

DOYLESTOWN TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

Wednesday, December 17, 2025 at 7 PM

Community Meeting Room, 425 Wells Road

Meeting Minutes

The Doylestown Township Planning Commission Regular Meeting was held at 7:00 pm on Wednesday, December 17, 2025. Members of the Doylestown Township Planning Commission in attendance included Judy Hendrixson, Chairman; Michael Kracht, Vice Chairman, and members Tom Kelso, Jill Macauley and Robert Repko. Others in attendance included Dan Wood, Board of Supervisors Liaison; and Stephanie J. Mason, Township Manager.

The meeting officially began at 7:00 pm.

Public/Commission Comments

None.

Presentation / Recognition

Ms. Hendrixson noted that Ms. Macauley will be stepping down as of the new year, and that she will be missed. She thanked Ms. Macauley for her service to the Township.

Review of Minutes

On a motion by Mr. Kelso, seconded by Mr. Kracht, the November 19, 2025, minutes were unanimously approved, with Mr. Repko abstaining.

Land Development

N/A

Other Business

Proposed Zoning Change/Amendment – Continued Discussion

Zaveta – Hart Property – 2250 S. Easton Road

Libby Naughton from Clarke Gallagher Barbiero Amuso & Glassman Law, sat in to represent the Township as solicitor. Sean Torpey from Pennoni Associates sat in to represent Mr. Bryson from Pennoni who was unavailable due to illness. Mr. Torpey was present to observe.

Present at the meeting were attorney Ed Murphy, Kyle McCoy from the Bucks County Historical Society, and Rich Zaveta, the developer.

Mr. Murphy noted a few items from the last meeting that would be addressed. With regard to the configuration of and location of the principal access to the site, the applicant has engaged Traffic Planning & Design as consultant. They were also the engineer for the Wawa across the street and are very familiar with this area. They are in the process of prepping a scoping application to PennDOT. Once a meeting time and day are set all stakeholders will be invited to attend the scoping meeting. The next item of note was the comments by the Township solicitor regarding what they call the South corridor

overlay district regulation. Since the last meeting suggestions have been made to amend the ordinance, and those changes have been accepted by the applicant. Since the last meeting, Mr. Zaveta has also been able to access the interior of the house and barn, and he will speak on those items. In addition, Ms. McCoy will speak to the mistruths that have been circulating on social media.

Mr. Zaveta noted that he has always intended to be straightforward and transparent with his goals for the property. His intention is to restore the existing structures with the exception of the metal industrial building used for storage. Exteriors will be maintained appropriately, and if not, the HOA can order the work to be done and assess the owner. He further reminded everyone that these are not protected structures. He noted his excitement about the project but stated that he does not need to do this, if it is not the wishes of the Planning Commission.

Mr. Zaveta proceeded to show photos of the house and barn interior. In addition, he showed a photo of the utility building or pole barn used for storing artifacts that is anticipated to be removed, and a new residential building would go in its place. The only other change would be the addition of two buildings 160 feet long, and an open-air pavilion space for community gatherings.

Mr. Zaveta restated his intention to restore and maintain the buildings in the spirit and intent of Mr. Hart, as he moved through the photos of the house and barn. The photos depicted several changes to the interior that were part of a 1950s renovation by Mr. Hart. Much of the integrity of the 18th century farmhouse had not been maintained through this renovation. He noted beams, doorways, fireplaces, etc. which showed more modern renovations and building techniques. The barn on the other hand, is very intact and impressive. He added, however, that it is time for restoration. He also noted that the “magical woodland” as it has been described, is full of ash trees that have been decimated by the ash borer, and that invasives run wild throughout, choking proper vegetation.

Mr. Zaveta concluded that while the house has some resemblance of the period, it is not original, and much of its integrity has been lost or defaced. The barn requires skilled attention and serious craftsmanship even to just stay as a barn. This warrants attention and they are skilled in it. He further reiterated his proposal and showed an alternate rendering of 2 and 3 cluster townhomes, as was requested. Heavy clearing and stormwater would be required for this type of plan. It is not one he wishes to do.

Mr. Zaveta introduced Jeffrey Marshall, an expert and architectural historian, who prepared an executive report for the property.

Mr. Marshall read through his report and how he arrived at his conclusions, (Exhibit A). He summarized that the changes made by Mr. Hart were not a restoration, but a reimagination of an 18th century house that a wealthy person of the time would have owned.

