

**PLAINFIELD TOWNSHIP
ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
FEBRUARY 1, 2021**

The regular monthly meeting of the Plainfield Township Environmental Advisory Council was held on Monday, February 1, 2021 via Telephone Conference Zoom Meeting Call-In Number 1-877-853-5247 (US Toll Free).

Conference ID: 817 1513 6382 (Press # when prompted)

In accordance with Governor Wolf's ongoing COVID-19 pandemic emergency declaration by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Plainfield Township officials are holding this regular meeting utilizing the Zoom authorized telecommunication device platform only. Remote meetings are permitted under the provisions of Act 15 of 2020 (Health Care Cost Containment Act). The Environmental Advisory Council members will not be physically present at this meeting. This public meeting will be recorded. We kindly ask that all interested parties participating via the dedicated conference call line to only speak during the sections of the meeting that are specifically reserved for public comment or when prompted by the Chairman and to also state your name each time you are speaking. Members of the public and all interested parties will have the opportunity to comment via the telephone conference call prior to any official action taking place and during the Citizen's Agenda/Non-Agenda portion of the meeting. Anyone intentionally disrupting the meeting will be promptly muted and/or ejected from the call.

Chairman, Bob Cornman, called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL:

The following members of the Environmental Advisory Council answered roll call: Robert Cornman, Jane Mellert, Bruce Rabenold, Stan Shelosky, and Jeff Beavan. Bob Simpson was not in attendance.

Also present was Township Manager/Secretary to the Environmental Advisory Council, Tom Petrucci.

Now that the roll call of the Environmental Advisory Council is completed, we will proceed with a roll call of all members of the public who are participating on this call. Please state your name(s) one at a time so the Township can make sure that your participation is recognized.

PUBLIC ATTENDANCE:

None

I. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – January 11, 2021 Draft Meeting Minutes

ACTION: Jane Mellert made a motion to approve the January 11, 2021 Draft EAC Meeting Minutes, as submitted. The motion was seconded by Stan Shelosky.

Prior to the vote, Bob Cornman called for any questions or comments from members of the public or the EAC.

The motion was approved. Vote 5-0.

II. MEETING BUSINESS:

1. Little Bushkill Creek Watershed Management Plan- 2021 Approved Action Plan dated December 9, 2020 (Approved by Board of Supervisors) – Little Bushkill Creek Watershed Management Plan Task 3 (Open Space Program) – Discussion on Open Space Acquisition Strategies and the Process for Identifying and Ranking Potential Properties

Township Manager Tom Petrucci had prepared a memorandum for the benefit and use of the Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) members dated January 26, 2021. The memorandum was entitled, “Little Bushkill Creek Watershed Management Plan-2021 Approved Action Plan dated December 9, 2020 (Approved by Board of Supervisors) – Little Bushkill Creek Watershed Management Plan Task 3 (Open Space Program) – Discussion on Open Space Acquisition Strategies and the Process for Identifying and Ranking Potential Properties”. The memorandum also included Appendices (A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H). The topic subjects included in the memorandum were identified as follows:

- Farmland Preservation
- Conservation Easements
- Fee Simple Purchase for Long-Term Holding
- Fee Simple Purchase for Short-Term Holding
- Identifying Potential Properties for Open Space
- Preservation of Current Natural Resources/Open Space Assets
- Application Scoring
- Administrative Tasks

- Open Space Plan Update

Tom Petrucci stated that the broad goal of tonight's discussion is for the EAC members to discuss ways to ramp up the open space acquisition program and explore the development of a process for Plainfield Township to acquire open space properties other than agricultural properties. Tom Petrucci stated that these processes already exist in other local communities- specifically noting that the *Bushkill Township Open Space Plan* provides a potential roadmap to Plainfield Township- depending on the direction Township officials want to take this proposed initiative. The EAC reviewed each point of the memorandum, identified as follows:

1. Farmland Preservation

It was identified that Plainfield Township Open Space Earned Income Tax (EIT) funds have only ever been used to supplement the County's Farmland Preservation program where necessary in combination with Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture funds. This has been the only open space acquisition strategy employed by Plainfield Township since the adoption of the Plainfield Township Open Space Plan and the imposition of the voter-approved .25% Open Space EIT.

