

**Plainfield Township  
Environmental Advisory Council Meeting  
April 3, 2017**

The Plainfield Township Environmental Advisory Council meeting was held on Monday, April 3, 2017, at 7:00 pm at the Plainfield Township Municipal Building, 6292 Sullivan Trail, Nazareth, PA 18064.

Those in attendance were:

Terry Kleintop, EAC Chairman	Robert Cornman – EAC Vice Chairman
Robin Dingle – EAC Member	Don Moore – EAC Member
Bruce Rabenold – EAC Member	Robert Simpson – EAC Member absent
Jane Mellert, EAC Secretary and Member	Tom Petrucci – Plainfield Twp. Manager

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

The pledge of allegiance was performed.

**Also in attendance:** The following Plainfield Township Board members attended the meeting: Board Chairman Randy Heard, Vice-Chairman Glenn Borger, Supervisor Steve Hurni, and Joyce Lambert.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES** – March 6, 2017 minutes

**Motion – March 6, 2017 Minutes** - A motion was made by Bob Cornman and seconded by Bruce Rabenold to approve the March 6, 2017 minutes. **Vote: 6 Yes**

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Plainfield Township Earned Income Tax Collection for Open Space Study** - The EAC and Tom Petrucci submitted the completed report to the Board of Supervisors for review. The report was listed on the March 8, 2017 Board of Supervisors agenda. The Board of Supervisors attended tonight’s meeting in order to review the contents of the report and have the opportunity to have questions answered.

Terry Kleintop asked if there were any questions prior to Don Moore starting the presentation.

Don Moore explained the contents of the study including the following:

- Inventory of Preserved Lands and Remaining Lands with Preservation Potential
- Tax Ramifications
- School District Impacts
- Maps
- Corrected typo 3,233 to 3,094 acres under Lands Currently Preserved

Randy Heard asked what happens if the land doesn't meet the required standards for preservation. Terry Kleintop explained the State and County have criteria for preserving which includes 50 acres are more that meet all of the soil and other requirements. If the standards are not met it may be able to be preserved through the County/Municipal Partnership program which has different criteria. The County still picks up on incidental costs and conducts annual inspections on land preserved under the County/Municipal Partnership program.

If the Township preserves land that does not meet either of the standards and preserves it then the Township is responsible for the administration, annual inspections and keeping current on the use of the land.

Don Moore explained that there are approximately thirty (30) additional parcels in Plainfield Township with over fifty (50) acres that could be preserved. Parcels over fifty (50) acres meet one of the States requirements for preservation.

A ten (10) acre parcel that is contiguous to a preserved farm can be preserved.

It was noted that both Bushkill Township and Moore Township have moved forward and preserved land without the County program. Moore bought a farm in 2014 for around \$20,000 per acre. The Township is willing to buy the land in order to preserve it even if the Municipality takes a loss on the land. Moore bought a farm, preserved it and then sold it for \$9,500 per acre. The landowner may do a tax free exchange. Moore Township has approximately 1900 acres of preserved farmland. The Northampton School District did adopt Act 4. Everything the municipality bought was in the hands of a developer.

With three thousand (3,000) acres still available for preservation, and three thousand (3,094) acres already preserved in Plainfield Township, the cycles of applicants from the municipality will probably slow down.

The County is currently going over the needed corrections for preserved property owners that have land in the building envelope and is under Act 319 or Act 515. The Acts give a reduced assessment value to land placed under the Clean and Green Acts. In Northampton County the building envelope is not included in Act 4 which freezes the tax rate at the time the land is preserved.

Terry Kleintop noted we need to explain the tax structure for people considering preservation. The EAC can put a letter together explaining the process and how the tax system works on land and buildings when going through the preservation process. The Board will need to give approval for the EAC to move forward with the letter.

Only two Counties in the State of Pennsylvania have offered Act #4 on the building envelope area.

Bob Cornman noted that the excluded areas may not be subdivideable according to our current zoning regulations. Jane Mellert noted that some landowners came into the Township and asked what the requirements were when they went to preserve (for the building envelope and in order to exclude land for future lots) but then the regulations changed.

Tom Petrucci noted that the concerns he has heard is about the buildings that are necessary for the operation of farming being charged taxes at the current tax rate. Tom reviewed the Act 319 and 515 tax examples on page five (5) of the report.

Plainfield Township sent a letter to Northampton County requesting a review of the assessments for Plainfield Township landowners with farmland. Northampton County noted that they could not check all of the farmland owned in Plainfield Township for errors because it could be considered spot assessments.

Tom Petrucci noted that the millage freeze under Act 4 of 2006 is costing the Township an estimated total of \$2,592.40 per year.

School District Impact – Terry Kleintop reviewed the enrollments from 1999 to 2020. Terry spoke to Walter Schlegel the Business Administrator at the Pen Argyl Area School District. He noted that additional information reviewed during compilation of the report has not been included. He further noted that millennials delaying marriage and having children, the birth rate is down, and the economic downturn in 2008, are all factors in the decreased enrollment at the school.

