
CONCERNED CITIZENS OF EXETER TOWNSHIP NEWS AND UPDATES

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November 2006

CCoET Meeting Held at the Dunn Community Center

On October 24th, Concerned Citizens of Exeter Township held a public meeting at the Dunn Community Center. Those attending heard our executive committee talk about how and why CCoET came into being, what CCoET has been doing and plans to do as part of its mission -- and what current township issues, in addition to farmland preservation, CCoET is working on. There was a lively question and answer period, and at the end of the meeting residents signed up to work on CCoET committees. Committees have been formed for Meetings, Mailings/Correspondence/Distribution, Membership, and Fundraising.

Among those present at the Dunn meeting was David Kessler, now the newly elected State Representative from the 130th District. Dave answered questions and

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WWW.EXETERTOWNSHIPFOCUS.COM

WHY JOIN CCoET:

- For too long we citizens of Exeter Township have felt powerless to impact township actions. CCoET is working to change this.
- CCoET will empower your lone voice.
- We are fellow citizens working for the good of everyone; we are ready to listen to your township concerns and take action.
- Help us preserve the good in our township and change what's bad.
- Help us prevent wasteful tax spending.
- Help us ensure our kids have excellent schools and a first-rate education.
- Help us prevent unnecessary destruction of what little remains of our beautiful agricultural heritage and open space.
- Help us ensure township growth is beneficial and not detrimental.
- Help us work to elect local officials who will work for the good of the township.

We hope you'll support CCoET with a contribution.

(Contributions can be sent to CCoET, PO Box 3738, Reading, PA 19606)

HELP US CREATE A TOWNSHIP WE CAN ALL BE PROUD OF.

Annual Association fee of \$10/household is used to pay for mailings and CCoET functions such as the meeting held on 10/24 and the gatherings held this summer with candidates for this past election. Other contributions are greatly appreciated and will help Exeter Township and Borough of St. Lawrence residents. Thank you.

spoke to issues of concern raised by residents.

CCoET Executive Committee Chairwoman, Jill Skaist, spoke in great detail about the origins of the group and the Mission to which it is dedicated. As an organization that has only existed since the end of May 2006, there has been a lot of work already done and much more planned.

The group has **actively worked to provide the citizens with access to candidates in this election.** Two meetings were held at Happy Landings including a barbecue at the beginning of October at which Dave Kessler (elected as Rep. of the 130th District) spoke and fielded questions.

One of the main **purposes for the group is and will continue to be the gathering and dissemination of information to the citizens of the community.** As such, since before the group's beginning, many of its members have attended and actively participated in meetings such as those for the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission, the School Board, the Borough of St. Lawrence Council and others. Information gathered from these meetings is compiled and distributed to help the citizens understand the many issues that happen in the life of our community.

Another issue, of which many are already aware, is the current struggle to help our community find the best place on which to construct a badly needed elementary school. While having to spend a rather large amount of time and effort on this task, the organization has continued to move forward in other areas. Unfortunately, those who are not in favor of the organization's actions concerning the school issue have chosen to declare that CCoET has no other purpose. That couldn't be further from the truth.

You've read the mission statement and understand that **CCoET stands for Farmland Preservation, Smart Development, Fiscal Responsibility and helping the community by providing information and acting as a Watch Dog while communicating with our elected officials.** But what are some of the specifics about our current tasks?

CCoET strives to be a part of the solution by providing the school district with many viable alternatives to be considered for the construction of new school(s). The dialogue, while sometimes tense, is nonetheless, proof that we are here to stay and to help.

The organization has an ongoing task to interview potential candidates for upcoming elections and to provide the citizens with information about the candidates and opportunities to communicate with them prior to elections. This is no small task and will only get larger as the 2007 election nears. With 2 and potentially 3 Exeter Township Supervisors up for election, CCoET and the citizens of the community are positioned to ensure that the right people are selected for those positions.

In any given week, there are at least one if not more meetings to be attended and members of CCoET are present at all of them per schedule. Active participation is paramount to ensuring that the will of the people is known in order to help our officials make good decisions.

What has been happening in our community that is being followed by CCoET?