2. Conservation Easements

A conservation easement is a legal agreement that limits future development by transferring certain rights from the landowner to a governmental entity and/or a nonprofit organization (such as a land trust) for conservation purposes. Conservation easements permanently restrict development while allowing properties to remain in private ownership and to continue ongoing uses which are consistent with conservation goals. Plainfield Township can help landowners retain private ownership of their properties, while protecting important farmland, environmentally sensitive areas, natural areas, scenic resources, and greenway corridors. It was discussed that conservation easements could be used as a tool to preserve the areas along the Recreation Trail and the Little Bushkill Creek.

3. Fee Simple Purchase for Long-Term Holding; 4. Fee Simple Purchase for Short-Term Holding

The EAC members discussed the pros and cons of fee simple open space acquisitions. It was identified that fee simple property acquisitions would make sense where the Township has identified properties that would expand the municipal park system (possibly including trails, passive open space, greenway connections, stream access, hunting and other recreational amenities).

Bob Cornman stated that he would only be in favor of fee simple acquisition that is adjacent to an existing municipal park, the trail, or parking near the trail.

Jane Mellert inquired whether stream corridors would also be included on the list. Tom Petrucci indicated that properties along stream corridors should ideally be targeted for conservation easements in lieu of fee simple acquisitions. Jeff Beavan recommended that fee simple purchases should only be pursued where the Township intends to use properties for active recreation.

Stan Shelosky identified that Bushkill Township has employed a strategy in the past whereby the Township has purchased properties fee simple that were then developed in part for active municipal recreation uses and also developed for residential uses, with the key takeaway that Plainfield Township may want to take advantage of similar situations and have the flexibility to do so if desired.

Bruce Rabenold stated that the Township should not always be afraid to acquire properties for long-term fee simple holdings. There are properties in the Township that could be well-positioned for long-term open space holdings that would not require a significant amount of maintenance (ex. mature growth forests). Bob Cornman countered that with conservation easements, the Township can preserve the properties but not have any roles associated with the preservation of the properties.

Jane Mellert stated that there are approximately six-thousand (6,000) Plainfield Township residents, and that the Township already has an extensive park system and trail network that need to be developed. The Township should be cautious in how many properties are to be taken off of the tax rolls. Bob Cornman indicated that he would be reluctant to purchase land for the sake of purchasing land; there should be an identified need for the use of the Township. He also stated that these are hypothetical scenarios, and that the Township needs to get into real-life situations that will be further evaluated. Jane Mellert stated that the area surrounding the Township already features the following: 1). Jacobsburg State Park and its Environmental Education Center, 2). Lower Mount Bethel Township and its Environmental Education Center, and 3). the Gall Farm Northampton County property will be the site of the future Gall Farm Preserve, which will be linked to the Township Recreation Trail, and also will feature an Environmental Education Center. In her opinion it is too far-reaching for Plainfield Township to also seek to its own similar facilities.

Stan Shelosky stated that the Township may face certain situations where the only way to acquire a certain targeted property would be to purchase it fee simple. The Township should be open to the possibility of acquiring properties fee simple. Bruce Rabenold concurred; Bob Cornman postulated that Plainfield Township may not want to be as aggressive as Bushkill Township has been on certain properties. Jane Mellert countered that Plainfield Township has been more successful in preserving farmland than Bushkill

Township, which has traditionally focused more on acquiring and preserving natural areas.

Generally, it was the overall sentiment of the EAC that acquiring conservation easements should be the prioritized strategy of Plainfield Township, but that the Township should remain open to acquiring properties fee simple (either short-term and/or long-term) only where it makes sense in accordance with a comprehensive evaluation process. All of these options should be written into the Open Space Plan, but that fee simple acquisition should be the last resort.

4. Identifying Potential Properties for Open Space/Preservation of Current Natural Resources/Open Space Assets

The EAC was in agreement that the Township should develop a master list of the properties that the Township would like to target for conservation easements and fee simple acquisition. These properties will in many cases align with the adopted Plainfield Township Official Map.

