

**Planning Commission
Minutes
November 12, 2024
7:00 PM**

Present:

Brett MacKay, Chairman
Nancy Becker
Matt Chartrand
Joseph Vavra
Ed Buonocore
Dennis McGeehan

Absent:

Patricia Younce
Michael Main

Staff:

Mary Stover, Township Engineer CKS

Supervisor Mr. Kofi Osei was present.

Approval of the October 7, 2024 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Mr. Vavra made a motion to approve the October 7, 2024 meeting minutes, and Ms. Becker seconded. Mr. Chartrand abstains. The motion carries.

New Business

WLD2024-01 – Waiver of Land Development, Goddard School

Presented by Ms. Catherine Harper, attorney with Timoney Knox, LLP, Mr. David Wilson of the Goddard School, Mr. Jon Heisey of the Goddard School and Mr. Peter Spisszak with Traffic Planning and Design, Inc.

Ms. Harper began the Goddard School presentation. She reiterated the current needs for a daycare within the Township. Ms. Harper went on to say that the Applicant had appeared before the Zoning Hearing Board and was granted relief from the parking requirement. She said the Applicant is seeking a waiver of land development because the school would use the existing building making no additions and removing the drive-thru portion of the building. She went on to explain that both PennDOT and Montgomery County have been given plans regarding the use of the current ingress and egress from Valley Forge Road and Sumneytown Pike and the Applicant is waiting on feedback. The Applicant was also asked to check the Stormwater Management System which has been evaluated and a report will be submitted to the Township.

Mr. Chartrand thanked them for coming before the Commission and asked how drop-off would be handled. Mr. Heisey stated that parents physically walked their children into the building. Ms. Harper passed out the drop-off and pick-up procedure for the school. She also stated that drop off and pick up times vary throughout the day, not needing the required number of spaces. Mr. Chartrand said he was happy that they would be improving the site and putting it to a good use. Ms. Harper went on to state that by obtaining the variance, they would be able to move ahead with remodeling the inside of the building and getting the Day Care operating.

Ms. Becker stated that she knew that sidewalks existed on the Valley Forge Road side of the property and went on to ask about the Sumneytown Pike side. Mr. Spisszak stated that sidewalk is currently continued from Valley Forge around the corner onto Sumneytown Pike to the existing driveway which is the end of the property. He stated sidewalk would be constructed towards the building within the site from Sumneytown Pike. Mr. Chartrand stressed the importance of adding sidewalks from both a connectivity and safety standpoint and noted that the Planning Commission is making a conscious effort to require sidewalks be added on all construction going forward. Ms. Harper noted that the sidewalk does connect to the Calvary Baptist Property. Ms. Becker stated that the Commission has asked the High School to install sidewalk along Sumneytown Pike.

Mr. Buonocore referred the Group to the Concrete Wash-Out detail on Sheet #9 of the Plan Set which references “contaminated water” and questioned why the school would have to address contaminated water. Impervious surface was discussed and Ms. Harper stated that there would be no increase but that they had hired a consultant to ensure the proper operation of the stormwater management system. Mr. Wilson reiterated this point and stressed that there would be no addition of impervious surface. Mr. Chartrand referred to Mr. Buonocore’s original question regarding the Concrete Wash-Out and explained that it was required during construction to contain concrete residue from getting into the storm water system.

Mr. Chartrand made the motion to recommend to the Board of Supervisors the approval of the Waiver of Land Development subject to the revised plan review letter from CKS Engineers dated September 25, 2024; the Bowman letter dated October 16, 2024; the Gilmore and Associates letter #2 letter dated October 2, 2024; and the letter from the Towamencin Township Fire Marshal dated July 16, 2024 stating that the plans had been reviewed and approved. Ms. Becker seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

ZA2024-01 – Main Street Overlay Concept

Mr. John Alejnikov P.E. from Bohler Engineering represented the Developer.

Mr. Chartrand recused himself due to conflict of interest; he is employed by Bohler.

Mr. Alejnikov introduced himself and said that Mr. Nicoletti could not attend the meeting due to a conflict. Mr. Alejnikov reminded the Commission that PSDC had submitted for a text map amendment in April of 2024. He asked the Commission if they wanted him to give a brief overview or review the CKS letter.

Mr. MacKay asked Ms. Stover if there were issues in the letter that she felt needed to be addressed and discussed and she replied that she felt that there were several such items. Mr. MacKay suggested that the letter be gone through point by point.

Mr. Alejnikov discussed the uses proposed to be removed from the list of approved Conditional Uses in the Northeast Sector of the proposed Main Street Overlay District, and the uses added as Conditional Uses in the Northeast Sector. Ms. Stover noted that basically all the residential uses were removed from the Northeast Sector. Ms. Becker brought up her understanding that residential use was to be on both sides and Ms. Stover added that it takes away the mixed-use quality of the Main Street concept but that it does make everything one-story on the Northeast side. Mr. Alejnikov stated that the Developer looked at the plan in the aggregate and they are looking to provide the best balance.

Ms. Becker stated that she was concerned about the height of the buildings in the Northeast Sector but that she was not necessarily opposed to the commercial use. Mr. Buonocore asked about the number of stories proposed for the commercial side and Mr. Alejnikov answered that there would be nothing over 4 stories. Ms. Stover added that the Ordinance does not address number of stories, but rather height. Mr. MacKay stated that height was an issue as addressed by the Fire Marshal because the Fire Department does not possess the equipment required for taller structures. Mr. Buonocore suggested the possibility of the Developer donating the equipment required to the Fire Department. Mr. Vavra stated that it was not only an issue of equipment but also of training and tactics. The letter of October 23, 2024 from Chris Dolan, Towamencin Township Fire Chief, was discussed as it raised these same concerns. Ms. Stover raised the issue of underground parking and Mr. Alejnikov replied that is still on the table, given that it would allow for additional greenspace but would push the height toward seventy feet.

