

Plan Con C Approved by Pennsylvania Department of Education

The Exeter Township School District submitted their plans for construction of one school on 110 acres of farmland and it was approved by the PDE on October 5th, 2006. The PDE has granted funds equaling approximately one third of the cost of the land.

Under PLANCON-C, Section titled, Agricultural Land Preservation Policy, it states:

- Executive Order 2003-2, Agricultural Land Preservation Policy, directs all agencies under the Governor's jurisdiction to "protect the Commonwealth's 'prime agricultural land' from irreversible conversion to uses that result in its loss as an environmental and essential food and fiber resource." The order further states "Commonwealth funds shall not be used to encourage the conversion of 'primary agricultural land' to other uses when feasible alternatives are available."

Now here's my view:

The Exeter Township School District met the "bare minimum requirements" set forth in PLANCON-C and were approved by the PDE. Prior to approval, the Department of Agriculture also reviewed the application and were informed of nine other alternate sites for construction in Exeter Township, some of which would require no land acquisition because they would use land already owned by the School District. The Bureau of Farmland Preservation was very interested (as determined via several phone conversations with members of the Concerned Citizens) and determined that while the application met the bare minimum requirements, they did not believe that enough was done

to actually follow the intent of the Governor's Executive Order to preserve agricultural land.

Some members of the School Board recently decided that a group of concerned citizens were at fault for delays in the project that in all actuality were caused by their own inefficient process. The land to be acquired would have been turned back over to the property owner, a lifelong resident and farmer in Exeter Township, by August 31st if the School Board could not complete all of the necessary requirements including Conditional Use Approval, Approval of PLANCON-C application and Preliminary Plan Approval. The Board only had one of those completed prior to August 31st. The only thing standing in their way was their own handling of the process. This led to the Board needing more time to complete their tasks and they chose to offer the property owner another \$100K for an extension. A stipulation was placed on the offer, which was given on August 28th. The Board informed the property owner that they would take the land by eminent domain if the owner did not accept the 6-month extension by August 30th. Back into a corner and being offered \$100K free and clear, the property owner granted the extension.

Now the School Board would like for the Taxpayers of Exeter Township to believe that they are not the responsible party for the delay, which has more than likely increased the cost of the project by \$1.1M due to material cost increases. How convenient for them that they have a group of concerned citizens on which to blame their own ineptitude. The only thing that the group has done is challenge the Board to be good stewards of the environment and to help maintain the dwindling agricultural lands in Exeter Township. The concerned citizens

have made public their beliefs that constructing schools on the very edge of town instead of centrally locating them would lead to more housing growth past the edge of town into the few remaining farms of the area. Unfortunately, the School Board still does not believe that is enough to stop their plans. Of course, there is also the huge congestion already in the area, and it will only get worse with the addition of another school in that part of town. Forget about getting around easily. Then there is the already undersized and overflowing storm sewers. A current project has land being taken away from homeowners to upgrade the sewers in the Jacksonwald area, which is usually flooded in moderate to heavy rain. Now they want to add more impervious surface to the area. The runoff will be almost unbelievable! Now let's stop the bickering and the blame game and work together to find a better alternative to meet all of the needs of Exeter Township. Building a school on 110 acres of farmland is wrong on so many levels. Submitted by Exeter Resident Andrew Yawger