

RESOLUTION OF THE FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP
(SOMERSET COUNTY)
ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
Master Plan (Conservation Element) - COMMENTS

The “Goals and Objectives” section of the “Conservation Plan Element” of the current Master Plan lists objectives that are appropriately worded; however, they do not appear to have been met.

The final goal listed, in the “Goals and Objectives” section, discusses “maintaining” and “protecting the Township’s historic and rural character...”. We can still protect the remaining historic character of the Township, but, we believe, even with over 30% of the Townships land base preserved, it may be too late to protect and maintain our rural character. Due to hard work a lot of progress has been made to maintain our rural character in portions of our Township. However, as a whole entity we now appear to be suburban and if we don’t act now to protect as much land as possible from unnecessary commercial, industrial and residential development, our remaining suburban character will become more and more urban.

We believe that the rezoning of areas to allow increased commercial and industrial development and the constant construction of single family homes, condominiums, townhouses and adult communities are leading us in the wrong direction. We are vehemently opposed to this practice of accommodation, believe it is contrary to the goals, ideals and intent of the Master Plan, and strongly advocate discontinuing these activities.

Franklin Township’s population has more than doubled in the past 25 years and our property taxes have more than doubled in the past 10 years. Although not necessarily the primary reason for our skyrocketing taxes, the increase in our tax ratable base has not stopped the taxes from rising rapidly. Our population and development growth has been a destructive venture both environmentally and financially.

The presence of open space enhances quality of life and increases property values. It is more economical to have open space than to build more housing.

The incredible amount of building occurring in Franklin, in part due to rezoning of agricultural areas and development in sensitive canal areas and in part caused by variances approved by the Township, is we believe, also contrary to the goals of the Master Plan. The building has substantially helped congest our roads, pollute our air and water, and cause flooding where in the past there wasn’t any.

In the “Water Resources” section of the “Conservation Plan Element” of the Master Plan, flooding is discussed as being “limited to relatively narrow corridors along the rivers and streams...”. Flooding is generally viewed as when the water overflows the banks of rivers and streams. What is not addressed is the flooding in hundreds if not thousands of basements on a routine basis. Part of the reason for this is that the rain water has less pervious ground to penetrate. The water flows to the areas of least resistance which frequently means basements where the sump pumps and French drains can’t handle the influx.

The clear cutting of forests, including significant old growth trees, at the new residential developments and commercial and industrial construction sites, also adds to the flooding problem. These trees and other vegetation would normally draw up a significant amount of water. Runoff from these sites is also polluting our streams, as proven by the Township Environmental Commission’s recent sampling project.

In the “Capacity-Based Planning” section of the Plan “effectuating proper ground water recharge” is discussed. In the “Conservation Plan” section, item 3 states, “Innovative techniques to reduce runoff and increase groundwater recharge should be explored...”. It further states, “Acceptable techniques should be incorporated in the Township site design standards as a supplement to County stormwater standards. Reductions in permitted impervious coverage and landbanking of required parking should be encouraged.”

To our knowledge, reductions in permitted impervious coverage have not been encouraged. Quite the opposite, from what we have seen. Furthermore, we are unaware of any “innovative techniques” that have been implemented or required in the new developments.

The Township Environmental Commission has extensively discussed groundwater recharge during the past 2 years and sent a letter to the Town Council addressing this issue including possible solutions. Whenever the Environmental Commission reviews a plan that requests a variance for construction that exceeds the allowable amount of impervious surfaces, the Environmental Commission routinely comments that these variances are unacceptable.

The best way to help conserve the integrity of our current suburban/rural atmosphere would be to stop the rezoning, stop the new construction whenever possible and stop the variance approvals, especially those that are contrary to the intent of the Master Plan.

We believe Franklin Township has veered off course, and should adhere to the original intent and wording specified in the Master Plans Conservation Element.

Our hope is that a well developed Master Plan will provide for responsible development that is respectful of the residents and the environment of Franklin Township.

Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved, that these comments be submitted to the Franklin Township Town Council and the Planning Board so that they and all other relevant Township Boards and Commissions shall protect and maintain the Townships suburban/rural character to the extent possible by following the currently outlined “Goals and Objective” of the Master Plans Conservation Element, by most specifically not allowing increased density via rezoning, the rezoning of agricultural and canal preservation areas and by not allowing variances that are counterproductive to the “Goals and Objectives” as well as to the health and well being of the Townships residents, wildlife and environment.

Adopted April 11, 2005, by vote of the Environmental Commission.

Commission Members

Barbara Beringer
Dr. Theodore Chase
John Clyde
Andrew Cozzi
Jean Gierlich
Arnold Schmidt, Chair
David Triggs
Lisa Huguenin, Alternate
Gary Randolph, Alternate