Ms. Stover addressed page #2 of the letter, particularly the portion on zoning. Mr. Alejnikov discussed the parcels not currently owned by PSDC, three of which are owned by the Township and noted that notice would be required to the owners of these parcels. He noted that there were properties along Forty Foot Road not included as part of the Overlay District. Ms. Stover stated that it made sense for these properties to be included in the Main Street Overlay District rather than outparceling them. Ms. Becker stated that a Super Wawa on Main Street does not make sense in keeping with the concept.

Ms. Stover stated that the balance of the letter addressed the ordinance itself, and Mr. Alejnikov stated general agreement by the Developer. Ms. Stover discussed the change in Sector 3D which under the proposal no longer limits what uses can be proposed for the properties along Reiff Road and although currently shown on the plan as open space does not have to be open space per the Ordinance. Whatever the Ordinance allows could be built in place of the open space. Mr. MacKay noted that he envisions a buffer along Reiff Road of 50 to 75 feet. Mr. Buonocore asked about the green space requirement and Ms. Stover noted that the maximum impervious is 80%. Mr. MacKay stated that the Planning Commission should agree on a buffer along Reiff Road to be included in the ordinance.

Ms. Stover noted that the proposed ordinance includes Hotel/Motel as a permitted use in the Southwest and Northeast Sector. The Commission agreed that this use should not be allowed. The Commission also stated opposition to "Housing for the Elderly" being included in the Main Street Overlay. The Commission did agree that solar energy roof mounted and electric vehicle charging stations be permitted in both sectors.

Ms. Stover next discussed setbacks. Ms. Becker asked where setbacks would be 20 feet; Ms. Stover replied that 20-foot setbacks would be anywhere not adjacent to a residential property. The Commission agreed that the setbacks would have to be addressed for Reiff Road. There was extensive discussion regarding setbacks as affected by the height of the proposed structure. Mr. MacKay suggested a sliding scale where the setback would increase proportionally by building height. Ms. Stover asked the Commission's opinion of the removal of current setbacks of 15' or 25' from internal roadways to not include setbacks for internal roadways. Ms. Becker stressed that a number should be included in the ordinance. Discussion continued regarding parking and how to provide bike lanes with parking on both sides of the roadway. Ms. Stover noted that it was difficult to define setbacks without having a better idea of the actual buildings to be constructed. Mr. Buonocore stated that there was very little open space and that more sidewalks would provide a visual break. Ms. Becker suggested a minimum width for sidewalks in the Main Street area.

Ms. Stover noted her recommendation that loading areas be located only on the side or rear of buildings which the Commission agreed to.

Regarding proposed density requirements, Ms. Stover asked that the Developer provide the Township with estimated floor areas to get a better understanding of whether the 80% residential density requirement is still reasonable.

Ms. Stover stressed that landscape buffer be installed adjacent to all residential areas and that the non-residential buffer be better defined by the Developer. Discussion continued regarding ensuring that in areas where street trees are proposed, there be varied plantings as well.

Public open space and amenities were the next item discussed. Ms. Stover suggested that it might make sense to address the commercial area differently from the residential. The commercial area being more appropriate for plazas, gathering areas, etc. and the residential more appropriate for green space. Mr. Alejnikov suggested a meeting between the Developer and the Township staff to address opportunities in this regard.

Ms. Stover stated that signage remains consistent with the current ordinance and that architectural consistency be retained. She went on to say that what is currently in place on in the ordinance be carried through the Main Street area per the architectural standards. The current ordinance also states that some residential and some commercial be built concurrently and that a ratio be determined.

Ms. Stover noted the addition of a new use, R-14 – Multifamily Dwelling similar to the existing Garden Apartment use but without the greenspace requirement. She said that this use could be considered in other districts.

Ms. Stover summarized the discussion and suggested that the Developer address the issues discussed and come back to the Commission.

Mr. MacKay asked for additional comments/questions from the Commission. There being none, he asked for comments from the floor.

Mr. David Kriebel, representing the Towamencin Fire Department stated that the Fire Department does not currently have a Tower Truck, nor do they intend to add one. He went on to state that the Fire Department is comfortable with a building height of fifty feet, but no more.

Mr. Joe Silverman, resident, questioned the proposed use of the access road from the Walgreen's site, currently not connected, to the Williamsburg townhomes. He asked if through traffic would be allowed and stated that he would not be in favor of that.

Ms. Tina Gallagher, resident, stated that she was also opposed to using that road for through traffic. Mr. MacKay stated that the Commission is not approving anything at this time. Ms. Gallagher went on to ask about the possibility of "swapping" or selling the Township property on Reiff Road and Mr. MacKay stated that would have to be addressed by the Township Solicitor.

Mr. Rick Burlingame, resident stated that he would like the Township to take a step back from the current discussion and address what the Township envisions itself to be.

Karen, resident stated that the Township is turning into a "concrete jungle," and that there are too many vacant buildings. She went on to address traffic problems and asked the long-term strategy for the Township.

Supervisor Osei stated that he was concerned about the number of vacancies in the community. He would like to see additional residential space and suggested reducing parking space for additional green space.

Mr. Joe Silverman, resident, stated that he agreed with Supervisor Osei's argument against parking. He stated that he did not see the need for additional commercial space other than restaurants.

Denise of Misty Meadow Lane stated that she is concerned about the number of vacant buildings and the upkeep of them. She said she would like to see more 55+ properties and stressed the need for a more strategic outlook.

Mr. Vavra made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Becker seconded. All were in favor – 8:35 PM

Respectfully submitted,


Will Brugger

Director of Planning, Zoning and Code Enforcement