

**HARRIS TOWNSHIP
Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
August 18, 2025**

Members in Attendance: Kent Baker, Chairman
Bob Igo, Vice Chairman
Jeff Duerr
Phill Becker
Peter Irish – via Zoom
Maria Spencer – arrived @ 7:07 PM
Peggy Johnson, via Zoom
Renee Diehl - Alternate

Staff in Attendance: Mark Boeckel, Township Manager
Todd Shea, Zoning/Ordinance Enforcement Officer
Debbie Lang, Administrative Secretary – via Zoom
Jenna Wargo, CRPA Principal Planner

Public in Attendance: Rich Burkett, Singular Construction
Tony Fruchtl, PennTerra Engineering

Public in Attendance via Zoom: Jeff Fredericks
Kelly Anderson

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Baker called the August 18, 2025 meeting of the Harris Township Planning Commission to order at 7:00 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Duerr moved to approve the minutes of the June 16, 2025 meeting. Mr. Igo seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved as submitted.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was no one present to discuss items not on the agenda.

4. PLANNING COMMISSION BUSINESS:

a. BLUE SPRING ENCLAVE PRELIMINARY SUBDIVISION PLAN:

Mr. Shea said on June 26, 2025, staff received from PennTerra Engineering, Inc. a preliminary subdivision plan that proposes the development of 7 building lots on a 4.581 acre property at 405

West Main Street. The property presently contains a house that is proposed for demolition as part of this project.

Two reviews of the plan have been completed, the second of which, as well as a plan sheet, were included with the agenda. The number of comments remaining from the first review is within the range that is acceptable for inclusion on the PC agenda. Most of the remaining comments should be able to be addressed in a timely fashion. One issue requires more attention and may affect the design of the plan going forward depending upon the outcome of further investigation.

In brief, the first set of review comments asked for clarification of the location of hydric soils as well as clarification if a wetlands delineation was performed and whether such study confirmed that no wetlands exist on the property. The response to the second question failed to satisfy the Township Engineer and more information has been requested to determine wetland status on the property. Mr. Shea noted an email was sent to the Commission Friday afternoon addressing this issue. If wetlands are present, the design of the plan may change; the degree of potential change to the plan would depend upon the locations of any identified wetlands.

The PC should discuss any outstanding issues described by the review letters. The 90-day deadline for required action on the plan falls after the September meeting of the Board of Supervisors so it is prudent to forward the plan to the BOS noting any comments the PC would highlight for their attention. Staff anticipates that a third version of the plan will be reviewed prior to the September BOS meeting.

Chair Baker asked Mr. Fruchtl for a brief update on the wetlands delineation report. Mr. Fruchtl said at the request of Mr. Northridge, the wetlands report was revised by ARM Group who did the initial study and it clearly designated the fact that there are no wetlands on the property. He said at some point he believes there was a question as to whether that was the case. He said there was a little bit of ambiguity in the initial letter that was sent. The second report received last week was more complete and definitively stated there are no wetlands that require any sort of Township review on the property.

Mr. Duerr said the stream is not very far away and the destruction of that house and the construction of this road if it was done in the spring, all of that would be in Spring Creek right now. Mr. Fruchtl said the location of the stream and the wetland are in the report. And both of those are off property by about 20' or so. Mr. Duerr asked how they are going to keep run-off out of the stream during construction. Mr. Fruchtl said they will use silt socks along the property line. He said the area closest to the stream is the long lot that is going to have the detention basin. Mr. Duerr asked if the detention basin would be built last. Mr. Fruchtl said it would be built first so that will be the protection. He also noted that they had originally applied for a general NPDES permit and it came back from the Conservation District that it is an individual permit so it does rise to the level that DEP will be taking a look at it.

