

**MIDDLESEX TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES**

August 24, 2026

START TIME: 6:59 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:16 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Tracy Gleim (Chairman)

Larry Claycomb

Robynn Eppley

Jim Gehr

Doug Graham

Wes Beard

Kelley Brickey

TOWNSHIP STAFF PRESENT:

Mark Carpenter, Zoning Officer

Bud Grove, Township Engineer

Zach Zook, Manager/Roadmaster

Tracy Gleim called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and John Manta to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENT (non-agenda items):

Michelle Skurzynski, 1 Aspen Lane, Country Manor West: Asked about the location and time of the upcoming Board of Supervisors meeting. Zach Zook stated the location has not yet been confirmed and will be posted on the Township website once finalized.

Earl Beam, 303 Country Club Road, Carlisle: Asked about emergency planning for a potential lithium fire or evacuation at the PAX-1 site and responsibility for related costs. Doug Graham stated contractors, developers, and future tenants are required to maintain emergency response action plans. Mr. Beam also requested access to meeting minutes without a computer, and Zach Zook offered to provide printed copies.

John Manta, 255 Wolfs Bridge Road, Carlisle: Asked about security and safety concerns at the Diamond Hotel, including unauthorized entry and children accessing the property. Mark Carpenter stated the matter is regularly addressed by Gerald Steigleman at Board of Supervisors meetings and efforts are underway to secure and board the building.

Approval of Minutes for August 10, 2026.

Robynn Eppley moved to approve the minutes of the August 10, 2026, Planning Commission meeting. Motion was seconded by Doug Graham. The motion approved, 7-0.

TPF 26-17. Discussion and Possible Recommendation on Application by Cumberland County for Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment to allow Principal Solar Energy Systems by Conditional Use in the Institutional (INS) Districts. (PC action deadline September 27, 2026, prior to October 07, 2026, BOS Public Hearing).

Principal Solar Energy Systems – Conditional Use

Principal Solar Energy Systems – Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment

Joyce Gerhart, RGS Associates, presented a proposal to amend the Zoning Ordinance to permit Principal Solar Energy Systems as a conditional use in the Institutional District. The proposed project is located along Army Heritage Drive near I-81 on an approximately 21-acre County-owned parcel south of the UGI facility. Gerhart stated that principal solar systems are currently permitted in the Highway Commercial and Industrial Districts.

Robynn Eppley asked county representatives how much of the property would be occupied by the solar array. Joyce Gerhart stated most of the 21-acre parcel would be utilized. Seth Berry, Solar Renewable Energy, later estimated approximately 17 acres of panel coverage. Discussion followed regarding Class 1 and Class 2 agricultural soils and under the “Environmental Protection” section.

Larry Claycomb asked about setbacks, property lines, and fire-code separation requirements between the solar generating facility and the adjacent UGI natural gas facility. Seth Berry stated he would investigate the applicable fire-code requirements. Tracy Gleim confirmed with Ms. Gerhart that the solar property directly adjoins the UGI property.

Kelley Brickey asked about the distance between the proposed solar installation and nearby residences at the Grange. Gerhart estimated approximately 300 feet, including an existing wooded buffer. Wetlands were also discussed, with Ms. Gerhart indicating that their extent would be evaluated as the project progresses. Larry Claycomb asked whether Cumberland County has additional plans for the surrounding property. Kirk Stoner, Cumberland County Director of Planning, stated that the County owns three parcels totaling approximately 80 acres. The only immediate additional plan is a second well for the Middlesex Township Municipal Authority on the rear portion of one parcel.

Mr. Stoner explained that earlier drafts of the recently adopted Middlesex Township Zoning Ordinance permitted Principal Solar Energy Systems in the Institutional District, but that provision was subsequently removed. He stated that County staff has been unable to determine why or when the change occurred and believes the omission may have been an administrative error.

Robynn Eppley noted that the zoning ordinance was developed over approximately three years with substantial participation from Township and County officials. Jim Gehr stated that numerous revisions occurred during that process and noted that the Board of Supervisors had previously indicated that further zoning amendments would generally be deferred until completion of the Comprehensive Plan. Gehr asked

whether the County could wait, although he stated that he considered the proposed location appropriate for solar development.

Kirk Stoner responded that postponement could jeopardize the project because of expiring federal incentives. He estimated the project would save Cumberland County approximately \$19 million over 40 years. Eppley asked whether these savings would result in direct tax relief and how they would be distributed among the County's municipalities. Stoner clarified that the savings would support County services rather than provide a direct tax reduction to individual residents.

Mr. Stoner stated that the financial projections assume approximately 2% annual increases in utility costs over the project's life. Larry Claycomb suggested that the Commission evaluate the proposal on its individual merits rather than rely upon whether the zoning provision had been removed inadvertently.

