

SMITHFIELD TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING – JUNE 18, 2024 AT 7:00PM

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A Regular Meeting of the Smithfield Township Environment Advisory Council was held on June 18, 2024, at the Smithfield Township Municipal Center at 1155 Red Fox Rd, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301, and via Zoom.

Present were Councilors Pat Owens, Brett Cartwright, Mitch Bowyer, Ken LeSure, and Eric White, Supervisor Michael Albert, Conservation & Recreation Director Alex Jackson. Commissioner James Munet is not present.

Also present were Mary Ellen Higgins and Jean Turn.

**1. Chair Pat Owens called the meeting to order at 7:00PM.**

**2. The Pledge of Allegiance is recited.**

**3. Minutes:**

**a. Regular Meeting – May 21, 2024.**

Ken LeSure motioned to approve the minutes of the May 21, 2024, Regular Meeting. Brett Cartwright seconded. Vote: all in favor; minutes accepted.

**4. Old Business:**

**a. Presentation: Kate Raman, Conservation Project Manager at Natural Lands**

Kate Raman introduced herself and provided background on her work with Smithfield Township since 2018. She discussed the "Places of the Heart" event held on April 30, 2019, where residents identified key areas for conservation. From this event, the Township Open Space Opportunities Map was generated, highlighting conservation priorities and criteria.

During the Conservation Prioritization discussion, there was an emphasis on water quality and contiguity as major criteria for the referendum. Kate Raman discussed different types of conservation methods:

- **Fee Simple:** Outright purchase of land, making the township the owner and turning the land into a public park open to everyone.
- **Conservation Easement:** Permanently limits land use while allowing the landowner to retain ownership. Easements are usually held by a land trust due to monitoring needs.
- **Trail Easements:** Allows public access to private land, typically held and monitored by the township.

The process for establishing easements was discussed. The next steps for Smithfield Township may include hosting a landowner outreach event, gauging interest, and seeking one-on-one meetings to determine if projects are ready to start.

A follow-up discussion ensued on easement duration, ownership, and sale of easements. It was noted that landowners retain ownership and can sell their property, but the easement remains in perpetuity.

**b. Discuss: Natural Lands Previously Distributed Documents and Smithfield Township's Former Open Space Review Board (OSRB) Minutes & Agendas**

Alex presented the minutes from the previous meetings, which detailed certain properties that had been discussed. The council first focused on the Schwarz Property, highlighted for its importance in protecting water quality due to its proximity to the creek and reservoir. Members acknowledged the challenge of offering fair market value compared to developers.

Mary Ellen Higgins described the Eureka Property, located near the Brodhead, Delaware River Bridge, and Glenn Park. This property is part of the Brodhead Gorge. Contacting landowners had been difficult as it is owned by an out-of-state corporation.

The Council suggested creating guidelines to evaluate properties based on watershed impact and developability to avoid wasting resources. Community engagement and transparency in property valuations were emphasized.

The difficulty landowners face in accurately valuing their land, leading to unrealistic expectations, was discussed. Fundraising options were suggested to bridge the gap between market value and landowner expectations, with a preference for fee simple acquisitions, though easements are also an option.

Easements for passive uses like trails were considered useful, even if landowners do not want to sell entirely. Concerns were expressed about landowners selling to developers if not approached in a timely fashion.

Mitch Bowyer raised the need for a root cause analysis of the past effort that failed to secure conservation land. The need for a clear process to review available land and learn from past failures was emphasized. Some discussion ensued regarding the previous board disbanding, possibly due to a lack of participation and the passing of a member, highlighting the need for committed involvement. Mary Ellen Higgins commented that experts like Louise Troutman from the Pocono Heritage Land Trust may have been too busy to assist at times, stressing the need for dedicated resources.

The importance of being opportunistic and flexible in conservation efforts was mentioned. The Council agreed to focus on willing landowners and maximize available opportunities. Community input and timing were highlighted as crucial. Initial conversations with landowners to gauge interest before formal appraisals were suggested.

Clarification was sought on the 2026 deadline for bond funding. The 2016 referendum showed 70% voter approval for purchasing open space for water quality protection, with a November 2026 deadline for bond enactment by the Supervisors. Formal action by the

Supervisors is still needed to enact the bond. The Supervisors have the authority to enact the bond based on referendum results but are not required to do so. Someone suggested the Supervisors may want to see a strategic scope of work for projects and timelines for action and evaluation.

