40% in the number of housing units (mainly single-family residential). The income went up by about 60% and so did the housing values. When you compare Rice Township to the neighboring municipalities, it ranks #1 in those categories. Rice Township is probably in the top 3 in Luzerne County in percentage population growth because, historically, the region has been losing population instead of gaining.

Mr. Varaly spoke about a Community Survey that was conducted prior to compiling the draft Comprehensive Plan. Rice Township did not receive an adequate amount of funding to conduct a new Community Survey; the Planning Commission will be evaluating the questions and results of that survey to see if they are somewhat representative of the feelings of the Township after almost 10 years. Mr. Varaly added that there are some significant changes that he would like to make to the Zoning Regulations, which were last updated in 2008. He stated that there are gaps in terms of uses that the Township may want to regulate and there are probably things that should be deleted.

The previous Comprehensive Plan included provisions for Growing Greener, which was represented as a recommendation in the plan. Mr. Varaly stated that there have been no takers, and believes that there will be none in the future. Although it gives the developer the right to condense the footprint of the development into a "cluster development" (smaller lot sizes), 50% of the land would remain open space, but to make it work, there needs to be a disincentive for developers choosing not to go that path; the Township did not include such a provision.

Mr. Varaly asked the Planning Commission to review the draft Comprehensive Plan and the Community Survey for discussion and revision at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Mr. Varaly discussed the original Community Survey. Some of the questions that were asked pertained to items that were beyond the Township's control. He stated that if the Township decides to conduct another survey in the future, it should be more condensed. The survey originally asked for positive and negative comments, and Mr. Varaly believes that the question should be rephrased to be more generalized, asking for a rating of quality of life in the Township. Asking for negative comments encourages an answer where there may not really be one.

Conducting a Community Survey can be a costly endeavor. Previous surveys that were conducted were done so on a mail to/mail back basis, and printing/postage is expensive. The Township population is roughly 3300, and ideally we'd want to reach out to 20% of the households. Mr. Varaly suggested utilizing SurveyMonkey, an online survey service. In the past, the surveys were random samplings of the population. Putting the survey online does not give the Township the opportunity to control how many times the survey is answered by one person. Someone could use different computers to answer the survey multiple times. People who answer online surveys must be computer literate. Mr. Varaly stated that he would look into this option over the next month.

Between this meeting and the next, Mr. Varaly will be working on updating the statistical data related to income, housing, population, migration, and natural change within the Township. Last time, there was a lot of emphasis put on the most positive characteristics of the quality of life within the Township and environmental features. This will probably remain the same; what will change is the amount of area that is vacant and available for development. Mr. Varaly stated that the area has

shrunk a great deal since he began working with the Township around 2000. While you'll still have development, the percent increase in population is in the high 20s low 30s, which is very high. This information is important for developing Land Use Regulations. All the prime land (easily developed) is pretty much gone at this point, so now the marginal land is becoming primary.

Solicitor Dean clarified with Mr. Varaly that the 2010 Comprehensive Plan was never adopted by the Board of Supervisors. It went before the Planning Commission and a recommendation to approve was given--it never went to a vote before the Board of Supervisors.

Chairman Fedor asked if there was a Comprehensive Plan adopted prior to 2010. Mr. Varaly stated that he believed there was one adopted in 1968. Marcia Thomas explained that the 1968 Comprehensive Plan is currently in effect. Commissioners asked why the plan was never adopted and discussed the timing of the presentation of the Comprehensive Plan with the Reorganization of the Board. Mr. Varaly explained that the 2010 Draft Comprehensive Plan was created using census data from 2000. He stated that the 2010 data is now available. Mr. Varaly also stated that the Census Bureau created a program called the American Community Fact Finder, which provides estimates on population, housing values, and income on 5-year intervals. Estimates are released at the end of the year. He explained that a lot of Grant work and funding is based upon the income level of the Township, so utilizing data from the American Community Fact Finder estimates can be helpful.

Marcia Thomas mentioned the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan and asked if there have been any changes to Wetland Protections since Rice Township did a Planning and Zoning update. Mr. Varaly stated that he's not impressed with the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Marcia asked about State and Federal levels impacting Wetland Protections. Mr. Varaly stated that the Floodplain Map has probably changed, and the Township should take a look at having the Floodplain as an overlay on the existing Zoning Map. He recommended planning a Floodplain overlay project in 2016 because it is beneficial to property owners in identifying whether or not their parcel is located within a Floodplain. Marcia Thomas agreed that the project would be worthwhile.

