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To: Honorable Members of the Bethlehem Township Board of Commissioners
Melissa Shafer, Township Manager
From: Nathan D. Jones, Planning Director
Date: December 14th, 2015
Re: Planning, Zoning and Construction Departmental Report

Departmental Activities:

-The Bethlehem Township Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee met on December 3rd to discuss major goals and objectives of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update. The major topics of discussion and expected focus of this Plan to date shall to be: 1. Strive for Sustainability 2. Maintain and Improve Community Services 3. Promote a Well-Designed Public Realm 4. Manage and Calm Vehicular Traffic 5. Enhance Neighborhood Areas 6. Enhance Commercial Areas 7. Support Conservation Design Areas 8. Create Village Area (Emrick West) 9. Create Village Areas (Other) and 10. Enhance Streetscapes. Further, Critical Topics are called out as: Traffic, Stormwater, Parks & Open Space, Trails, Sidewalks & Crosswalks, Redevelopment, Natural Resource Protection and lastly- Streetscape Enhancement.

An afternoon and evening workshop is scheduled for January 7th from 3PM until 8:30PM at the PPIS/ BTMA Building on Orth Street across from Comer Park. At this session, the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee will review and compose specific action items from the topics listed above to be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan Update.

-As the end of the calendar year approaches, Department Staff will begin annual harvesting and archiving of permitting files during the winter months. This annual process populates the Township archives and creates filing space in preparation for the next construction season beginning in 2016.

-Unseasonably warm weather has led to continued intensity in permitting and construction activities in the Township. Inspectional Staff is remaining busy with a rate of scheduled inspections much higher than this time in 2014. With mild weather expected through at least January, construction activity should remain constant.

Recent Submissions:

-Please note- the December, 2015 Planning Commission Meeting has been cancelled.

-Bethlehem Plaza has submitted a sketch plan for review of a proposed plaza entrance/ egress modification. The sketch is currently before the Board of Commissioners for review and comment. The Planning Commission has noted the importance of possible connectivity between Bethlehem Plaza and McDonald's and has encouraged both parties to work together on the matter.

-The Goddard School has submitted a sketch plan for a proposed annex to enlarge the facility. The sketch is currently before the Board of Commissioners for review and comment. Zoning relief may be needed upon submission of a formally engineered plan. Site stormwater review will be of particular importance when a Preliminary Plan is submitted for this project.

-McDonald's on Route 191 has submitted a Preliminary/ Final Plan for a complete site rebuild. The application is being reviewed by staff and the Township Engineer currently and will be reviewed by the Planning Commission at their January 25th, 2016 meeting. As with Bethlehem Plaza, staff is highly recommending interconnectivity between the two developments.

-A landowner on Wilson Avenue immediately adjacent to the Freemansburg Borough line has submitted a sketch plan for a minor subdivision for review. Township Staff and the Township Engineer have begun review and the Zoning Officer has determined that relief through the Zoning Hearing Board shall be needed. The applicant may choose to appear before the ZHB before seeking any further review by the Planning Commission. However, as of now, the Planning Commission will review the sketch plan at the January 25th, 2016 meeting.

Major Project Updates:

-Master site planned Madison Farms remains active & under construction with work underway on commercial building fit outs and apartments. The Department has received notification from the developer for Phase Two residential work, which was presented to the Planning Commission in November. Phase Two residential work includes phased construction of townhomes, carriage homes and single family homes. The Department will be administratively reviewing and recording these plans and then issuing building permits. The Planning Commission noted that this proposed work is in line with previous approvals, the master site plan and meets the originally agreed upon design guidelines for Madison Farms.

Additionally, the mild weather has allowed the Developer to proceed with winter planting and construction of streetscape features on Freemansburg Avenue. These improvements are currently under way as per the manual of design guidelines and the Master Site Plan.

-The application by Traditions of America for Green Pond remains tabled with the Planning Commission. No new submission has been offered to the Planning Commission for review at this time. Township Staff met with the Applicant recently and an update on the status of the proposal was given. The applicant has been working to address traffic, stormwater and environmental concerns over the past several months. Further site testing has been conducted and alternative site plan modifications are being considered. A new submission by the applicant may be possible in early 2016 that addresses the above listed previous areas of concern.

-The BAVTS “Skills Hill” project has begun site work. The intent of the Applicant is to complete as much work as possible before winter weather sets in for the year. Site work is planned to continue as long as weather allows.

-Birchwood Commons site work is underway. The Board of Commissioners granted permission for indemnification and other agreements to be signed for building permits to be issued prior to plan recording, as such the Department has released building permits for two of the apartment buildings. A PennDOT TIS meeting was recently held at the site and it appears that further design and review shall be necessary to obtain the necessary HOP for the project. The Board of Commissioner should be aware that PennDOT approval may now be delayed for this site.

-The William Penn Commons owners have scheduled a meeting with Township Staff for Friday December 18th to discuss project status and William Penn Highway Corridor traffic concerns for the project and PennDOT HOP issues.

-St. Luke’s Hospital Anderson Campus is engaged in site work for their internal roadway system and the previously approved medical office building or “MOB”.

-Mill Creek Corporate Office Park submitted sketch plans for review several months ago and has a subdivision approved for the property. The subdivision has been recorded following final PennDOT approval. The applicant has partnered for the William Penn Highway Traffic Study. The applicant is also currently in the process of working on site concept and design to comply with Township overlay district design guidelines. A submission in early 2016 is possible.

For updates on any other plan submissions, project status or information; please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns.

Respectfully submitted,



Nathan D. Jones, AICP, BCO
Planning Director
Bethlehem Township