

MINUTES
November 9, 2023
Milford Township Planning Commission Hybrid Workshop
560 Route 6 & 209, Milford, PA 18337
7:00 p.m.

A workshop of Milford Township Planning Board was called to order at 7:00 P.M. by Chairman Kevin Stroyan through a Hybrid call, the contact information for which had been advertised in advance in the Pike County Dispatch. Also present at this meeting were Members Ray Willis (Vice Chairman), Robert Di Lorenzo, and Patrick McCarthy, Supervisor Rachel Hendricks, Certified Planner Jayson Wood, Solicitor Thomas Farley, and Secretary Shahana Shamim.

Comprehensive Plan Update with Focus Group: Richard Peter, Bob Stewart, J Donson, Nancy Pinchot, Evelyn Di Lorenzo, and Bill Pitman were present as members of the focus group. Mr. Stroyan thanked them for showing interest in attending this meeting. Jayson Wood, the landscape architect and certified planner retained by the township to work on this comprehensive plan, stated that the Comprehensive Plan is a kind of vision. It provides a long-term vision and mission and serves as an overall long-term plan for the township, outlining the planning direction the township would like to take. It has several parts, and he wants to hear from everybody whether they admire and are happy with the status quo or if there's a specific aspect they would like to explore or a direction they want the town to take. The last comprehensive plan from 2010 was used and updated to create this lengthy draft. The authors of the 2010 version of the plan were Thomas Shepstone and Carson Helfrich. Regarding the history, he mentioned that the last comprehensive plan was a joint plan with the Borough. Mr. Stroyan added that a separate comprehensive plan for just this township was being created this time.

Mr. Wood said that in the last comprehensive plan, Milford was defined as a bedroom community because there was a big focus on folks traveling out of the area for work. This new draft focuses on Milford Township, and it's defined as rural eastern Pennsylvania. It has more single-family homes and focuses on more space and water. It's supposed to describe Milford Township in 2033, and the vision statement is: "Milford Township, a beautiful rural municipality in northeast Pennsylvania, supports a significant population of young adults, young families, and local businesses. Many of these businesses offer family-sustaining wages, provide a balanced standard of living, and value career-focused employees. Minimal adjustments made to taxes and development fees allow adequate medical and fire protection services to protect the community and for the Township to function responsibly. A clear sense of place has been established by maintaining the community's rural character and providing easy access to public spaces. Milford Township is a deeply desirable place to live, where a high percentage of residents own homes, work close by, and enjoy a deep sense of community pride."

Members stated that it is helpful to realize that the Comprehensive Plan is, in some respects, a wish list. Not all items within it need to be fulfilled; rather, it is intended as guidance for the town. Mr. Wood said that some demographic and planning issues were discussed at the beginning of this update project. Among the initial priorities, maintaining the small-town

character, single-family homes, and low density emerged as key considerations. It was observed that many younger people were leaving the area and not necessarily returning. Consequently, an aging population is growing, prompting a closer look at businesses in the Township. The cost of housing and the possibility of municipal support to ensure people receive a family-sustaining wage, form families, raise them here, and ultimately contribute back to the municipality were also discussed.

Mr. Wood explained that this township has only three zones of land use, providing opportunities for residents to establish businesses and engage in various activities within these zones. This is possible as long as individuals coordinate with the planning board and supervisors to ensure compliance. If specific uses are not defined or included in the Zoning Ordinance, people can come in and advocate for uses that are not defined, leading to many conditions and potential disputes. The community character was assessed, revealing that even starter homes or smaller family homes are priced out of the median income for the age group of 20 to 34-35. A more dense and mixed-use area, possibly along 209, was also discussed, but it did not align with the survey. Mixed use is defined as having a business on the first floor and living quarters or a different type of business on the upper floors. This is considered mixed-use because it combines residential and commercial elements and is higher density, allowing multiple floors for various uses. In response to Nancy Pinchot's inquiry, Ms. Hendricks explained that the majority of commercial activity occurs in the development district. The Conservation District is now referred to as Low Growth (LG), and the other zone is residential.

In reply to one of the residents' inquiries, Mr. Wood said that the words "district" and "zone" were being used interchangeably, and the districts/zones are depicted on the map with different colors. Mrs. Pinchot asked for an explanation of why those zones were chosen, and Mr. Stroyan replied that a thousand-foot perimeter on Route 6 and 209 constituted the commercial zone because that's where the most commercial activity takes place. The residential zone included the existing subdivisions that existed at that time. A significant portion of the township consists of LG (Low Growth), which are owned by the state, and some of those are private properties. Mr. Stewart asked if the purpose was to reestablish these districts to the updated vision for the township. Members replied that the purpose was less specific and pointing out the zones was just a part of the conversation. The comprehensive plan is a kind of bird's-eye view and very conceptual.