Ms. McCoy spoke to the rumors and misinformation written about the Historical Society. Bucks County Historical Society, the Mercer Museum and Fonthill are the same organization, with the goal of preserving Henry Mercer’s legacy. In addition, BCHS owns two secondary properties not directly attributed to Henry Mercer, one of which is the Hart property. Over many years and discussions, the board voted unanimously to sell the Hart property in an effort to reallocate resources to the primary

responsibility of BCHS, which is the Mercer, Fonthill, and the collections. They believed working with Mr. Zaveta was their best opportunity and that he shared their ideals for the property. She clarified that BCHS is not a preservation organization. She noted that the metal building used for storage of artifacts is not to the standards that is required for them as a museum, and they need a new and more appropriate space. She added that despite what has been misrepresented, Mr. Mercer himself was not a complete preservationist. He removed an existing barn and built a concrete garage, and he also encased the existing farmhouse in concrete and then added 44 rooms. She restated that they are reallocating resources in order to better serve their mission and meet the professional standards required of them. She added that they still have a right to sell the property as it is, zoned I2.

Mr. Murphy concluded the presentation and noted that they are here seeking a recommendation on what the Planning Commission believes would be the most appropriate use of the property and the merit of Mr. Zaveta's proposal that accompanied the original application.

Ms. Hendrixson stated that they have to specifically talk about the change in use, and the modifications to be made. She asked Ms. Naughton from the solicitor's office to speak on that.

Ms. Naughton explained that any zoning change would have to be in the best interest of the township. It was the position of the solicitor's office and other consultants that the original proposed change constitutes spot zoning, which is illegal in the state of Pennsylvania. They discussed at length what would be a better amendment. Leaving it as I2 would allow for very dense development, which is not the position of the Township. The zoning was changed to I2 in the late 1990's when the warehouse was built, but it was previously zoned R4. Further, I2 also affects Fonthill and Moravian Tile Works, and they do not want to touch that. Adding an amendment to include a B15 use would add a multifamily use while maintaining historic buildings there.

Ms. Hendrixson noted the issue is that they have to look at other parcels that this change would affect.

Ms. Naughton replied that the Burpee property could be impacted and potentially one other property, but not Fonthill. There was a question of what that other property is, but it was uncertain at the time.

Mr. Kelso noted that the Burpee property could allow for 150 units potentially.

Ms. Naughton added that they did not look into Burpee in detail. They were asked to propose a better alternative to the original amendment.

Ms. Hendrixson said that while it makes a lot of sense for this property, it has to work universally. The Planning Commission needs to review which other properties are included.

Ms. Naughton added that this is the least dense option under the current zoning code.

There was a discussion of the current density in R1 under historic properties and how that varies.

Ms. Mason added that the Planning Commission has been given a draft to start with and needs to decide what to keep or change.

Ms. Hendrixson expressed concern that in order to recommend this project associated with the zoning amendment, they need to see a finalized draft of the ordinance.

Ms. Naughton clarified that that is entirely up to the Planning Commission. They will take their recommendations and make revisions.

Mr. Repko asked Ms. Naughton if they saw this as the best option for doing the proposal that is on the table. She confirmed that from their perspective it eliminates the risks of changes to I2.

Mr. Murphy reiterated that they would establish a conservation easement and preserve open space, and would adopt a coordinated unilateral declaration of covenants, in order to avoid any uncomfortability.

Ms. Hendrixson expressed that those items would be part of land development, but that the ordinance needs to be finalized first.

Ms. Naughton noted that this is the only feedback they've gotten thus far. Changes can be made with their recommendations.

Mr. Murphy suggested that if the Planning Commission is comfortable with this and wanted to ensure that the ordinance matched this or needed additional controls, that would be the recommendation, subject to the staff continuing to refine the ordinance to address concerns.

Mr. Repko expressed his understanding that the applicant wants a commitment tonight, and they are looking at the amendment to zoning to accomplish that, but also not create unintended consequences elsewhere. He did not believe anyone was saying that the plan shouldn't be approved.

Mr. Murphy stated that this is the first time that suggestion has been made. They need some kind of affirmation that this is what the Planning Commission is looking for.

Ms. Macauley added that they can't officially say they condone the project. The concern is about doing due diligence to avoid any downstream impact.

Mr. Murphy noted that this is vague for the applicant and what direction they are to take.

There was a question of whether there are deed restrictions at Fonthill to prevent further development. Ms. McCoy said they did not know of any but were told by the Heritage Conservancy that the I2 zoning provides some protection.

It was discussed that the Planning Commission might support a motion to support this change with the caveat that they still need to finalize the draft ordinance.

Ms. Hendrixson opened the floor to questions from the audience.

Robert Goldman of New Britain, an attorney, suggested that no matter what is thought of this property, the consequences have to be dealt with. Changes that would affect Burpee and other properties would be a mistake, and giving credence to this proposal would be getting ahead of yourself. He respectfully

suggested that it won't take long to look at those consequences before committing to Mr. Zaveta. He then asked, if the property stayed I2, how many homes could be built?

Ms. Naughton replied that there is not a residential use under the current I2 zoning. The house there would be considered nonconforming.

Ms. Mason added that the property could still be sold under I2 and developed under the zoning with a "by right plan", for example a sports complex shown by the applicant.

