



WEST EARL TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

Dean Weinhold, Chairman · Jennifer Prunoske, Vice Chairwoman
Janell Frazier, Secretary · Craig Miller, Member · Cameron Renehan
Ben Craddock, Township Engineer

Meeting Minutes October 19, 2021

The West Earl Planning Commission held their scheduled monthly meeting on Tuesday, October 19, 2021. Chairman Weinhold called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Those members in attendance were:

Dean Weinhold, Chairman
Jennifer Prunoske, Vice Chairwoman
Janell Frazier, Secretary
Craig Miller, Member

Cameron Renehan, Member
Ben Craddock, Township Engineer via
Zoom
Jenna Seesholtz, Township Manager

Attendees: Karen Stauffer, John Stauffer, Joseph Stauffer Christine Wolf, James Zook, Elvin Hoover, David Lapp, Aaron Fisher, Barbie Fisher, Lisa Martin, Mike Pautz, Jacob Yoder, Susan Burkholder, Chris Gregar, Harold Stauffer, Matthew Mack, Nancy Lapp, Jacob Lapp, Samuel Beiler, San King, Harvey Yoder, Nelson Hoover, Steve Lapp, Mary Lapp, Fannie Beiler, Earl Weaver, Jim and Hannah Tupitz, Rudy Yoder, Jonas Shirk, John and Nan Jacobs, Dave Thornton, Keith Kauffman, Ernest Scheiber, Jay Stauffer, Kelly Stauffer, Hannah Greiner, J. Dwight Yoder, Esq., Sarah Ving, Anthony Petersheim, Jean Hoover, Harold Martin, Ela High, Lloyd Hoover

Minutes

September 21, 2020 Minutes: A motion by Miller second by Frazier to approve the Planning Commission minutes of September 21, 2021 as submitted. Motion carried.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

New Business

Special Exception – Earl Shirk: This item was tabled.

Blessings of Hope – Text Amendment Request: Dwight Yoder, Esq. of Gibbel, Kraybill and Hess LLP presented the proposed text amendment on behalf of his client, Blessings of Hope. The property in question is located at 1850 Diamond Station Road, Ephrata. David Lapp of Blessings of Hope gave some background information on Blessings of Hopes mission. Atty. Yoder noted that the proposed text amendment opens up approximately 90 acres of Ag property to allow food processing in the Ag zoning, 40 acres of that is owned by Blessings of Hope.

Mattew Mack of Mack Engineering presented the sketch plan for the potential Blessings of Hope facility.

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It was noted that there was a petition that contained over 500 signatures on behalf of Blessings of Hope in favor of allowing the project to continue.

Public Comment on Blessings of Hope:

Jim Tupitz read a statement on behalf of Respect Farmland. They noted that they had no negative comments on the mission that Blessings of Hope is carrying on, but Ag land should be preserved for agricultural purposes.

Attorney Matt Creme (via Zoom): Attorney Creme spoke on behalf of his clients, the Stauffer's. He noted that the Township is regulated and guided by the Municipal Planning Code. The use that Blessings of Hope is proposing is more of a commercial or industrial use not agricultural.

Elvin Hoover of 222 Conestoga Creek Road, Ephrata: Mr. Hoover noted that he was personally involved in the comprehensive plan for the Township. Ag zoned property should remain farmland and not allow commercial industry to be placed on the property.

Harold Stauffer of 187 Diamond Station Road, Ephrata: Mr. Stauffer countered the statement made by Blessings of Hope's representative in that the footprint of what Blessings of Hope is proposing is not small. He asked about the kind of future we are leaving our children if the farmland is no longer available to farm.

Aaron Fisher of 307 Millway Road, Ephrata: Mr. Fisher noted that he grew up with a disabled parent and that this was the reason he decided to do for others through Blessings of Hope. He notes that the project has the potential to impact thousands of people and would be honored if Blessings of Hope could build the facility they are proposing in West Earl Township.

David High of 241 S. Orange Street, Lancaster: Mr. High stated that we should respect farmland and he read a prepared statement.

Nelson Hoover of 275 Pleasant Valley Road, Ephrata: Mr. Hoover is concerned that is Blessings of Hope is able to construct this facility, what happens to the building if Blessings of Hope moves out. What may be allowed to move into the property.

Sara King of 1470 Oregon Pike, Leola: Ms. King can see both sides of this issue, but believes that Blessings of Hope will be able to honor the Ag property. She has no objection to what is being proposed.

