

ROSS TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

MONTHLY MEETING

June 17, 2025

The Ross Township Planning Commission Meeting, scheduled for June 17, 2025, was called to order by Chairman Roger Christman at 7:00pm. The meeting was held at the Township Municipal Building.

In attendance were the following Planning Commission Members: Chairman Roger Christman, Vice-Chairman Rick Meixsell, Lauri Lapping, David Labar and Frank Piraino Jr.

Planning Commission Members Roger Green Jr and Herb Stecker were absent.

Also in attendance were Attorney Michael Gaul, of the King Spry Law Firm, Planning Commission Solicitor, and Alternate Township Engineer Tighe Meckes, from Keystone Consulting Engineers.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A motion to approve the minutes of the May 13, 2025 meeting as presented was made by David Labar and seconded by Lauri Lapping. The motion carried unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Chairman Roger Christman stated there had been two outside communications received by the Planning Commission. One item was the requested Determination Letter from the Zoning Officer in regards to the Andrews Plan on Elmer Drive which explained that Zoning Relief would be required for Sections 801.A.1 and 801.B.1.

Chairman Roger Christman asked Attorney Gaul if he had any conversations with Zoning, which he answered he had not. Attorney Gaul then explained three questions had been put to the Zoning Office for response, two of which did not require Zoning Relief, but that the first would require Zoning Relief. Chairman Roger Christman asked if there were any further questions.

Attorney Gaul asked Daniel Saunders, who was in attendance, if he had made any decision based off of the letter. Mr. Saunders stated he had filed an appeal with the Zoning Hearing Board for a Variance the previous day, June 16th, when he had received the paperwork and would be waiting to hear back from the Zoning Office on a hearing date.

Mr. Saunders stated that Attorney Joe Weismeth and Engineer Chris McDermott were unable to attend the meeting that evening due to conflicts, but that he had received the latest review from Township Engineer Tighe Meckes and that he had no further questions. He further stated they have been unable to complete the Percolation Test due to the excessive amounts of recent rain which could have an effect on the determination of engineering for what would be needed. Engineer Tighe Meckes confirmed that a new plan had not been submitted yet for review so the remaining comments would still be basically the same.

Attorney Gaul stated he had reviewed his previous comments on the Plan to determine if any items still remained to be addressed. He stated one item that remained was whether the applicant needed to submit an HOP or a letter from PennDOT stating a HOP would not be needed. The applicant's engineer, Chris McDermott, previously stated one should not be required as there are no proposed changes to the current access opening. Mr. Saunders stated he had been in contact with someone at PennDOT who told him the HOP would not be needed since there would be no work completed in the PennDOT right of way, but that he could request a letter stating such to submit to the Township.

Attorney Gaul stated a note would need to be added to the Plan about access to the state highway and the HOP. He asked Engineer Tighe Meckes and Mr. Saunders the accessway improvements would be completed prior to final plan approval or if Mr. Saunders was waiting for a final approval. Mr. Saunders stated he was waiting for final approval. Attorney Gaul then stated an Improvement Agreement would need to be signed and financial security posted to guarantee the work would be done. A Cost Estimate would need to be provided. Attorney Gaul stated that he would draft a letter for Attorney Weismeth and Engineer Chris McDermott to summarize items discussed at the meeting.

Attorney Gaul went on to explain that the other outstanding items/conditions for a recommended approval of the Plan were more standard and included items such as the Cost Estimate, Improvement Agreement, Stormwater Agreement, letter in regards to HOP and Planning Module approval.

Attorney Gaul asked if the Planning Module was still with the Township, to which Mr. Saunders responded that the SEO had written a letter to either the Board of Supervisors or Planning Commission on April 3rd stating the SEO did not see a reason that the Plan would not be able to move forward. Attorney Gaul stated he had not seen the letter. The revised version of the module had not yet been presented to Engineer Tighe Meckes.

Attorney Gaul asked Mr. Meckes if he had reviewed the proposed construction details for the access way improvements. Mr. Meckes replied that the revised plan showed the minimum width, depth of stone and crown requirements of the Modification that had been granted. Mr. Meckes also confirmed that an inspection would still need to be completed to verify the minimum requirements set within the SALDO were met for improvements made to the road in response to a question by Chairman Roger Christman.

When the Planning Commission was asked if there were any other questions or items to discuss, it was determined there were no other items, as there were no other new submissions for the Plan. Attorney Gaul stated the Planning Commission may feel further discussion at this time would be premature until Township Engineer Tighe Meckes was able to review the Stormwater results, which could have an impact on work needing to be completed. Attorney Gaul then stated he would draft a summary letter to the applicant's attorney and engineer, and a draft list of Conditions for a Recommendation of Approval for the next meeting. Having the list would allow for a convenient reference point for the Planning Commission discussion at the meeting, in the event that the Planning Commission desired to recommend conditional approval, and allow them to focus on any other items that may arise. Some of the listed conditions could include the applicant receiving Zoning Relief and payment of all Township Fees. Attorney Gaul stated the preparation of the list of conditions was for the convenience of the Planning Commission, and was not intended to be an indication one way or the other as to whether the Planning Commission should provide a recommendation of approval, conditional approval or denial. The Planning Commission makes that decision. Drafting conditions for a discussion point did not change that.

