

Washington Township

Northampton County - Planning Commission

Public Meeting

Tuesday, June 16, 2026

7:00 PM

The Washington Township Planning Commission public meeting was held Tuesday, June 16, 2026, at the Municipal Building, 1021 Washington Blvd, Bangor, PA.

Members in attendance were:

- Chair Charles Dertinger
- Vice Chair Michael Mazzella
- Commissioner Carol Rice - excused
- Commissioner Katie Purdue -excused
- Commissioner John Buck
- Engineer Matt Evans (KCE)
- Solicitor Ricky Santee
- PC Secretary Lisa Shetler

There were 8 people in the audience.

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Dertinger called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The pledge was recited.
3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING: Commissioner Buck made a motion, seconded by Vice Chair Mazzella, to approve the 04.21.26 minutes. The motion passed unanimously.
4. SUBDIVISIONS / SUBMISSIONS:

Township Job Name: GGH Investment LLC Lot Consolidation 2026

Applicant: GGH Investment LLC

Address: 359 & 363 Blue Valley Drive

Engineer/Surveyor: Stateline Engineering LLC

Time: 7-7:30

Matt Evans from Keystone Consulting Engineers (KCE) presented the review letter for Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) and Stormwater Management Ordinance, as amended, and offered the following:

PROJECT NARRATIVE

This office has received and reviewed a Lot Consolidation application submitted by GGH Investment LLC. (property owner of record), dated May 6, 2026, for the properties located at 359 & 363 Blue Valley Drive, Bangor, Pennsylvania 18013, identified as Tax Parcels E9-3-2D and E9-3-2G. The subject properties consist of approximately +/- 0.4310 acres and +/- 2.3190 acres and are located within the Commercial (C) Zoning District. The applicant is proposing to consolidate the two (2) existing commercial parcels into one (1) proposed +/- 2.7501-acre lot. There is no additional development proposed at this time. The submission has been classified as a Lot Consolidation/Reverse Subdivision and the plan has been prepared by Stateline Engineering, LLC and submitted as a Preliminary/Final Plan.

SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT COMMENTS

1. SALDO Article 7 – 7.2.A – Submission and Review Procedure – Minor subdivisions shall be reviewed as a Final Plan in accordance with this Section. Please revise the plan title to reference only a Final Plan.
2. SALDO Article 7 – 7.3.B.2.c – Final Plan Requirements – The property is owned by a limited liability company (LLC). It is recommended that the applicant provide documentation verifying that the individual signing the plans is an authorized corporate officer with the authority to execute documents on behalf of the LLC.
3. SALDO Article 7 - 7.3.B.2.d - Final Plan Requirements – The plan does not appear to identify all owners of the properties surrounding the subject property. The property to the south of Blue Valley Drive are not identified on the plan.
4. SALDO Article 7 - 7.3.B.3 – Final Plan Requirements – Certification of ownership is to be signed by all owners of the subject property(ies) and notarization is required. Certifications have been provided and shall be executed. Also see comment 2 above.
5. SALDO Article 7 - 7.3.B.4 – Final Plan Requirements – The Engineer's/Surveyor's certification language shall be substantially consistent with the language provided in Appendix C, or as otherwise deemed acceptable by the Township Solicitor
6. SALDO Article 7 - 7.3.B.5 – Final Plan Requirements - The plan includes approval/review signature blocks. Confirm that the block for the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) includes adequate space for the LVPC's approval seal, as required by the Appendix B.1.D.5 checklist.
7. SALDO Article 7 – 7.3.C.1 – Final Plan Requirements – Contours shall be provided based on accurate field survey or photogrammetric procedure. A note indicating where existing contour data was derived shall be provided on the plan.
8. SALDO Article 7 - 7.3.C.4 – Final Plan Requirements – Reference to the FEMA FIRM Panel should be added to Note 3.
9. SALDO Article 7 - 7.3.E.1 – Final Plan Requirements – Right-of-way width and pavement width for Blue Valley Drive should be provided on the plan.
10. SALDO Article 7 - 7.3.E.4 – Final Plan Requirements – The location of all existing utilities (ie: water lines, electric service line, gas line, etc.) shall be shown on the plan.
11. SALDO Article 7 - 7.3.E.5 – Final Plan Requirements – Any easement, covenants, or restrictions of which may affect development shall be included on the plan.