Terry also noted that Pen Argyl and Wind Gap taxpayers are benefiting from the land being preserved in Plainfield Township. If more land in Plainfield Township had been developed then the additional households would have increased the enrollment at the Pen Argyl School District.

Three (3) subdivisions in Plainfield Township that were moving forward in past years have not been developed and are now preserved.

Jane Mellert reviewed the content of the interviews conducted with landowners (farmers) that preserved their property. It was noted during the interview process that preserving the farm is the main thing. Working farmers persevere despite low and fluctuating prices for the products they produce. Farming is in their bones. Long term farm families believe that there has to be dedicated, hardworking people committed to feeding the people of the nation. The average age of the farmer in Northampton County is 64 years. Many of the farmers in Plainfield Township are in that age range. Not enough is being looked at to transitioning the farms to next generations. Younger people who want to go into farming have a difficult time to afford to purchase the land and sustain a living. Many acres (approximately 1,500) in Plainfield Township are leased out to the same farmer. The cost of equipment and building maintenance is high and the price paid for farm products often doesn't produce enough income to cover the cost, allow equipment updating and produce a profit.

A discussion was held on whether there is a market for preserved farmland.

Bruce Rabenold reviewed the Future Utilization of Open Space EIT Funds section of the report. Bruce noted that the Township already has an Open Space Plan and further explained that there is a little bit of confusion of what we are doing right now. Wetlands do a lot of valuable things to control water. The stream buffers need to be looked at. Easements can be done along the streams that have advantages for stream protection and the recreation trail.

Approximately 1100 acres of land was identified as having possible preservation potential for natural features.

Tom Petrucci noted Township will be required to reduce the sediment load by 10%. There is a possibility that the Open Space money could be used to acquire easements. The money would not need to come out of the General Fund to do the improvements. This would be better than not having that (EIT collections) income stream. The Official Map can show lands that are environmentally sensitive

to help protect the resources. Look at areas that are going to be developed. The Official Map gives the Township first dibs on property.

Bushkill Township and Moore Township have Official Maps. Bushkill Township's map is strict. To try to allow Mother Nature continue to take care of problems by preserving natural areas.

Robin Dingle noted there have been a lot of studies and the Army Corp of Engineers are now looking at buying tracts of lands instead of putting in levees. The benefit can be both ecological and economical. It is difficult to rely on the regulations of the State over time. Sediment occurs naturally. Streams can carry natural loading but when a stream takes on excessive sediment loads that it creates scour and an imbalance occurs. The natural function of the stream is to carry sediment but when it is overloaded then when a storm vent comes along and the water can't get through the stream can back up. The stream will then need to be dredged. Streams become wider due to the flow being reduced and then the water temperature can go up and it affects the aquatic life. Smaller stream systems can become imbalanced quicker due to the size and amount of water flow.

The recommendation is to continue to collect the Earned Income Tax for a minimum of five years and target another eight hundred (800) acres for farmland for preservation in that time period. It is also recommended that further studies be done to identify improvements in the current use of the EIT as well as possible expansion for use to preserve other categories of open space.

### **Zoning Regulations**

It was noted that the current Zoning Ordinance regulations need to be updated to revise areas that conflict with land preservation and in order for property owners wanting to preserve to be able to meet the regulations.

### **Northampton County Farmland Preservation Board**

A letter was sent to the Letter to Northampton County Farmland Preservation Board requesting a change in the application process deadlines. A response has not been received. Terry Kleintop attended the last Northampton County Farmland Preservation Board meeting. Cathy Allen was in attendance at the meeting and has indicated that she would be willing to listen to the Townships concerns.

Terry Kleintop noted that up until 2013 or 2014 that Maria Bentzoni believed that when the tax millage rate was frozen that the tax rate would be frozen on the building envelope. Misinformation may have been given to the landowners going through preservation.

Don Moore noted that the Witmers withdrew from moving forward with preserving their property. They expressed reservations over moving forward with farmland preservation

Randy Heard noted that when the Open Space program was originally developed most people had the idea that the program was for farmland preservation. There doesn't seem to be a great threat of development in Plainfield Township. There is a concern over having too much funding in the Earned Income Tax for Open Space account to be justified.

It was noted in order to preserve another eight hundred (800) acres of farmland that the cost is approximately four million (\$4,000,000) dollars.

Expansions of the parking lots are needed along the trail. Knitters Hill Road needs additional spaces and Jones Hill Road needs a parking area.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

**MEETING ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion - Meeting Adjournment** – A motion was made by Robin Dingle and seconded by Bob Cornman to adjourn the meeting at 9:48 pm. **Vote: 6 Yes**

Respectfully Submitted,

Jane Mellert, Secretary  
Plainfield Township EAC