

**East Hanover Township Planning Commission – Public Meeting for Agricultural Conservation Zoning
Meeting Minutes
March 31, 2026
Ono Fire Hall**

Members:

- *Marvin Smith
- *Justin Beamesderfer
- *Mike Long
- *Dennis Grubb
- *Kenneth Moyer

*= Present for the meeting

Others Present:

Erik Harmon, Township Manager
Steve Dellinger, Township Planner, Hanover Engineering
Ed Heagy, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors
Stefan Wentling, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Supervisors

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

All members were present.

Mr. Smith provided an overview of the potential amendments to the zoning ordinance, specifically the creation of a new zoning district titled the Agricultural Conservation District. The purpose of this district is to protect and preserve the Township’s existing agricultural lands—particularly areas with high-quality soils, large contiguous tracts, and environmental conditions most conducive to productive crop farming. Its intent is to maintain the long-term viability of agriculture as a core land use within the Township.

Mr. Smith explained that the purpose of the meeting was to provide information and allow for questions and comments from the public. He reviewed the results of the property-owner surveys distributed as part of the Comprehensive Plan update in February 2023, excerpts of which were included in the handouts. A majority of respondents supported the idea that the Township should take greater efforts to preserve or protect natural areas, including woodlands, agricultural lands, farmland, and historical resources.

Within the Comprehensive Plan, several stated goals relate directly to agricultural preservation: preserving agricultural areas for agricultural use and maintaining their importance in the local and regional economy; preserving high-quality agricultural land by encouraging farming activities and farm-related businesses; and protecting agricultural areas from encroachment by non-farm activities that interfere with or prevent normal farming operations.

The Commission reviewed the current zoning ordinance to determine whether the existing Agricultural zoning district appropriately and sufficiently protects agricultural areas. A key concern was that larger agriculturally zoned parcels could still be subdivided or fragmented into smaller lots. Mr. Smith noted

that, in evaluating a potential Agricultural Conservation District, the Commission considered factors such as minimum lot size, groups of contiguous parcels over 50 acres, and higher-quality soil classifications.

The current Agricultural zoning district encompasses approximately 12,000 acres. Of that total, roughly 60%—about 7,000 acres—consists of lots 50 acres or larger. Prime soils and soils of statewide importance are found throughout the Township but appear to be concentrated along the Swatara Creek.

Three areas (A, B, and C) were identified as potential candidates for inclusion in the Agricultural Conservation District. All properties within these areas are at least 50 acres in size. Collectively, these three areas total approximately 5,000 acres, representing about 44% of the current Agricultural zoning district.

Key changes to the draft Agricultural Conservation zoning district include limiting permitted uses to prioritize agricultural activities, reducing permitted development density (such as the number of allowable subdivisions), and expanding the 2-acre maximum lot size requirement to all lots rather than only new single-family dwelling lots.

Comments/Questions from the public:

Note: Comments have been summarized for brevity, and some repeated comments have been omitted.

- **Steve Levengood, 31 Indiantown Gap Road**

Mr. Levengood does not want his farm included in the proposed AG Conservation zoning district and is against government control of property regulations. He referred to the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program, which pays landowners to voluntarily place a deed restriction or conservation easement on their farm to prevent future commercial development and subdivisions. He asked if the township would be paying the landowners affected by this zoning change. Mr. Smith answered that the township would not be paying landowners. Mr. Levengood expressed concern that the proposed zoning changes would affect the ability of landowners to qualify for the ACUB program, speculating that the Army would not be interested in purchasing deed restrictions or conservation easements where the township's zoning regulations have already reduced the potential development capacity. He encouraged the township to research the potential effects to the ACUB program compatibility. He believes that the proposed zoning changes will reduce the value of the properties within the AG Conservation zoning district.
- **Rod Martin, 27 Groff Road**

Mr. Martin asked if uses currently permitted in the AG zoning district (and not permitted in the proposed AG Conservation district) will be grandfathered? Mr. Harmon and Mr. Smith confirmed the uses would be grandfathered. Mr. Martin commented that the proposed changes will not only prevent large developments but will also prevent or restrict the creation of new rural lots.
- **Robert Shuey, 50 Reeds Creek Road**

Mr. Shuey stated that his farms (in East Hanover & Union Township) are preserved through the

ACUB program. He is not in favor of what the Township is proposing, because he doesn't think even three or four lots subdivided from a farm are a good thing. Mr. Smith explained that nothing the township does would supersede the ACUB program or Lebanon County Farmland Preservation restrictions.

