

**LOWER GWYNEDD TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of May 21, 2025**

Present: Rich Valiga, Vice-Chair
Maureen Nunn
Danielle Porreca
Michael Mrozinski
Craig Adams

Patty Furber, B&Z Administrator
Ed Brown, Gilmore & Associates

Absent: Craig Melograno, Chairman, Rusty Beardsley

Call to Order:

The meeting of the Lower Gwynedd Township Planning Commission was called to order at 7:00 PM.

Approval of Minutes: March 19, 2025

A motion was made by Ms. Porreca and seconded by Mr. Adams to approve the minutes of the Lower Gwynedd Township Planning Commission meeting of March 19, 2025. The motion carried unanimously.

Conditional Use Application:

**Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School
1345 Sumneytown Pike**

#25-03CU

Present for the conditional use application was Ms. Christen Pionzio from HRMM&L, Mr. Robert Jordan from Woodrow & Associates and Ms. Denise Marbach, President of Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School.

Ms. Pionzio stated that they are proposing to install a bridge over the watercourse to connect the building addition to the athletic field. Ms. Pionzio stated that they have received their DEP permit, review letters from Gilmore and the Montgomery County Planning Commission. Ms. Pionzio stated that they would comply with all the comments that were noted in Gilmore's review letter dated May 15, 2025, regarding providing a stormwater design along with a grading permit and ADA requirements.

Ms. Pionzio stated she wanted to note that there is a small stub reflected in the plan that shows a future trail leading to a grassy area, but they are unsure if this will be built. She stated if they decide to pursue building that trail, a grading permit would be submitted.

Ms. Pionzio stated that the Montgomery County Planning Commission requested in their review letter dated May 15, 2025, that they plant vegetation to replace what would be destroyed by the installation of the bridge. She stated they would comply.

Ms. Pionzio stated that this would be a pedestrian boardwalk style bridge with supports on each side. She stated that this is already permitted through DEP. Mr. Valiga wanted more of an explanation of what was being proposed. Mr. Jordan explained that with the new building addition, they would like to connect the existing school trail to a path that would link up the school facility with the athletic facility. He stated that they will be encroaching within the riparian area, very minimum, with no disturbance of the wetlands, but this is why conditional use is required.

Mr. Valiga stated that the site plan included with the submission lists waivers. He stated that he wanted to make sure that there would be no additional waivers or deferrals requested with this application. Ms. Pionzio stated that the site plan was included to show the approximate location of the proposed pedestrian bridge and there are no additional waivers requested.

Mr. Valiga wanted to know if they would have any issues with Gilmore’s review letter, item number 1, regarding the stormwater design. Mr. Brown stated that he believed that there could be available storage within the existing stormwater facility that was completed for the parking area. Ms. Pionzio stated that would be confirmed through their grading permit submission.

A motion was made by Mr. Valiga and seconded by Ms. Porreca to recommend approval of the conditional use application to the BOS with the following recommendations:

- 1. The applicant agrees to provide the information that was requested in the Gilmore review letter dated May 15, 2025.

The motion passed with a 5-0 vote.

Conditional Use Application
Foulkeways
1120 Meetinghouse Rd.

#25-04CU

Present for the conditional use application was Ms. Christen Pionzio from HRMM&L, Mr. Robert Jordan from Woodrow & Associates and Mr. Bill Durbin from Foulkeways.

Ms. Pionzio stated that near the existing fitness center (located in the center of the campus) there is an existing stormwater endwall where water comes out that creates a drainage channel that feeds into the wetlands. She stated that they are proposing to take that channel, pipe it underground and move the outlet water to a different location. The underground pipe would still feed the wetland area. She stated a conditional use is required because it's a watercourse and buffers are involved in the riparian corridor.

Ms. Pionzio stated that they received Gilmore's review letter dated May 16, 2025. She stated they already have the DEP permit and would submit a grading permit. Ms. Pionzio stated that they would also comply with the Montgomery County Planning Commission's review letter dated May 15, 2025, that requests to replace the vegetation that is covered by the piping.