12. SALDO Article 7 – 7.5.A. – Access by Easement - The applicant shall provide documentation demonstrating legal access to the State roadway, including a valid PennDOT Highway Occupancy Permit (HOP) or equivalent evidence that the access is pre-existing and compliant in accordance with Article 10.12.B. Where access does not meet current ordinance requirements, the applicant shall demonstrate compliance with this Section Article 7.5 (Access by Easement).
13. SALDO Article 8 – Guarantee of Improvements Installation – An improvements guarantee and development agreement may be required in accordance with this Section.
14. SALDO Article 9 – Recording of Final Plan – The Final Plan approved by the Board of Supervisors shall be recorded in the office of the Northampton County Recorder of Deeds in accordance with this section and all costs of recording shall be the responsibility of the Applicant.
15. SALDO Article 10 – 10.7 – Open Space and Recreation Areas – The Board of Supervisors may require dedication of open space or a cash in lieu fee be provided by the applicant. *RYAN DENTITH, ON BEHALF OF THE APPLICANT, REQUESTED WAIVER AT THE TIME OF THE MEETING/RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.*

GENERAL COMMENTS

Any comments from the Township Zoning Officer and the Township Solicitor shall be satisfactorily addressed. Any proposed waivers or modifications shall be made in writing with sufficient justification.

ZONING CONCERNS:

1. There is no HOP from the State Highway Department. There should be a designated entrance and exit.
2. The existing garage on Lot 3 was permitted for residential storage only. I feel this should be noted on the plan.
3. The existing garage with 2nd floor apartment has no bathroom in ground level garage. Therefore, I feel it should be noted before any commercial activity takes place in that garage; restroom facilities need to be approved. Garage should be brought up to code since there is a 3-bedroom apartment on 2nd floor area.

Although this is just being considered as a lot consolidation, I feel that future use could be addressed at this time. The previous use has been abandoned for more than 12 months

Commissioner Buck made the motion, seconded by Chair Dertinger, to recommend approval of waiver #15.

Commissioner Buck made the motion, seconded by Vice Chair Mazzella, to have the BOS grant conditional approval of the plans as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

ADVISORY REVIEW:

Township Job Name: Franklin Hill Solar West & East

Applicant: FFP PA Washington Project1, LLC & FFP PA Washington West Project1, LLC

Address: Franklin Hill Rd (No 911 Address); 223, 237, 239, and 245 Franklin Hill Rd

Council for Applicant: Attorney Shawn Gallagher

Developer: Forefront Power, Christian Schlesinger

Property Owner: John Domingues

Time: 7:30-8:22

The Board of Supervisors at its May 13, 2026, meeting directed that the above-referenced matter be transmitted by the zoning office to the Planning Commission for an advisory review with the request that the proposal be reviewed in comparison to the township's comprehensive plan and current zoning ordinance. This advisory review is permitted by Section 8.2.A.3.d of the Zoning Ordinance.

Mike Evans of KCE prepared the following comments for review:

1. Introduction

Keystone Consulting Engineers, Inc. has completed a planning review of the proposed Franklin Hill Road Solar Fields, a coordinated two-site solar development located both southwest and east of the intersection of Franklin Hill Road and West Factoryville Road in Washington Township.

This review evaluates the proposal for consistency with the Washington Township Zoning Ordinance and the Slate Belt Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan (Plan Slate Belt), with particular emphasis on agricultural preservation, rural land use patterns, and protection of rural character. This review is advisory in nature and does not constitute a determination of zoning compliance, nor shall it be construed as a formal land development review or approval.