Chair Baker said he saw in one of the reports that there would be some fill brought in for the last lots on the northeast corner. Mr. Fruchtl said a couple of those lots fall off to that back corner so the fill will be just to keep the houses above the street level at that location. Chair Baker asked if

the drainage from those lots would go to the street. Mr. Fruchtl said the drainage from the front of the houses would go to the street, the rest of the drainage would go the way it goes now toward the corner. Chair Baker asked if there would be a homeowners association created to maintain the retention basin. Mr. Fruchtl said there would be. Mr. Igo asked if there would be special language and assessment to make sure that is maintained in perpetuity. Mr. Fruchtl said he did not know if that has been determined yet, but the owner has been made aware that that is a thing. He said they had that conversation late last week. He said there are only seven lots so there are seven property owners that will need to maintain that.

Mr. Duerr said that area is incredibly soft in the spring and you can't even walk the paths in the spring. He said a lot of water accumulates in that area in the spring. Mr. Fruchtl said the path along the back corner has been rerouted.

Mr. Igo asked at what point the riparian buffer would be put in place. Mr. Shea said it would only come into play if there is a stream or wetland on this property. Mr. Igo said he thinks when we have marginal areas like this, and he is positive and confident that Mr. Northridge would steer us right on what we are compliant with, but he is a little conservative and wants to be cautious about when we build in areas like this. He said the future homeowners know that there are potential issues here. He said how people in this area are going to manage heavy rains should be forefront in their minds. Mr. Fruchtl said they appreciate the concern and it will be taken into consideration.

Mr. Becker moved to recommend approval of the Blue Spring Enclave Preliminary Subdivision Plan contingent upon satisfactory completion of all comments from the July 31, 2025 memo of the Principal Planner and the August 12, 2025 letters of the Township Engineer and Zoning Officer. Mr. Duerr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. TIBBETTS PROPERTY SITE PLAN REVIEW:

Mr. Shea said in early July, staff received a site plan for an elevated deck construction project for a property at 1221 Linden Hall Road. The property is located within the FEMA floodplain although the project is proposed in a peripheral layer of such. The project was discussed with the applicant and Township Engineer prior to site plan submission to clarify the existing conditions on the property and the applicability/requirements of the zoning ordinance.

The site plan proposes a 151' x 5' trench to the rear of the lot as mitigation for any disturbance the deck construction might cause to the floodplain. This idea was vetted and approved by the Township Engineer.

Two reviews of the site plan have been completed and all comments except required signatures have been addressed – a copy of the site plan was included with the agenda. The BOS will review the site plan at their September meeting and, following their approval and staff approval of the site plan, zoning and building permits can then be submitted to complete the project.

Chair Baker said this is for both a deck and two future flagstone areas that are all in the

floodplain. He said there are certain limitations on what you can do in a floodplain but this would meet those. Mr. Shea said that was correct. Chair Baker said it does require site plan review. Mr. Shea said yes and it also requires him to report it on a yearly report that he does to FEMA. Chair Baker said they have this trench on the plan that looks like where the drainage is coming from at the northeast side of property. That trench will intercept some of the run-off and infiltrate it to help alleviate these paved conditions.

Mr. Igo said this property is in the floodplain and asked what the likelihood is of flooding. He said it seems counterintuitive to build in the floodplain. Mr. Shea said it is in such a peripheral area of the floodplain that it is his understanding, when talking with Mr. Northridge, that the risk of flooding with or without this project is minimal and Mr. Northridge felt the trench was overkill. Mr. Shea said the site plan or review comments reference that the bottom of the deck cannot ever be enclosed. Mr. Igo asked of Mr. Shea knew anything more about the trench. Is it going to be a drainage area or ditch? Mr. Shea said he thinks if there is any overflow anywhere, or if it is particularly wet conditions, that infiltration trench will more quickly absorb the water and keep it from moving elsewhere.

Mr. Becker said looking at the trench, it looks like it is on the uphill side of the property. So, the trench would be slowing down infiltration to the property, not stopping any runoff from leaving the property. He said it makes very little sense to him why a five foot deep, 151 foot long trench is a better idea than just using big footers to make sure the deck doesn't get washed away. Mr. Shea said he could not explain it any more than to say it complies with the requirements as per the Township Engineer.