The Solicitor explained that every township has two major ordinances, the Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO). The Zoning Ordinance defines the zone you're in and what you can do in each zone. Some uses are permitted, meaning you can come to the township and get the permit. Conditional Use means you may be able to do it in that particular zone, but the Township will add conditions for that use. The Zoning Map doesn't change unless there are major hearings and discussions. The SALDO regulates major projects, such as developments and lot line changes. Every community has these two ordinances. Under the law of Pennsylvania, townships and boroughs have to come up with what they are going to do in the next ten years, and that's the Comprehensive Plan, which is the vision. One of the main reasons for a comprehensive plan is that grants can be secured when everything

you want to see is included in the plan, but the goal is to get the community to say, "Okay, this is where I live; this is where I am now; what do I want for the future?" but it's conceptual. Tonight, this Board is now sitting in this place to make decisions for the township. You're the residents and the people who are taking part in that. Mr. Stroyan added that Rachel has some concerns, which Jason had mentioned, and that's we've got a problem with affordability for young families, and young families make a community. We're here to hear where you want the community to go so that we can write some sort of a vision, and it's not about any specific ordinances or specific rules. There will be a Public Hearing on the Comprehensive Plan.

Nancy Pinchot commented that the elephant in the room is this warehouse, which is quite contrary to everything that the comprehensive plan is putting forward. Thus, this community is being attacked in one of the most fundamental ways, and the plan needs to protect against that. The Solicitor replied that the warehouse project is currently going through because, according to the Zoning Ordinance, it is a conditional use, which is not the focus of this meeting. Specific uses cannot be prohibited, as that would make it a use not provided for. If that were the case, applicants could go wherever they want. Therefore, all uses have to be regulated, as stipulated by the municipal planning code in the State of Pennsylvania. Nancy expressed concern that the warehouse could proceed using whatever methods they choose and asked if that can be controlled. The Solicitor replied that the spot is perfect for a warehouse, but the issue is the water underneath. A resident then asked whether the property has already been purchased for the warehouse to go through or if it is still for sale. If the latter is the case, he questioned whether it could be considered for purchase by the Township. The Solicitor explained that the usual practice among lawyers is to have an agreement of sale as an option pending approvals so that a lot of time and money is not spent before the approval is acquired. Rachel added that the warehouse concern is widespread across the state of Pennsylvania, and many communities are having a similar response.

Mr. Wood stated that all the information had been gathered, analyzed, and 10 goals were identified in the last six to seven meetings. The first goal is to provide educational opportunities for the public to learn and become involved in the zoning and land development process. The general public may not necessarily understand the fundamentals and complications of planning, so this goal is particularly important. An action item for this goal is to host an open house in the municipal building to discuss economic development and zoning amendments, both in person and online. In response to inquiries about the Wellhead/Watershed Protection Ordinance, the Secretary clarified that the Wellhead Protection Ordinance (Ordinance #426) had already been adopted by the Board of Supervisors. It has been placed in Section #4 of the Zoning Ordinance on the official website.

Mr. Donson commented that in the draft, there is no language about short-term rental areas for rural districts. He added that Delaware Township bans it in the rural residential area. Mr. Wood said that this is something that should be taken into consideration. Mr. Stroyan added that the ordinance is currently being worked on, and several ordinances of other townships in relation to that have been reviewed for the last half of the year. Mrs. Evelyn Di Lorenzo commented that this Township doesn't have any playgrounds/ballfields for children, while young

families are being discussed, and every other municipality has one. This Township also doesn't have an ambulance and senior center. She added that she had to take her children to Matamoras field when they did sports. Rachel added that this item was intentionally added to the survey because Evelyn had mentioned it earlier. The Lily Pond is currently owned by the DCNR.

The Santos farm is still up for sale, and the Township does not have any control over it because the Township doesn't own it. It's in the commercial zone. Gray Towers is the only historic structure in this Township. The Santos' farmhouse is one of the oldest houses in the county, and so, it has value as a historic structure. Santos' farm takes on quite a lot of importance in terms of defining the character of the township. Ms. Pinchot mentioned that since Santos Farm holds significant importance in defining the character of the township, it should be a focal point for achieving many of the goals outlined in the comprehensive plan. Members replied that appropriate funds will be needed, and that's not the function of the Planning Board. Certain things that can be done with that if enough money is generated or somebody has to come along and buy it, but the Santos family has a right to do what they please with their property. Rachel added that the previous comprehensive plan identified the Santos farm as a parcel that they wish to have preserved, and that resulted in the county buying the eighty acres that sit between here and the park service land. This is why the vast majority of it was preserved, and this area wasn't preserved because it borders the main road and was seen as prime development area.

One of the residents said that the proposed Act 537 plan isn't going through. Members replied that the property owners in the borough can handle the sewage they're generating right on their properties, and the Dimmick Inn has solved its problem on its property. It's less expensive than a central sewer system. Ms. Pinchot said that the sewer goes into the ground and out to the Delaware River. Members replied that there's no scientific proof of that statement. Rachel pointed out that the sewer plan that was submitted was rejected, but it's certainly too soon to make a presumption that nothing is going to go forward. Members said that \$150,000 of Scenic Rural Character Preservation (SRCP) funding was spent to study the proposed sewer. The Milford Township Supervisors said that they won't prohibit anybody from using the sewer. Eventually, there will be some kind of sewer line, but there's no more funding available from SRCP. It's going to take several years to do another study. There are no ground failures here, and that's the impetus for having the central sewer system. Increased density is the byproduct of the central sewer system, which can automatically double or triple the density because no room is needed for on-lot sewer system. The Borough wants to increase its density, and they want to put more people in less area. The younger people cannot be helped just through density, and there's a whole other set of problems and issues that come along with higher density.