Solicitor Dean pointed out that the next meeting is scheduled for the day before Thanksgiving. Jack Varaly stated that he would be out of town, so the meeting during which this discussion will continue will occur in December. Mr. Varaly asked for Commissioners' mailing and email addresses so that he may relay necessary information.

Bob Smith asked if this Comprehensive Plan would be based off of the 2010 Census Data. Jack Varaly confirmed, and added that there may be data later than 2010 that can be used.

Bob Smith asked if we would be conducting a Community Survey, since it occurred not too long ago. Jack Varaly stated that the results from the last Community Survey could be evaluated by the Planning Commission. Marcia Thomas stated that in 2006, when the Survey was conducted, the Board of Supervisors at that time decided to mail surveys to the entire Township rather than using a sampling. Local University students assisted in tabulating results from hand-written survey responses. Mr. Varaly reported about 500 returns from the previous survey. Answers to the subjective questions are sorted into classifications; about 24% of the answers are classified as "Other." Bob Smith stated that subjective answers could change monthly based on issues that may

arise in the Township, such as the Ice Lakes Dam drainage issue. Marcia Thomas stated that it was wonderful to see such a large return for a 12-15 page survey.

Jack Varaly explained that some questions receive different answers based on a resident's background. For example, classifying Rice Township as Rural vs. Suburban, or determining the amount of traffic congestion in a given area. Those who have lived in the Township their whole lives see the area as suburban based on the amount of development occurring, and those who just moved to the area from larger cities see the area as rural.

Marcia Thomas stated that there have been 2 instances in the past 4 years where people are putting up oversized political signs. She stated that it is a concern for a few reasons: traditionally, everywhere you go, the political signs are the same size. She stated that the previous Zoning Ordinance was more specific as to what category a political sign would fall under, so the Township was able to regulate it. She stated that the rural characteristic was such an important aspect to the quality of life within the Township, and previous administrations did everything they could to limit the amount of signage and lighting. There are no billboards in Rice Township, and residents cared very deeply about keeping the rural characteristic of the Township. Marcia stated that a change in the Zoning Ordinance would need to come through the Planning Commission. She stated that Fairview Township has a lot to say about the character of their main roads and what they would like to see. Marcia asked for feedback on the issue.

Jack Varaly stated that a Political Sign typically comes under the definition of an event sign; it is that way in Wright Township. He stated that for whatever reason, it was unintentionally omitted from Rice Township's Zoning Ordinance. He believes that either the Board of Supervisors or the Zoning Officer at that time did not wish to regulate Political Signs. As long as the Township wants those regulations in the Ordinance, they can be added. Marcia Thomas stated that if it is not regulated in some way, there's no telling what our roadsides will look like.

Ann Kijek stated that the Kite Festival signage was extremely large, as well as the Fear Hollow signs for the Legion.

Jack Varaly recommended incorporating Political Signs in with event signs, which are temporary in nature, as the regulations will be the same. Solicitor Dean clarified that we have signs up that are outside of regulation and our remedy is to cite them. He stated that a simple amendment to the Ordinance needs to be made, which will assist in expediting a resolution to signs found in violation. Jack Varaly suggested requiring a bond for signs erected within the Township. Solicitor Dean suggested adding a fine of \$100/day for each day the violation remains, which will give the offending party the opportunity to remove the sign. Tom Romanyshyn stated that it would make sense to keep all signs the same size. Jack Varaly stated that the maximum size of Commercial signs in a B-1 district is 32 square feet, in a B-2 is 64 square feet, and a C-1 is 32 square feet. Event sign size regulations are less than a business sign, at 3' x 2'. Mr. Varaly suggested changing the list of permitted uses format into a chart format based on Zoning District.

Mr. Varaly stated that in order to enforce penalties for continual violations, the Zoning Officer will need to take pictures daily and document the violation. He stated that he would draft up the proposed Zoning Amendment and get it on the agenda for the next meeting.

Ann Kijek asked if this would apply to business signs as well. It is explained that those regulations are already in place.

ADJOURNMENT:

The next meeting of the Planning Commission is Wednesday, November 25th, at 7:00 p.m.

MOTION by Tom Romanyshyn, second by Ray Fedor, to adjourn at 7:41 p.m.

All in favor.

MOTION CARRIED.