Rob Steere of Birdsong Way spoke on behalf of neighbors in Doylestown Hunt and noted that they would be highly affected by a "by right use". They have been involved in the meetings with Mr. Zaveta and believe without question that his plan is the best option. Further, his principles meet those of the Historical Society's mission. He added that when he purchased his house, he thought that the forest would be protected forever. Realizing that is not the case, they highly recommend this proposal. He expressed that as neighbors; they also have more skin in the game.

John Everett of Turk Road asked what the "by right plan" would be?

Mr. Murphy showed a sketch of a "by right plan" that presents a private recreation facility that is fully consistent with the current zoning of the property as I2.

Jeff McGeary of Doylestown Hunt said that he had spoken to Mr. Zaveta, participated in meetings, and remembers the original Board of Supervisors meeting where this project was first discussed. At the time he asked for a figure of what the Historical Society was looking for and added that there was never a chance to fundraise to satisfy the need of the Historical Society. He understood that number now to be around 5 million. He further added that making this change would set a precedent and the ramifications of that need to be understood.

There was a question of the agreement of sale, but it was noted by Mr. Murphy that this is not public. Mr. Kelso said that he had seen some documentation of the sale price.

Ms. Mason said the Township does not have a breakdown of the deal between Mr. Zaveta and BCHS and added that there are many rumors out there regarding the sale price.

Mr. McGeary added that should they move forward with this proposal he would like to look into buffers, lighting, traffic, etc. that would impact the Hunt.

Ms. Mason clarified that these items would all be flushed out during land development.

Mr. McGeary asked if Mr. Zaveta, being equitable owner, was contingent on this proposal being approved.

Mr. Murphy replied that it is correct, without the sale, it would fall back to BCHS.

Doreen Stratton of Doylestown Borough noted that she spoke last month about her concerns and appealed to the Planning Commission not to make any approvals tonight. She added that she has more questions for the Historical Society and the impact to Fontheill.

Anne Marie Remy, a nonresident, spoke of how her ancestors predated colonization in the area that is part of what is considered for development. She said that she has walked this land, which is occupied by native wildlife, various species and animals. She said the land must be preserved, and we don't need to develop every inch in Bucks County. It will be noisy with more busy traffic, and where will the animals go? The Planning Commission has a unique opportunity to preserve the forest that predates Doylestown for future generations.

Doug Linde of Doylestown Hunt referred to the September minutes and said that it was not clear where the access road would be and expressed concern over it coming through the Hunt.

Ms. Mason replied that it was Karen Hyland from Doylestown Borough who suggested an access going through the Hunt. She added that, as Mr. Murphy suggested, this would be evaluated through the applicant's traffic consultant, and the Planning Commission will see that result in the near future. This will be discussed through land development as well.

Kim Troup, a nonresident, suggested that it is strange that we should have to worry about preservation of the property while it is in the hands of the Historical Society. She noted that she thinks it is clear that everyone agrees that the property is historic. Why don't we do the right thing and protect it. She made reference to the Township's comp plan from 2008 and 2019 and suggested some inconsistencies with what the Township deemed as a need, i.e. walkability, affordability, aging in place, and what this development proposes. She further noted adaptive reuse as opposed to new construction.

Christine Boyd of Birdsong Way said that while wishing the woods would remain, it is crystal clear, and many have missed this, that the Historical Society has the right to sell the property, and no one, including the Planning Commission, can take that right away. The issue facing all of us is what is the best way to manage the sale of this property that will enhance it. This is the best approach. She understood that Burpee and other hypotheticals need to be considered but right now we need to agree that this is the best use of the property which is going to be sold. We cannot take away that right whether we agree with it or not.

Mr. Kelso made a motion to table the item. The motion died for lack of a second.

There was a discussion about whether a motion to support the concept contingent on finalizing the zoning amendment would have any weight. Ms. Naughton said that the Township would not be bound, nor would the applicant.

Mr. Kracht requested a report from staff regarding what properties would be impacted.

Mr. Repko further requested that it be received well in advance of the January meeting so there is time to give it full consideration.

Ms. Macauley added that they want to see the development potential of the parcels affected.

Ms. Mason asked for clarification for the minute taker is a motion being considered in support of the concept that has been presented by Mr. Zaveta, and that the draft ordinance is contingent upon finalization?

Ms. Hendrixson made a motion to support the concept plan that has been presented by Mr. Zaveta, and that the draft ordinance is contingent upon finalization. Mr. Repko seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Ms. Macauley suggested to the applicant that they would not have been progressing in this way if there were red flags in the proposal and apologized for the vagueness to the applicant.

Mr. Murphy appreciated the sentiment but said that it had not previously been conveyed.

Doylestown Borough Climate Action Plan (DCAP) 2025

Ms. Hendrixson noted that the plan was sent to the Planning Commission for comment.

Mr. Kelso made a motion thanking the borough for submitting it and recommending to the Board of Supervisors that it is consistent with the Township's approach and that of the EAC. Ms. Macauley seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Adjournment

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 9:16 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kaitlyn Finley
Office Manager, Code Enforcement