Mr. Valiga wanted to know about Montgomery County Planning Commission's review letter regarding their comment under "Conditional Use" regarding "we defer to the township solicitor to determine if a building expansion would meet the criteria in Section 1298.17." Ms. Pionzio stated that the "future building expansion" is the future fitness center which won't happen until after the watercourse is piped. She stated that you can't erect a building within any wetlands, creeks, watercourses, streams or waters of the commonwealth. She stated that they are piping the watercourse underground first, then the building expansion will come afterwards which will require a full land development application. Mr. Valiga wanted to know if that would change the nature of that area. Ms. Pionzio stated that they are just moving the watercourse so that it's not in an open ditch towards the wetlands. She stated that it will be enclosed in a pipe with dirt and grass. Ms. Pionzio stated that the purpose of this is to be able to build on top of that area to avoid building in a wetland or a riparian area; it will be all underground. Ms. Pionzio stated that there is no other place to build an addition for the fitness center. She stated that Foulkeways is trying to modernize, they need space for group activities and equipment space. Ms. Pionzio stated that the infrastructure within Foulkeways is 58 years old. She stated that they need to do the renovation to bring in revenue because the sewer system, kitchen and fitness center are all old. She stated for them to modernize they must put an addition on the fitness center.

Mr. Valiga stated that he wanted to make sure the township solicitor reviews the application so that this board is not endorsing something that the solicitor would have an issue with. Ms. Pionzio stated that her job is to make sure they meet all criteria, including the approval of the township solicitor during the Board of Supervisors hearing.

Ms. Porreca wanted to know if Foulkeways received any comments or push back about enclosing that area. Mr. Durbin stated that they looked at every possible option to expand the fitness center and this was the only viable option. He stated that their long-term plan is to try and improve that area to allow the residents to enjoy it.

A motion was made by Ms. Porreca and seconded by Mr. Adams to recommend approval of the conditional use application to the BOS with the following recommendations:

1. The P.C. supports the conditional use application with the intention that the proposed riparian buffer mitigation does not change or alter the existing municipal regulations pertaining to wetlands and streams.
2. The applicant agrees to the recommendations and comments listed in the Gilmore review letter dated May 16, 2025.

The motion passed with a 5-0 vote.



Update of the comprehensive plan:

Ms. Claire Warner from the Montgomery County Planning Commission was present to give an update on the comprehensive plan. Mr. Valiga stated that he wanted to give the board some background regarding the progression of the comprehensive plan. He stated that they have been working on the comprehensive plan for the past two and half years. He stated that a steering committee was created by the Board of Supervisors, which consists of residents, business owners and interested parties to provide Ms. Warner detailed comments to address each of the elements of the plan. He stated this process started in July of 2023 and included over 22 meetings and two public sessions.

Ms. Warner stated that Ms. Jamie Worman, Assistant Township Manager and Director of Building & Zoning, was present in front of the P.C. back in March to give an update and inform them regarding the process. Ms. Warner stated that she wanted to give an update on the comments they have received from the public meetings and Monday night's steering committee meeting. Ms. Warner stated that they had a few public meetings, surveys were put out, and updates were posted on Lower Gwynedd's website. Ms. Warner stated that they are now in the final phases to review the plan before the official public comment period begins.

Ms. Warner gave a brief overview of exactly what a comprehensive plan contains with various topics such as traffic, transportation, housing, environmental contexts, trails and

