

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 2, 2023 3:29 PM
To: Willig, Robert A.
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Office of the Attorney General-ACRE Inquiry

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Hey there Robert,

I truly appreciate your timely response! I am going to send a separate email after this with a copy of the ordinances that were provided to me, from which you will find that there is no fee schedule and no instance stated where I am required to pay for permits. The reason I am reaching out to you is because of the permits I'm being forced to pay even without them being listed in the ordinances, but also because of numerous false reports from the township about my farm and the continued harassment from the township. Please let me know if you have any questions.

My letter:

Hello,

My name is [REDACTED] I reside at [REDACTED] I own 3 adjoining lots in total, one "the main house" is 1.13 acres and is zoned R-1. Immediately behind that lot is a 13 acre tract, zoned agricultural. Adjoining the 13 acre lot I own .74 acres zoned R-1 which is a house we are working on.

I am writing to complain about Bloss Township abusing their power and constantly harassing my husband & I for owning goats and forcing us to pay permitting fees that they do not have the legal authority to do so.

We purchased our home in February of 2022, which historically had been a pony farm 10+ years prior, and had a historic barn located on the property. We purchased our first two goats in May of 2022. After continuous bear issues, we decided we needed to construct a barn to house our goats at night that would be secure, rather than just the goat "house" located in their pasture. We called the township and requested the zoning officer to come out since we did not know the local ordinances at the time. On June 25th, 2022 we requested the Bloss township zoning officer to come out and walk us through any permits we needed to either 1. Construct a goat barn or 2. Tear down part of the existing barn that had collapsed and rebuild the exact same structure. He informed us that we did not need *ZONING* Permits for either, however since he was there and this was our first involvement with him and we would be doing demolition he went ahead and filled out a demolition and zoning permit for us, to which we paid \$50 for the permit. He told us that we could do what we wanted, but gave us the outlines of when we would need a building permit (I.E if we ran power to it etc.)

We torn down the 10x26ft addition to our original barn in June with the intent of building the goat barn there. After some considerations (slope of the property etc) We decided that we would not rebuild the barn for the goats, but rather build a new goat "barn" (10x20 shed) on top of the hill, which we began construction on in July and finished in July. No mention was made by the zoning officer or township of this building.

In March of 2023 we built a 10x20 bunny "barn" (10x20 shed) next to our existing barn, and soon thereafter purchased rabbits. A few days after it's construction, the zoning officer called and asked why I didn't have a zoning permit, to which I replied that I hadn't asked for one because he said we didn't need one. (Please note

here that originally before we started doing anything to the property that WE were the ones that called him so we would be doing things the right way.) He denied stating that, and then I said something to the tune of "Since I'm getting conflicting information, I'd like to see the ordinances that say when I need a permit and when I don't" Immediately after that he became very angry and demanding on the phone and yelled at me that he would fine me \$500 a day and force me to take the building down if I didn't get a zoning permit. I was incredibly upset at him threatening me, and told him I would pay for the permit but I wanted to see where I was required to pay for them.

Upon going to the township building the next day, he could not indicate where in Bloss Township's ordinance it stated I needed a zoning permit, and he forced me to pay an additional permit for the goat "barn" built in 2022. The total permits paid that day were \$100.

After taking screenshots of the ordinances that day, and the fact that the zoning officer could not indicate where in their ordinances it said I needed a permit, I read through them and contacted my lawyer. My lawyer upon review also could not find anything in the ordinances that stated I needed a zoning permit, but rather that the buildings constructed were "principal permitted uses". My lawyer sent the township a letter in the beginning of April 2023/ end of March. I attended a township meeting (held monthly) on April 13th, to where I asked the township supervisors and secretary to indicate where it says that 1. A permit is required and 2. That I have to pay for a permit (there was no fee schedule in the ordinances.) They were unable to answer that question and stated their lawyer would respond within the month. I also asked why they were targeting me, someone who was remodeling their home and following the law, but letting a nearby neighbor who was breaking the ordinances with a junk yard in a residential area, had not been questioned, fined, or forced to pay permit fees. I also wrote a formal complaint against their zoning officer for him threatening me and misrepresenting the zoning ordinances.

On May 11th I attended the next township meeting and asked where the update was, to which they responded their lawyer had not responded to them at all. They did not have any updates on my formal complaint against the zoning officer, nor did they have any updates on why the neighbor wasn't being harassed as I was, even though I was following the ordinances and they were not.

On June 1st, 2023, I received a visit from the Department of Environmental Protection due to a complaint from the township (which was confirmed to be the township on 6/2/2023 by the Tioga County Conservation District) that there was "Goat poop in the road" and "goat poop in the creeks". The officer requested a copy of my manure management plan and suggested I move my manure pile. My manure management plan was updated 6/2/2023 based on his recommendations and sent to the Tioga County Conservation District. No poop was found to be in the road or creeks. Fact of the matter being: the closest my goats are to the road is in a new pasture that was created in May of 2023, and it's roughly 20ft back from the road. The pasture they complained about, which was constructed prior to obtaining our first goats, is roughly 300ft from the road and my garage/ house/ barn are all between the goats and the road. I believe that this report was retaliation and fictitious and their attempt to "shut me up" because I am pursuing the truth.

I called the township secretary on 6/1/2023 and asked for an update on my request for information, to which she said she did not have one nor could provide an estimated time to provide that to me. I believe this also to be in violation of the Sunshine act as it has been 2 months since the information was requested. I also told them any false reports will be met with a lawsuit moving forward, after which the secretary complained about the smells from my property.

I have 18 goats, only 6 of which are adults. All of them are dwarfs or pygmy's other than one which is a small toggenburg. We have had numerous neighbors come to visit them, and our manure pile is out of site/ cannot even be smelled from our house. I put up a post in a local community facebook group asking the citizens of Arnot if they had, when driving by, smelled any "pungent odors" to which in under 5 hours 14 citizens responded (post was published this morning) that they live one house down, or drive by numerous times a day (to and from work/ to the grocery store etc) and have never once smelled my goats or seen any goat poop in the road. Many of them commented that they love seeing our goats, and they were invited out to the farm to meet them. Not a single complaint on social media (at least at the time of this email complaint) or in person,

has ever been received about our goats, the smell, or any "goat poop in the road." Additionally, the neighbor directly across the street from us, and downhill from us, with his home maybe 20ft back from the road, stated he had never smelled our goats nor seen goat poop in the road.

I believe that the township will try anything and everything to harass us at this point because I am "pushing back" about them forcing me to pay for permits that their own ordinances say I do not need. I am concerned for the safety of my animals and myself due to the numerous threats I have received from the township. We have had to purchase security cameras because we are so afraid of them coming onto the property to let our animals loose or harm them. While it hasn't happened yet, I'm confident animal control and any other agency they can convince that I am doing wrong will be sent out to my farm in a short matter. Even though we live in a very visible location on a through road, and our animals are very clearly pampered as is evident by the communities support against the Bloss township for their continued harassment.

Thank you,