Chair Baker said there is going to be a net effect. He said it looks like the trench will be accepting the runoff from the railroad bed. He said he noticed the house itself is partially in the floodplain. Chair Baker said if there is flooding, the deck will be the least of their problems. Mr. Shea said he believes that house has been there for nearly 100 years and it is still standing.

Mr. Becker said he did not know that he had enough to not recommend this, he just doesn't understand the trench. He doesn't understand why the trench is at the highest elevation. He said that big of a trench would seem like more disturbance to the floodplain than just the concrete footers going in. Mr. Becker asked if the flagstone is considered impervious so they are trying to create more infiltration. Mr. Shea said he thinks the trench is to address the footprint of the deck. The future flagstone area is not being proposed now and we don't know if that is going to be a pervious or impervious surface. Mr. Shea said if it is just pavers, it will not require a zoning permit. Mr. Becker said he doesn't know if his lack of understanding is enough not to recommend it, but it sounds like overkill is the right word for that huge trench for just a deck whose feet are in the floodplain.

Mr. Igo moved to recommend approval of the Tibbetts Property Site Plan to the Board of Supervisors at their September meeting. Mr. Duerr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

c. VILLAGE ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ms. Wargo said over the past two years, the Harris Township Planning Commission conducted a comprehensive review of zoning regulations for the Village of Boalsburg and surrounding areas. This work implements recommendations from the Boalsburg Small Area Plan and the ad-hoc Village Parking Committee, incorporating parcel-level analysis, public input, and coordination with Township staff.

The Commission recommends creating a new Village Residential (VR) zoning district and amending the existing Village (V) district, along with targeted parking regulation updates. The proposed changes aim to preserve Boalsburg's historic character, support walkable mixed-use development in the Core Village, and provide regulatory flexibility that reflects existing conditions while protecting adjacent neighborhoods.

Attached to the agenda was a memo outlining the rationale for the recommendations that will be presented to the Board of Supervisors. As discussed during the June meeting, the next step in this process is for the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to hold a joint meeting to discuss the Commission's recommendations. This joint meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, September 24th at 7:00 PM.

Staff requests that the Planning Commission review the memo and provide comments or edits prior to its transmittal to the Board.

Ms. Wargo provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Village Zoning Recommendations. She said staff took a two district approach to this. She said the two conceptual districts are the Village (V) which was the core village and the Village Residential (VR) districts which is the surrounding neighborhood. She explained the intent, permitted uses and dimensional standards in both districts and explained the impact the V – "Core Village" would have.

Ms. Wargo discussed the proposed parking alternatives for the Core Village (V) and staff's analysis of this proposal.

Chair Baker asked if we checked if decreasing the lot coverage and impervious coverage in the new district is creating any new non-conformities. Ms. Wargo said she did not believe so. Staff said there may be one, however, that property may have been conforming when the previous regulations were in effect. Mr. Shea said that property may have been fully developed when the lot coverage was 25 percent. Chair Baker asked how the affected property owners would be notified and how will they be invited to comment on this. Mr. Boeckel said once the Board reviews the Planning Commission's recommendation, and if they are interested in moving forward with preparing an ordinance, we will have to decide if we will have an open house or some type of outreach to let people know. Chair Baker said one of the things we are doing is expanding the existing Village Residential which includes the R1 zoned lots along Pine Street and Academy Street and he thought maybe we should clarify that in either the first or second paragraph of the memo. He said on the third page, we talked about removing mail order agencies and we are also removing firehouses and schools in the core village district. He thought this should also be mentioned in the memo. He said he is excited to meet with the Supervisors on this and see how it goes.

d. ZONING ORDINANCE – FAIR HOUSING AMENDMENTS:

Ms. Wargo said as part of the 2025 Planning Commission work program, staff are recommending amendments to the Township’s zoning ordinance to ensure compliance with the federal Fair Housing Amendments Act (FHAA). The proposed changes address outdated definitions and restrictions related to Family Care Facilities, Group Homes, and similar residential uses.

