The Bethel Township Joint meeting was called to order by Chairman Jacob Meyer at 6:02 p.m. in the Bethel Township Meeting Room, Bethel PA.

Attending the meeting were Robbi Lane, Michael Graby, Jacob Meyer, Bill Straw, Michael Orendo, Corey Houser, Betsy Bowman, Lisa Hassler, Sheldon Martin and George Shollenberger. Also, in attendance were Solicitor Stephen Price, Engineer Jeffrey Steckbeck, Code Inspector Paul Labe III (attending in Robin Royer’s absence) and Township Sec. Treas. Jayne Seifrit.

Jake Meyer read the first name on the sign in sheet, Larry Schmehl. Larry Schmehl asked the exact status of the Daub Road Warehouse, mainly remove waivers and the developer having to bring the Daub Road up to Penn DOT specification. He also said he doesn’t want to see any more farm land put in IC, NEVER AGAIN! Larry Schmehl was told the Daub Road Warehouse has preliminary plan approval and it is too late to remove waivers that have already been granted. Also, the road was talked about as far as improvements, it was decided at that time full road improvements were not desired because it would be a place for parking and fear of what that would cause, litter, sleeping etc. The only requirements were coming into site from 645 and the emergency entrance/area near Daub Rd. Jeffrey Steckbeck also stated the plan was preliminarily approved September 24, 2019 so the waivers and approval are good for 5 years.

Jake Meyer called the next name in order as they appeared on the sign in sheet:

Jerry Bowman, he stated he had nothing at this time.

Fred Bowman placed three demonstration boards on easels. He referred to them as he was going through his presentation. He reiterated some of the information he had shared in the past, family farm, need to sell as they are aging, inheritance for the family etc. Fred Bowman stated again not looking to put a large warehouse on properties. Their vision is to use the farm properties for the best use for all involved which would be a win, win win for everyone. They would be desired amenities for the community. IC has a wide variety of uses, need to have a negligible affect on the Township, bring sewer to the north side of I-78, be better paying jobs for families. The vision is for retail space, not limited to: restaurant, fast food, Medical Arts, hotel, and convenience store. He stated they have a signed sales agreement with a developer that shares their vision.

Jim Smith, attorney for concerned residents in the vicinity of the Bowman properties, he stated changing the properties from Agriculture Preservation to IC is inconsistent with goals of the Comprehensive Plan and zoning as it states in the ordinance. Jim Smith stated the Township wants to preserve existing buffers and keep the rural nature of the area as surveys stated when the Comp. Plan was done. The zoning had reflected that as of the February 12, 2019 meeting, something changed. He pointed out discussion was on keeping rural, protecting farms, less light pollution and a campaign was based on no warehouses and protecting farms.

Judy Apgar stated they want the area to remain rural and pointed out they have been good neighbors. Judy Apgar stated some of the uses in IC by right, not what they want to see in the neighborhood. She stated they can put up with Intensive Ag. It was stated the families would like to see the Boltz and Bowman properties that are not in IC remain in AP. Judy Apgar stated the tax breaks for some properties last for ten years. Judy Apgar stated the Bowman’s don’t live here. She asked the joint Board to do the right thing and keep properties not already in IC in AP.

Betty Martin stated the mural on the meeting room wall reflects a rural community. She stated if farm land gets placed in IC it is lost forever. Betty Martin pointed out the uses in IC are not all conducive to family life and the rural neighborhood. Betty Martin said what the Bowman’s are calling benefits would increase traffic and need for more services. The water run off would increase, causing additional issues on the road. Betty Martin stated on a map it was noticed fourteen properties were stated to change to commercial, then it was stated they would go back to Village on the latest map and one parcel on 645 from IC to AP; it can be changed for 14 properties it should be changed back for the benefit of the 34 properties around the proposed change for the Bowman properties. Betty Martin is asking the Board to keep the Boltz and Bowman properties in AP.
Cindy Ziegler stated she would be very close to the IC properties of changed. They would be directly affected by trucks idling, increased traffic and no buffer. She is asking the Board not to rezone the Bowman properties to IC.

Herbert Zechman stated the IC properties as they are now at the northwest corner of 645 and I-78 should remain IC; small businesses would be conforming. He also stated he believes the rest should remain in farm AP. Herbert Zechman stated this has drug out long enough and a decision needs to be made.

Steve Burkhart said his position has not changed from the beginning of this process. He stated he believes the committee has the best intentions for the Township. Steve Burkhart stated they need to be consistent and not turn anymore farm land to IC. Additionally, he stated there doesn’t need to be another fire house (Daub Road Warehouse person stated they would give land to Fire Company). He would like to see it stay AP. Steve Burkhart stated again he is against anymore large warehouses.

John and Donna Gierveld – He stated questions were already asked and answered.

Sherry Glass had an aerial of the current warehouses. She just wanted everyone to be aware of how many Bethel Township already has and pointed out the ones in operation and the ones not yet in operation. She stated there is already over 9 million square feet of IC in the Township.

Attorney Anthony Fitzgibbons stated what he has heard is driven by emotions. He is asking the joint Board to hold off making any decisions until his client has the opportunity to show what is being proposed for the site. They just didn’t have enough time to be ready for tonight’s meeting but will be ready for a meeting in the future whenever it is scheduled. Michael Orendo stated there is a sales agreement now, but what assurances the developer will follow vision as stated earlier. Anthony Fitzgibbons stated they can place restrictions on the documents protecting and ensuring how the properties are to be developed.

Jim Smith stated it is not good planning to change zoning for a project based on verbal agreements.

Stephen Price stated the Boards can wait for fact finding, give a month if so choose.

Roman Bontrager stated the Bowman’s plea is based on finances and money, what is best for them and those that may inherit. Should not be changes to IC for their family’s inheritance at the expense of the Township.

It was asked who wants to have fact finding and wait until next month. There was a roll call vote: George Shollenberger no, Betsy Bowman yes, Robbi Lane yes, Mike Graby yes, Jake Meyer yes, Bill Straw no, Michael Orendo no, Corey Houser yes, Lisa Hassler yes and Sheldon Martin no. There were 4 no’s and 6 yeses. There will be a meeting for fact finding on March 10, 2020 at 6:00 pm. Mike Graby made a motion authorizing the advertising of the meeting, seconded by Robbi Lane. All agreed. Motion carried.

Robbi Lane made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:21 pm., seconded by Mike Graby. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jayne K Seifrit
Township Secretary