

COVERT TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 REGULAR MEETING
6:30 P.M., COVERT TOWNSHP HALL

Call to Order / Roll Call / Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Rendell called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Members Present: Robert Brown, Tom Bury, Luke Dennison, Austin Harding, Jena Johnson, Wayne Rendell, Lonzey Taylor

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Rebecca Harvey, Township Planning Consultant

Approval of Agenda

Motion by Bury, seconded by Taylor, to approve the agenda of the September 18, 2024 regular meeting, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Minutes – August 21, 2024 Regular Meeting

Motion by Brown, seconded by Bury, to approve the minutes of the August 21, 2024 regular meeting, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

No public comment was offered.

New Business

Chair Rendell stated that no New Business is scheduled for consideration.

Ongoing Business

Site Plan Review – 31982 Blue Star Highway (Ronan)

Chairperson Rendell reminded that the request had been considered by the Planning Commission on March 20, 2024 and postponed to *‘allow the applicant the opportunity to prepare a revised site plan and/or seek relief from the ZBA regarding the parking requirements.’* At the applicant’s request, the matter has been placed on the agenda for continued consideration.

Due to the absence of the applicant, the Commission agreed to consider the request later in the agenda to allow additional time for arrival.

Text Amendment: Shipping/Storage Containers

Chair Rendell reminded that the Commission reviewed/discussed Draft #2 - ‘Shipping Containers as Accessory Structures’ in August. He noted that Harvey was directed to revise the draft text to include the discussed waiver provision for Planning Commission final review in September.

Harvey provided an overview of Draft #3, highlighting the revisions made in response to Planning Commission review comments.

Chair Rendell noted that the use of shipping containers as accessory structures is currently allowed in the AG District (when related to a commercial agricultural business operation) and the I District, without limitation by Section 18.14 (2). He suggested there may be merit in continuing the current approach in the new regulations, noting that the new regulations seem too restrictive for agricultural business and industrial uses.

Planning Commission members noted that there have been no problems with this approach observed to date and that said storage is needed.

Lengthy Planning Commission discussion then ensued regarding the basis for regulating the use of shipping containers as accessory structures for agricultural business and industrial uses differently than for other uses allowed within the Township. The following was noted:

- Agricultural business and industrial uses have greater storage needs.

- The storage needs of these uses are short-term and constantly changing . . . limiting the practicality of constructing permanent storage buildings/facilities.
- The use of shipping containers as accessory structures allows for safe storage practices where the construction of permanent storage buildings/facilities is not practical.
- The use of shipping containers as accessory structures is more in alignment with the character statements/objectives of the AG and I Districts than with those of the residential and commercial districts in the Township.

It was noted that the proposed ‘waiver provision’ incorporated into Draft #3 offers the special land use approach for variation from the standards when needed. Does this provide a suitable alternate approach to relaxing the standards for agricultural business and industrial uses?

It was reasoned that quantity of shipping containers needed varies greatly depending on the agricultural/industrial use and the special land use process would become unwieldy in trying to predict these changing circumstances.

There was Planning Commission consensus that the objective is to provide regulations for the use of shipping containers as accessory structures in residential areas to address potential negative impacts on the character of the Township’s residential areas. To that end, there was agreement that the proposed regulations should instead be limited to the residential districts.

Harvey was directed to revise the draft text so as to apply only to the residential districts (RR, LD-1, LD-2, MD, HD) and the AG District . . . and to retain Section 18.14 1. and 2. as written . . . for final review in October. This will serve to allow/regulate the use of shipping containers as accessory structures for residential uses; prohibit same for commercial uses; and allow without limitation use of same for agricultural business and industrial uses.

Site Plan Review – 31982 Blue Star Highway (Ronan)

Chair Rendell noted that the applicant is still not present and requested the pleasure of the Commission. In response to questions, he explained that the applicant has been in communication with staff and is aware of the pending site design issues. He noted that the applicant requested the item be scheduled for the September meeting and indicated several times that she would be present.

Following discussion of the options available, motion by Brown, seconded by Harding, to postpone the matter to the October meeting to afford the applicant additional time to address the pending site design issues and/or be present at the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

Communications

Harvey advised that the first draft of the Updated Master Plan/Coastal Management Plan is complete and will be distributed to the Commission shortly.

Public Comments

Alan Smaka recognized emerging issues facing the Township (short-term rentals, shipping containers, etc). He noted that the Township is generally flexible in their consideration of these issues, which is good, but supported the concern expressed with negative impacts to Township character. He suggested consideration of a form-based code approach.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rebecca Harvey, AICP, PCP
(McKenna)Township Planning Consultant