

Solebury Farm Committee
March 26, 2024
Hybrid Meeting

Minutes

In attendance: Graham Phillips, Gary Manoff, Kaitlin Farbotnik, Lowie Comly, Josh Perlsweig, Buz Teacher, Tim Luccaro (Zoom), Hanna Howe (Supervisor Liaison), Terry Clemons (Solicitor) & Renee Scally (Township Administration). **Absent:** Lars Crooks

Call to order

Graham Phillips called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm

Approval of Minutes

January 30, 2024 meeting minutes approved 1st Graham Phillips, 2nd Gary Manoff, all in favor.

New Business

I. Farmer Land Match/Land Preservation Committee

Phil Johnson from the Land Preservations Committee (LPC) wanted to reach out to the Farm Committee to see if any interest for farmers to farm on the Preserved Land in the township. The LPC may reach out to Delaware Valley University Agricultural department, to see if any upcoming graduates would be interested. One concern is possible liabilities, but the township could have an indemnification for any liabilities.

II. Spraying/Aerial Applications (EAC)

Phil Getty from the Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) wanted to know if farmers could let their neighbors know when they are spraying/aerial applications to their farms. According to the Right to Farm law, farmers do not have to notify their neighbors if spraying, but farmers could educate their neighbors.

III. Comprehensive Plan Committee – updates

The Comprehensive Plan Committee is in the initial phases. They are calling this Comprehensive Plan the “Solebury 35”, since this will take us up to 2035. Once the initial phase is completed, the committee will offer community surveys, workshops with the BCPC (Bucks County Planning Commission) and forums. The total process should take 12-18 months.

Old Business

I. Administrative Business

Josh Perlsweig made motion, second by Graham Phillips to have Gary Manoff & Kaitlin Farbotnik to be representatives from the Farm Committee to meet with the township manager, township engineer, Terry Clemons, and representatives from the BCCD (Bucks County Conservation District) to talk about stormwater & grading permits for farmers.

Graham makes motion to schedule another meeting for April 23rd. Kaitlin seconds this motion, all in favor.

II. Agricultural Promotion Objectives

Nothing to report

III. Land & Zoning Use

a. Agricultural Ordinance Accessory Uses

Discussion in sued regarding amendment to the Zoning Ordinance. The committee approved Terry Clemons to prepare the ordinance subject to all comments/concerns made by the Farm Committee. Once drafted and approved by Farm Committee, it will then go to the Planning Commission for approval and then to the Board of Supervisors for final approval.

Public Comment

Brent Alderfer spoke of the USDA 2022 census that there is an increase of farmers under the age of 35 years old and that PA has lost over 4,000 farms in just 5 years. This is all due to land costs, labor costs and equipment costs are rising. Farmers do not need hand-outs, they need the township to help farmers with supplemental income. He also said, it is getting harder and harder to farm in Solebury. He wants to expand his farm, but zoning has declined this. In regards to the preamble, he suggests to have noise, parking and traffic standards for events and farmers should not have to get any permits. He also mentioned for events to set the parking standard as 10 spaces for every 25 people.

Malika Spencer of Roots River Farm on Sugan Rd. She runs a small vegetable CSA farm. She has been on a journey against the zoning restrictions in Solebury Township to try to expand her farm. She said that being able to farm and live in Solebury is getting harder and very expensive. She does not make enough to support herself and her family, by just farming. She wants to know how this preamble is going to allow to expand her farm, be sustainable and looking for creative solutions to live, farm and be a part of the Solebury community.

Steven Phillips, mentioned that traditional farming is changing. The township needs to make farming more sustainable and recognize that traditional methods of farming is not economically feasible.

Phil Johnson, he's been farming in Solebury Township since 1977. The traditional ways of farming has changed since then. Moving equipment from point A to B is sometimes impossible. The equipment is much larger and the distance is much longer than in 1977. The zoning issue also needs to be addressed. If you have an existing structure, you should be able to use for other things, such as storage.

Sam Marlow, has been farming in Solebury Township for 20 years. Solebury seems to have limitations on farms and was wondering where the committee is on this.

Phil Getty, if farmers want to build something, such as a barn, farmers have a larger property than residential residents. There is a buffer and justification in place for a farmer, and most people do not understand this.

Meeting adjourned at 9:40pm by Kaitlin Farbotnik, 2nd by Graham Phillips

Respectfully Submitted,
Renee Scally