

WORCESTER TOWNSHIP  
PLANNING COMMISSION WORK SESSION MEETING  
WORCESTER TOWNSHIP BUILDING  
WORCESTER, PA  
Thursday, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013      7:30 P.M.

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Gordon Todd at 7:30 PM.

**ATTENDANCE**

**PRESENT:**

Mr. Gordon Todd	Chairman
Mr. Doug Rotondo	Secretary
Ms. Chris David	Member
Mr. Anthony R. Sherr	Member
Mr. Matthew Schelly	Township Planning Consultant, Montgomery County Planning Commission

**ABSENT:**

Ms. Pat Quigley	Vice Chairman
Ms. Tiffany M. Loomis	Township Zoning Officer

**GUESTS:**

Ms. Karen Allum, Anvil Drive Resident  
Mr. Frank R. Bartle, Esq. with Dischell, Bartle & Dooley, PC representing Methacton School District  
Mr. Robert Cannon, Mill Road Resident  
Ms. Susan Caughlan, Overhill Drive Resident  
Ms. Andy Detterline with Morris Road Investors representing 2750 Morris Rd  
Ms. Genevieve Dickey, Peacock Drive Resident (Lower Providence Twp.)  
Mr. Eric C. Frey with Dischell, Bartle & Dooley, PC representing Methacton School District  
Ms. Michelle Jackson-Greenawalt, Locust Drive Resident  
Mr. Pat Kelly, Mill Road Resident  
Dr. James Mollick, Country View Lane Resident  
Mr. David Pataki, Conestoga Lane Resident  
Mr. Joshua Rehrer, Kriebel Mill Road Resident  
Mr. & Mrs. John & Marcia Staples, Mill Road Resident  
Ms. Jeanie Steigerwalt, Grange Avenue Resident  
Ms. Barbara Young, Mill Road Resident

**1. CONDITIONAL USE APPLICATION REGARDING LIGHTING FOR METHACTON SCHOOL DISTRICT FOR PROPOSED ATHLETIC FIELD IMPROVEMENTS AT METHACTON HIGH SCHOOL**

Before the Planning Commission was able to consider and discuss the proposed plans for this project and Mr. Schelly's review letter, Mr. Frank R. Bartle, of Dischell, Bartle & Dooley, (legal representatives for the Methacton School District for this project) insisted on making a preliminary statement. Mr. Bartle had issues with the township's planning consultant from the Montgomery County Planning Commission, Mr. Matthew Schelly, who reviewed the proposed project and wrote a review letter with several recommendations. Mr. Bartle

believed that there was a “conflict of interest” with the Chairman of the Board of the Montgomery County Planning Commission, Mr. Marc Jonas, who also happened to be representing a resident in the surrounding neighborhood adjacent to the high school. Mr. Bartle was afraid that Mr. Jonas had somehow influenced Mr. Schelly’s recommendations to favor the residents over the school district. Mr. Bartle also believed that Mr. Schelly was not qualified to make any recommendations on this project, because Mr. Schelly is not a certified lighting professional.

Ms. Susan Caughlan, of the Board of Supervisors, stated that the township’s solicitor had looked into the possible conflict of interest in this matter, but had found none. Mr. Bartle protested saying the process would be “tainted” and that the Planning Commission should not be reviewing something with which they have no expertise. Mr. Gordon Todd said that Mr. Bartle was wrong, that the township planning commission was merely making a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors and not physically designing the lighting system. Ms. Caughlan reiterated the opinion of the township solicitor.

Mr. Todd said that the township planning commission very often reviews plans drawn up by engineers and surveyors, but are not involved with the actual designing of the projects. He said the Planning Commission’s role was one of advisory. Mr. Anthony Sherr said that the Planning Commission does not always agree with Mr. Schelly’s recommendations.

Mr. Schelly went over his review letter, dated September 12, 2013. He recommended that the lights should use the least level of illumination for proposed events while still providing safe and adequate light. He referenced professional literature which sets industry standards for the design of such lighting systems. Mr. Schelly recommended that the township have their own independent lighting professional review the proposed project so that the current lighting ordinance is followed in conjunction with reasonable industry standards. He also suggested that the township require more tree and shrub screening along the high school property lines to mitigate the effect of glare on neighboring properties. This screening should be maintained, added to, and replaced as needed perpetually, so that current and future neighbors are protected.

Questions and discussion ensued among the members of the Planning Commission and Mr. Schelly.

