

East Rockhill Township

Planning Commission Work Session Meeting

September 3, 2020

MEETING MINUTES

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*PC Attendees:* Anne Fenley (Chairperson), Dave Nyman, Joseph Chellew, Richard Kelly, Blake Eisenhart, James Weikel, George Brodhead, Marianne Morano (Township Manager), Steve Baluh, P.E. (Township Engineer)

*BCPC Staff:* Mike Roedig, Luke Rosanova

*Public:* Several members of the public present.

**Minutes:**

Chairperson Fenley called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. She asked if there are any corrections to the minutes from the August 6 meeting. Mr. Chellew requested that language in the minutes was more formal and that instances of “the Planning Commission was okay with” be changed to “the Planning Commission came to a consensus”. Mr. Roedig agreed and said the minutes would be corrected. Mr. Nyman made a motion to approve the minutes with Mr. Chellew’s requested edit. The motion was seconded and passed.

Chairperson Fenley turned the meeting over to the Bucks County Planning Commission (BCPC). Mr. Rosanova provided an overview of what material would be discussed, including Weisel Village, the Rural Holding Area, and Jim Nietupski’s comments.

Mr. Rosanova stated that at the last meeting the Planning Commission decided that a consensus on including Weisel Village in the comprehensive plan had not been reached and additional research was required. Mr. Rosanova presented the findings of the research conducted by the BCPC. He stated there are four questions that needed to be answered: what is a village, was Weisel a village, was Weisel a village in East Rockhill, and is Weisel a village today.

Mr. Rosanova cited *The Villages of Bucks County: a guidebook* and described the types of villages. He provided the definition of village as “a relatively small clustered settlement which is often dominated by houses of a single historical period. Frequently, the houses are spaced closely together at a crossroads, evoking the image of the village as an identifiable place.” The guidebook describes the types of villages, such as hamlets, residential villages, and commercial villages. Weisel is not included or mentioned among the villages detailed in the guidebook.

Mr. Rosanova cited “The Farm Journal Farm and Business Directory of Bucks County, Pennsylvania” and *Place Names in Bucks County* and stated that both publications document Weisel as having a post office.

He also cited a book published by the Haycock Historical Society titled *Our Lost Tohickon Valley – Haycock Township Bucks County – Pennsylvania*. *Our Lost Tohickon Valley* describes Weisel through the memories of the residents who lived in the Tohickon Valley prior to its flooding. The book also contains a map of key

places discussed in the book. The map depicts the Tohickon Union Church, the Landgreens general store, and an approximation of where Sterner Mill Road would be under Lake Nockamixon.

Mr. Rosanova stated that historical aerial imagery of Bucks County, dated 1938, shows three to five structures between the Tohickon Union Church and the general store. North of the general store, there are a few structures along Three Mile Run Road and a few structures across a bridge on Sterner Mill Road. The structures that were present along Sterner Mill Road in the 1938 aerial are not visible on the 1975 aerial.

Mr. Rosanova summarized his research by stating that if Weisel was a village, it was likely a hamlet centered around the Lake House Inn. The Lake House Inn was a general store and the Weisel post office. He stated that if Weisel was a village, his research on the location of Weisel is inconclusive. He stated that in 1983, Bedminster Township, East Rockhill Township, and the Bucks County Planning Commission conducted a study of the villages of Pipersville, Bedminster, Keelersville, and Hagersville with the intention of adopting historic village zoning. Weisel was not mentioned in the study or related notes.

Mr. Chellew stated that he doesn't think it is a question at all that at some point Weisel was a village. He said it seems that some of the village was in East Rockhill centered around the Lake House Inn. Mr. Roedig stated that we can definitively say it was a post office and if it was a village, Weisel was likely a hamlet with a few buildings around the Lake House Inn.

Mr. Chellew asked Mr. Roedig why we are hesitant to call it a village. Mr. Roedig stated that the discomfort we have in calling Weisel a village is because the memories of people do not necessarily depict Weisel as a village and the location of Weisel was not found to be definitive. Mr. Chellew stated that the research suggested Weisel was a place with structures now under the lake and Mr. Roedig agreed.

Mr. Chellew stated that he comes away from the research with the conclusion that Weisel is an identifiable place, some type of village, either a hamlet or a residential village, straddling East Rockhill and Bedminster townships, most of the village is destroyed, and there is nothing left that can be called a village. He stated the remnants of the village, being the general store and Tohickon Church are fairly historic. He proposed the idea that the language in the comprehensive plan be tweaked to detail Weisel as a village that existed but does not exist today.

Chairperson Fenley stated that what is left of Weisel is no longer a village. Mr. Chellew agreed and thinks that what is left of the village should be documented as part of Weisel was in East Rockhill.

