

DOYLESTOWN TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

Monday, June 26, 2023 at 7 PM

Community Meeting Room, 425 Wells Road

Meeting Minutes

The Doylestown Township Planning Commission Regular Meeting was held at 7:00 pm on Monday, June 26, 2023. Members of the Doylestown Township Planning Commission in attendance included Tom Kelso, Chairman; Judy Hendrixson, Vice Chairman; members Michael Kracht, Jill Macauley and Robert Repko. Others in attendance included Stephanie Mason, Township Manager; Sinclair Salisbury, Director of Code Enforcement; Judy Stern Goldstein, Gilmore & Associates; Jennifer Herring, Board of Supervisors Liaison.

The meeting officially began at **7:03 pm**.

Public Comment

N/A

Review of Minutes

On motion of Mr. Kracht and seconded by Ms. Macauley, the May 22, 2023 minutes were unanimously approved as prepared.

Plans Scheduled for Discussion

None

Sketch Plans Scheduled for Discussion

Greyhawk Sketch Plan – Continued Discussion

Present at the meeting was Oleg Khramov, owner of the property at 3775 Bristol Road. The sketch plan presented a three-lot subdivision, with two new single-family homes to be built and the existing building to remain for the time being. The new homes are expected to be approximately 2500 square feet and styled similarly to the neighboring homes. The hope is to improve this area and make it better than it currently sits.

Mr. Kelso asked if the applicant went through the review letters received from consultants and staff.

Mikhail Zavyazkin, engineer for the project, said that yes, they have gone through the review letters, and have made some changes to the original site plan. The lots will be larger than what is required by zoning, and they will propose stormwater for each lot at the next stage, when soil testing is complete. There was a question of adding a bike path, and while they want to work with the Township, this could be too costly for the project.

Mr. Kelso noted that as required by ordinance, if they do not do a bike path, they will need to add a sidewalk.

Mr. Zavyazkin added that they also intend to connect to public water and sewer. He added that they have been looking for documentation regarding an easement for the water vault located on the corner of the property.

Ms. Mason suggested they speak with Keith Hass from the Municipal Authority or North Wales Water Authority regarding that.

Mr. Kelso confirmed that the new plan relocates the driveways for the two properties as well, one adjacent to Upper State Road, and the other on Bristol Road, but moved further away from the intersection as recommended. The orientation of the house on lot 1 is now oriented toward Upper State Road. He also confirmed that there are currently no plans for the existing house and barn on lot 3.

Mr. Khramov said that they do intend to connect this house to public water and sewer but would like to wait for the other houses to be built to decide what to do with it. The house is currently unoccupied, and he added that he has spoken with the Township fire marshal about using the property for training, which he is willing to allow. As for the barn, it is in very bad condition, and will be demolished if needed.

Ms. Goldstein noted that the subdivision plan should note the intentions with the barn and lot 3.

Mr. Kelso asked for further clarification of the proposed stormwater plan.

Mr. Zavyazkin said that if the conditions are right, they will try for an underground seepage pit.

Mr. Khramov added that there are some issues with water at the back of the neighboring properties, but adding stormwater management to each of the new lots should help with these issues.

Mr. Kelso added that this is the earliest we see a plan in the process. The next step will be for the applicant to address the review letters and return with a preliminary plan, which will show engineering and more detail.

Items Scheduled for Discussion

Zoning Non-Commercial Backyard Poultry

Mr. Kelso asked Mr. Salisbury to provide some background on the issue.

Mr. Salisbury explained that the code office had received some complaints about chickens which resulted in a poultry owner writing a letter to the Township supervisors noting some needed changes to the ordinance. The letter was then referred to the planning commission. He added that this might be a good time to look at and update the ordinance. He noted that there is an outstanding notice of violation which has been on hold pending this discussion.

Mr. Kelso asked if the party that wrote the letter would like to speak.