Kelley Brickey questioned the relationship between the proposed solar project and the Township Authority's planned Well No. 2. Kirk Stoner explained that other development could create substantially more impervious surface, while a solar array would retain greater stormwater infiltration and could therefore be beneficial to groundwater recharge associated with the well.

Tracy Gleim asked about the project's anticipated term. Seth Berry stated that the contract is for 30 years, while the equipment has an estimated useful life of approximately 40 years and carries a 30-year warranty. Mr. Berry stated that the proposed equipment is highly rated and that panels would likely be sourced domestically, including from manufacturers in Florida and Texas. Jim Gehr expressed his skepticism regarding the projected rate of return. Mr. Gehr also questioned the timing of the County's application for the solar installation as the Federal incentives for PSES installations were contained in the "Big Beautiful" Bill, passed by the U.S. Congress on July 3, 2025.

Kirk Stoner stated that the County has no plans to permanently preserve the property for agriculture and believes solar development represents the best current use of the land.

Mr. Neidich, Green Works Development, identified Green Works as Solar Renewable Energy's project partner. He explained that solar panels have no moving parts and are projected to degrade approximately 0.5% annually. He stated that increasing electricity prices could make the electricity generated by the system more valuable over time even as panel output gradually declines. Mr. Neidich stated that Green Works has developed hundreds of projects representing approximately \$600 million in solar assets over 16 years and has provided the County with references from school districts and municipalities.

Mr. Neidich also stated that increasing regional electricity demand, including demand associated with future data-center development, could contribute to higher electricity costs. He emphasized that the project must meet an upcoming completion deadline for the County to qualify for available federal tax incentives.

Tracy Gleim reminded everyone the public hearing for the proposed zoning ordinance amendment is scheduled for October 7, 2026.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Ashley Asper, no address provided, asked whether amending the Zoning Ordinance would apply broadly to future projects throughout the Township. Jim Gehr indicated that it would. Ms. Asper stated that she opposed a Township-wide amendment because of its potential impact on future projects and residents. She also asked about the size of the proposed installation. Seth Berry stated that each panel would be approximately 7 feet by 3½ feet and that the project would include approximately 8,475 panels.

Larry Claycomb sought clarification regarding the effect of permitting principal solar systems in the Institutional District. Mark Carpenter explained that such systems would be permitted as a conditional use within that zoning district, requiring approval by the Board of Supervisors following a conditional-use hearing before submission of a land development plan.

Earl Beam, 303 Country Club Road, questioned the projected 40-year useful life of the solar panels, citing his own experience with residential solar panels that performed for substantially less time than originally represented.

Phil Neiderer, Middlesex Township Supervisor, corrected an earlier characterization of Board policy. Dr. Neiderer quoted the Board of Supervisors' February 27, 2026, motion, which unanimously suspended further zoning map or ordinance amendments or overlay districts that would permit or expand data center uses until completion and adoption of an updated Comprehensive Plan. Dr. Neiderer emphasized that the Board's action was specifically intended as a moratorium on additional data-center development, rather than zoning amendments generally.

John Manta, 255 Wolfs Bridge Road, questioned the projected lifespan of the solar panels and raised concerns regarding long-term deterioration, eventual decommissioning, potential heavy-metal contamination of the soil and aquifer, impacts to Well No. 2, farmland, wildlife, and the environment. He requested consideration of an environmental impact study and questioned the practical public benefit of the projected \$19 million in County savings when distributed over approximately 40 years. Manta also asked for the specific federal incentive deadline creating urgency for the project.

Josh Asper, Horners Road, suggested that any approval should apply only to the proposed project rather than amending the Institutional District generally. Mark Carpenter explained that Institutional zoning includes properties such as the sewage treatment facility, Township parks, recreational facilities, and the (Carlisle Country Club) golf course. Mark Carpenter noted that the golf course had previously been zoned Open Space Conservation before being changed to Institutional because recreational uses were considered compatible with that district.

Tracy Gleim asked Mark Carpenter approximately how many acres were contained within the Institutional zoned area. Mark stated he was not sure but estimated around 500 acres +/-.

Jim Gehr accessed the Board of Supervisors' meeting minutes from February 27, 2026, wherein the approved minutes state: "On the motion of Vice-Chairman Neiderer, seconded by Supervisor Goodhart, it was unanimously agreed to not allow any further amendments to the zoning map and zoning ordinance or establish overlay districts that would permit or expand data centers' uses within the Township has

completed and formally adopted an updated comprehensive addressing the future of the Township to include data center land use, infrastructure impacts as well as community impacts.” Jim Gehr commented Dr. Neiderer’s February 27 comments were very straightforward and applicable to the discussion at hand. Additionally, that particular meeting (02/27/2026), there was much public comment to the action taken by the Board of Supervisors, including comments from himself, John Manta, Robin Eppley, and Mr. Brenneman, the Township solicitor.

