

Pennsbury Township Planning Commission Minutes

April 8, 2026

Present: Kay Ellsworth, Joe Short, George Trammell, Karen Meloney, Dennis Smith, and Dan Boyle.

Chair Kay Ellsworth called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in the Harris Room.

The minutes of the Planning Commission meeting of March 11, 2026, were presented. A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by George Trammell and seconded by Karen Meloney. The motion passed unanimously.

Sketch Plan--Windmill Hollow Reverse Subdivision (Brinton's Bridge Road)

Chair Kay Ellsworth advised all parties that the current review is limited to a sketch plan and carries no legal or binding effect on the Township. She explained that sketch plan reviews are conducted by the Planning Commission for preliminary, non-binding discussion purposes, allowing applicants and the Township to identify potential issues, provide initial feedback, and guide the preparation of a formal land development or subdivision application. As such, the review is for informational purposes only, and any information communicated between the parties should not be relied upon.

Applicant's representative Marina Perez, on behalf of property owner Dick Sanford, presented a sketch plan for a proposed reverse subdivision of Phase 2 of the Windmill Properties tract off Brinton's Bridge Road. Phase 2 consists of approximately 64.5 acres currently approved as five lots under an existing subdivision plan.

Ms. Perez explained that Mr. Sanford began acquiring the overall property in 1989 and, by 2002, had assembled roughly 250 acres, much of which lies within the Brandywine Battlefield Overlay District. In 1995, he constructed his residence on what later became Phase 1. In February 2026, he sold the Phase 1 main house lot and two additional large lots (totaling approximately 90 acres) to a single buyer,

consistent with his long-standing goal of limiting the number of homes on the property.

Mr. Sanford retains the Phase 2 acreage, approximately 44.5 acres fronting U.S. Rt. 1, and two existing riverfront lots extending to the Brandywine River. He has no present intention of selling or developing the Route 1 frontage or the riverfront lots.

The applicant is proposing to rescind the existing five-lot Phase 2 subdivision and recombine the tract into a single lot. Mr. and Mrs. Sanford would then construct a smaller residence for themselves within this recombined parcel while preserving the land as open space and allowing for a family compound setting, with adult children potentially occupying existing and nearby dwellings. Ms. Perez emphasized that Mr. Sanford does not wish to build the long private road that would be required to serve the currently approved lots and does not want additional houses constructed on the tract to finance that improvement.

The property is presently improved by a “spring house apartment” and a small tenant house. The spring house apartment is vacant but maintained under a historic façade easement to the Pennsbury Land Trust. The small tenant house is currently occupied by Mr. Sanford’s daughter and is not intended to be rented. The land itself is largely open and rolling, with some wooded pockets and an extensive network of gravel and grass carriage trails.

Access is via a shared driveway from Brinton’s Bridge Road serving the McManus residence, the tenant house, and the spring house apartment. The driveway has a wide apron at the road, but narrows to roughly 12 feet and crosses a small stream by means of a culvert/bridge. Ms. Perez indicated that extending the driveway approximately 1,000 feet to the proposed new house site would involve minimal grading and no significant tree removal.

Township Engineer Matt Houtmann noted that Township ordinances require a 16-foot-wide surface for shared driveways for the first 75 feet from the public road and that any future development of the riverfront lots would trigger a need to upgrade the initial segment of the driveway and the bridge to private road

standards for emergency access. Ms. Perez acknowledged these requirements and stated that the owner will coordinate with the Township Engineer as part of any formal application.

The Commission discussed frontage requirements in the R-1 District, including minimum frontage for interior/flag lots. It was noted that a 50-foot private road right-of-way was established with the earlier subdivision and that Phase 2 retains sufficient frontage for zoning purposes.

Ms. Perez advised that homeowners' association documents, driveway maintenance and easement agreements, and related recorded instruments linked to the prior subdivision will be reviewed with counsel so that provisions that are no longer applicable after recombination can be amended or extinguished.

