

BERKS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
BERKS COUNTY SERVICES CENTER
633 COURT STREET, 14TH FLOOR.
READING, PA 19601-4309

September 11, 2024

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Christopher Spohn called the monthly meeting of the Berks County Planning Commission to order at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was held on Wednesday, September 11, 2024, as a virtual meeting using the platform Microsoft Teams.

The following members were present:

Christopher Spohn, Chairman
Lisa Weaver-Gonzalez, Vice-Chair
Glenn R. Knoblauch
Jodi L. Gauker
Thomas C. McKeon, AICP, CECD
Miguel Herrera
Sarah Phillips
David Mattes

Also Attending:

David N. Hunter, Sr., AICP, Executive Director
Ashley J. Showers, Assistant Director
David Peris, Berks County Solicitor
Elizabeth Burkovich, GIS Analyst
Laura Mursch, Intergovernmental Planner III
Alan D. Piper, Transportation Planner III
Matthew McGough, Transportation Planner III
Pam Menet, Executive Director Community and Economic Development
Shanice Ellison, Planner I
Michael Golembiewski, Transportation Modeler Planner III
Amanda Timochenko, Transportation Planner II
Shailyn Hernandez, Office Support V
Michelle Franklin, Planner III
Thiago Correa de Almeida, Planner II
Devon Hain, Transportation Planner II
Taylor Lawrence, Planner III
Richard Royer, Design Planner I
Amanda Timochenko, Transportation Planner II
David Myers, Berks Alliance
Deb Millman, GRCA, President of Berks Development Fund
Pamela Menet, Director of Economic Development
Derek Harris, Economic Development Coordinator
IS Production, Berks County Department of Information Systems
Melissa Lewis, Application Specialist & Trainer
Jeremy Zaborowski, Director of Industrial Development

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

3. REPORTS OF STAFF

A. Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Hunter began his report by reminding the Board about the Building the Boroughs event happening on October 3rd. Mr. Hunter then shared with the Board the October meeting agenda which will include a presentation by Simon Wangolo, regarding the City of Reading Downtown Plus Plan adoption.

Additionally, Mr. Hunter shared dates for several upcoming events including the SRPRA Board meeting and reception (Oct.28th), Pennsylvania Planning Association Annual Conference (Oct.13th-15th); Long Range Transportation Plan public meetings (Oct 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 10th, 15th and 16th).

Mr. Hunter concluded his report by introducing and welcoming Planning's new staff member Thiago Correa de Almeida as our new Planner II. Thiago gave a quick overview of his background and goals for joining the team.

A grand welcome was given to Thiago by the Board.

B. STAFF REPORTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

A. **Michelle Franklin**

a. **Lincoln Park Elementary School – Spring Township**

The proposed plan was submitted as a Final Plan for the Lincoln Park Elementary Annexation. The site is located on the southwest side of Dorchester Avenue, between the intersection of Dorchester Avenue and Amherst Avenue and Dorchester Avenue and Filmore Avenue. The site is in Existing Development and Designated Growth Future Land Use areas according to the Future Land Use Map of the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update. The proposal for the Annexation is consistent with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030.

Discussion ensued on the reasons behind the project, whether it is related to expansion and the impact it will have on the community.

b. **Hawthorne Ridge – Cumru Township**

The proposed plan was submitted as a Final Plan for the subdivision Hawthorne Ridge. The site is located along the south side of Philadelphia Ave (S.R.0724) at Poplar Neck Road, and along the west side of I-176. The proposal is for 200 apartment units, it will consist of 9 buildings of 24 units, the units will have garages along their parking areas. The site is designated as an Rural Conservation area according to the Future Land Use Map of the Berks County

Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update. The overall site is mostly wooded, has slope issues, a Natural Heritage Area core habitat area, and a tributary/stream. The placement of the apartments and associated improvements will involve clearing wooded areas, encroachment on a Natural Heritage Area core habitat and may be increasing the slopes in various areas of the site. Therefore, the proposal, as submitted, is not consistent with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update.

c. Kutztown University Foundation Inc. & Ursus Solaris Inc. – Maxatawny Township

The proposed plan was submitted as a Final Plan for the Kutztown University Foundation Inc. & Ursus Solaris Inc. The site is located on the northwestern side of Baldy Road, adjacent to the Kutztown University Golden Bear Village South dormitory complex. They are proposing adding an emergency access to the site and bring the main access drive off the existing driveway into the site. The site is designated both Future Growth and Existing Development area according to the Future Land Use Map of the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update. Chapter 4 of the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update, Energy Conservation, notes to incorporate into the development process new energy-efficient technologies while using site and location choices that take advantage of existing energy resources. Therefore, the proposal for the solar array project is consistent with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update.

Discussion ensued on the use of Berks County Planning Commission’s Solar & Utility Advice with this project. There was also discussion if there has been any resident push back on the project since a solar farm is of significant size.

C. IN-PERSON VS VIRTUAL BOARD MEETINGS – APPROVAL

MOTION: Jodi Gauker made a motion to have a discussion and vote on the change of having all in-person meetings for the remainder of 2024. The motion was seconded by Lisa Weaver-Gonzalez and passed unanimously.

Discussion ensued on the benefits of having all in-person meetings for the remainder of the year. There was discussion on the By Laws of the meetings and which type of attendance is allowed. According to the By Laws, a Board member may call in and it can be considered as attendance to the meeting.

4. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. July 10, 2024 Meeting Minutes
- B. Land Development & Subdivision Activity Report/Summary June-July / July-August
- C. Endorsed Land Development & Subdivision Activity June-July / July-August

MOTION: Jodi L. Gauker made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by David Mattes and passed unanimously.

5. STAFF, STAKEHOLDER AND BOARD MEMBERS REPORTS

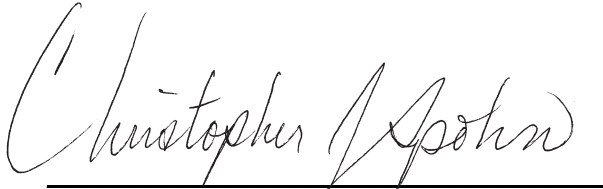
A. Sarah Phillips – Farmland Preservation

Board Member Sarah Phillips presented on farmland preservation specifically, how it relates to the Berks County Planning Commission. Ms. Phillips shared data on how Berks County compares to other counties with the cost paid per acre of farmland purchased through the conservation easement program.

Additionally, discussion ensued on the funds given to farmland owners from the County for having the farmland acres preserved as well as the farmland preservation and easement policies.

6. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Sarah Phillips made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:20p.m. The motion was seconded by Dave Mattes.



Christopher Spohn, Chairman



Lisa Weaver-Gonzalez, Vice Chair