- **David Hostetter, 1758 N. State Rt. 934**

Mr. Hostetter asked if his farm was rezoned to Industrial when the Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2024. Mr. Harmon answered that his farm was identified as Limited Industrial on the Future Land Use Map in the updated Comprehensive Plan adopted in August of 2024 but the zoning did not change – the property is still in the Agricultural zoning district.

- **Kyle Cassel, 1715 N. State Rt. 934**

Mr. Cassel commented that one of the stated objectives of the Comprehensive Plan is to “preserve quality agricultural land by encouraging farming activities and farm related businesses” but the proposed regulations would take away the farm related businesses as permitted uses. (Agriculturally oriented commercial establishments)

- **Doug Porter, 5 Groff Road**

Mr. Porter is against government control of properties. Mr. Porter asked why the Planning Commission feels that these proposed changes are necessary. Mr. Smith answered that historically larger farms have been subdivided and fractured into smaller lots and the current ordinance still allows this to some degree.

- **Robert Shuey, 50 Reeds Creek Road**

Mr. Shuey referenced the warehouse development in neighboring Union Township and the loss of farmland. He stated that he believes the township does need to do more to protect farmland in East Hanover Township.

- **Rodney Wert, 1052 School House Road**

Mr. Wert stated that he previously owned a farm in Linglestown which he sold to a developer. He has no intention to develop his 130 acre farm. He does not feel that there is currently development pressure in our area and feels the regulations aren't necessary. He also stated that he is against government control of properties.

- **Tyler Wert, 1052 School House Road**

Tyler had questions regarding agritourism and concerns that it would not be permitted in the AG Conservation district as it would potentially affect his Christmas tree farm.

- **David Settino, 49 Groff Road**

Mr. Settino had a question regarding Riding Clubs and what constitutes a riding club.

- **Willis Geesaman, 88 Homestead Road**

Mr. Geesaman stated that his property is not currently in the draft AG Conservation district but is concerned about what comes next; he heard this is just phase 1 of a larger process. Mr. Smith clarified that this is not a phased approach.

- **Matthew Schneider, North Side of Swatara Drive (99 acres)**

Mr. Schneider suggested changing some of the permitted uses in the AG district to special exception uses instead of creating a new zoning district where they're not permitted. He believes the proposed zoning amendments are an overreach of government. He asked if

creating the AG Conservation zoning district would affect the size of other zoning districts, such as commercial or residential. Mr. Smith responded that this proposal would not affect the other zoning districts.

- **Dale Heagy, 769 Ono Road**

Mr. Heagy thanked the Commission for looking into this issue now and looking forward. He stated that he is in favor of the proposal, partially due to the impact of new residential properties creating regulatory setbacks from wells. He also stated that he disagrees with the opinion expressed by some in attendance that the proposed zoning amendments would lower property values, citing recent sales of preserved farms.

- **David Hostetter, 1758 N. State Rt. 934**

Mr. Hostetter asked why the new six-lot subdivision along Jonestown Road (just west of Yordys Bridge Road) was approved at that location. Mr. Harmon responded that the land is zoned Low-Density Residential, the subdivision was permitted by the zoning, and the public sewer is located in that area.

- **Willis Geesaman, 88 Homestead Road**

Mr. Geesaman commented that he agrees with the comments made by Dale Heagy but doesn't agree with the development rights being reduced without compensation to the landowner.

- **Ken Hebel, 1067 Gravel Hill Road**

Mr. Hebel stated that he served on the Zoning Hearing Board for a number of years and understands what the Commission is trying to do and thinks saving farmland is a good idea. He said that after years of waiting (20 years +/-) his farm will be preserved by the Lebanon County Farmland Preservation sometime next year. He doesn't believe that the proposed regulations will limit the ability of landowners to preserve their farm(s). He also commented that there are too many uses permitted by special exception and asked if roadside stands are permitted by right. Mr. Harmon confirmed that roadside stands are permitted by right in the AG district. He also asked the Commission to consider allowing some lots 10 acres or larger (for farming), just like the ordinance previously allowed.

- **Dennis Lerch, 40 Indiantown Gap Road**

Mr. Lerch asked how the Commission decided which properties to include in the proposed AG Conservation district. He commented that if the township is going to move forward with this, it should be for all agricultural properties in the township.

