

POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE SUSQUEHANNA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

The Susquehanna County Planning Commission is made up of nine volunteers from throughout the County, appointed by the County Commissioners. The members of the Planning Commission provide a voluntary service to the community and receive no compensation for their time and effort. They can be reimbursed for any necessary and reasonable expenses incurred in the performance of their duties.

The Planning Commission meetings are advertised each year in January and are open to the public. The agenda for each meeting is on the County's web site (www.susqco.com) one week before each meeting. Initial action on certain minor subdivisions and addition subdivision plans may take place prior to a meeting. All industrial or commercial development plans, major subdivision plans, and any plan requesting a waiver of a requirement of the Ordinance are acted on at a public meeting. Every subdivision or land development plan is sent, as soon as it arrives in the Planning Department office, to the local municipality for their review and comments. No final action is taken on plans before hearing from the municipality.

An application for a subdivision or land development becomes public information upon receipt officially at a Planning Commission meeting. The Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance details the method of accepting subdivision plans, which is consistent with Pennsylvania State law (the Municipalities Planning Code, Act 247 of 1968 as amended). By law, the Planning Commission has 90 days from the date of official receipt to take action on a plan. The Ordinance contains a specific format to follow to determine when a plan has been officially submitted.

The County's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance is available on the County's web site or on CD. It is available in printed form for a small fee to cover the cost of reproduction.

The Susquehanna County Planning Commission is charged with protecting the rights of all citizens and landowners of Susquehanna County with regard to their enjoyment and use of their land as they see fit, as long as it is done legally. This includes a landowner's right to subdivide or develop their land.

The single land use regulation tool that the County Planning Commission has available at this time is the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, which is governed by Pennsylvania State law (the Municipalities Planning Code, Act 247 of 1968 as amended).

A planning commission assists the governing body in and assumes primary responsibility for developing the ordinances necessary to guide future growth. A planning commission can merely act as an advisor to the governing body (County Commissioners) in defining how the community should grow. However, the governing body may, by ordinance, delegate approval authority to a planning commission for subdivision and land development applications. In practice most of a planning commission's time is devoted to administration of the subdivision and land development ordinance.

A County may enact a zoning ordinance. In Pennsylvania all but a few zoning ordinances are enacted at the municipal level which provides the greatest local control over land use. Certain townships and boroughs in Susquehanna County are moving toward adopting zoning ordinances.

The difference between subdividing and zoning is often misunderstood. Zoning regulates the specific types of uses allowed in a given area. A subdivision is the act of dividing land into 2 or more lots or parcels. Land Development regulations control how a particular use (such as a retail store or manufacturing plant) is physically placed on that particular parcel of land. Because the County has a Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance only, the Planning Commission cannot, under its Ordinance, tell someone they cannot propose a specific type of development on a specific piece of land. The Planning Commission may only regulate how that specific piece of land might be developed with the proposed type of development, such as through setbacks and buffers, in order to mitigate the effect it would have on neighboring property.

The Planning Commission invites and encourages all citizens and landowners of the County to attend its meetings. Meetings are held on the last Tuesday of each month beginning at 7:30 P.M. in the Conference Room of the County Office Building, 81 Public Avenue, Montrose. For more information you can call the Susquehanna County Department of Planning at (570) 278-5950, daily from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.