2. Project Description

The application proposes the development of two (2) Principal Solar Energy System facilities on separate but related tracts of land within the Agricultural (A) Zoning District. Both sites are currently utilized as active agricultural farmland, with the eastern tract also containing identified wetland areas.

The combined development would convert approximately 3,967,071 square feet ($\pm$ 91 acres) of land currently in agricultural use to a non-agricultural principal solar energy use.

Site Breakdown

Southwest Site

- Total Lot Area: 1,508,681 square feet
- Solar Panel Coverage: approximately 192,000 square feet (13%)

Eastern Site

- Total Lot Area: 2,458,390 square feet
- Solar Panel Coverage: approximately 342,000 square feet (14%)
- Presence of wetlands requiring environmental consideration

Although the solar arrays occupy approximately 13–14% of each tract, both sites are proposed as principal-use solar energy facilities. As such, the entirety of each tract is functionally dedicated to a non-agricultural use, resulting in the effective removal of the land from agricultural production for the duration of the facility's operational life

Access and Site Infrastructure

Each site proposes:

- A gravel access drive intersecting Franklin Hill Road
- Installation of both overhead and underground utility lines for the transmission of generated electricity

The submitted plans do not fully depict the internal electrical interconnection system, including wiring between solar arrays and transmission infrastructure. Additional components such as inverters, transformers, and collection lines are anticipated but are not clearly identified or detailed within the current plan set.

Stormwater and Grading

The plans depict areas of newly created steep slopes that are likely intended to function as stormwater management facilities. However:

- These areas are not clearly labeled or identified as stormwater management basins
- Supporting design calculations and technical documentation have not been provided

Based on the information submitted, the stormwater management approach cannot be adequately evaluated for compliance with Township stormwater management requirements and accepted engineering standards.

Regulatory Approvals

The proposed development will require approvals from outside regulatory agencies. Based on the scope of disturbance and proposed improvements, these may include:

- NPDES Permit for Stormwater Discharges Associated with Construction Activities
- Potential wetland permitting, if impacts are identified
- Other applicable state or federal environmental approvals

At the time of this review, documentation demonstrating the status of these approvals, including supporting studies and agency correspondence, has not been provided.

As a result, the ability to fully evaluate the environmental and regulatory compliance of the proposed development is limited.

Land Use Context

The proposed solar facilities constitute a non-agricultural principal use within the Agricultural (A) Zoning District. Under current Pennsylvania case law, principal solar energy systems are not classified as agricultural uses and must be evaluated as a separate land use under applicable zoning regulations.

The development would result in the long-term conversion of land currently in active agricultural use to a non-agricultural use, representing a substantive change in land use that is inconsistent with the intended purpose of the Agricultural Zoning District.

Plan Slate Belt identifies agricultural land as a critical regional resource and emphasizes the preservation of prime farmland, the maintenance of contiguous agricultural areas, and the protection of rural character. The Plan encourages land use patterns that sustain agricultural viability and discourage the conversion of productive farmland to non-agricultural uses.

As proposed, the introduction of a principal solar energy system on active farmland does not align with these stated planning objectives.

3. Planning Considerations

The Slate Belt Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan emphasizes the preservation of prime farmland, maintenance of large contiguous agricultural areas, and protection of rural landscapes. The Plan encourages municipalities to direct non-agricultural development away from productive farmland where feasible.

At the same time, Plan Slate Belt supports sustainable practices and acknowledges the importance of renewable energy as part of a diversified and resilient regional economy. However, the Plan does not provide specific guidance regarding the siting of utility-scale solar facilities within agricultural areas, requiring a balanced evaluation of competing planning objectives.

