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WORCESTER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
May 28, 2026

Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Worcester Township Planning Commission was called to order at approximately 7:00 PM by Chair Tony Sherr.

Attendance

Planning Commission Members Present: Tony Sherr, Chair; Michelle Greenawalt, Vice Chair; Lee Koch; Bob Andorn; Jennifer Taylor

Township Representatives Present: Dan DeMeno, Township Manager; John Evarts, Township Engineer

Small Project / Minor Lot Plan Ordinance Discussion

The Township Manager reviewed the proposed ordinance revisions intended to clarify and modernize the process for small-scale subdivision and land development applications. He explained that the purpose of the draft was to create a clearer and more efficient framework for projects with limited impacts, including lot line adjustments, simple consolidations, and modest site improvements. He noted that, under the current process, nearly all matters proceed through full land development review, which can increase costs, delay applicants, and require consultant review fees even when the project is relatively minor.

The Manager further explained that the Township Code already contains a minor lot plan concept, but that the existing language does not function effectively because, in practical terms, almost nothing qualifies for the process as written. The proposed revisions were intended to finish that framework and create a usable process without allowing projects with meaningful impacts to avoid appropriate review.

The Commission discussed the proposed eligibility standards. The Manager stated that the minor or small project process would be limited to projects that meet strict criteria. Among other limitations, eligible projects could not include new roads, utility extensions, new stormwater infrastructure, or major site impacts. The project would need to be permitted by right, comply with zoning and subdivision and land development requirements, and could not depend on variances or waivers. The Manager stated that staff would not administratively grant waivers, such as sidewalk waivers, through this process. Any project requiring a waiver, variance, or broader discretionary relief would proceed through the full land development process.



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The Commission discussed whether the Planning Commission should receive or review applications submitted under the proposed process before a determination is made. The Manager explained that the draft could be revised to provide that applications are circulated to the Planning Commission, or otherwise made available, so that members could identify concerns and request that a matter proceed through the full land development process. The Manager noted that the Township also maintains a land development page on the Township website and that small project submissions could potentially be posted there for transparency. Members discussed whether additional notice, correspondence, or a letter mechanism would be appropriate.

Members raised concerns about ensuring that projects with unusual site history, possible cumulative impacts, or non-obvious issues are not approved administratively without Planning Commission awareness. The Manager acknowledged that staff review includes review of Township records and prior approvals, but that some older projects require manual research because prior restrictions or conditions may not always be easy to identify. The discussion included prior subdivision history, phasing, deed restrictions, and the importance of checking whether a property had been subject to prior approvals or restrictions.

The Commission discussed the proposed dimensional threshold. The draft had used 10,000 square feet as a working figure, but members expressed concern that the number may be too large. The Manager stated that he was not committed to the 10,000 square foot figure and that the purpose of the threshold was to make the process useful for modest improvements without opening the door to larger projects. Members discussed potential figures, including 2,500 square feet and 5,000 square feet. The Manager noted that 2,500 square feet is already a significant amount of impervious area for a parking area, while 5,000 square feet may be a reasonable compromise if the Commission wanted a smaller threshold than 10,000 square feet.

The discussion also distinguished between residential accessory improvements and commercial or institutional projects. The Manager explained that many residential accessory structures, such as a pole barn or similar improvement on a single-family property, would typically be addressed through zoning and permitting rather than land development, provided zoning, impervious coverage, setbacks, and other requirements are met. The main use case for the proposed process would likely be commercial or commercial-adjacent improvements, such as modest parking additions or small building additions for an existing use.

The Manager explained that one of the main policy goals was to reduce reliance on waivers of land development. He stated that prior matters, including small-scale commercial improvements and the Myers Museum matter, illustrated the difficulty of relying on discretionary land development waivers. The Manager stated that a clearer ordinance-based process would be preferable to the Board of Supervisors making waiver decisions based on general comfort level or a case-by-case gut feeling. The Commission discussed that the process should be structured

so that the Board is not placed in the position of granting or denying land development waivers without consistent standards.

The Commission discussed fees and process timing. The Manager stated that an eligible small project would involve a reduced administrative burden, reduced review requirements, and fewer meetings than full land development review. Consultant attendance and review would still be charged where necessary, but the process would be less expensive and faster than requiring every qualifying minor matter to proceed through full Planning Commission review.

