The Bethel Township Joint meeting was called to order by Chairman Jacob Meyer at 6:00 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, Robin Royer and Township Sec. Treas. Jayne Seifrit.

Jake Meyer read the first name on the sign in sheet, Fred Bowman thanked the members for the additional time and introduced Attorney Anthony Fitzgibbons. Anthony Fitzgibbons also thanked the members for additional time. He stated during the many meetings over the years they have listened to the comments from the community and feel they have addressed the many concerns that were expressed. He introduced Tom Meagher, Blue Rock. Tom Meagher described a possible plan for the Bowman properties if the zoning would all be IC. It would include three industrial flex buildings with mechanisms in place to reduce noise and lighting issues for the neighbors. Additionally, there would be possible hotel, medical arts, restaurants, daycare fast food or gym to be located on the portion of property closest to Route 645. The roads to all buildings would be off of 645 and be internal, thus affecting none of the Township roads, except emergency access point(s). There would be a second entrance if trucks don’t go into the first designated driveway. Tom Meagher stated the taxes would amount to over one million dollars. He stated the school district would get a larger amount while the Township’s would be about $60,000.00 a year. Tom Meagher introduced Engineer Paul Szewczak, from Liberty Engineering. He stated the elevation of a berm would be 8-10 feet in height and trees planted on top of that. There would be security to the industrial flex buildings and fences. Paul Szewczak then showed and explained a plan for the properties as they are zoned now in IC and AP. There would be two warehouses near 645 and then 6 husbandry houses on the properties zoned AP, including the acreage along the homes near Daub Road and Little Mountain Rd. Anthony Fitzgibbons stated they have received a letter from Attorney Susan Buchnum stating the layout as shown would be lawful. Paul Szewczak stated the IC/AP plan would be using Township roads; there would not be any berms built. The buildings would also sit atop the ground. Tom Meagher stated they are not asking for LERTA or any tax abatement. Jake Meyer asked about the tax comparison between the two plans. Tom Meagher stated the taxes would be about 20% of the IC plan for the IC/AP plan ($12,000.00). Anthony Fitzgibbons stated the IC/AP plan is a win for the Bowman’s, a win for the Township and a win for the residents. It was asked what affect this would have on residents’ taxes if rezoned. The answer was none. Bill Straw asked about the mix of passenger vehicles and truck in the same driveways. They stated it is a Penn DOT road, they would be calling the shots.

Jake Meyer called the next name and he continued with the list as each finished.

Gerald Bender stated enforcement of no truck turns at the intersection of 645 and Frystown Rd. He has pictures showing trucker error, he said they can’t read English.

Harold Boltz stated there is flooding on Daub Road. He asked how either plan will affect the flooding. It was stated either plan won’t make it worse.
Jim Smith, Attorney, stated we are not here to address plans. The decision before the members is zoning. They need to look at what is in the best interest of the community. The promise of restrictions placed on the development borders on insanity. He stated the plan can be withdrawn at any time. There would be the windfall for the Bowman Family, with no assurances for the residents or Township. Jim Smith stated the proposed rezoning of the Bowman properties goes against the Comprehensive Plan survey. He stated the residents prefer poultry houses. He also stated the cost to the home owners and community is to great. Anthony Fitzgibbons stated they can alter plan but not violate the deed restrictions. Steve Price stated the deed restrictions box them in, the risk is the property owner /developer. Anthony Fitzgibbons gave a sample of restrictions that could be imposed.

The meeting was suspended at 7:10 pm so the Planning Commission Meeting could take place. The meeting reconvened at 8:18 pm.

Betty Martin is comparing the old zoning map to the proposed map. She stated there are buffers throughout the township from IC to residential properties. The area of the Bowman’s would not have the buffer. She asked why the 14 properties in the area of Salem Road are proposed to go back to V. They would have a buffer. Jeffrey Steckbeck stated the historic bridge is along Salem Road and it was decided having C zoning there could be detrimental to the bridge. So those 14 properties would remain in V. Betty Martin stated the minutes of February 2019 stated the Bowman and Boltz properties to remain AP, what changed? Jeffrey Steckbeck stated when he was hired in May of 2019 he was advised of prior discussions. He was asked to revise map in the fall of 2019. Betty Martin stated petitions have been signed by half of the adult population of the Township opposed to expansion of IC.

Connie Bashore, Director of the Bethel Food Pantry, stated what is happening here affects other Townships. The warehouses have had a good impact, they used to serve 120 households. That number is down to 90. Dollar General provides skids of products to the Food Pantry including food, cleaning supplies and clothing. The Bowman properties zoned to IC would continue to improve the local economy, provide technical jobs. Connie Bashore stated the Board granted warehouse development to faceless entities, why not welcome a Medical Arts and other services to the community to help it prosper.

Judy Apgar stated residents are already complaining about traffic, and drivers missing entrances and needing to turn around. It is one tenth of a mile off of I-78, that is a lot of traffic in a short distance. Judy Apgar referenced the petitions that were signed and not wanting any more warehouses. Judy Apgar stated she does not want the zoning changed to IC from Ap.

Steve Burkhardt is disputing the berm height and the effectiveness. He stated the people have spoken… they don’t want any more warehouses and no more farms to IC.

Monica Coury (spelling) stated there is no guarantee what is proposed will be what is put in if changed to IC. She is not in favor of rezoning the AP to IC.

John High stated he does not want to see traffic on our local road a result of husbandry houses being built. He is in favor of the change to IC and having all of the traffic internally as on plan showing the three manufacturing buildings and the retail, hotel, medical arts etc. buildings. He does not want chicken, duck or pig barns on the Bowman properties.

John Brown pointed out there needs to be emergency access. Corey Houser stated that would be looked at during the planning process.
Oscar Manbeck, Tulpehocken School board President and resident of the Township, stated the school has not raised taxes since 2012-13. The school needs to be renovated or rebuilt, depending on costs. The revenue from the warehouses makes this possible. He stated the school district is getting 2 million dollars just from warehouses. He said at this time they could fund the school project without raising taxes. Oscar Manbeck stated they have held and decreased taxes while other districts have raised taxes about 17%. Jim Smith asked what is the school district’s budget. Oscar Manbeck believes is it about 26 -27 million dollars. Jim Smith asked if the hold and reduction on taxes is because of the warehouses or because the school board is conservative or both. It was stated it is probably both.

Jerry Bowman stated statements have been made that aren’t true. He stated there are petitions signed, but one of them is against closing Daub Road. He stated with the IC/AP proposal there will be 1200 trucks traveling on Township roads a year.

Jake Meyer stated the moment has come, a yes vote means change the Bowman properties to IC from AP; a no vote is to leave the Bowman properties in AP. They voted, Jayne Seifrit asked for a role call vote. George Shollenberger no, Robbi Lane no, Mike Graby no, Jake Meyer yes, Bill Straw no, Corey Houser stated we do not need to finish the vote as two of three supervisors voted no, and they have the final say anyway. Steve Price said to finish the vote. Corey Houser yes, Michael Orendo yes, Lisa Hassler yes, Betsy Bowman yes and Sheldon Martin no. The vote ended with 5 yeses and 5 nos. Steve Price stated it will be on the Board of Supervisors agenda next week.

Mike Graby made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:07 pm., seconded by Lisa Hassler. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jayne K Seifrit
Township Secretary