A. Zoning Compliance

- The Zoning Ordinance does not permit principal solar energy systems within the Agricultural (A) Zoning District. The proposed use is not permitted under the current Zoning Ordinance, as amended in 2026, and was likewise not identified as a permitted use—either by right or by special exception—under the prior Ordinance. Accordingly, relief from the Zoning Hearing Board would be required.
- The stated intent of the Agricultural District is to preserve protect and preserve the scenic, recreational and environmental resources in the Township and to provide for agricultural and animal husbandry uses.
- The introduction of a principal solar energy system represents a non-agricultural use that is not aligned with the intent of the Agricultural District

B. Farmland Preservation

- The proposal would convert approximately 91 acres of land currently in agricultural production to a non-agricultural principal energy use.
- Plan Slate Belt identifies the preservation of prime agricultural soils and the protection of contiguous farmland as core regional priorities
- The conversion of active farmland to non-agricultural use is discouraged where it may compromise long-term agricultural viability.

While solar facilities may be decommissioned at the end of their useful life, the anticipated operational duration constitutes a long-term removal of the land from active agricultural production.

C. Environmental Constraints

- Wetland areas and associated buffers are depicted on the eastern tract.
- The source, methodology, and date of the wetland delineation are not identified within the submitted plans.
- Supporting documentation confirming the delineation (e.g., field delineation report or agency verification) has not been provided.

D. Infrastructure and Design Clarity

- The submitted plans do not fully depict the internal electrical interconnection system, including wiring between solar arrays and transmission infrastructure
- Key components such as inverters, transformers, and collection lines are not clearly identified or detailed within the plan set
- Stormwater management facilities are not clearly labeled, and supporting design information has not been provided

Based on the information provided, the proposed infrastructure and stormwater management design cannot be adequately evaluated for compliance with Township requirements and accepted engineering standards.

E. Visual and Rural Character

- The introduction of a principal solar energy facility may result in a substantial alteration of the existing rural landscape character
- Plan Slate Belt identifies preservation of rural character—including open agricultural fields, scenic views, and low-density development patterns—as a key planning objective
- The scale and visual presence of solar arrays, associated infrastructure, and site modifications may be inconsistent with these characteristics.

As proposed, the development has the potential to alter the visual and rural character of the area in a manner that is not consistent with the land use patterns encouraged by Plan Slate Belt.

4. Planning Assessment

The proposed principal solar energy system raises substantive concerns with respect to consistency with Township Zoning and the policies of Plan Slate Belt, particularly in relation to agricultural preservation, rural land use patterns, and completeness of the submitted design.

In evaluating the proposal, the following considerations are relevant:

- The extent to which the project results in the conversion of land currently in agricultural production
- Whether impacts to productive or potentially prime agricultural soils have been avoided or minimized
- The adequacy of stormwater management design and supporting technical documentation
- The level of detail provided for utility and electrical interconnection systems
- The identification, verification, and protection of environmental resources, including wetlands
- The compatibility of the proposed development with the surrounding rural landscape

Basis for Concern

The proposal may be found inconsistent with Township and regional planning objectives for the following reasons:

- Conversion of a substantial acreage of land currently in agricultural use
- Introduction of a non-agricultural principal use within the Agricultural Zoning District
- Long-term removal of farmland from active agricultural production
- Alteration of established rural land use patterns and landscape character
- Incomplete or insufficient documentation to fully evaluate environmental impacts and engineering design

5. Summary of Planning Assessment

The Franklin Hill Road Solar Fields proposal presents a clear conflict between renewable energy development and the preservation of agricultural land and rural character.

Plan Slate Belt provides consistent and well-defined guidance emphasizing the protection of prime farmland, the maintenance of contiguous agricultural areas, and the preservation of rural land use patterns. In contrast, the Plan does not establish specific policy support for the siting of principal solar energy systems within the Agricultural Zoning District.

The proposed development would convert approximately 91 acres of land currently in agricultural use to a non-agricultural principal use, representing a substantial and long-term change in land use. Based on this conversion, as well as the scale and visibility of the development, the proposal appears inconsistent with the agricultural preservation and rural character objectives of Plan Slate Belt.