The current ordinance uses terminology and occupancy classifications that do not align with FHAA requirements and may unintentionally discriminate against individuals with disabilities. In addition, existing spacing requirements—such as limiting certain facilities to one per block face—may violate FHAA provisions prohibiting disparate treatment of protected classes.

The Planning Commission is asked to review the draft definitions, evaluate the two regulatory approaches for small residential care facilities, and determine whether to proceed with eliminating potentially discriminatory spacing requirements. Staff also request feedback on whether to proceed with the updated definitions for Group Homes and Halfway Houses/Rehabilitation Centers.

Ms. Wargo provided a PowerPoint presentation briefly explaining the purpose and current ordinance content. She said to ensure compliance with federal and state laws, staff is prioritizing amendments to the zoning ordinance. She said the definitions of family care facility, group home and halfway house/rehabilitation center should all be updated.

Mr. Becker asked where this would fit into the zoning ordinance. Mr. Shea said it would come under the definitions section of the zoning ordinance. Mr. Becker asked if we would define family care or residential facilities for persons with disabilities. Ms. Wargo said it would be one or the other. The group discussed what would need to be changed in the zoning ordinance with both definitions. The group agreed it should be updated.

Mr. Duerr asked how we would define 3 unrelated individuals. He said there are 3 unrelated and they are living there but there is always going to be another person 24/7 who are on eight hour shifts, but they are not living there but there will always be 4 unrelated people in the house. Mr. Shea said that would not matter because they aren’t living there. Mr. Becker said the word occupancy is the key word here. Mr. Becker said he is in favor of the alternative option of getting rid of the family care definition and using the new phrasing. Ms. Spencer said she agrees. Ms. Johnson said she likes the alternate definition. Mr. Irish said he felt Mr. Becker’s proposal was good.

Mr. Duerr asked if this was going to be an issue with long-term and short-term rentals. He said a lot of these people who stay in these places, certain care facilities, are short-term rental. Mr. Shea said the properties are owned by the caregiver and the situation is that the clients aren’t really paying rent. Mr. Boeckel said we also have the definition that they are to be certified and licensed through DHS. In response to a question from Mr. Duerr, Mr. Shea said we are going to change the one per block. Mr. Duerr said these companies that own these homes are not great

yard-scape landlords. He said if you live in that neighborhood, you have to think if it affects the residential property value.

Ms. Wargo said staff has also provided updated definitions for group home and halfway house/rehabilitation center. These are based off what she would say are best planning practices after going through a lot of legalese. She said staff's recommendation is to update these two definitions. She said we could not limit occupancy in these two cases and that is solely based off the zoning district that they are permitted in. The group discussed the zoning districts these uses would be allowed in.

Chair Baker asked if staff would put this in an ordinance and bring it back to the Commission. Mr. Boeckel said we could bring it back to the Commission if they would like us to. He said if the Planning Commission is comfortable with these changes, they can recommend that these changes be put in an ordinance and sent to the Board for their consideration. He said this is part of something that had been brought up back in 2019 with the residential zoning district updates. He said at this point, staff was thinking with some of the changes that have happened over the last couple of years, they did not think that updating terminology in the ordinance would be worthwhile. It might be better to wait until after the Comprehensive Plan is done in case there are any other broader zoning changes and consider more comprehensive residential updates. He said staff was thinking at this point this is what we would do for residential and then maybe move on to some other work plan items at future meetings.