Mr. Nyman stated that there will be no mention of Weisel at the end of the comprehensive plan update process. The Board of Supervisors will not adopt a comprehensive plan that mentions Weisel in any form. He said it does not make sense or serve any value to include it in the comprehensive plan, it was not included in the previous comprehensive plan, and he does not want to see it included because one commercial entity wants to have it included. Mr. Nyman said he is struggling not having members of the Planning Commission on the same page as the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Chellew responded by stating that he does not think they are talking about Weisel only because one commercial entity wants it in the plan. He also does not think it should matter if the Board of Supervisors will not approve the plan if Weisel is included because he thinks that it is the Planning Commission's decision and he thinks including Weisel in the plan is the right thing to do.

Mr. Chellew made a motion to ask the BCPC to revise the existing text to reflect the facts that were presented at the meeting. He said the text should be changed to say Weisel was a village, dating from the mid-1700s, straddled the two townships, was flooded by the lake, does not exist today, and two historic structures of the village still exist today.

Chairperson Fenley asked for discussion on the motion. Mr. Weikel agreed with Mr. Chellew and seconded the motion. Mr. Kelly agreed in concept with Mr. Chellew and reiterated that the location of the village is uncertain. He would like to see the narrative that the BCPC comes up with. He recommended moving the narrative on Weisel to the introductory paragraph where historic villages are discussed.

Mr. Eisenhart stated that he thinks that Weisel should be removed from the 10-year plan because it is not relevant to the 10-year plan. He said it is an artifact of history and should be recognized in the appropriate places but not in the comprehensive plan.

Mr. Weikel asked Mr. Roedig if Weisel was removed from the plan if that would cause another 45-day review period. Mr. Roedig stated that, in his opinion, removing Weisel from the plan is not a substantial change and would not cause another 45-day review period but would recommended asking the township solicitor as well.

Mr. Chellew called a motion for a vote. He stated that the motion is to revise Chapter 10 to remove Weisel from the current list of villages, revise the paragraph of historic villages by saying that Weisel was a village but it is not anymore, and say there are a few remnants of the village that still exist. Chairperson Fenley requested that the motion be amended to call Weisel a hamlet instead of a village. Mr. Chellew accepted the amendment.

Chairperson Fenley called for a vote. Mr. Nyman abstained, Mr. Eisenhart voted no, and the rest of the Planning Commission voted yes. The motion carried with five votes in favor.

Mr. Chellew provided Mr. Roedig and Mr. Rosanova with notes on how to amend the text that details Weisel. Mr. Kelly asked that the narrative remain as is in calling the Lake House Inn "the general store" instead of the Lake House Inn.

Chairperson Fenley was asked if there could be a time for public comment to discuss Weisel. Mr. Nyman stated that there would not be a point as there was already a vote. Chairperson Fenley stated that all public comment would be heard at the end of the meeting.

Mr. Roedig said that the BCPC would edit the text and send a draft to the Planning Commission to review.

Mr. Rosanova stated that at the last meeting he said he wanted to check the development capacity calculations prior to a decision being made on the Rural Holding Area in the future land use plan. He said he was mistaken and if the Rural Holding Area would be changed to the Rural Protection Area there would be no impact on the development capacity calculations. He stated this is because the development capacity calculations did not extend beyond the Development Area, which the Rural Holding Area is separate from.

Mr. Nyman clarified that changing the Rural Holding Area east of Route 313 from Rural Holding Area to Resource Protection Area would not impact the development capacity or the zoning. Mr. Roedig confirmed that neither the development capacity analysis nor the zoning would be impacted by changing the future land use map. Mr. Eisenhart asked if there are any objections to changing the future land use

map. Mr. Rosanova said there are not any objections now that we know the development capacity analysis will not be impacted.

Mr. Rosanova explained that the public utilities in East Rockhill are within the Rural Holding Area in the center of the township, adjacent to the Development Area, but substantial changes would have to be made to bring public utilities to the Rural Holding Area east of Route 313. Mr. Nyman stated that it makes sense to keep the Rural Holding Area in the middle of the township and change the Rural Holding Area east of Route 313 to Resource Protection Area.

Mr. Chellew asked if a motion would be needed to make this change. Mr. Rosanova said yes, and changing the future land use plan in this way would likely constitute a substantial change to the plan and another 45-day review period would be needed.

Mr. Nyman called made the motion to change the Rural Holding Area along Mountain View Drive to the Resource Protection Area. Chairperson Fenley asked if there was any more discussion on the topic, and asked for a vote. The motion carried.

Chairperson Fenley pointed out that Sterner Mill Road is inaccurately labeled on Map 10 Functional Street Classification. Mr. Rosanova said that he would make the change to Map 10.

Mr. Roedig stated that other issue to discuss is Supervisor Nietupski's memo. Mr. Nyman said he would like to respond to Supervisor Nietupski's comments as he is another elected official and it would be easier for him to respond to Supervisor Nietupski. Mr. Nyman said that the first issue, regarding fundamental strategy, is addressed by the executive summary and plan actions. Regarding the desired state of East Rockhill, Mr. Nyman said that the bottom line is the municipal planning code and the Board of Supervisors are responsible for the health, welfare, and public safety of the residents, and they are also looking at the resident survey.

