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Mr. John D. Funk, Chair
E. Vincent Twp. Bd. of Supervisors
262 Ridge Road
Spring City, PA 19475

Mr. Mark Dunphy
E. Vincent Twp. Bd. of Supervisors
262 Ridge Road
Spring City, PA 19475

Ms. Christine McNeil
E. Vincent Twp. Bd. of Supervisors
262 Ridge Road
Spring City, PA 19475

Re: Pennhurst

Dear Supervisors:

Please deny the request of Pennhurst Acquisitions, LP to rezone the site that includes the Pennhurst property. Any rezoning should be based on the Township's Comprehensive Plan, rather than employing zoning of that spot to accommodate a specific use. I think that the request is contrary to the Township's goals as set forth in its Comprehensive Plan in the following respects:

- a. The area north of Commonwealth Drive, should not be re-zoned as proposed for the reasons that led to it being shown as parkland in the Township's Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan, referenced by the Comprehensive Plan. If re-zoned, then to the extent not already restricted to rural conservation or agricultural preservation, uses should be restricted to be more in keeping with park uses that reflect the environmental and scenic sensitivities of that area. The area north of Commonwealth Drive is uniquely suited to park use--no other land in the township (including township owned park land) offers a similar combination of assets: Schuylkill River overlook at the bluffs, river access, greenways trail access, and flat open areas previously used for ballfields and park. The park need not be publicly owned (see p. 3-14 of Open Space Plan).
- b. The area south of Commonwealth Drive, where the historical buildings are located, if rezoned at all, should be re-zoned, after adequate study and public input, in a manner that best promotes the rehabilitation and reuse of the historical structures there, in accordance with the Township's Comprehensive Plan. A recent study by Urban Partners has indicated that allowing rental housing at Pennhurst's historic core, may promote rehabilitation and reuse of structures there. I have not seen studies to support the change advocated by Pennhurst Acquisitions, LP.

When the Township, through its Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan, and its participation in the Pennhurst Development Authority study, proposed a park for the area north of Commonwealth Drive in the 1990s, we were much less certain regarding what should happen to the land south of Commonwealth Drive. Personally, I doubted that many of the buildings could be restored, and could not conceive of a sufficiently substantial use for more than one or two of them in any event, other than as a community college (we approached Montgomery County to consider the site as a joint community college with Chester County, but Montgomery County was already leaning toward the Pottstown location).

Since the 1990s, though, attention to Pennhurst has renewed as a result of two developments:

1. Growing recognition of how places along the Schuylkill River are connected when viewed from the perspective of American history, particularly from the standpoint of our civil rights history, from William Penn's Commonwealth (a place where religious beliefs were freed from government control), to the War for Independence (Declaration of Independence, Valley Forge, and Constitutional Convention), to the movements for abolition of slavery, voting for women, and rights of people with disabilities (Pennhurst's closure being a significant step in the last of these); and
2. Historical preservation groups have determined that the Pennhurst buildings are worth saving.

Please consider the above, and the many years that were spent developing the Township's plans, how much has been accomplished pursuant to those plans, and how much more could be accomplished through unified leadership that pursues common goals, in determining how to proceed.

Sincerely,

cc:

Mr. Jason Herron, Chair
E. Vincent Twp. Planning Commission
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Ms. Judy DiFilippo, Chair
Chester County Planning Commission
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