James Zook of 128 W. Main Street, Mountville: Mr. Zook is a representative of Faith Friendship Ministries. He is able to run a 74-bed facility because of Blessings of Hope. The ministry receives \$37.00 per day to feed and house each resident which they refer to as "family members". With Blessings of Hope, they are able to keep the food costs down. He asked that the Township Supervisors consider changing the ordinance to allow Blessings of Hope to build their facility in West Earl Township.

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Lloyd Hoover of 30 Hoover Lane, Leola: Mr. Hoover is a representative of the Potter's House which serves the homeless population of Lancaster County. He considers the tract of land that Blessings of hope has purchased to be the perfect place for this project.

Kelly Stauffer of 76 Buchland Road, Ephrata: Ms. Stauffer has traveled Diamond Station Road for over 30 years and sees the potential traffic as a concern. She would not like to see any farmland converted into commercial property and would like to maintain the farmland we have in West Earl Township.

Jacob Lapp of 307 Millway Road, Ephrata: Mr. Lapp is a member of the Board for Blessings of Hope. He feels this is a great way to process and use the produce that would ordinarily be left in the fields to rot. Locals can also bring their produce to Blessings of Hope and because of this, he does not agree that this new project should be located in the city.

John Stauffer of 151 Pleasant Valley Road, Ephrata: Mr. Stauffer lives adjacent to the proposed Blessing of Hope property located at 1850 Diamond Station Road. He agrees with the Blessings of Hope mission but believes they should find suitable industrial property for the project, not Ag property.

Jay Stauffer of 2409 E Harold Street, Philadelphia: Mr. Stauffer feels the Comprehensive Plan for West Earl Township was well written. He would like to see this property remain as is as stated in the Comprehensive Plan.

Karen Stauffer of 151 Pleasant Valley Road: Mrs. Stauffer struggles to understand why Blessings of Hope purchased this property when it was not properly zoned for the use they are seeking. She stated that any warehouse will have huge capacity, but the land is more than what it produces and that is it about a way of life.

Fannie Beiler of 24 Stauffer Court, Leola: Ms. Beiler is a sister to the Lapps and said she worked 80-90 hours a week during the height of the pandemic to keep up with demand. She stated that Blessings of Hope is in need of a larger building.

Hannah Greiner of 130 S. State Street, Brownstown: Ms. Greiner stated that over 52,000 people in Lancaster County are food insecure. The new facility in the Township would allow more volunteerism opportunities and this would benefit the community. This facility would also support farmers who would generally have to waste the food they were not able to sell.

Mary Lapp of 307 Millway Road, Ephrata: Ms. Lapp noted that the location was chosen because of its close proximity to Route 322 and Route 222. There was no comment from those attending the meeting via Zoom.

Chairman Weinhold asked to hold an executive session, but it was noted that the Planning Commission must deliberate in public. No executive session was held.

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Planning Commission Members Comments

Member Miller asked about hours of operation to which David Lapp replied that they are currently operating from 6AM to 10PM.

Member Renehan inquired about anticipated truck traffic. Blessings of Hope representative noted that they average around 30 trips a day, but the projected use at the new facility may triple that number of trips.

Public Comment

Harold Stauffer noted that the Lapps claimed they have over 18,000 volunteers who can all then take home food from the distribution center. Stauffer asked if this would just be a de facto food outlet.

Kristine Wolf of 436 S. 9th Street, Akron: Ms. Wolf has been volunteering with Blessings of Hope for over a year. She suggested that all members of the Planning Commission plan a trip to tour the current Blessings of Hope facility.

Member Comment

Chairman Weinhold knows that Blessings of Hope is a great mission and his wife is a volunteer at Blessings of Hope's current facility. He has an issue with the fact that they purchased a piece of property that is not zoned for the use they are seeking.

Action

A motion by Prunoske second by Renehan to table the Text Amendment request made by Blessings of Hope. This will allow the Planning Commission members to review all of the material supplied to make their recommendation to the Board of Supervisors. Motion carried.

Special Exception – Earl Shirk: The Planning Commission reviewed the submission that was earlier tabled, and the consensus was that the members have no recommendation on the Earl Shirk Special Exception. No action was taken on this item.

Adjournment: There being no other business before the Planning Commission, a motion by Prunoske second by Miller to adjourn the meeting at 8:51 PM. Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenna Seesholtz, Township Manager