5. Application Scoring and Administrative Tasks

The EAC members expressed the sentiment that the application scoring process (and corresponding flow chart) should be streamlined where possible. The identified concern of the EAC was that the process may take too long and the Township could lose out on properties where time is of the essence (especially fee simple properties as opposed to conservation easements). Tom Petrucci will provide the EAC with a hypothetical period of time that corresponds with each individual step identified in the flow chart. It was identified that there are no unnecessary steps in the flow chart, but the process could be streamlined where possible/feasible. Tom Petrucci identified that the Township should follow any application process in a consistent manner, so that all applicants receive the same fair and equitable treatment.

6. Open Space Plan Update

It was discussed that the Township will need to update the *Plainfield Township Open Space Plan* in order to effectuate an expanded open space acquisition program of Plainfield Township. The *Plainfield Township Open Space Plan* update project should accomplish the following:

1. Allow the Township greater flexibility in the use of Earned Income Tax (EIT) Open Space funds to acquire conservation easements or properties fee simple, with the latter open space acquisition option only to be used in instances where absolutely necessary. The current Open Space does not provide a comprehensive process for the acquisition of open space by the Township, and this update would bridge that gap. In other words, the

plan should give the Township the ability to utilize a number of methods to potentially acquire open space and allow for a **case-by-case review** of potential acquisitions.

2. To identify a master list of properties that the Township has an identified interest to acquire based on high priority conservation values. The primary goal would be to seek conversation easements in almost all cases to ensure properties remain on the tax rolls and maintenance responsibilities do not fall solely on the Township. The riparian buffer/recreation trail greenway corridor as shown on the Official Map would receive the highest priority open space acquisition (conservation easement) values.
3. Update the mapping that is included in the Open Space Plan (and to provide revised GIS shape file layers) to more accurately track properties that have already been preserved and to identify areas that are prioritized for potential acquisitions.

ACTION: Bob Cornman made a motion to send a request to the Plainfield Township Board of Supervisors to authorize the EAC members and the Township Manager to commence a project to update the *Plainfield Township Open Space Plan* in 2021. The motion was seconded by Bruce Rabenold.

Prior to the vote, Bob Cornman called for any questions or comments from members of the public or the EAC.

The motion was approved. Vote 5-0.

Following the vote, Stan Shelosky asked whether the Township should update the Official Map to focus on the prioritized areas of acquisition other than the identified greenways. The Official Map is generalized in nature and does not specify the specific properties or measurements of the corridors. Tom Petrucci will send Stan Shelosky the Official Map Ordinance, which identifies the areas to be reserved on the Official Map. The Township's Official Map differs from Bushkill Township's in that there is a clause in the Ordinance that states that the properties to be acquired need to be survey-located.

III. CITIZEN'S AGENDA/NON-AGENDA (*There is a 5-minute time limit for speakers. Please state your name prior to addressing the Environmental Advisory Council*)*

*In addition to direct public participation during the meeting, written comments concerning any listed agenda items may be submitted to the Township Manager by way of an email to manager@plainfieldtownship.org or via U.S. Mail C/O Township Manager, Plainfield Township, 6292 Sullivan Trail, Nazareth, PA 18064.

There were no members of the public in attendance.

IV. NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Bob Cornman mentioned that a resident had inquired within him if there are any chemicals in the brine that the Township uses that could impact waterways. Tom Petrucci stated that the Township does not utilize brine; the Township utilizes a deicing salt/cinder 50/50 mix. Tom Petrucci stated that brine itself is a solution of water and salt, which needs to be at the right mix so that the water does not freeze on the roadway surface. Tom Petrucci stated that some communities do not apply the brine far enough in advance of forecasted storm events, so that it does not have the chance to stick to the roadway surface.

Tom Petrucci stated that the Clean Fill Regulations Ordinance Request for Proposals (RFP) has been posted on PennBid, and it is due on February 19, 2021.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

Having no further business to come before the Environmental Advisory Council, motion was made by Jane Mellert and seconded by Stan Shelosky to adjourn the meeting. Motion approved. Vote 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:28 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas Petrucci
Township Manager/Secretary
Plainfield Township