

BENNER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
January 22, 2009

CALL TO ORDER

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Benner Township Planning Commission was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chair Nate Campbell at the Benner Township Municipal Building.

ATTENDANCE

Members present: Robert Fugate, Dan Horner, Dave Jackson, Genny Robine and Nate Campbell. Member absent: Joe Shultz. Also attending was Renee Swancer, Zoning Officer, Supervisors—John Elnitski, Jr., Jim Swartzell, and Dave Breon; Bryan Rodgers, Elaine Schaeffer, William Schaeffer, Sue Straley, Patrick and Megan Kelley, Ken & Bernice Fisher, Bob Dively, Chris Walker, Evelyn Smith, Greg Piper, Chris Weaver, Thomas Brewster, Tom Weaver, Peter Shaw, J. McCartney, resident from 421 Valentine Hill Road, and Irene Jones.

MINUTES

The minutes from the January 8th 2008 re-organizational and January 8th meeting minutes were presented for approval. Mr. Jackson moved the approval of the minutes. Mr. Horner seconded the motion.

Vote: Mr. Swartzell: yes Mr. Fugate: yes Mrs. Robine: yes Mr. Jackson - yes
 Mr. Shultz: absent Mr. Campbell: yes Mr. Horner - yes

PERSONS TO ADDRESS THE BOARD

Centre Peace Discussion. Mr. Elnitski opened the meeting up by addressing both the Planning Commission and residents present explaining the purpose of this meeting was to allow Centre Peace to discuss with the residents their concept of having a "transitional house" for men leaving the Centre County Prison. Mr. Brewster started the discussion by explaining what exactly Centre Peace wants to do with the transitional housing. Centre Peace would like to house as many as seven individuals with a house manager. Counseling would be provided at the home to help with the transition back into society by providing help with finding a job, life skills, etc, drug or alcohol addictions. Currently Centre County prison pays between \$22,000-40,000 per inmate. Centre Peace, through private sources, can provide help for about \$7,000-\$8000 per individual. Mr. Brewster stated currently an average of one individual per month leaves the Centre County Prison with either no home or no direction. Mr. Brewster stated the warden for the Centre County prison is supportive of Centre Peace's transitional home idea. Mr. Brewster only wants to house Centre County residents, no sex offenders (because a school bus is close to the home), and men. Mr. Brewster noted that currently Centre County is "in need" of a suitable place for temporary housing for these individuals. House rules would be very strict and length of stay by individuals would be relatively short.

Mr. Elnitski agreed with Mr. Brewster that Centre County is "in need" for this type of housing. Mr. Elnitski noted the Supervisors would consider amending the zoning ordinance to allow this type of housing only if the community supports it. Mr. Elnitski noted that the Township, working along with the residents, has the ability at this time to create zoning language addressing all concerns. Ms. Megan Kelly asked if the Township supervisors have already made a decision to have it in the Township? Mr. Elnitski noted "no."

Mr. Tom Weaver, of Belair Hills Road, spoke. He works at the Centre County Prison and was very involved over the years with Centre House, a temporary housing facility in State College, PA. Mr. Weaver cautioned the group about the risks and responsibilities involved with having a facility like Centre Peace wants to have. Mr. Weaver has been in the professional field of the legal prison system for over 30 years. He is well aware of the problems that Centre House had when it started and the growing pains it experienced over the years. Mr. Weaver noted that 24-hour supervision of individuals should be mandatory as well as a very structured set of rules and regulations governing the facility. Without it, problems will definitely occur. Drug problems can be very hard to control.

Mr. Weaver noted that parolees not permitted to go home are usually the problem individuals because their families don't want them to come home. These individuals can be mentally disturbed, or have drug and alcohol problems. Mr. Weaver thinks that if there are more than 3 individuals living in this Centre Peace home, problems will definitely arise.

Ms. Straley asked why Mr. Brewster didn't respond to her email, and Ms. Straley asked how the State Police would cover the area. Mr. Elnitski noted that maybe that would be a requirement for Centre Peace to hire more police services from an adjoining municipality.

Questions were also raised about who is living in the home now. Mr. Brewster noted that "a family" currently residing in the home—no parolees.

Yvonne Smith noted she was very upset with the letter. She thought if the residents didn't "go along" with Centre Peace's ideas, they were not church abiding citizens.

Denny Nau spoke about the numerous phone calls he has received regarding the transitional housing Centre Peace proposes. Mr. Nau noted in order to be successful, the residents need to support it.

Mr. Elnitski noted the purpose of this meeting was to bring Centre Peace and adjoining residents together to start dialogue between the two groups to see issues can be worked out. The question was asked if a resident committee could be formed. Mr. Elnitski stated if that is what the residents want to do, it is fine. Mr. Tom Weaver stressed again, that regardless of what Centre Peace does, there will be problems if 24-hour supervision and strict regulations are not in place. These individuals are high-risk.

Mr. Chuck Gambone, a member of Centre Peace, spoke and noted that Centre Peace can operate with three individuals and if they want to do, they will do it. Some residents were upset by Mr. Gambone's statement. Mr. Swartzell noted that if three unrelated individuals can reside in a single family home, regardless of background (i.e., parolees). Mr. Swartzell noted the Township is encouraging public input. A question was asked if Centre Peace is tax-exempt. Mr. Brewster noted it was. Mr. Elnitski ended the discussion and thanked everyone for coming and talking.

The Planning Commission took a short 5 minute recess to allow folks to leave.

Fastrax Kustomz - conditional use hearing (continuation). Mr. Chris Walker of Fastrax Kustomz was present to continue discussing with the Commission is conditional use application. Mr. Fugate made the motion to "conditionally approve" the Fastrax application pending receipt of the following information:

1. Letter from Grays Towing.
2. Letter from Confer
3. Business sign permit can be obtained from the Township.

Mr. Jackson seconded the motion.

Vote:	Mr. Swartzell: yes	Mr. Fugate: yes	Mrs. Robine: yes	Mr. Jackson - yes
	Mr. Shultz: absent	Mr. Campbell: yes	Mr. Horner - yes	

NEW BUSINESS

Fulton Bank Land Development Plan. This plan was already approved by the Commission several months ago. Several changes were made to the plan, and reapproval of the plan is necessary. Mr. Fugate moved to reapprove the plan.

Mr. Jackson seconded the motion.

Vote:	Mr. Swartzell: yes	Mr. Fugate: yes	Mrs. Robine: yes	Mr. Jackson - yes
	Mr. Shultz: absent	Mr. Campbell: yes	Mr. Horner - yes	

Benner Commerce Park Preliminary Plan: The Plan now meets the requirements of the Department of Environmental Protection, as well as, the engineering and county comments. Ms. Robine moved to approve the plan. Mr. Horner seconded the motion.

Vote: Mr. Swartzell: yes Mr. Fugate: yes Mrs. Robine: yes Mr. Jackson - yes
 Mr. Shultz: absent Mr. Campbell: yes Mr. Horner - yes

Phyllis Thomas Subdivision - planning module approval. Ms. Thomas is proposing to subdivide the remainder of her property located on Purdue Mountain on the northside of the mountain. The Planning Commission reviewed the module and signed the portion related to the Planning Commission. Mr. Swartzell moved to approve the module. Mr. Fugate seconded the motion.

Vote: Mr. Swartzell: yes Mr. Fugate: yes Mrs. Robine: yes Mr. Jackson - yes
 Mr. Shultz: absent Mr. Campbell: yes Mr. Horner - yes

ADJOURN

With all business complete, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:
Renee Swancer, Zoning Officer