Mr. Nyman continued and said township revenue is stable. Regarding economic development, he said the results of the resident survey do not support the township pursuing economic development. He said the township's earned income tax increases annually to cover increased expenses. Regarding historic preservation, Mr. Nyman said what the draft is proposing is the same as what is in the current plan. He said that the results of the resident survey and the economy of the Bucks County is based on historic preservation.

Mr. Nyman continued and said regarding arterial access limitations, the township is in line with the Route 313/Route 663 study done by Bucks County. Regarding the rezoning of the Route 313 C-O district, Mr. Nyman stated that any development in that zone is unrealistic because of a lack of public facilities in the area. Mr. Nyman stated that in the last comprehensive plan, the township added more commercial zoning which has not yet been developed, so he does not see a reason to add any more.

Mr. Chellew said that he does not need to go through all of the points because he sees the memo as a poke in the eye and would have rather received the comments during the process rather than at the end.

Chairperson Fenley stated that it makes sense to rezone the C-O district along Route 313 as the land is poor for development. She stated that she agreed with Supervisor Nietupski regarding the historic preservation recommendations. She said that she hopes nothing will be done about the historic

preservation recommendations as they are obtrusive to land owners. Chairperson Fenley asked for additional comments on Supervisor's Nietupski's memo.

Mr. Kelly stated that he does not see a need for additional commercial development in the township and does not see a need to make a motion on any of the comments in the memo.

Mr. Chellew asked where the comprehensive plan is procedurally. Mr. Rosanova stated that based on the decisions made tonight there will be another 45-day review period. Mr. Rosanova will send the Planning Commission a draft of the changes prior to the 45-day review period starting for their approval. Mr. Chellew clarified that the revisions include the Weisel text and the change to the Rural Holding Area on the Future Land Use map. Mr. Roedig stated that based on the changes, another 45-day review period and another public hearing would be required.

Mr. Chellew asked when the plan is given to the public and send to the surrounding municipalities and school district if we would draw attention to the changes. Mr. Roedig confirmed that we would say there have been editorial changes and a change to the land use map.

Mr. Eisenhart asked about updating the census data in the plan and the release of 2020 census data. Mr. Roedig responded that the data would likely be available next March. Mr. Nyman asked how long it would take the BCPC to incorporate the data into the plan and if that would require an additional 45-day review period. Mr. Roedig stated that we could wait and change the numbers and it would only take the BCPC a few days to do so. Mr. Roedig questioned whether or not waiting for the census data would impact the development capacity analysis. Mr. Roedig said that another factor to consider is that the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission is releasing new projection data at the end of the year.

Mr. Baluh stated that East Rockhill has seen very little development in the past 10 years. He said that while new data would be great, he doubts it would change a lot for the outlook of East Rockhill. Mr. Nyman responded and said that with the amount of land preserved in the township there is little land left for larger developments.

Mr. Chellew stated that it sounds like there is little benefit to waiting another year to move forward with the plan. He asked if it was possible to amend the plan when new data becomes available. Mr. Roedig recommended waiting to look at the census numbers and considering amending the plan if the Census data is significantly different than the data in the comprehensive plan. Mr. Eisenhart agreed and suggested the Planning Commission proceed with the plan and evaluate the data next year.

Mr. Nyman asked when the 45-day review period starts. Mr. Roedig stated that the 45-day review period starts when the BCPC sends out the review letters to the surrounding municipalities and school district. He said that any time after the review period has started the township can hold the public meeting. Mr. Nyman asked if having a meeting on October 8 is too quick for the BCPC. Mr. Roedig said that would be fine.

Chairperson Fenley asked for public comment. Petrona Charles, 2328 East Rock Road, said that the information on Weisel in the comprehensive plan is poorly written. She said that there is no designation of Weisel on maps from the 1800s. She stated that the Tohickon Church is not in East Rockhill and not in Weisel.

Robert Naper, 2360 East Rock Road, asked that the reference to the Tohickon Union Church be stricken from the Weisel text and possibly included in the Keelersville narrative.

Alice Moore-Powell, 2747 Three Mile Run Road, stated that she reached out to the chairman of the Perkasio Historical Planning Commission and was told that the Weisel post office opened in 1921 and closed in 1955. The post office was part of the general store, part of which is now the Lake House Inn. She stated that she was told Weisel was located north of the Lake House Inn and the Church Hill Covered Bridge is located 200 yards off-shore under the lake. She stated that the Lake House Inn does not appear to meet the criteria of a historic building under the Department of Interior's requirements for the National Register. She said that the current Weisel area would not meet the requirements for historic preservation that are part of Buck County's smart growth vision.

Jeff Knueppel, 2810 Creek Road, stated that he does not know how we can reference something that we do not know where it is located. He stated that it is important to a lot of the residents that Weisel not be included in the plan as it could be used as a stepping stool for a zoning change. He read a petition, which received 90 signatures, to block any attempt to designate or rezone the Weisel area.

Alice Moore-Powell, 2747 Three Mile Run Road, stated that she thinks the Planning Commission voted on something without having all the facts. She asked if the Planning Commission would reconsider their vote based on the information provided during public comment.

Chairperson Fenley acknowledged the comment and made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:42 p.m.