Members of the Planning Commission expressed general support for reducing the number of approved lots and recombining ground in a manner that preserves open land and limits further residential density. As the plan was presented for sketch review only, no formal action was taken. The applicant will prepare and submit a formal reverse subdivision application to the Township. Upon receipt, the Township will forward the application to the Chester County Planning Commission for review pursuant to Section 347 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

800 & 1000 Hickory Hill Road – Conditional Use

Attorney Max O'Keefe, engineer Tom Schreier, and property owners John and Jill Renninger presented the status of the four-lot subdivision and Conditional Use application for 800 & 1000 Hickory Hill Road, a property subject to a Brandywine Conservancy conservation easement and located within the Brandywine Battlefield Overlay District. The proposal involves four single-family dwellings and the historic Isaac Mendenhall spring house.

Mr. O'Keefe reported that Township Landscape Architect Anne Walters, in a letter dated April 8, 2026, reviewed the proposed landscaping along Hickory Hill Road. The original plan depicted a formal allée of evenly spaced street trees. Ms. Walters instead recommended a more naturalized arrangement of trees and

shrubs in clusters, which would better satisfy the ordinance's requirements for a continuous green buffer while preserving valued views across the open fields.

In response, the applicant prepared an alternative landscape plan showing approximately 21 trees and 10 additional shrubs along Hickory Hill Road in irregular groupings rather than evenly spaced intervals. Planning Commission members commented that the revised design appears to implement the Township landscape architect's guidance by providing a continuous, yet visually varied, roadside buffer while maintaining key viewsheds and potential agricultural use.

The Historical Commission, represented by Judi Wilson, advised that it had reviewed the proposed elevations and concluded that three of the four homes (on Lots 1, 3, and 4) do not fully conform to the specific historic architectural styles referenced in the Brandywine Battlefield Overlay District regulations, although they are high-quality contemporary interpretations. The Historical Commission recommended that additional landscaping be used around the dwellings on Lots 1 and 4 to soften their appearance and reduce the extent of façades visible from the public right-of-way. The house on Lot 3 was of less concern because it is not viewable from any public right-of-way at any time of the year. The house on Lot 2 was viewed as more consistent with the prescribed styles, though normal residential landscaping is still anticipated.

The applicant maintained that all four homes are generally consistent with the ordinance criteria and indicated a willingness to present expert architectural testimony at the Conditional Use hearing. The parties acknowledged that the degree to which the structures satisfy the stylistic requirements is, to some extent, subjective.

Additional landscaping was discussed for Lots 1 and 4, which are more visible from Hickory Hill Road. The applicant presented a supplemental plan for Lot 4 that adds evergreen and flowering trees between the proposed dwelling and Hickory Hill Road along the existing woodland edge to strengthen year-round screening of the house when viewed from the road and from the Isaac Mendenhall historic resource across the road. Similar additional plantings are proposed for Lot 1 to break up the building as seen from Hickory Hill Road. The Commission agreed that

this supplemental landscaping for Lots 1 and 4 should be incorporated as a condition of approval.

The Commission then discussed the historic Isaac Mendenhall spring house. A Historic Resource Impact Study dated May 2025 identifies seven mitigation measures (items 1–7 on page 49). Chair Ellsworth noted that while the subdivision is not expected to significantly impact the spring house physically, the Township seeks to ensure the structure is properly cared for and not subjected to “demolition by neglect.”

The applicant expressed concern that the recommendation in the Impact Study to “rehabilitate” the spring house could be interpreted as requiring a potentially extensive and open-ended restoration. Following the discussion, there was consensus that the owner should be required to maintain the spring house in good condition, based on a professional assessment, but not be bound to a vague or unlimited rehabilitation mandate. There was also a discussion of a sentence in the Impact Study suggesting that all four lot owners share financial responsibility for long-term maintenance. Commission members felt that prescribing a specific multi-owner cost-sharing arrangement could be problematic over time and that future responsibility should instead flow from recorded easements or agreements associated with the final plan.

Historical Commission Chair Wilson requested that any substantial work on the spring house be supervised by a qualified professional with historic building expertise. The owner indicated an intention to repair and improve the spring house at an appropriate point in the project, and expressed a desire to work cooperatively with the Historical Commission rather than undergo an extended, iterative review process.