Brooke Henningsen of 788 Sandy Ridge Road provided a summary of her letter and noted the items in the ordinance that are inconsistent, vague, and in need of an update. **See Exhibit A.** She added that she believes she has been unfairly targeted because of one neighbor, even though the other nine have no issues. Changing the ordinance would positively impact all of Doylestown.

Ms. Hendrixson asked for clarification regarding the crowing of hens.

Ms. Henningsen responded that hens can crow if no male is present, to create a pecking order. So, for that to be the main constraint against a rooster doesn't hold water. In addition, the prohibition of a rooster does not fit the Township's noise ordinance, which prohibits noise for 5 minutes consecutively during the hours of 10 pm to 7 am and 15 minutes consecutively for the hours of 7 am to 10 pm. Roosters would not crow this consistently.

Mr. Repko noted that although Doylestown is historically agricultural, it is now residential.

Ms. Henningsen replied that larger lot sizes can still lend to the agriculture and backyard farming uses.

Mr. Repko asked for clarification on how the number of chickens compares to bunnies as previously noted on other properties.

Ms. Henningsen replied that often bunny owners can have 5-10, but it is harder to control the population of bunnies. You can do that with chickens.

Ms. Hendrixson expressed concern over free range chickens roaming neighborhoods and possibly getting into the street.

Ms. Henningsen replied that this is irresponsible on an owner's part and should not be standard practice. She added that the language of the ordinance needs to be altered for the betterment of the animals.

Mr. Kelso asked Mr. Salisbury if any permits were required for Ms. Henningsen's chicken coop.

Mr. Salisbury said no, based on the interpretation of the ordinance. He added that part of this discussion is to determine if any permits should be required.

Ms. Goldstein replied that structures for accessory uses should require a permit.

Mr. Kracht questioned whether it is prudent to make changes to the ordinance based on one situation. More information is needed to make changes.

Ms. Mason added that the Bucks County Planning Commission may have some updated information the Township can look into regarding chickens.

Ms. Goldstein noted that when the ordinance was updated about six years ago there was a significant amount of research and documentation at that time.

Ms. Herring added that the ordinance was much more restrictive before and it was agreed that it needed revision.

Ms. Henningsen replied that the keeping of chickens increased during covid, and it has become much more prevalent and important.

Ms. Macauley asked if there was any data regarding the number of homes with chickens in Doylestown.

Ms. Goldstein replied that there is not since permits have not been required.

Glenn Nemoth of 774 Sandy Ridge Road added his support of Ms. Henningsen and the updating of the ordinance. He noted that dogs bark more often than chickens crow, and cats roam in neighborhoods. Chickens have a low impact on the community but enhance it. The ordinance needs to reflect and

reward those animal lovers who are responsible. Times are changing, and it is likely we will see more and more backyard chickens.

Sean Sablosky of 717 Limekiln Road commented that this is mind numbing, as chickens are not nearly as disturbing as someone mowing their lawn early in the morning. But neighbors accommodate each other. Ms. Henningsen added a large and costly fence to her property to accommodate her neighbor. The ordinance could be greatly improved.

Ms. Goldstein wished to clarify that the fence was not a requirement of the ordinance.

Jake Moyer of 356 Pine Run Road added that he has had chickens now for 5 or 6 years. Allowing chickens to roam free implies poor ownership. Fencing in a yard is more responsible. In addition, bunny owners could have 30-50 bunnies and there are no restrictions on this. He added that there are other uses to the manure, rather than simply throwing it away. Backyard chickens supply food for families as well. All the restrictions are too much.

Mr. Kelso said the planning commission will not take any action on this tonight but will do more research. He appreciates the issues involved.

Mr. Moyer wished to further note that Doylestown Borough does not have restrictions on chickens, and those properties are usually much smaller than those in the Township. It is good the ordinance was changed in the past, but it needs to be changed again.

Adjournment

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 8:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kaitlyn Finley
Office Manager, Code Enforcement