

Drumore Township looking into alternatives

Farmland preservation being planned

DRUMORE, Pa. - Anticipating a state mandated plan in the future which will leave little decision making to the local governing bodies in regards to preservation of agricultural lands, the Drumore Township Planning Commission in Lancaster County has set out to find what the residents of its jurisdiction propose as guides to be followed in the sale and development of the farmland in that township.

Approximately 35 residents attended the first meeting on Jan. 26 called for this purpose by the planning commission. Chairman Aldus Martin prefaced the open discussion with a summary of what types of alternatives are in use or speculated for future use. He also cited statistics pointing out the population growth, sale of land and tax assessments.

Quoting figures given last March at the Pennsylvania Planning Commission, Martin said 60 per cent of the state was in farm land in 1920. By 1940, that percentage had decreased only five points. As of 1970, farmland constituted only 30 per cent of the state's land. In 1920, 202,000 people lived on farmland as compared to 172,000 in 1940 and 62,000 in 1970. Two per cent of the population in Pennsylvania lived on farmland in 1970.

Due to the stepped up rate of land being sold and subdivided for housing purposes rather than agricultural, the highly productive farmlands which are near to the metropolitan areas have developed at least four plans which could slow down or eliminate the conversion of farmland into housing or industrial real estate.

One proposal is titled purchase and lease back which provides for agricultural land to be bought by a governmental body such as a township or district. This land is then leased back to the farmer for farming purposes only. No one could buy this land for development

A second alternative is the agricultural district plan whereby a group of farmers with adjoining land may have their land declared an ag. district for a specific length of time, such as ten years, and during the duration of that agreement the real estate in that district may not be developed; it must remain agricultural. According to Martin, New York does have these ag districts in operation presently.

Selling development rights is a third option to encourage ag land preservation. The farmer may sell his land to a governing body which in turn pays the farmer the difference between the price of the farm if sold at market value as farming land and the price of the farm if sold for development. An initial sum is paid to the farmer at the time of sale and the remainder is paid over several years. This land is never to be sold for development. The reasoning behind such an arrangement is that the farmer may still maintain a just compensation since farmers traditionally hold their land as an investment which when sold will provide retirement finances.

A final plan is the transfer of development rights in which a township sets aside a certain percentage of the land for residential development. Builders must pay development rights to the farmer in order to develop the land he purchased from him. Costs of such rights usually prohibit development.

Martin pointed out that the purchase and lease back and sale of development rights plans are expensive for the tax payers who provide these funds.

As things stand at the present, Martin urged that the local governments decide how they want their land used before they are told how by the state "At present it is economically more practical to sell to developments than to keep in

agriculture," one resident summed up the situation.

"Where do we draw the line?" Martin asked. Although the Clean and Green Act, applying for variances, and county ordinances offer some aids to keeping sub-division and taxing in check, they are not sufficient to stop the trend of converting good farmland into housing, says Martin.

Jacob Gicker, secretary for the commission gave projections for the county in 1985 which included an increase in population by 42,000 with an additional 27,093 housing units needed.

"Why are people moving into Drumore Township?" Gicker asked. "Do the Drumore residents want population growth? The answers have to come from

the residents themselves," he stated by way of explaining the meetings.

One resident said, "We are an area for exploitation because we are letting it be done."

"There is too much ease in accepting the state's mandates," reflected another.

"We must allow for some development in our comprehensive plan or it will not hold up in court," explained another.

"The energy crisis will put pressure on people to live closer to their work." "Cities need to be more attractive for housing than they are now." "Driving fifty miles to work with one person to a car will be impossible," concludes another resident. "Right now the only thing

that keeps farmland in farmland is a personal commitment to the land. The profits in selling to developments are powerful forces though," said a farmer present.

"When the farmer gets a decent price for his products he won't have to sell the land for development," another commented.

"Farm commodities will come up to realistic standards some day," prophesied another.

Until they do, Drumore

Township has decided to make more specific subdivision requirements, establish building codes which at present are not in effect in it or in surrounding townships and set up the mechanics for enforcing ordinances and codes. Although this will be a time-consuming undertaking, the first phase has started.

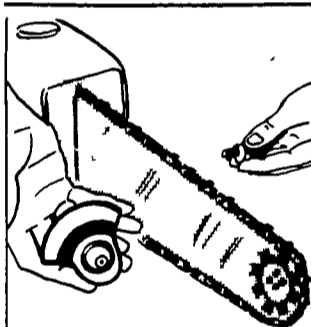
Chairman Martin invited the public to attend the next meeting to be held at the township shed February 23 at 8 p.m.

What's new

RAT BAIT BOX

A new metal rat bait box is being marketed by McCoy's Chemical Company of Cleveland, Ohio. The heavy-duty, Galvanized Box is designed to help farmers comply with EPA poison label requirements that state: "Baits should be placed in areas inaccessible to children, pets, wildlife and domestic animals or in tamper proof bait boxes." Stamped "POISON" in large, raised letters, McCoy's galvanized rat bait box

helps meet these requirements by using 23 gauge metal for the one piece stamped base and separate, snap-on lid and by providing two one-way nylon security ties to seal the unit. The security ties must be cut to be removed. The overhanging lid and raised entrance holes help prevent spoilage of bait by the elements including seepage. The tray is sturdy, yet inexpensive enough to be disposable. Access to the private bait chamber is provided by 2-1/8 inches diameter entrance holes in both ends of the box. For extra security, the bait box may be nailed in place.



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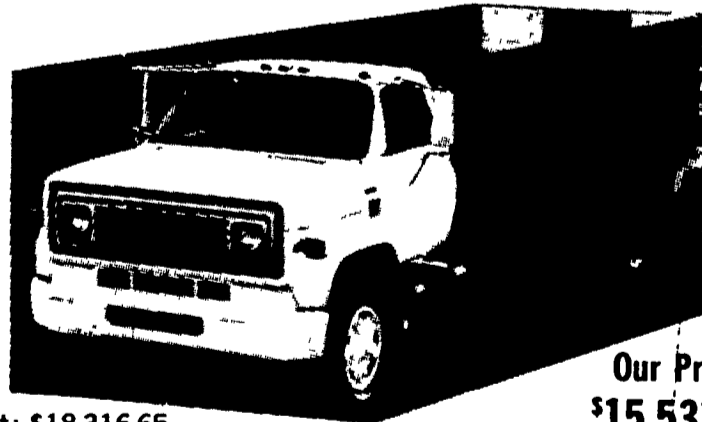
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