

The stated meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Abington was held on Wednesday, April 27, 2016 at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA., with Chairperson, Ms. Lucy Strackhouse presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: COOPER, ROSEN, WEGGEL, SPEARMAN,
RUSSELL GAUTHIER, STRACKHOUSE
Excused: ROBINSON, DiCELLO

Also Present: Director of Code Enforcement MATTEO

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Strackhouse polled the Board as to whether or not they would like the meetings of the Planning Commission to begin at 7 p.m. as opposed to 7:30 p.m.

Consensus by members of the Planning Commission was to keep the 7:30 p.m. start time of their meetings.

AGENDA ITEMS:

The Role of the Planning Commission:

Ms. Strackhouse noted that Mr. Narcowich could not be here this evening, but he provided a copy of a booklet on "The Planning Commission in Pennsylvania" for review.

Also, she provided a copy of "Article II" of the Planning Code outlining the responsibilities and what the role of the Planning Commission is.

In regards to Section 209.1 of the code – Powers and Duties of Planning Agency, Item 1 – "Prepare the Comprehensive Plan for the development of the municipality" in which a few members have been involved with previously. Also, to maintain and keep on file records of its action in which minutes are taken and Township staff maintains those records.

The planning agency at the request of the governing body may make recommendations to the governing body concerning adoption or amendment of an official map, and this has not been done during her time on this Board.

Ms. Gauthier added that there is a zoning map, but there is no official map showing street extensions that are planned for the future.

Mr. Matteo noted that the street map is designated in the zoning map.

Ms. Gauthier continued that some other municipalities have secondary access roads shown on a map, so as if there is development in that area, they have to provide the right-of-way for that secondary access road, which is a useful tool to have.

Mr. Rosen said the most important thing to begin focusing on is the scope of our vision as it is defined by the planning code and Pennsylvania statute. Also, as a Board, need to voice what we feel we should be doing other than what have been done by this Board, historically. There are some functions that the Planning Commission has been asked to do in which has not been done for some time and one of those functions is to update the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Spearman commented that updating the Comprehensive Plan every 15 years does not work and there should be an ongoing involvement, so the dynamic vision informs and changes the comprehensive plan which in turn informs and changes the zoning ordinance.

Mr. Rosen agreed that is a great point because having managed the last Comprehensive Plan, which was a product of efforts made by so many people contributing huge amounts of personal time. It is a big project that we need to face and it should be done in a separate meeting of a subcommittee.

Ms. Strackhouse suggested that all members of the Planning Commission review the current Comprehensive Plan.

The Board reviewed the list under Section 209.1 – Powers and Duties of the Planning Agency.

Ms. Gauthier commented that following the adoption of the revised Zoning Ordinance; her next priority would be to review the SALDO (Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance).

Ms. Strackhouse noted there is a training class offered by the Montgomery County Planning Commission, which was helpful to her and might be for the newer members as well.

Ms. Gauthier added that since Abington has a contract with the County they would offer the training session here in this building.

Ms. Strackhouse suggested setting up that training session by the County on a separate evening.

Mr. Rosen said he feels that the Planning Commission has a broad charge to do what is needed related to the growth and planning of land use in our Township subject to the approval/authorization of the Board of Commissioners.

Ms. Strackhouse agreed that this is an advisory role and we simply make recommendations to the Board.

Relationship to Township Committees:

Mr. Spearman commented that he feels the Township is in a transition zone in that it is not urban and not completely suburban, although, it has a few major corridors that do not have consistency or character, so he feels that the Township is not completely built out.

Mr. Rosen said members of the Planning Commission have been trying to be better informed about what the EDC (Economic Development Committee) has been doing to create active interest in redevelopment in the Township. He would like to see more of the visions that we have for Abington take flight. Unfortunately, it will not be done through this Commission because it is more about economic development.

He is interested in being more involved with the EDC to see if there is some effort that members of the Planning Commission can add to the process.

Ms. Gauthier commented that she would like a monthly or quarterly report be provided by the EDC to the Planning Commission as well as from other committees/commissions.

Mr. Weggel added that a liaison between the Planning Commission and the EDC would be beneficial.

Mr. Rosen suggested identifying what are the best things that could happen in Abington, where should they happen and what can we do to make it happen. And, as a Planning Commission, he would like to see if there is something more that can be done for the Township by way of economic development that will continue to make Abington thrive.

Mr. Matteo noted that development/redevelopment in Abington usually begins with meetings with the neighbors.

Ms. Strackhouse commented that there is a new County grant program, although, the deadline is May 1st, but we can think about projects for next year since we will not make it this round. It is a five-year program and the areas of concentration are vibrant economy, sustainable design and connectivity.

Mr. Rosen commented that he would like to expand Penn State's influence in our community, and although it is starting to happen with the residential development, there is more he hopes to accomplish.

Ms. Strackhouse replied there is an effort being made to get a meeting set up with the new Dean of Penn State to find out what the direction of the campus will be and how it will grow going into the future.

Mr. Rosen said we need to structure having a frequent relationship with the EDC and we to identify the projects that we feel are most attractive.

In regards to the Comprehensive Plan; he suggested getting professional assistance as it is a very large project.

Ms. Strackhouse said in summary, we will work on the Comprehensive Plan and continue meeting with the EDC. Also, Cathy Gauthier is our liaison to the Vacant Property Review Board as well as the Shade Tree Commission and EAC.

New Business:

Ms. Strackhouse said in regards to design review of properties; we need to discuss what the Planning Commission's role is in this area.

Mr. Rosen replied there is an ordinance for sketch plan review, which is optional for the applicant.

Ms. Strackhouse agreed, but the Planning Commission can make recommendations on design as it relates to fitting in with the neighborhood, etc.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Recording Secretary