

From: The Ad-Hoc Zoning Committee of the Mt. Gretna Campmeeting Board of Managers

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Campmeeting – a history of its land use

Mt. Gretna's Campmeeting began in the late 1800s as a seasonal, transitory retreat with spiritual, educational, and cultural features. Much of its planning, development, and construction occurred before people owned automobiles and adopted the suburban standard of living, which today's land use regulations are designed to ensure. In the early years, residents arrived by train, and a donkey cart conveyed them and their luggage to their tents, cottages, or the onsite dormitory. As a retreat, there were no provisions in Campmeeting for residents' carriages, horsed or horseless. From the beginning, many of those staying in the Campmeeting did not come for the whole summer, but were transient residents, coming only for a portion of the season or a part of the Bible Festival. Many borrowed or rented tent sites, cottages, or dormitory rooms. Campmeeting, originally part of the Church of the United Brethren, and its Tabernacle, an outdoor covered auditorium, always provided religious services, in addition to community-oriented events such as music, oratory, and entertainment.

Campmeeting's Tabernacle was part of a larger summer resort complex spanning several municipalities centered on Mt. Gretna, originally including: amusement parks in West Cornwall Township, the Bible Festival in Campmeeting's Tabernacle, literary events in the Mt. Gretna/Chatauqua Hall of Philosophy, concerts and plays in the Mt. Gretna/Chautauqua Playhouse, swimming and canoeing in South Londonderry Township's Conowago Lake, nature walks near Governor Dick, and the parade and training grounds of the Pennsylvania National Guard. These Mt. Gretna neighborhoods still support a miniature golf course, a roller rink, two gift shops, and five restaurants including the Jigger Shop (a 125-year-old ice cream parlor). Summer and vacation rentals in Campmeeting have been a continuing part of that mix.

Despite the woodland setting, Campmeeting has its own significant infrastructure. Buildings in Campmeeting are *not* served by individual wells and septic systems, but rather by a community water system and a community sewage collection system, both with underground mains. The water system includes wells, a water tank, water testing and treatment, as well as underground waterlines with laterals to individual cottages. The sewage collection system consists of sewer lines that feed into the Mt. Gretna Sewer Authority system and treatment plant. Campmeeting's streets are narrow and meander, because they were paved after cottages were built, and sometimes after trees had grown in the right of way. These facilities (water, sewer, and streets) were built and are maintained by the Campmeeting through private assessment.

Because of this history, the Campmeeting will always be non-conforming with respect to many aspects of today's zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and building codes. Examples include small lots, tiny or non-existent set-backs, narrow and twisting roads, poorly insulated cottages designed for summer use, porches built within road rights-of-way, seasonal and short-term rentals, lack of off-street parking, and a semi-public entertainment venue (the Tabernacle) in the heart of the community.

The Mt. Gretna Campmeeting Historic District is even listed in the National Registry of Historic Places.

In order to preserve Campmeeting's unique historic and cultural aspects, it is important for West Cornwall Township to provide appropriate zoning for an "historic, seasonal, transitory, spiritual and cultural retreat". Whether through a separate zoning district or an overlay zone, Township zoning should permit Campmeeting's heritage to continue to flourish and evolve.