- **Wal-Mart Expansion:** Did you know that the

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WHY IT IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF ALL EXETER RESIDENTS THAT CCOET WINS ITS LEGAL CASE TO PREVENT SCHOOLS FROM BEING BUILT ON AGRICULTURAL-PRESERVATION LAND (specifically, the 110-acre property along Ritters Road):

In the opinion of CCoET, the school board's decision is wasteful of our money and our natural resources:

- **There are viable non-ag-preservation sites for the school(s) the district says it needs now or may need in the future.** Among these sites is land already owned by the school district. The Exeter Planning Commission suggested most of these sites, and CCOET discussed them with the school board. But the school board continues to dismiss all these options; it wants only a sprawling three-school site. **The bottom line is there are workable site options and building solutions for solving our school needs that don't require unnecessary destruction of prime farmland.**
- **We don't need huge, sprawling campuses to give kids a first-rate education.** CCOET believes we should build our schools on the smallest possible footprint that still gives students adequate outdoor-activity area. The Millmont Elementary School in Reading, on approx. 2 acres, is about to be rebuilt as a 3-story school (with an underground parking lot) for 900 students. The Haverford Twp. School District this year opened an elementary school on 3.7 acres. And the Warwick School District in Lititz recently opened an elementary school on 2.5 acres.
- **Building schools on ag-preservation land wastes both money and land because**

Schools on AP Land Continued on page 4

preliminary plan has been approved and that the traffic in the area of Lincoln Dr. will increase as a result of the expansion? . PENNDOT has not authorized the requested crossover on 422 (with a stop light) east of the current Lincoln Dr. light. This is very unfortunate. Instead, the plan now has a couple of turn lanes being added on Lincoln Dr. and 422. This will create problems for the businesses in the area (Scott's Car Wash, DQ, KFC and Taco Bell) that already have problems with access. With the addition of more lanes, in the words of the owner of Scott's, it will be much more difficult to get in and out of the business. Also, the plan calls for the removal of approximately 15 feet of frontage on the properties on Lincoln Dr. At last word, the residents did not yet know that they would be losing property.

- **Landfill Issue:** It was recently requested by the owners of Pioneer Crossing Landfill to change the way they handle the leachate. Currently, the leachate is sent to sewage and the proposal is for recirculating it. This would allow compaction of the trash, hence more room and less need for expansion. Drawback? Smell is already bad at times. If they can take care of the odor then this is a good idea. Otherwise, trash it!

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- **Tax Study Commission:** A lot of information was delivered to the dedicated volunteers on this commission. Their task was to determine if a proposal should be made to perform a tax swap from property tax to either an EIT (earned income tax) or a PIT (personal income tax) as directed by the state as a means to help alleviate the property tax burden. It appears as though a proposal will be made to have a question on the primary ballot to consider an EIT.
- **Rural Village:** CCoET has taken an active interest in this concept as it will impact future development. After much research and effort, several changes have been made to the original plan to help prevent excess development of land currently zoned as agricultural preservation. A win for us!
- **New Mall:** This goes hand-in-hand with another purpose for our organization, helping to get more businesses to call Exeter, "Home." While not in favor of only getting lower paying, less technical jobs, the general idea to get some businesses to take the currently unused properties near the bypass, is a good one. It would be better if we could have something in there other than the rumored Target. The point of contention for our group? The developer will need to shell out millions for upgrades to the road and has asked not

to pay property taxes for a very long period of time. We think a compromise could be reached that doesn't include further draining our tax base and making the homeowners responsible for more of the school district's funds.

That was a small wrap-up of an information-packed two-hour meeting. If anyone who was unable to attend the meeting would like more information or would like to sign up for committee work and help us make Exeter Township the best it can be, please let us know by calling any executive committee member or emailing us at

ccoetadmin@exetertownshipfocus.com.

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structures and hard surfaces on ag-preservation land to 20% of the entire site, so more land is needed and wasted than would otherwise be necessary.

- **The school board says it is taking the 110-acre farm for schools in order to prevent development on that land, but the fact is that land is now zoned ag-preservation and cannot be developed; if the school board would build the school(s) elsewhere, we could work to together to make sure the 110-acre farmland remains zoned ag-preservation and therefore free of development.**
- **If the school board would put the school(s) on land already zoned for residential development, it would keep out more development/children and save taxpayer money:** Oley Twp. supervisor Dave Kessler has run numbers that show for every 1.7 children (the average per home) the school district loses money: It costs \$11,500 per child during the school year; for 1.7 children that equals \$19,550, and the amount of school taxes coming in for that 1.7 children

leaves the district with a shortfall of about \$5,000 to \$8000 per household.