Michael Albert motioned to reach out to Louise Troutman from PHLT, include the topic as a recurring agenda item, and continue discussions to finalize proposals for the Supervisors. The motion was seconded. There was some discussion on PHLT, and Mitch Bowyers wanted to understand why it didn't previously work out and the root cause. Brett Cartwright motioned to focus on the Schwarz property, and further discussion ensued. Eric White mentioned some dead ends that weren't fully explored previously and that there's an opportunity here to push harder. Pat Owens pointed out that what happened in the past was a function of the people involved, and we may not learn anything by fully exploring that. Michael Albert disagreed with a thorough root cause analysis that takes six months. Mary Ellen Higgins mentioned that maybe if we get closer to a deal, it's time to re-engage PHLT. Pat Owens called an end to the discussion.

Michael Albert withdrew the motion.

Michael Albert motioned to table the discussion until the next meeting to gather more information. Mitch Bowyer seconded.

Discussion: Brett Cartwright wished to speak with Gary Swartz and learn more. The Council agreed.

Vote: All in favor: motion carries.

**c. Discuss: Smithfield Sewer Authority**

The Council discussion on Smithfield Sewer Authority, and how they were concerned about visitors due to insurance. They are doing their due diligence to make a visit possible. Educational Presentation: EAC needs to be more specific about the presentation topic. The main question is about water quality and treatment processes.

Brett Cartwright reached out to the Smithfield Sewer Authority, who have a meeting on the second Monday at 1 PM. The Council agreed it's a good idea for Brett Cartwright to attend to show presence and find out what's occurring.

Michael Albert motioned to table the discussion, Brett Cartwright seconded. Vote: All in favor: motion carries.

**5. New Business:**

**a. Information: "A Community Guide to Local Land Use" Document**

Alex Jackson introduced the handout, complementing its simplicity and clarity. Mitch Bowyer suggested picking sections to read before the next meeting for discussion. Council decides to read the entire document and include it on next month's agenda.

**b. Discuss: Change in Zoning District for Stroudsburg Pocono Airport, Inc., of 4.2 Acres from R-1 to M-1 Zoning**

Discussion focused on the impact of zoning changes and the increase in imperviousness from 30% to 70%, as well as the changes in permissible uses between the two zoning districts. Council members discussed the presence of wetlands and the tributary to Little Sambo Creek. Mary Ellen Higgins commented on the significance of these wetlands.

The discussion also considered the impact on future development and neighboring properties. Alex Jackson pointed out that the property appears to be in a floodplain or wetland, making 70% imperviousness potentially unfeasible. Michael Albert pointed out the terminology of maximum imperviousness. Pat Owens inquired about the creek, and Alex Jackson clarified that a tributary of the Little Sambo Creek Watershed is in the northern section.

Further discussion highlighted the property owner's inability to build on wetlands regardless of zoning changes, with setbacks also mentioned. Brett Cartwright led a discussion on the landowner's willingness to reopen the airport and the potential impact of building a two-story warehouse. Alex Jackson noted that zoning district changes typically consider the percentage of imperviousness allowed and the types of uses permitted on the property.

Brett Cartwright motioned to propose that the EAC suggest the parcel remain R-1; Mitch Bowyer seconded. Eric White emphasized that the EAC does not want an industrial parking lot leading up to Little Sambo Creek. Brett Cartwright pointed out that the landowner across the road, the airport owner, was not being considered. Michael commented that if none of the neighbors mind, the Township already has zoning ordinances in place to protect the environmentally sensitive area, regardless of zoning. Alex Jackson clarified that the wetlands margin area is 75 feet and that the hearing on this subject has been advertised. There will be two hearings: one for the zoning district change and one for the ZO wetland amendment.

Vote: Councilors Pat Owens, Brett Cartwright, Mitch Bowyer, Ken LeSure, and Eric White in favor; Supervisor Michael Albert opposed; Motion carried.

**c. Discuss: Smithfield Township 2001 Comprehensive Plan**

Council discussed the need for a comprehensive plan update but decided to defer the discussion to the next meeting. Mitch Bowyer highlighted that he would not make the same motion at the EAC that he made in the Planning Commission. He pointed out that he had sent out three documents and highlighted key pages that focused on important issues.

Michael Albert motioned to table the discussion, Mitch Bowyer seconded. Vote: All in favor; motion carries.

**6. Public Comments:**

Mitch discussed the importance of public participation and the influence of the EAC. Some further discussion on the Comprehensive Plan and the lack of action on recommendations.

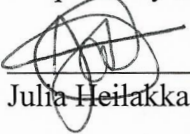
Pat Owens asked for public comments; there were no further comments.

**Adjournment:** There being no other business before the Council, Michael Albert motioned to adjourn, Pat Owens seconded. Vote: all in favor; meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM.

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Minutes recorded by Alex Jackson

Respectfully submitted,



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Julia Heilakka, Township Secretary