



# ORPC Oxford Region Planning Committee

Chair: Albert Jezyk Jr. Vice-Chair: Charles Fleischmann Treasurer: Robert Ketcham

## October 2023 Meeting Report

**Thank you David for hosting the October 2023 Zoom meeting.**

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, October 27, 2023 - 7:00 pm      **Venue:** Zoom Video Conference

**Reported By:** Mark Gallant, ORPC Secretary

**Please note** that I have added a feature to the ORPC Meeting Report that identifies follow-up or homework for the ORPC secretary, membership, or individual member(s): **← Follow-up for Mark.** This should serve as a reminder and help to ensure that requested follow-up is completed.

**ORPC Representatives:** Rachel Greer – East Nottingham; Albert Jezyk, Jr. – Elk Township; Joel Brown – Lower Oxford Township; Bob Ketcham, Pauline Garcia Allen – Oxford Borough; Charles Fleischmann, Scott Rugen – Upper Oxford; David Ross – West Nottingham Township.

**Guests:** Ann Lane, Interim Director – Agricultural Development Council; Wes Bruckno, Senior Community Planner – Chester County Planning Commission.

**Chair’s Report** *Albert Jezyk, Jr.*  
None at this time.

**Treasurer’s Report** *Bob Ketcham*  
Balance: \$1,355.40.

**Municipal Updates and More** *Planning Committee*

*Upper Oxford.* Budget Season. Someone is talking about a sports venue or subdivision on Old Baltimore Pike near Lincoln University. Either option would have an impact on traffic in the area.

*Oxford Borough.* Debris removal from the demolition that followed the recent fire is scheduled to begin in early November. It is expected to take about four weeks and public safety and convenience are be prioritized. The Borough is completing a financial and operational review funded by the Strategic Management Planning Program (STMP). Following a baseline report in June, the consultant developed recommendations for changes and investments to increase the Borough’s financial capacity and avoid raising taxes.

One recommendation focuses on restructuring the Borough police department, that could result in a merger with the Southern Chester County Regional Police Department headquartered in New Garden. The Borough asks that the ORPC municipalities share their thoughts on regionalization by reaching out to Pauline. Pauline asked that police regionalization be discussed as part of the Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan update.

□ **The Future of Agriculture in the Oxford Region** *Wes Bruckno, Ann Lane*

Ann and Wes were in attendance to talk about a new initiative that the Chester County Planning Commission (CCPC) and Agricultural Development Council (ADC) are working on to promote ag-friendly zoning. Ann is the interim director of the ADC whose mission is to “make sure Chester County continues to be a place where agriculture can grow and thrive.” The ADC recently completed the County’s first Agricultural Economic Development Strategic Plan (the Plan) that was adopted by the Chester County Commissioners in March of 2023. While talking to stakeholders around the County about the Plan, one of the key issues identified was a need for more work with municipalities to get folks to understand that “we need to support the ag industry to help it continue to be here.”

This presentation follows up a letter that was sent to all applicable municipalities in the County with specific recommendations for making their ordinances more ag-friendly.

Wes introduced the tools/strategies for municipalities to consider to further promote agriculture (Consider the establishment of a designated or specialized agricultural district; Permit secondary farm businesses; Permit agricultural uses by right; permit controlled environment agriculture; permit agritainment) and the ORPC membership offered the following comments/questions/concerns:

- There is a need for an agritainment e-tool with sample ordinance language. What building codes are required to turn barns into event venues for things like weddings? When does event-hosting become the primary business over actual farming?
- Concern over ag vehicle transportation safety issues and how to work with farmers when they are asking for more tree branch removal and wider roads for their large equipment. What resources exist for municipalities to help pay for road maintenance/signage/changes? There is a need for more outreach to the public about sharing the road with ag vehicles, from combines to Amish buggies.
- Clarification on the definition of agriculture as it can be defined differently in different contexts. Does it include kennels? Does it include agritainment? Ag-related welding shops and support businesses? Composting? The state views concentrated animal farming operations (CAFO) one way, but the public may

have different feelings about the practice. It would be helpful to have a decisive definition.