- **The PA Legislature recently amended the school code to give school districts an extra 10% subsidy if they renovated or enlarged an existing school instead of building a new one.** This was enacted in response to new guidelines by the Council of Educational Facility Planners International, a non-profit school building association that says that renovating or enlarging existing schools to state-of-the-art standards is usually cheaper than building new ones.
- **Agricultural land is an asset to be cherished.** Once gone, it is gone forever. The soil on the 110-acre farm is among the finest in the *world*.
- **Just imagine how high your school taxes will go if the school district continues on its present course. The school board has not said how much what they plan to do will cost (including cost of infrastructure upgrades).** Your school taxes went up 6.8% in 2005-2006 over 2004-2005 -- and up 7.3% in 2004-2005 over 2003-2004.
- **Preservation of farmland and open space is critical to protect our water supplies; streams and aquifer recharge areas; keep our property taxes down, and assure the future of Berks County's economic development in the food and fiber industry.**
- **New schools on Ritters Road will be a magnet for new development on remaining farmland, which will raise taxes for *all* residents and create a need for yet more schools, while destroying what little remains of Exeter's beautiful, historic farmland heritage.** According to the Berks County Conservancy, allowing conditional-use for schools on ag-preserve land has opened up Exeter's zoning to challenges by any developer.
- **The Exeter Planning Commission, Berks County Commissioners, and Berks County Conservancy are against our township's decision to allow schools on**

ag-preserve land. According to the Conservancy, the Berks County 20/20 Vision Comprehensive Plan, developed several years ago to preserve Berks County farmland and keep development within certain areas, has been consistently ignored by Exeter Township, much to the dismay of county officials.

The school board says it cares about Exeter's prime farmland as much as CCoET does. If that were true, we would not be in this situation. And the board has *falsely* blamed CCoET for added costs and project delay. The truth is: 1) the school bd. knew at least 5 years ago that it would need an elementary school but did nothing; 2) the board never filed the necessary sub-division plan for the 110-acre property, which it needed to do in order to buy the property before the original contract-of-sale deadline of Aug. 31, '06; this caused the need for the board to get a contract extension and pay the landowners another \$100,000 (The landowners agreed to the extension because they were told eminent domain proceedings would begin immediately if they did not agree, and they were afraid of the cost of that legal battle); 3) PA state site-reimbursement approval, which the district needed in order to proceed, was not granted until October 2006.

CCoET had urged twp. supervisors not to allow schools on the 110-acre AP land. We fought & won getting the conditional-use zoning reversed back to its original AP zoning. But the school district had filed its schools application prior to that zoning reversal, and in a 3-2 decision the supervisors ok'd the application, but did so for only 1 school even though the school board plans to put 3 schools on the land. We believe the stakes are so high we had no recourse but to take legal action & appeal the 3-2 decision.

CCoET Executive Committee

Chairman – Andy Yawger
Vice Chairwoman – Jill Skaist
Treasurer – Joe Mraz
Secretary – Louise Swartley
Postmaster – Bill Ballamy
Assistant Treasurer/Spokesperson – Jeff Corke
Fundraising Chairman /Spokesperson – Jack Bertolet
Corresponding Secretary/Spokesperson – Kit Ogilvie
Alternates – Jim and Linda Focht

See www.exetertownshipfocus.com for more info.

Concerned Citizens of Exeter Township, Inc. (CCoET, Inc.)

Our Mission:

- To protect Exeter Township and the interests of its residents
- To work for positive changes in the township and, when necessary, to oppose what we believe is detrimental to the township and residents

Among other issues, CCoET will work to preserve Exeter's agricultural land and open space and to ensure rational growth and efficient use of the Township's natural and financial resources.

To become an associate of CCoET, Inc. and receive information about issues of importance to Exeter and St. Lawrence residents, please, send your contribution (\$10 Association Fee per household) and contact information including the name(s), address, phone number and email address(es) of those wishing to join to:

CCoET, Inc.
P.O. Box 3738
Reading, PA 19606

Do you know something that is happening in our community that others should know?

Tell us about it!

Share your knowledge and experience. Become part of a growing organization designed to help the citizens of Exeter Township and the Borough of St. Lawrence.

**Mail can be sent to:
CCoET, Inc.
P.O. Box 3738
Reading, PA 19606**

**CCoET, Inc.
P.O. Box 3738
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