a focus area chapter on Bethlehem Pike. Ms. Warner stated that part of the main guidepost for the township to move forward is the future land use plan. She stated that they have received comments from the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, and those fall into general categories. Ms. Warner stated that they also received a lot of comments regarding the condition of Bethlehem Pike. She stated that the future land use map comments were related to the topic "town center/mixed use/future land use" category and how that relates to the different properties that fall under those categories. Ms. Warner stated that the future land use map contains several categories that are listed by residential low, medium, and high density. She explained that is reflected on the exhibit plan in fuchsia and is referred to as the "town center/mixed use." She stated that there was feedback on that term concerning using the word "town" sounded too traditional. She stated it would create a vision that wouldn't be appropriate around areas that would be considered mixed-use. She stated that the concern was the property on Norristown Road and the Pen Ambler sections near the Penllyn train station. She stated that those areas would not be appropriate for that same mixed-use category. She stated during the most recent steering committee meeting, they discussed having tiered categories for mixed-use such as high, medium or low depending on the context the properties are in. She stated that this is still being developed, but generally it would be based on site context, building design, uses, scale, dimensions and intensity of the location of the property.

Ms. Warner stated besides the color categories on the map, there are two circles around the two train stations. She just wanted to inform everyone that those areas are not considered land use designations, just acknowledging the train stations are located there. She also stated that area might be considered for gentle density increases. Ms. Porreca wanted to know what she meant by "gentle density increases." Ms. Warner explained she meant that smaller-scale projects would be more appropriate for that type of location than larger-scale projects.

Mr. Valiga stated that there was a lot of discussion regarding the proposed map, and this is just a draft or a footprint for future development. Mr. Valiga stated that this is a model that will give the township staff a general idea of where to go with a proposed project. Ms. Warner stated that they want to improve walkability and focus on streetscape, building design and create places where people want to go. Ms. Warner stated that they have been doing some design work to improve the streetscape and revitalize the corridor a little bit better. Mr. Mrozinski wanted to know if there was a specific location along the corridor that they are using as a model. Ms. Warner stated that they used the Fairland at Gwynedd project along Bethlehem Pike. She stated that they looked at the footprint of the building and they heard that the residents liked the appearance of the development with the townhouses behind retail with gentle density and a nice aesthetic feel.

Ms. Warner stated that the sidewalk and trails are generally in line with the specific recommendations of the trail and sidewalk plan. She stated that there would be a reference to the sidewalk/trail map in the comprehensive plan. Ms. Nunn wanted to know regarding the safety aspects of the trail and sidewalk plan. Ms. Warner stated that safety issues are always considered. She stated that traffic calming measures have been taken into consideration to improve safety. Ms. Nunn wanted to know if the trail and sidewalk plan would be an attachment to the comprehensive plan as discussed at the last P.C. meeting. Ms. Warner stated that they didn't want to have any conflicting information regarding the trail and sidewalk plan and that it will be referenced in the comp plan if anyone is interested in viewing that separately.

Ms. Warner stated that the next steps are to take additional feedback and work on a clean draft that will be reviewed internally. She is hoping to have this completed by the summer. She stated that once the township has a draft, there will be a 45-day comment period, and another public meeting will be scheduled. She stated she would return to the P.C. if anyone had further questions. Ms. Nunn wanted to know what the difference was between the high-level of the plan vs the 20-year-old comp plan. Ms. Warner stated there are a lot of similarities when it comes to the high-level difference, but there has been a lot of development since then due to the large increase in population. Mr. Valiga stated that there were discussions about the differences in the plans moving forward. He stated that sections were updated to reflect what we have today in Lower Gwynedd Township by using that as the base moving forward, we are focusing on what we are envisioning for various sectors within the township.

Ms. Warner stated that there is a large staff at the Montgomery County Planning Commission that helps to advise her with a team of design planners to help with the vision. Mr. Valiga stated that Ms. Warner has been a pleasure to work with. He stated that the whole focus of the future view is to try and preserve the unique character of Lower Gwynedd Township. He stated that we have a very unique country-style setting here that we are trying to maintain. Some of the P.C. members requested a copy of Ms. Warner's presentation to be emailed to them. Ms. Warner stated that she would email tonight's PowerPoint presentation to Ms. Furber to forward to the P.C. members. She stated that if anyone wants to share their comments, please email her or Ms. Jamie Worman.



ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 P.M.
Respectfully submitted,
Patty Furber, Secretary