
CONCERNED CITIZENS OF EXETER TOWNSHIP

NEWS AND UPDATES

Volume 1, Issue 2 "SPECIAL EDITION"

December 2006

WHY CCoET'S LEGAL VICTORY THAT NOW PREVENTS EXETER SCHOOLS FROM BEING BUILT ON AGRICULTURAL-PRESERVATION LAND (specifically, the 110-acre property along Ritters Road) IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF ALL EXETER RESIDENTS, INCLUDING OUR STUDENTS:

The school board's application request to build schools on prime farmland, which Judge Lash of the Berks Country Court of Common Pleas denied in a written decision dated 12/11/06, would have wasted our money and our natural resources:

- Despite what the Exeter School Board says, there *are* viable non-agricultural-preservation sites for the elementary school we need now and the one or two additional schools that we may need in the future. Among these sites is land already owned by the school district. The Exeter Planning Commission had suggested most of

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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 CCoET fulfill its mission. Thank you.

these sites to the school board, and CCoET urged the board to seriously consider them. But, despite claiming that they care about Exeter's dwindling farmland heritage as much as we in CCoET do, school board members refused to change their site choice. **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 for 900 students (with underground parking). 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. CCoET believes about 12-15 acres (as opposed to the planned 36 or more on the 110-acre site) would be generous for our needed elementary school.
- **Building schools on ag-preservation land wastes both money and land because zoning restricts the building structures and hard surfaces on ag-preserve land to 20% of the entire site,** so more land is needed and wasted than would otherwise be necessary.
- **The school board said it was 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.** Now that the school district will have to build the school(s) elsewhere, we would like the school board to work with us to make sure the 110-acre farmland remains zoned ag-preservation and therefore free of development.
- **Putting our school(s) on land already zoned for residential development, instead of on ag-preserve farmland, is the correct course of action to keep out more development/children, and doing so will save taxpayer money:** Development causes taxes to rise: It costs the district \$11,500/yr to educate a child; at an average of 1.7 children per family, a new home generates \$19,550 in school cost; an average home assessed cost of \$250,000 generates \$5875 in school taxes (at 23.5 mils); this leaves a \$13,675 cost deficit; the state covers 30% (\$5865) of the \$19,550 cost, leaving a net deficit of \$7810/family. Even if the district would choose a more expensive residentially zoned site to put schools on instead of a less expensive AP site, over time money would be saved due to fewer homes/children.
- **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. If any of our school capacity needs can be met this way, it would save taxpayer money.
- **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*. The school board said it cares about Exeter's prime farmland as much as CCoET does. If that were true, we would not have been in this situation.
- **Just imagine how high your school taxes would have gone if the school district had been allowed to continue its planned course.** 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 the 110-acre farm property would have been a magnet for new development on remaining farmland, which would have caused a rise in taxes for *all* residents and would have created a need for yet more schools, while destroying what little remains of Exeter's beautiful,**

historic farmland heritage. The Reading Eagle agreed (Editorial 10/24/06).

- **The Exeter Planning Commission, Berks County Commissioners, and Berks County Conservancy were all 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.
- **Per the court decision, the school board and three of our five supervisors ignored the requirements of our municipal zoning laws.** They evidently thought they could get what they wanted without following our laws. Our victory teaches a good civics lesson and is a win for Exeter citizens.

The school board has *falsely* blamed CCoET for added costs and project delay. The truth is the bd. caused its own project delay & added costs: 1) the school bd. knew at least 5 years ago that it would need another 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 8/31/06; this caused the need for the board to get a contract extension & 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) – and the school bd. still had not yet filed its sub-division plan as of the 12/11/06 court decision, and because of this, if the bd. had won the case it would likely still not have been able to close on the land by the 3/1/07 extended contract deadline; 3) PA state site-reimbursement approval, which the district also needed in order to proceed, was not granted until October 2006.

ABOUT THE LEGAL CASE WE WON: Three of our five twp. supervisors had changed the ag-preserve zoning along Ritters Road to allow conditional-use by schools, which allowed Central Catholic and Exeter to go after the ag-preserve farmland they wanted. Before forming CCoET, we as individuals had tried fighting the Central situation to no avail and then began fighting the Exeter situation. After we organized into CCoET, we urged twp. supervisors to not allow Exeter to build schools on the 110-acre AP land, and we fought and won getting the conditional-use zoning reversed back to its original AP zoning that did not allow conditional-use, but the school district had already filed its schools application prior to that zoning reversal, so the supervisors had to vote on whether to ok the application. Despite the fact that our attorney advised the supervisors prior to their decision that the application did not meet zoning law requirements and must be rejected, the supervisors, in a 3-2 decision, ok'd the application. We believed the stakes were so high that we had no recourse but to take legal action and appeal the 3-2 decision. We did so and won. And because the AP zoning now no longer allows conditional-use by schools, Exeter cannot re-apply and must choose a non-ag-preserve site.

We in CCoET care deeply about our township and the welfare of our fellow residents, and we look forward to working with township and school board officials to help make Exeter Township the best it can be.

Congratulations to our new 130th District Representative, Dave Kessler! The Concerned Citizens of Exeter Township thank you for your support and wish you well as you strive to help the citizens of Pennsylvania the way that you have helped those of us in Berks County for so long.



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 \$10 Association Fee per household and any additional contribution along with the contact information of those in your household wishing to join (include name, address, phone number and email address) to:

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

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.

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

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