Chairman Roger Christman told Mr. Saunders to have further submissions into the Township at least 10 days prior to the next meeting, to which Mr. Saunders responded he was not in control of the Zoning timeline. Attorney Gaul explained the approval for Relief from the Zoning Hearing Board would be added as a Condition in the event that the Planning Commission recommended approval next meeting. Attorney Gaul stated that a decision from the Zoning Hearing Board by that time was unlikely as their usual time lines could include up to 60 days to meet after an application was submitted and up to 45 days after a Hearing to issue a written approval. This may result in the applicant requesting another extension.

Mr. Saunders asked Mr. Meckes if it would be helpful to submit the current stormwater analysis they had while waiting to be able to complete the Perc Test. Attorney Gaul stated it would be more efficient to wait for all items to be submitted for a full review.

With no further questions, a motion was made by Vice Chairman Rick Meixsell to table further discussion of the Andrews Plan until the July Planning Commission Meeting. The motion was seconded by Lauri Lapping and carried unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS:

Catherine Andrews – Land Development Plan – Extension 8/4/25

Daniel Saunders was in attendance as a representative for the Plan. Items for the Catherine Andrews Land Development Plan had been discussed through the review of Communications received. Mr. Saunders left at the conclusion of the communications relating to Ms. Andrews' Plan.

NEW BUSINESS:

Tom Kilcommon was asked to sign in and he stated he was before the Planning Commission to inquire about wanting to add an additional house to his 3.75 acre property for his son. He stated he had been into the Township Building and was recommended to be present for the meeting to go over his questions.

Chairman Roger Christman stated he had been one to speak to Mr. Kilcommon over the phone and informed him he was told to come before the Planning Commission to be able to go over all requirements that would go into a Plan to add an additional house such as determining if there would be enough land available to meet the required acre per house, sight setbacks, the need for an additional septic and other items which would have been difficult to explain over the phone. He further stated that the Planning Commission would have been unable to make a decision without the required information being submitted to the Township.

Attorney Gaul stated the previous Plan that had been discussed at the meeting, for the Andrews' Property, was also for approval to build a second home on an existing lot and explained that the process is involved as it is similar to the process of a subdivision on the property leading to the recommendation that Mr. Kilcommon would need professional help for the Plan such as a Surveyor or Engineer.

Mr. Kilcommon stated he had previously contacted a Surveyor, Bobby Beers, who had done the original survey of the property who recommended him to John Shoop, but he has now not heard back from him recently to move forward.

Attorney Gaul explained the need for a Surveyor or Engineer to be able to determine items such as proper setbacks, septic testing and determining where the house could be built in order to establish ability to build another home, or subdivide the property, that would comply with Township Zoning Ordinances. Attorney Gaul continued with stating some of the usual issues that can arise with such a Plan could include access to the second home, earth disturbance over 5,000 sq ft that would require an E&S Plan and a Stormwater Plan for impervious surfaces over 5,000 sq ft. These items would be worked through with an Engineer for proper submission of a Plan and while Mr. Kilcommon could use a Surveyor to begin the process, he may still need a Contractor or Engineer for other compliance items as some may be more difficult given the smaller size of the property.

Mr. Kilcommon shared a copy of his original property drawing for the Planning Commission to view and showed where the property and access was located off of Meixsell Valley Road. After viewing the survey map, and discussing where Mr. Kilcommon would ideally like the new home to be built, Attorney Gaul stated again that Mr. Kilcommon should contact an Engineer to be able to have access and placement that met requirements of the SALDO.

Chairman Roger Christman stated adding the secondary access may be difficult to get the proper sight distance from the road and Engineer Tighe Meckes stated that with the road having a speed limit of 40 MPH that a sight distance of about 300 ft would be needed and could also be determined off of the slope of the property. The current house on the property sits close to the road as it had been built before the Zoning Ordinances were put into place within the last 30-40 years which would now need to be followed for new construction on the property.

Mr. Kilcommon asked if the Planning Commission would give any recommendations on an Engineer for him to contact, to which Attorney Gaul stated they would be unable to give one, as the Planning Commission would be reviewing the work and did not want any conflict of interest. Mr. Kilcommon stated he would find a contact and was just wanting to start with finding out if such a plan would be possible or not. After his discussion with the Planning Commission, Mr. Kilcommon left the meeting.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:

Howard Beers was present and stated he had a couple comments in regards to the items discussed with Mr. Saunders about his plan and about what Mr. Kilcommon had brought forward.

In regards to the Andrews Plan on Elmer Drive, Mr. Beers asked why the Planning Commission was having Mr. Saunders continue with paying for tests and plans if there was a chance he would not be able to receive a Zoning Variance. Attorney Gaul stated that the decision to proceed is Mr. Saunder's decision, and not the Planning Commission's requirement. Mr. Saunders is proceeding at his own risk and costs in general in regards to the plan, as had been discussed previously, as he does not own the property.

Mr. Beers then asked in which zoning district Mr. Kilcommon's property was located because it could determine what the acreage requirements would be for both homes. Properties zoned as RR require at least 2 acres per unit while R1 zoning only requires 1 acre per unit. After review, it was determined Mr. Kilcommon's property was R1. The Planning Commission then briefly discussed where the access drive would need to come in for proper visibility, the slope of the driveway and if any wetlands are present on the property.

There were no further public comments.

PENDING:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:34pm. The motion to adjourn was made by Frank Piraino Jr, seconded by David Labar, and carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lizzy Stortz
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