

Penn Township updates zoning ordinance to account for solar, wind uses

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Penn Township Land Use Administrator Clinton Bonetti sits Tuesday, October 8th at his desk at the Penn Township Municipal Building. William Pitts/Butler Eagle

PENN TWP — Supervisors approved a sweeping Amendment to their Zoning Ordinance during their meeting on Tuesday night, October 8th, which made numerous changes mainly to account for future land uses such as solar and wind energy facilities.

According to Land Use Administrator Clinton Bonetti, this Amendment — which changes or adds language in 10 different chapters of the Zoning Ordinance — has been in the works since this May.

“We didn’t have any regulations that dealt with solar or wind,” Bonetti said. “So, we had to get that in our Ordinance.”

“Clinton, our Planning Commission, and our Solicitor have been working on issues that over the years have accumulated,” said Township Supervisor Samuel Ward. “And they’ve prepared clarifications and new sections covering wind and solar and brought it up to speed. This should be helpful to all.”

Among the more notable changes, “small solar energy facility” was added to the list of Permitted Accessory Uses for all six of Penn Township’s Zoning Districts, while Farmettes — small hobby farms — were elevated from Permitted Conditional Use to Permitted Use in the R-1, RE (Residential Estate), and S (Conservancy) areas.

In addition, two-family dwellings were added to the list of Conditional Uses for the C-2 (Highway Commercial) Zoning District, which mostly includes Pittsburgh Road.

For Farmettes, there is a maximum number of animals that can be kept per acre, depending on the type of animal: 10 rabbits per acre, six chickens, four alpacas, four llamas, two sheep/goats, and one cow, horse, or pig.

If a Farmette keeps multiple types of animals, a combination of animals can be kept which adds up to the maximum amount per acre; for example, eight alpacas (for two acres) and six goats (for three acres) on a five-acre parcel.

Small energy solar facilities can be “ground-mounted” or “roof-mounted.”

Roof-mounted facilities cannot exceed 35 feet in height, while ground-mounted facilities cannot be located in front yards. All solar facilities must conceal their cabling “to the extent practical.”

Two sections were added to address wind energy facilities and principal solar energy facilities — industrial-strength solar farms, as opposed to solar energy systems powering a single property. Principal solar energy facilities are a Conditional Use in the RE, R-1, C-2, and I-L (Limited Industrial) zoning districts, while wind energy facilities are a Conditional Use in the I-L district only.

A public hearing was held on the Zoning Ordinance Amendment before Tuesday night’s meeting, but no one spoke.