One of the residents asked if the Santos Farm sale was contingent upon the Central Sewage. Rachel replied that there was a sketch plan, which indicated that they would address certain aspects of the project when and if the sewer system came through. The entirety of their project was not dependent on that. They had designated an area for sewage in the last plan they presented as a sketch, but they have never actually submitted an application to the township.

Mr. Wood said that the second goal was to establish a contemporary framework for the planning board and supervisors to make environmentally beneficial land use and development decisions, aiming to maintain the township's rural character, limit development density, and connect public spaces. According to the survey, conversations, and public feedback, maintaining the rural character goes hand in hand with limiting development density. Mr. Pitman mentioned that industries would be necessary here to generate tax dollars. While the comprehensive plan looks promising, there is a substantial financial investment required to achieve these goals. Mr. Donson added that Short-Term Rentals could be a way to generate taxes. Mrs. Pinchot highlighted that the campaign for Scenic Rural Character Preservation aimed to keep Pike County green. Money was successfully raised for this cause, and it could be done again if there is sufficient interest from the community.

Mr. Wood said that goal number three is to adopt the wellhead public source waters protection plan, and it was completed during this Comprehensive Plan project. Goal number four is to update the current zoning map to reflect all amendments and changes since its adoption in 1991; it is still being worked on, as some zoning changes were made after 1991. Goal number five is to review the locations, densities, buffers, and proximity to amenities in residential and commercial areas to make them more accessible to all citizens. Rachel stated that the township currently has revisions to the SALDO in front of it, which the planning commission has been working on throughout the year. Part of that includes setting aside a certain amount of open space for new developments. Whether they have to build a playground or a trail hasn't been decided yet, but there has to be a plan for some type of recreation for that community. The Board is still going back and forth about how to implement that to ensure the best result for their residents.

Mr. Wood said that Goal Number Six is to adopt zoning changes that promote long-term residency of families, home ownership, and economic growth within the Township. Goal Number Seven is to create an acceptable plan that helps provide 24/7 emergency services (ambulance, police, fire) within the township, alleviating existing and foreseeable issues due to the community's aging population and rural layout. Goal Number Eight is to consider the Township's millage, impact fees, permit fees, and tax revenues to ensure all municipal costs are covered annually. Goal Number Nine is to organize transportation and establish multimodal connections between the Township, adjacent municipalities, and the region. This should include public spaces such as the Delaware River, recreational sites, and bike and trail paths. Goal Number Ten is to collaborate with adjacent authorities to provide adequate sewer coverage for larger businesses and residences that desire to connect to the central system along SR 6 and 209, as tentatively proposed, and this goal needs to be amended quite a bit as it's not really tentatively proposed anymore.

Light industries will bring family-sustaining jobs, and so, this question was placed on the survey, but it was pushed down. These industries offer higher pay and don't require road frontages. Many residents expressed a need for more resources and attention to emergency services. Currently, the township demonstrates fiscal responsibility. However, costs will rise

rapidly with any increase in density or amenity additions, as these involve additional services. The topic of short-term rentals is addressed in the housing section under objectives. The discussions in previous workshops also touched upon solar panels, green energies, and EV charging stations. There is a significant demand for short-term rentals, but the challenge lies in creating an enforceable ordinance. It's crucial that any ordinance put in place is practical and does not create unnecessary liability for the township. While some municipalities have successfully implemented ordinances for solar power, they are encountering issues. Ordinances can be adopted and modified, but procrastination is not an option, especially considering potential imminent challenges.

The Township cannot necessarily reject any businesses solely based on the traffic they will generate. Additionally, the Township does not have control over federal and state highways. On the flip side, the township does not actively create businesses, such as a new restaurant that might compete with Balch's, on specific properties. Instead, the Township waits for the private sector to express interest in investing in the community. This approach makes it challenging to specify exactly what the Township desires. If the Township were to state a preference for a particular business on a specific parcel, it could be considered spot zoning, which is not legal. Certain aspects can be regulated through the SALDO, such as adjusting coverages, increasing buffers, expanding setbacks, and mandating rear parking rather than frontage parking. In our DD district, the current zoning allows for a lot coverage of 65%, with a possibility of 75% if a valid reason for the extra 10% is presented to the Supervisors. The comprehensive plan outlines the community's preferences for such instances. As buildings increase in size, setbacks should be greater, and buffers should be more substantial.

Bob Stewart and Rich Peter expressed their concerns about affordable housing. Mrs. Pinchot commented that many issues are being directed towards the Zoning, and that's the aspect the public doesn't get to weigh in on. Members replied that this isn't the case. The Planning Board holds two public meetings every month, during which ordinances are reviewed. Additionally, two ordinances were updated very recently.

The workshop was adjourned at 8:50 P.M.

Respectfully,

Shahana Shamim

Secretary