- Agricultural zoning (1 dwelling unit per 10, 15, 20, 25, 50 acres) is great in theory but how do municipal officials work with landowners who are concerned that their development rights are worth less money than a landowner with property zoned at a higher density?
- How should municipalities be thinking about solar farming? What happens when companies want to cover prime ag soils with rows of solar panels? Is it truly compatible with farming or is it an end to agriculture? Who pays to have the panels removed at the end of their useful life? Can that property ever fully be restored?
- When does an accessory use become a primary use? For example, when a produce farm opens a welding shop, but that shop gets increasingly popular. Is it by square footage of the business it occupies? Is it by percent income generated by the property? How should municipalities define this?
- Promote the “note on the deed” practice. When homeowners purchase property, they are asked to initial that they understand they are buying in an agricultural area/district which may entail noise/odors/vehicle traffic. What enforcement options are available for municipalities once new owners sign this note?
- Help municipalities distinguish between ag zoning and ag security areas so they can explain it to residents.
- It’s not enough to hope that Amish farm owners will always choose farming over profit when they are approached by developers. There can be a strong temptation to sell and then purchase less expensive farmland elsewhere.
- For controlled environment agriculture, there should be provisions about businesses needing to be fully bonded to ensure that should an enterprise fail, the property will be restored to its original condition.
- In the upcoming ORPC comp plan update, it’s important to distinguish between “unused or vacant” land and land in agricultural production.
- Consider ways to help code officers enforce zoning. Clear, objective standards are a good way to address this.

The “ag-friendly zoning” strategy is an implementation tool for the County’s Comprehensive Plan, Landscapes<sup>3</sup>. Ann and Wes will return to the ORPC to present model ordinance standards.

- **Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan Update (MMCP) – draft VPP Grant Agreement** *Mark*  
In spite of the United States Postal Service, all of the VPP signature pages have been completed and the funding agreements have been signed. Speaking of the funding

agreements, we have received an invoice from Gawthrop Greenwood for development of the agreement - \$666.50 (The ORPC approved payment).

**Mini-survey:** To date, 52 mini-surveys (regional prioritization form) have been completed. Mark provided an overview of the early results and will complete a more thorough breakdown as we get closer to the end of the year. **Follow-up for ORPC membership** → ORPC municipalities should continue to push out the link and QR for the rest of 2023. See below. Either one or both can be used on your website, in your newsletter, or it can be printed out and included on a postcard to be handed out at your township building or at a community event such as the Apple Festival.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OxfordRegionSurvey>



**Existing Land Use Exercise.** Upper Oxford PC and BOS have started their review. Lower Oxford will begin their review in late October. Rachel Greer broke out the existing land use map into sections so the East Nottingham PC can work on their review individually.

□ **Activities of ORPC Subcommittees** *David and Mark*

**Regional Volunteer EAC.** The EAC hosted a table at the October First Friday (10/6) that focused on energy resiliency and stormwater. The EAC, led by Kathryn Cloyd has been involved with many activities including distribution of seeds that were harvested from the native plants in various locations in the Borough. Several locations for lawn to meadow conversions are being considered. The West Chester Green Team has offered to help reestablish the native plant pocket garden that was displaced by the fire. The EAC also had a conversation about how they could assist local planning commissions in implementing their regional early in the development application process (sketch plan phase).

**Historic Preservation Sub-Committee.** Mark was unable to attend the October meeting and will forward a meeting report to the ORPC membership. **← follow-up for Mark** Mark did share that Blair Fleischmann had taken more of a leadership role with the sub-committee and that he was very grateful for her increased participation.

□ **Public Input** None.

□ **Website Updates:** See for yourself:

<https://chescoplanning.org/municorner/projects/oxfordregion>

**Next Meeting:** December 7, 2023 via Zoom.