Mr. Bartle asked Mr. Schelly several questions, which Mr. Schelly answered sufficiently. Mr. Todd said that Mr. Bartle was unfairly questioning Mr. Schelly and that he was only making a recommendation.

Mr. Pat Kelly said that the proposed level of illumination was excessive. He believed that the athletic fields will eventually be more akin to a public park than a school playing field.

Mrs. Barbara Young remarked that she and her husband moved to Worcester for the ambiance and desired for it to continue. She was concerned that the proposed lights would ruin the quality of life for the neighborhood.

Mrs. Marcia Staples attested that the Quinn-Harris Document (a compromise brokered between then-MSD Superintendant Timothy Quinn and a local resident dealing with the proposed lights, dated November 27, 2012) set forth an appropriate guide for regulation of

the proposed lights. She believes that the quality of life and property values of the area would be diminished if the lights are built.

Mr. John Staples agreed with his wife and expressed concern over illumination spilling into the neighbors' houses. He did not think that the area for the proposed lights was appropriate, given the number of nearby residences. Mr. Staples also believed that it would be wrong for the school district to rent out the fields to outside groups in order to pay for the lights.

Mr. Robert Cannon agreed with the previous statements. He thought that the Worcester Planning Commission had the ability to make a recommendation to protect the neighbors. He believed that the Quinn-Harris Document was an appropriate compromise. Mr. Cannon stated that Mr. Bartle never mentioned the protection of the residents in his remarks.

Mr. Joshua Rehrer remarked that he liked how much darker the night sky in Worcester was compared to other places he had lived. His main concern was outside, non-school district affiliated groups coming in to use the fields in addition to regular school athletic events. He predicted that the pleasant atmosphere of the neighborhood would be degraded.

Mrs. Michelle Greenawalt-Jackson was concerned about the quality of life for the nearby residents.

Dr. James Mollick asked if the Planning Commission was going to make a formal recommendation regarding the proposed lighting plans.

Mr. Todd responded "No."

Dr. Mollick tried to assure Mr. Kelly that the current lighting ordinance would properly regulate the allowable levels of lighting through testing the system during installation. He said that "higher is better" in this kind of lighting situation and that the ordinance had lowered the maximum height of lights.

Mr. David Pataki commented that the current conditions of the athletic fields are "atrocious." He hoped for a good compromise.

Ms. Genevieve Dickey said that the people of Lower Providence Township should have equal say in the planning process as Worcester residents, since Lower Providence contributes more students than Worcester. She is very concerned about the safety of the students playing sports and the need for even more space for athletics.

Ms. Karen Allum remarked that she is not opposed to the proposed lights. However, she was worried about the future quality of life for the neighbors, especially traffic, noise, and vandalism. She thought that the school district was unwilling to listen to the concerns of the residents and uninterested in working with them to find a reasonable solution. Her property has incurred vandalism several times, and she may be forced to move if things get worse, due to the lights.

Mrs. Jeanie Steigerwalt expressed fears about the potential for increased noise pollution from multiple nights of athletic field use, the amount of light that might spill onto nearby properties, and outside groups using the fields. She thought that the Quinn-Harris Document was a good compromise and that since Dr. Quinn was no longer superintendent, the school

district was lying to the residents. She questioned as to why the school district was planning on doing all the field improvements at once.

Mr. Bartle said that the proposed lights would be allowed to be used for whatever length of time the current lighting ordinance allows and that the level of illumination *on the fields* was what mattered. He insisted that the school district had listened to the concerns of the neighbors, though not necessarily satisfying everyone. He believed that Dr. Quinn had no right, as Superintendent, to make the agreement which became the Quinn-Harris Document.

Mr. Sherr further explained that the Planning Commission had strictly an advisory role and that it was not qualified to make specific decisions about lighting design.

Mr. Todd further explained that he understood the concerns of the neighbors but knew that the lights will eventually be constructed. He believed that everything possible should be done to shield the nearby residents from the glare of the proposed lights.

The Planning Commission was in agreement that, though the lights are inevitable, the rights of the neighbors need to be taken into consideration as the project moves forward.

No formal action was taken on this item.

The consensus of the Planning Commission was that Mr. Schelly's letter should be made part of the minutes, with special emphasis on his recommendation for additional vegetative buffering and the perpetual maintenance of such.

## **2. LIMITED INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH DISTRICT – ORDINANCE AMENDMENT**

The Planning Commission reviewed the final draft of this proposed ordinance amendment and some minor corrections were made.

No formal action was taken.

## **3. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before this committee, the meeting of the Worcester Township Planning Commission was adjourned by Mr. Todd at 10:00 PM.