The Manager stated that he could prepare another revised draft incorporating the Commission's comments before the upcoming joint Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission work session. The Commission generally agreed that the key issues for further discussion were the threshold number, the level of Planning Commission review or visibility, and the process for requiring full land development review when warranted. No formal recommendation was made during this discussion.

Data Center Ordinance Discussion

The Manager then reviewed the draft data center ordinance at a high level. He explained that the draft was intended to regulate data centers as strictly as possible while still maintaining a defensible zoning framework. The Manager stated that the Township must tie the standards to health, safety, and welfare concerns and avoid creating a de facto prohibition that would be vulnerable to legal challenge.

The Manager advised that staff had reviewed the Township's LI district and believed the draft ordinance preserved at least a theoretical path for a data center use, which is important for legal defensibility. He noted that any potential project would still be difficult and expensive to pursue and would require significant proof of compliance with the ordinance standards.

The Manager described the outside materials reviewed in preparing the draft, including ordinances from other municipalities and model ordinance language. He stated that the Worcester draft was intentionally stricter than many of the examples reviewed, including some county-level model language, because of the Township's desire to address environmental, infrastructure, and community impacts as strongly as possible.

The Commission discussed definitions and the need to distinguish between large hyperscale data centers and smaller or limited data centers that may already exist in some form within commercial or industrial buildings. The Manager explained that the ordinance should not define every server room or small air-cooled data operation as a regulated hyperscale data center. He stated that the draft should focus on the primary use of the building or development, and that definitions could include objective criteria such as building size and electrical demand. The discussion included possible thresholds such as 100,000 square feet of floor area and 10

megawatts of electrical demand, with corresponding language to distinguish larger data centers from limited or traditional facilities.

The Manager summarized the principal areas regulated by the draft ordinance. These included setbacks and separation distances, water usage, energy usage, sound, thermal impacts, emergency services planning, hazardous materials concerns, abandonment, and decommissioning. The Manager noted that the draft included sound measurement requirements at property lines and limitations based on ambient sound. He also discussed heat island or thermal effects and the need to prevent off-site thermal impacts.

The Commission discussed water impacts and the need for any applicant to prove that the proposed use would not adversely affect groundwater or the water table. The Manager stated that the draft could require strong proof of no impact and that closed-loop systems may be necessary for an applicant to demonstrate compliance. The discussion also touched on concerns that expansion of public water or utility capacity could create additional development pressure if not carefully controlled.

The Manager explained that the draft treats energy generation as a separate principal use rather than as a simple accessory use to a data center. The intent is to prevent an applicant from arguing that major power generation infrastructure is merely incidental to a data center project. Any separate energy generation use would need to satisfy its own zoning requirements and review process.

The Manager emphasized the importance of moving quickly to place some form of regulation on the books. He stated that peer municipalities have adopted data center standards and that Worcester should not remain without clear regulations while the issue continues to develop regionally. The Commission discussed the possibility of adopting a strong initial ordinance and then returning to the topic for additional Planning Commission review and amendments if needed.

Members discussed whether additional steps could be considered after an ordinance is adopted, including preservation strategies or deed restrictions for properties that might otherwise satisfy the ordinance. The Manager and members acknowledged that those ideas were premature until the Township first has a defensible regulatory structure in place. The general direction of the discussion was that the Township should get a baseline ordinance adopted first and then evaluate additional policy tools later. No formal recommendation was made during this discussion.

Ordinance Review Materials and Process

The Commission discussed the preferred format for reviewing ordinance drafts and supporting materials. The Manager stated that he had previously provided substantial materials all at once and later attempted to break the information into sections, but that he wanted clearer direction

from the Commission on the most useful format. He offered to provide full drafts, section-by-section materials, links to source ordinances, printed copies, or any other format that would help the Commission review the issues efficiently.

The Manager stated that he would provide electronic links to the source materials used for the data center ordinance and would print copies for any member who wanted paper copies. The discussion concluded with the understanding that the Manager would continue to coordinate with the Commission and provide materials in a format that supports productive review.

Upcoming Planning Commission Agenda Items

The Manager advised that the next regular Planning Commission meeting was expected to include the plans already distributed by the submission cutoff. The anticipated land development matters included Bold Fox Farm, the Myers Legacy Museum, and the final Trooper Ridge submission. The Manager stated that no additional plan submissions were expected for the June agenda because the submission cutoff had passed. Review letters and related materials would be provided to the Commission in advance of the meeting.

Adjournment

There being no further business reflected in the meeting record, the meeting concluded.

Respectfully submitted,

Dan DeMeno
Township Manager