NORTH WHITEHALL TOWNSHIP

FARMLAND PRESERVATION / OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE MINUTES

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October 9th, 2025

Convened: 7:00 pm Adjourned: 8:00 pm

In Attendance:

Randy Cope -Township Manager	Al Geosits -Supervisor	Marlene Stofflet - Secretary
Dennis Klusaritz- Supervisor/Committee Chairperson	Ron Heintzelman - Supervisor	Heather Skorinko
Mark Yatcilla - Vice Chair	Bob Korp	Susan Williams
Mike Kukitz - Director of Grants, Preservation, & Trails	Paul Semmel	Richard Semmel
	Stacy Yoder – Gilmore & Associates	Donna & Bob Steckel

Mike Kukitz, Director of Grants, Preservation & Trails called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm for the first time in our new township building, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

MEETING Agenda:

1. **Approval of July 10, 2025 Meeting Minutes:**

   Dennis Klusaritz noted that on page 2, item #4, and first bullet that says "counties" should be changed to "townships."

   Motion was made by Bob Korp to accept the minutes, with the correction noted by Dennis.
   Seconded by Paul Semmel.
   The motion was passed unanimously.

2. **Preserved Farmland Questionnaire:**

   Mike Kukitz, presented the following:

   - A questionnaire which will eventually be taken to individuals who preserved their property. This questionnaire will gather information and give the township some more information and history about preserved land/farms. He reviewed the questions which were given to each person in attendance.

- Mike would like to have an interactive questionnaire on the township website for residents to view.
- Dennis added that we should also ask if the farm is a Century Farm meaning a farm that has been in the same family for 100+ years. This question will be added to the questionnaire.
- Susan Williams inquired as to how many farms in the township are not preserved. It was determined after some discussion that this would be difficult and time consuming to determine but that staff should continue to send out preservation letters to all landowners who own 10 or more acres in the township.
- Dennis Klusaritz said that the date the farm was preserved is now located on the farm sign installed on the properties.

3. <u>PRESERVATION UPDATE:</u>

a. Skorinko #1 was approved August 4th at the board of Supervisors meeting.
b. A township map showing all preserved properties was handed out to those in attendance. Map was reviewed. Mike will contact GIS at Keystone Consulting Engineers to revise and create a new ASA and Preservation map. Properties that will most likely not be developed include schools, gun clubs, fire departments, etc. which were also shown on the map.
c. The 2026 Lehigh County ranking List shows that North Whitehall does not have any new farms that will be preserved in 2026 with county assistance unless the township would like to pursue preserving properties 'out of order'.

   - Pat S. farm property easement issue has been resolved will be preserved in 2026.
   - Ted R. farm – Mike will do a follow-up with him on his property issues.
   - Paul Semmel asked if any new farms are seeking and ASA designation. Mike said that the Stangel and Nemeth farm are as such.
   - Mike will create a map of all of the properties in the townships ASA.
   - Mike stated that the three 2025 farms that staff have been working on (Pat S., Heather S. #1, and Heather S. #2) will all be preserved in 2026 with county funding assistance.
   - Mike said that letters to land owners of 10 acres or more will be sent out around the holidays.
   - Dennis suggested to Randy that large framed maps of the area/pictures could be printed to hang around the township.

4. <u>OPEN SPACE ACTION PLAN</u> – Draft Plan Presentation

- Stacy from Gilmore and Associates gave a brief overview of the plan and highlighted the evaluation forms created to evaluate future easements and property acquisitions.

- Paul Semmel asked about the group of key person interviews that were done and what set of questions were asked. Stacy said no set formal questions were used. It was more of a free form discussion to gather thoughts and information regarding open space in North Whitehall.

- Stacy said both young and older farmers wanted more preservation but that they were also concerned about their own retirement and future decisions with regards to their property. Some other key person interviewees thought there was enough land preserved and there wasn't much interest in developing recreation/park land.

Bob Korp gave some observations he found in the action plan:

- Across surveys & interviews conducted for Comp Plan, PR&OS Plan, & this OSAP, residents repeatedly voice opposition to development pace/scale & support for open space preservation.
- The finance statistics were good
- Using a real-life cost breakdown will be beneficial in 'telling our story' if/when we educate the public on this plan and the costs associated with a potential EIT tax.
    - He gave an example as such:
      If a homeowner gave $169.98 per year which is $14.17 per month ($3.54 a week) this is less than the cost of a 9 ounce bag of potato chips per week. Or, 101.99 per year would be $2.12 per week.
- The report recommends a public relations campaign to ask voters for a dedicated 0.15-0.25 ETI to be done as a referendum to vote to preserve, protect and enhance the township's quality of life for a certain amount of acres per year for 5 years. If people vote it down at the ballot box, than that has become their choice and they will own having more development in their community.
- Since 2002 zoning permitted by-right development of many farmed and woodland properties into one acre lots.
- If there is inadequate funding for the future, there is a risk that 520 acres will be forever lost to development instead of preserving.

FINAL COMMENTS FROM FLOOR:

- Mike concluded that there should be an educational campaign for the people to understand the preservation processes.
- Sue Williams, Bob Korp, and Mike Kukitz discussed various avenues to do a campaign. Mike confirmed that funds for this are in the draft 2026 budget for approval.
- Randy Cope said there is still interest in doing a video with fly-over drones of various parts of the township to create interest.

Bob Korp made a motion to recommend the Open Space Action Plan be adopted by the Board of Supervisors.

Sue Williams 2nded the motion.
Everyone present was in favor.

MOTION TO ADJOURN: by Bob Korp, seconded by Paul Semmel.
Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Marlene Stofflet, Secretary

The Next Farmland Preservation/Open Space Committee meeting is scheduled for February 12, 2026.