

TINICUM TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
September 9, 2025 – 7 pm

MEETING MINUTES

Committee Members

Dr. David Upmalis, Chair; Terry Johnston, Vice Chair; John Clement, Secretary; Neil Sullivan; Luke Sorenson; Dan Ullman; Melissa Gustafson

Roll Call of Members

Present: Dr. David Upmalis, Chair; Terry Johnston, Vice Chair; John Clement, Secretary; Dan Ullman; Melissa Gustafson; Neil Sullivan; Luke Sorenson

Number of Public in Attendance: 0

Call to Order: Dr. Upmalis

Public Comment: None

Approval of Meeting Minutes

MOTION by Mr. Johnston and seconded by Mr. Sullivan to approve the Planning Commission minutes of August 26, 2025. **Unanimous Vote to Approve.**

New Business

1. Review and advise with regards to the Agricultural Security Area Application for 336 E. Dark Hollow Road. TMP No. 44-022-001

Mr. Sorenson presented a history of the property, mentioning that definitive documentation including the property in the Agricultural Security Area could not be found, but cited several Township documents dating back to 1989 that indicate that it is included. The Bucks County Planning Commission had reached out to the Township for confirmation. Dr. Upmalis said the property meets all the criteria and has numerous features worth preserving, and Mr. Sorenson confirmed that the property is being used as a farm now.

A lengthy discussion followed regarding existing records of the ASA properties within the Township and how they are recorded to prevent similar issues in the future.

MOTION by Mr. Sullivan to recommend the Supervisors approve adding the subject property to the Agricultural Security Area. Seconded by Ms. Gustafson. Unanimous vote to approve.

Old Business

1. Comprehensive Plan

Dr. Upmalis discussed the expenses involved with hiring an outside resource to update the Comprehensive Plan and it was agreed that the cost was prohibitive. Mr. Clement agreed to contact members of the previous Comprehensive Plan committee to determine if an editable/digital copy of the current Plan exists.

Mr. Clement suggested that the Commission request that the Board put out a call for volunteers to form a Comprehensive Plan Update Committee to work with the Commission so that members of the community, especially residents who are experts in relevant fields covered in the Plan, could provide valuable input on subjects that Commission members might not be up to date on. Dr. Upmalis said that such a process could be time-consuming and lengthy. Mr. Clement said that working with a Committee might speed up the process considerably, noting that the Commission was already working at capacity with the current workload. Mr. Johnston agreed, adding there are numerous residents that could be better relied upon for their expert knowledge and experience in many important fields. Ms. Gustafson spoke of the need to streamline the document so that it's less unwieldy, which was generally agreed upon by the Commission, but it was also agreed that a searchable/digital version of the document would make it immensely more user-friendly.

It was agreed that an update Committee was desirable, and Dr. Upmalis agreed that he would discuss the matter with the Supervisors.

2. Warehouse Zoning

Mr. Johnston said that he would research the differences between the draft ordinance that was presented and what was approved.

3. Accessory Dwelling

Continued discussion on amending the Ordinance for accessory dwellings (or ADU's). The discussion focused on the current rules, particularly the requirement for double the acreage and a separate septic system for an accessory dwelling. It was argued that these rules are overly restrictive, based on thwarting worst-case scenarios, and make multi-generational living and/or "aging in place" in the Township extremely difficult, and it was noted that the Board of Health finds the idea of tying two dwellings into a single existing septic system impractical.

The group debated the original intent of the rules, suggesting it might have been to discourage accessory dwellings or to force the clustering of buildings to limit ecological impact. It was pointed out that allowing a shared septic system might actually encourage clustering more effectively than requiring a second, separate system. A concern was raised about the potential impact if a large number of residents were to build accessory dwellings for rental income prompted by a change in regulations. The discussion included anecdotal evidence of residents creating unpermitted living spaces (e.g., in a 'sheep shed') because the current rules are too restrictive. Examples of 'bad actors' were discussed, including a past situation where a travel trailer was improperly connected to a septic system, to illustrate how some residents bypass ordinances. However, it was also noted that many long-time residents often disregard the rules and that ordinances should not be designed solely to punish everyone for the actions of a few.

It was generally agreed that one logical step would be to amend the ordinance to allow a separate septic system for accessory dwellings, which would also encourage better overall septic health in the township.

The fact that the current ordinance limits the use of ADUs to family members or farm employees and prohibits renting them to the public was also discussed, which raised questions about the ordinance's effectiveness in promoting affordable housing. Several potential ordinance amendments were discussed, including setting a maximum size for ADUs (e.g., 1,500 sq ft), establishing a minimum lot size (e.g., two acres), and clarifying ambiguous terms like 'subordinate' which have led to restrictive interpretations regarding the placement of principal dwellings relative to ADUs.

Another discussion centered on the ambiguity of the term 'required front yard' in the Ordinance and the fact that accessory buildings are not allowed to be placed in the required front yard. It was noted that this rule had been interpreted in the past to prevent logical placements of accessory structures like garages, even when setback requirements were met. The consensus was that the language should be eliminated to avoid future misinterpretations and unnecessary challenges for property owners. Other related topics like septic requirements and the size of accessory dwellings were also discussed, but it was decided to address them separately.

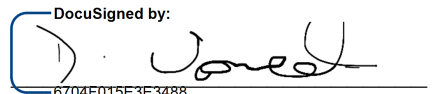
MOTION by Mr. Sullivan to recommend that the Board of Supervisors remove Section 900.12 – “Accessory Buildings in Front Yards” that reads “Accessory buildings shall not be permitted within required front yards” and renumber the following sections accordingly. Seconded by Mr. Sorenson. Unanimous Vote to Approve.

Adjournment

MOTION to adjourn by Mr. Johnston. Seconded by Ms. Gustafson. Unanimous vote to approve.

Date: 9/9/25

Approved By:

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Dr. David Upmalis, Chairperson

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Terry Johnston, Vice Chairperson

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John Clement, Secretary