- **Rod Martin, 27 Groff Road**

Mr. Martin asked if this zoning district is one the township is required to provide per state law. Mr. Smith answered no – agricultural zoning is required but the proposed AG Conservation is not required. Mr. Martin stated that he is not in favor of the regulations because he feels that this would limit his flexibility (AG related uses) and potential value.

- **Tyler Wert, 1052 School House Road**

Mr. Wert asked for clarification regarding the use category "Sandpits, gravel pits, removal of topsoil, etc." He explained that part of his business is a nursery, and he is concerned that "removal of topsoil" could be interpreted to include his activities related to growing and harvesting trees. Mr. Smith responded that he did not believe the nursery operations would fall

under the category “Sandpits, gravel pits, removal of topsoil, etc.” but stated that the Commission would look into the matter.

- **David Hostetter, 1758 N. State Rt. 934**

Mr. Hostetter commented that if the Army partners with more property owners through the ACUB program, the zoning amendments would not be necessary. Mr. Harmon clarified that the majority (approximately two thirds) of the proposed AG Conservation district is currently outside of the ACUB boundary and therefore not eligible for the program. Mr. Hostetter remarked that he heard the boundary will be expanded in the near future.

- **Matt Hossler, 83 Sherks Church Road**

Mr. Hossler is not in favor of government control of property rights and is concerned that the amendments will affect the property values and potentially affect the ability of landowners to preserve farms in the future.

- **Bethany Canner, 20 Black Walnut Lane**

Ms. Gehr noted that the Commission stated that they have looked at examples from other municipalities and asked if the Commission had asked these municipalities if there has been any negative repercussions to enacting similar AG zoning regulations. Mr. Dellinger responded by explaining some different options the Commission looked at, such as Transfer of Development Rights.

- **Kyle Cassel, 1715 N. State Rt. 934**

Mr. Cassel noted that it appeared as if most of the comments received in the Comprehensive Plan update surveys were about preventing warehouse development and minimizing residential home construction. He asked why the Commission decided to focus on agricultural regulations. Mr. Smith answered that the Commission was aware of the comments regarding warehouses but also received comments regarding protection of agricultural areas. Mr. Cassel added that to make a living as a farmer you need to get into value added opportunities, and by limiting certain uses (e.g. agriculturally oriented commercial establishments) in the proposed AG Conservation district, you’re hurting the potential for long-term farm use by the younger farmers.

- **Doug Porter, 5 Groff Road**

Mr. Porter commented that the draft regulations do not allow a 100-acre parcel to be divided into two 50-acre parcels. He asked the Commission to consider allowing this type of subdivision.

- **Rodney Wert, 1052 School House Road**

Mr. Wert asked whether the zoning would need to be changed in order to construct a housing development in the Agricultural zoning district. Mr. Harmon responded that a large development—for example, 10 to 30 homes or more—would require a zoning change. He clarified, however, that the subdivisions discussed at the meeting refer to the up to six additional lots currently permitted within the AG district.

- **Tyler Wert, 1052 School House Road**

Mr. Wert suggested the Commission consider requiring setbacks for wells constructed on new lots for single-family homes in the AG district, so that the regulatory setbacks for spraying/manure applications would not affect existing farm operations.

- **Chelsea Schneider, North Side of Swatara Drive (99 acres)**

Ms. Schneider asked if the small areas of land in between the proposed AG Conservation district would be permitted to create a housing development. Mr. Smith clarified that the proposed amendment would not change the current AG zoning district regulations, so a “housing development” in the AG zoned lands would not be permitted by right.

- **Rodney Wert, 1052 School House Road**

Mr. Wert suggested that if the township proceeds with changes, it should be to all agricultural properties, not just the properties in the proposed AG Conservation district.

- **General Comment (from multiple people)**

Several people suggested that inclusion in the proposed AG Conservation district should be a voluntary process, where landowners can opt-in to the district. Mr. Harmon stated that he doesn’t think zoning works when it’s a voluntary process.

- **Howard Lerch, 40 Indiantown Gap Road**

Mr. Lerch questioned why there is no land in the northwest portion of the township included in the proposed AG Conservation district. He commented that with the number of properties owned by Kreider Farms, he is concerned about the future of that land. He also commented that changes to agricultural regulations should be to all agricultural lands.

The meeting concluded at approximately 8:40 pm.

Submitted by Erik Harmon