Mark Carpenter countered Mr. Gehr and stated Comm if you want my opinion I think we are short sighted not to use as much solar energy as we can. Mark continued to say he believes the owners are very responsible and there are no lithium batteries being used, but rather inverters would be (which have a shorter life span).

Mark Carpenter countered Mr Gehr and, if you want my opinion I think we are short sighted not to use as much solar energy as we can. Mark continued to say he believes owners are very responsible, there are no lithium batteries being used, but rather inverters which would have a shorter life span.

Doug Graham stated he didn’t believe the Planning Commission was against a solar application as its intended location up against I-81, it was more the fact the Planning Commission was being asked to do something that previously had been paused until after the rewrite of the Township’s Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Carpenter countered there was a Township supervisor present that stated what was codified at the February 27 2026, meeting was not his intention.

Tracy Gleim brought the discussion back around to Principal Solar Energy Systems (PSES) of 20 acres or less being allowed in institutional zoning districts as a conditional use. Tracy shared he had investigated a solar application on his farm previously but with zoning changes the Gleim Farm would be prohibited from installing a PSES. However, Gleim could install a smaller (personal) scale solar installation. Mark Carpenter stated he thought Tracy was aware of the change when the Township voted on the zoning ordinance. “Well, we talked about it and discussed it before we acted on it. I even talked with the county about removing it from the institutional before it was done.” Tracy, this is a decision that was made. The public seems to not want them. I would say they are opposed to them. We had allowed them in the AG District in the new zoning ordinance and in the R1, and in the institutional district and in the C 2. The supervisors heard what the public was saying.”

Tracy Gleim said, “So, it seems that the government can have a 20-acre solar array, but I cannot.” Mark Carpenter countered with, “We talked about it and discussed it before we acted on it. I even talked with the County about removing it from the institutional area before it was done. I would say *that* are opposed to them. We allowed them in the AG district in the revised zoning ordinance and in the R1, and in the Institutional District and in the C2. They were removed from all the districts except for the Industrial and the C1.”

Mark Carpenter stated he supports solar energy and believes solar facilities can be developed with limited environmental impact when properly monitored, mitigated, and optimized. Mark clarified that the proposed solar panels do not use lithium batteries. Mark also noted, with Supervisor Niederer present, that the board’s prior zoning action was intended specifically to restrict additional data center related zoning changes.

Kirk Stoner stated that Cumberland County would be responsible for decommissioning the solar facility. He also referenced recently enacted Pennsylvania legislation requiring landowners to assume responsibility for decommissioning solar projects.

Mark Carpenter explained that the Board of Supervisors had received the application, scheduled it for public hearing, and requested a recommendation from the Planning Commission. He stated that determining consistency with Board policy ultimately rests with the Board of Supervisors.

Larry Claycomb stated that the Planning Commission's role is to evaluate the proposal under the applicable Zoning Ordinance and make a recommendation, distinguishing the ordinance requirements from Board policy.

Joyce Gerhart stated that she had no additional comments regarding the application.

Tracy Gleim stated he would entertain a motion.

Prior to the vote Wes Beard asked whether the Planning Commission had ever rendered a “no recommendation” decision. Discussion took place among the Planning Commission members. Larry Claycomb stated as he saw it, the Commission had three choices: 1) do nothing; 2) vote to recommend; 3) vote not to recommend. Wes Beard asked whether a vote on the county’s application would be exclusive to their parcel off I-81, or whether the change would apply to all property located within the “industrial” zoning areas. Tracy Gleim also stated a lack of action on the part of the Planning Commission was essentially the same as a “no” vote.

Robynn Eppley made a motion to recommend denial of application of TPF 26-17. Motion was seconded by Kelley Brickey. Motion approved 6 yay, 1 nay, (Larry Claycomb).

**TPF 26-14 Discussion and Possible Recommendation on Preliminary Final Land Development Plan for Sheetz Store #191 Rebuild
(BOS action deadline September 2, 2026)**

Larry Claycomb made a motion to table TPF 26-14. Motion was seconded by Wes Beard. Motion approved, 7-0.

Doug Graham made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion was seconded by Larry Claycomb. Motion approved, 7-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Action Summary Below

FORMAL ACTIONS

MOTION	MOVED BY	SECONDED BY	VOTE	ACTION
Approval of Minutes for August 10, 2026	Robynn Eppley	Doug Graham	7-0	Motion carried.
Denial of application of TPF 26-17.	Robynn Eppley	Kelley Brickey	6-1	Motion carried.
Table item TPF 26-14.	Larry Claycomb	Wes Beard	7-0	Motion carried.
Motion to adjourn. Adjournment 8:16 p.m.	Doug Graham	Larry Claycomb	7-0	Motion carried.

Date Approved: October 12, 2026