Following discussion, a motion was made by Karen Meloney to recommend that the Board of Supervisors approve the Conditional Use application for the four-lot Hickory Hill Road development, subject to the following conditions:

1. That applicants implement the revised, “naturalistic” landscape design (the plan presented at the PC meeting on April 8, 2026) of the required street

- trees along Hickory Hill Road in keeping with the recommendation of Anne Walters, including clustering the trees and adding shrubs to the groupings.
2. That applicants comply with all mitigation measures stated in the Isaac Mendenhall Springhouse Historic Resource Impact Study, dated May 2025, as they relate to the Springhouse; that is, items 1-7 on p. 49, with three modifications:
 - a. In paragraph 4, the word “Rehabilitate” is replaced with “Maintain”.
 - b. In paragraph 6, the last sentence is stricken.
 - c. An additional measure is added, which is that the restoration of the Springhouse shall be overseen by a historic building professional.
 3. That applicants implement their landscape plan presented at the PC meeting on April 8, 2026, to plant flowering, deciduous trees and evergreens on the ridgeline below the southernmost residence (Residence #4) to eventually screen the house from Hickory Hill Road and the Isaac Mendenhall Farmhouse, even in the winter.
 4. That applicants implement their landscape plan presented at the PC meeting on April 8, 2026, to plant a group of evergreens as additional screening of Residence #1 to soften the view of the top part of the house from Hickory Hill Road.

800 & 1000 Hickory Hill Road – Four-Lot Subdivision Plan

The PC next considered the subdivision and land development plan for 800 & 1000 Hickory Hill Road. Township Engineer Matt Houtmann summarized his review letter dated April 7, 2026. He stated that most comments are technical in nature and can be addressed as the plan moves to final approval.

Outstanding issues include final stormwater management calculations and details, a driveway connection detail to demonstrate proper handling of roadside drainage where the new drive meets Hickory Hill Road, and documentation of access easements, including a shared driveway/barn access easement between Lots 1 and 2 and a 30-foot access easement over Lot 4 for the benefit of Lot 3. Mr. Houtmann noted that an earlier concern regarding the Lot 1 driveway encroaching onto Lot 2 has been resolved by shifting the drive fully onto Lot 1.

The applicant and engineer indicated that the Lot 1/Lot 2 barn access easement will be drafted so that it can be extinguished by mutual agreement of the two property owners in the future, while the Lot 3/Lot 4 access easement will remain a permanent easement for shared driveway access.

The PC briefly discussed the Township's recreation/open space or fee-in-lieu requirement. Mr. O'Keefe suggested that, given the large-lot, low-density nature of the subdivision and the substantial open land preserved, the applicant may request a waiver from the fee requirement, subject to review and decision by the Board of Supervisors.

The Brandywine Conservancy has issued preliminary approval for the project and has requested submission of final landscape plans and the final subdivision plan for review and written approval. The applicant agreed to provide the requested materials and comply with the Conservancy's conditions.

At the applicant's request to avoid a return appearance limited to minor technical matters, a motion was made by George Trammell to recommend that the Board of Supervisors approve the subdivision plan for 800 & 1000 Hickory Hill Road, contingent upon (1) the applicant resolving all outstanding comments in the Township Engineer's April 7, 2026 review letter, and (2) the applicant obtaining written approval from the Brandywine Conservancy for the final subdivision and landscape plans and complying with any conditions imposed by the Conservancy. The motion was seconded by Dennis Smith and passed unanimously.

Comprehensive Plan Update

Karen Meloney provided a brief update on the ongoing Comprehensive Plan process. She reported that a recent public workshop was held at the Township Building, with attendance by several residents and members of the Planning Commission. The workshop included interactive stations at which participants identified where they live, listed priorities and concerns, and allocated play money among categories such as housing variety, open space and recreation, and transportation improvements.

Ms. Meloney noted that traffic concerns, particularly along U.S. Rt. 1 and at intersections such as Parkersville Road, were a recurring theme in the public comments. She advised that the consultant had begun receiving survey responses using the QR code. Kay Ellsworth stated that the Township newsletter containing the Comprehensive Plan survey has been mailed and will arrive in residents' mailboxes soon. Additional public input is anticipated as more residents complete and return the survey.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dan Boyle
Recording Secretary