Mr. Igo moved that the Planning Commission recommends that staff retain, revise and eliminate the family care facility definition, add a new definition for residential facilities serving persons with disabilities, supports removal of spacing restrictions that may violate the FHAA and approve the inclusion of updated definitions for group homes and halfway houses/rehabilitation centers based on use rather than occupancy status. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

e. PLANNING COMMISSION RESIGNATION:

Chair Baker said Tom Long resigned his position as an alternate on the Planning Commission since he will be moving from the Township. He said the Board of Supervisors will consider appointment of a new alternate at their organization meeting in January.

c. AGENDA FOR SEPTEMBER:

Mr. Shea said there are no plans at this time. Mr. Boeckel said there is a small possibility the short-term rental related amendments to the zoning ordinance could be on the September agenda. Chair Baker asked if this would include changing the use charts. Mr. Boeckel said the Planning Commission would be asked to provide definitions for both short-term and long-term rentals and then adding those uses in the charts where residential uses are permitted. He said that is the extent of what the Planning Commission would be asked to review because we currently do not list or permit short-term rentals as a use in our zoning ordinance. Chair Baker said absent that we may not have other items on the agenda. Mr. Boeckel said in looking at the Commission's 2025

Work Plan, many of the items have been checked off. Chair Baker said if the Commission does not need their September meeting, they will just consider the Joint Meeting with the Board of Supervisors on September 24th as their September meeting.

5. REPORTS:

Zoning permits: Zoning permits for June and July were circulated.

CRPC: Mr. Duerr said this group discussed the Comprehensive Plan. He said there were some really great maps and graphs included in this plan. He said they also received a report on how to deal with PennDOT for grants and work orders. The last thing he reported was that the park on Whitehall Road is open.

CCMPO Technical Committee: Ms. Johnson said this group did not meet.

Spring Creek Watershed Commission: Mr. Igo said it is budget season and they have sent out their budget. He said he would like to sit down with the Board and discuss the budget. He said they are in the process of looking for projects for next year and their regular meeting will be held on the 17th. He said one of the major emphasis for the upcoming year is going to be on storm water management. He said the biggest threat to the watershed is storm water and how we manage that and deal with it at the community level is a big deal. He said the DEP regulations cover a broad swath and because of our unusual geological area those regulations are not as effective as they could be. He said the Watershed Commission is taking a look at what we could be doing better or what we could be doing in addition to what DEP is recommending through their new updated MS4 regulations.

6. RECENT ACTIONS BY THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Mr. Boeckel said at their August 11, 2025 meeting, the Board of Supervisors conditionally approved the Sunoco Fuel Canopy Minor Land Development Plan, which will allow for the installation of a canopy over the fuel islands at the Timesaver convenience store on Boal Avenue.

The Board continues to work on the development of regulations that would apply to short-term rentals. If these regulations move forward, the Planning Commission may need to review some minor amendments to the zoning ordinance related to the ordinance. The Board also discussed proposed amendments to the Sign ordinance and forwarded those to the CRPC for review.

The Board also held a public hearing and adopted Ordinance #376, which included comprehensive technical and grammatical updates to Chapter 12.

7. STATUS OF LAND DEVELOPMENT/SUBDIVISION PLANS UNDER REVIEW:

This was not read at the meeting; however, it was part of the agenda language.

- ***Rockey Ridge Section 6 Preliminary Subdivision Plan – Includes 15 building lots on the northeast side of the existing Rockey Ridge development. This plan***

will need to be reviewed by the Planning Commission prior to consideration by the Board of Supervisors.

- ***Lingle South Minor Subdivision Plan*** – *This plan proposes subdividing a 128 acre tract along Linden Hall Road. There would be five lots that are 10-20+ acres in size along the south side of the road with a residual tract of approximately 57 acres on the north side of the road. All parcels have frontage on Linden Hall Road. First reviews were recently completed.*

Chair Baker asked if the Rockey Ridge plan is going through the process right now. Mr. Shea said it is in the third or fourth year of the process. Chair Baker noted since the Lingle plan is a minor subdivision plan, that would not need to come before the Planning Commission.

8. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Planning Commission, Mr. Igo moved to adjourn and Mr. Duerr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 8:06 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Boeckel, AICP
Township Manager