Additionally, based on the information submitted, certain aspects of site design, environmental resources, and supporting technical documentation cannot be fully evaluated.

Accordingly, from a planning perspective, significant concerns remain regarding the appropriateness of this use at the proposed location. These concerns should be carefully considered in the context of the Township's zoning regulations and long-term land use planning objectives.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION:

Chair Dertinger, who was administrator for Northampton County, sitting on all sides of this issue as well as administered the farmland preservation and conservation district in Northampton County, spoke about his bias to protecting farmland from 91-105 unit subdivisions, as we've seen in Forks and Bethlehem townships. He stated that livestock could still be fed under the panels, just no crops could be grown. They are not paving, just putting posts into the ground to support the solar arrays. He stated, "You are not hurting the ground and you are not creating impervious ground cover because that water is still able to go down into the ground that is still there." Also, "When we make it impossible for farmers to maintain their farms, we wind up with a lot of houses, more kids in our schools and higher taxes."

Engineer Matt Evans presented the information above in his review letter. He appreciated Chair Dertinger's viewpoint. He thinks this solar farm layout is probably well thought out and is conceptual in nature. He has a concern for wetland and other environmental considerations and suggests outside agency approvals. He recommends the board consider the consistency of this proposed project with the township's long-term planning goals. This is not explicitly permitted in the agricultural zoning district, in particular, that relates to amendment added to the zoning ordinance just this year.

Mr Shawn Gallaher, attorney for the Project Applicant, and Mr Christian Schlesinger of Forefront Power, presented a power point on their project, including mapping and land use of the solar arrays, benefits of solar, project detail of materials used, module spec sheet, vegetative screening examples, investor spec sheet, decommissioning and site restoration with costs, and community impact. The presentation pamphlet is available at the Township Office.

Justin Huriatiak thanked the gentlemen for the presentation. He did speak to his work on the Slate Belt Plan board, his position as a WT supervisor working to update the zoning ordinance, and him also being a developer. He spoke of the reasons for updating the ordinance because the Township was being inundated with requests, pamphlets, and flyers from everyone out there wanting to benefit from potential tax credits or anything else that was out there for these renewable energies. He stated that out of the 34 acres of development on this 91-acre parcel is really at 40%, regardless of the 13% coverage that was presented in the power point. He is a strong advocate for us as a township to preserve prime agriculture farming land as much as possible, as this is why we have the Slate Belt Plan.

Commissioner Buck's concern was the cost of decommissioning and site restoration as he has seen other solar agencies go bankrupt even before completion of the project. He would like to see contract stipulations for bonds and securities reviewed at a 5-year or yearly cost of living rate to defray costs that surely will rise in 30 years.

Vice Chair Mazzella stated that there are pros and cons on both sides of this. The biggest concern is subdivision development. The planning board watches all these developments pop up. He stated that Charles has been one of the biggest advocates of keeping the township as green as possible. While Vice Chair Mazzella is not a big fan of solar farms, the one proposed is not the worst type of solar farm you could have. Using commercial space and rooftops where you're using 100% land coverage used by a 100% rooftop, is one of the best uses of solar energy. But we are in a township where we don't want any more developments, we don't have all this commercial use. So, losing 30 acres for 30 years and making a million dollars in that timeframe of tax money is, he thinks, a benefit. He supports this if the township is protected by a surety bond. He would like to see the bond money put aside beforehand so that it covers any options of a failure and we are covered. If this was able to be broken down (dismantled), he would be in favor of it; especially since the application was submitted before the amended ordinance. This is what the ordinance is for, protecting the township in the future. He would approve this as a special consideration because the application was submitted before the ordinance amendment, the developer did its homework with a well-thought-out plan.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

6. OLD BUSINESS: None.

7. NEW BUSINESS

8. ADJOURNMENT: With no further discussion, Vice Chair Mazzella motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Shetler
Washington Township Planning Commission Secretary