

**MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING JANUARY 14, 2020**

Attendees: Sherri Glantz Patchen, Patrick Doran, Peter Cornog, Bob Dambman, Scott Quitel, Charlie Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning and Zoning, Vince Manuele (BOS Liaison), Jim Hersh (Township Engineer), and Dave Sander, Esq. (Township Solicitor's office)

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** 7:00 PM by Vice-Chair Dambman
2. **ELECTION OF CHAIR:** Motion by Ms. Patchen, second by Mr. Doran to elect Bob Dambman as Chair. Vote was unanimous
3. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR:** Motion by Mr. Cornog, second by Mr. Dambman to elect Patrick Doran as Vice-Chair. Vote was unanimous.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS & CORRESPONDENCE

Announcements:

- Mr. Guttenplan introduced Jim Hersh, P.E. from Gilmore & Associates as the new Township Engineer.

Correspondence:

- As requested by Vice-Chair Dambman prior to the meeting, copies of the "Townhouse Layout" plan set (3 pages) were made for the members to reference later on as they got into the project being presented tonight.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Mr. Doran moved to approve the minutes from the December 10, 2019 meeting with minor amendments by Ms. Patchen, himself and Mr. Cornog; seconded by Mr. Cornog. Vote 5-0

6. ZONING HEARING BOARD APPEALS: None

7. SUBDIVISION &/OR LAND DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

- SLD#05-14 / 901 Washington Partners, LP, 901 Washington Street, Conshohocken, PA; 62 Townhomes; Preliminary Plan Review. Mr. Guttenplan explained that plans were submitted and approved back in 2015 for a 82,000 square foot office building on the site, but unfortunately because that wasn't leased and tenants were unobtainable, that was never built. The same applicants are proposing a plan for townhomes. The Planning Commission saw this application as a sketch plan and then again as a Zoning Hearing Board application where they were granted one special exception and five variances. During the course of the Zoning Hearing Board's hearings one of the conditions was to restrict the number of townhomes to a maximum of 62. The current proposal is for 62 units, 46 stacked/front to back units, and 16 traditional townhomes; the plan that was originally presented with the Zoning Hearing Board application contained 75 units, 40 stacked units and 35 traditional townhomes.

Jim Vesey, one of the owners of the property at 901 Washington Street Partners; Jim Bannon and Greg Newell, Engineers from Nave Newell; Greg Richardson, Traffic Engineer; and Sarah Peck, developer/partner from Progressive New Homes, were present.

Mr. Vesey stated they are here to present and show enhancements to the plan and present a PowerPoint orientating the Commission to the property and the existing conditions. They started with the concept of an office building, but due to lack of tenant interest they changed the plan; considered apartments but felt they were already many available, so they turned to townhomes to meet an untapped market. They had a vision for something unique. He also mentioned that they have an Act 2 (environmental) clearance. Since they are

not home builders or builders of townhomes, they started with big developers which became too complex and the project was too small for them. They sought out Sarah Peck, formally CEO of Rouse Chamberlain, who went out on her own and formed Progressive New Homes. Within two weeks she presented a revised plan, a budget, a strategy and building materials; she is now a partner. Mr. Cornog asked if the office building is off the table; in response they are not marketing it, they are well down the road on this project, there was a change in market conditions, they made 6 proposals and couldn't compete with the large office buildings in Conshohocken,

Sarah Peck stated this site is an opportunity. Most sites near rail lines have issues, and this property has all of them; however, the market is very strong, people want a more walkable, more sustainable life style which is very hard to find. What Ms. Peck did not like about the old plan was the fact that certain homes were blocking the river view from the other homes; the townhomes were stacked (3 flights to upper unit); the lower unit had no use of the river; they were very tall; no ongoing views to the river from the central courtyard area; and the garages were not private. What she is visualizing is front to back townhomes; 3 stories over the garage not 4; all units will have a balcony and the potential for a roof deck, for river views. The townhomes are proposed to be 2,400 square feet with a 2-car side by side garage on the first floor; the front/back townhomes are proposed to be front – 1,700 square feet; back 1,750 square feet. These will have 'tandem' garages (one vehicle in front of the other). Floor plans, views of the townhomes, elevations and materials were discussed. Smart vents will be installed in the garages between the units and in the garage doors and will open automatically if there is a flood and will automatically close if there is a fire. Approximate pricing for the front to back townhomes range from low to mid \$400,000, higher for the townhomes. They met with John Hosbach (Township Arborist) and Sean Halbom (Township Assistant Manager) and they identified what trees need to come out, which had to be replaced and which ones were dead, etc. There is no connectivity to the trail so their thought is to build a boardwalk with the stormwater beneath so less trees will be disturbed. This may not be able to be done because it does not meet the zoning requirements. There is more parking now with 165 spaces versus what was previously on the other plan of 107; guest spaces are now 41 spaces versus 29 and are put in proximate locations of the residences.

Jim Vesey spoke about some of the access issues. They are redoing Washington Street in front of their property to make it a quality road and offering it for dedication to the Township. To avoid a cut-thru to the David's Bridal property (with whom they have an access easement) there will be a gate with fob access for the residents and a Knox box will be placed on the gate for emergency vehicles. Jim Behr, a member of the Zoning Hearing Board, made sure there is an emergency action plan. Prospective buyers will receive a copy of the Emergency Action Plan when they review the public offering statement. Mr. Cornog asked if Mr. Behr was comfortable with the cartway width and turning radius; in response yes, Chief Ward reviewed the fire truck turning plan and found it acceptable. They were also asked to do an emergency boat ramp with an agreement with the Township they would pay for the ramp and the Township would get the approvals needed. It would be for emergencies only, not recreational. There is an existing recorded cross easement with David's Bridal; they will be meeting with the new CEO and new CFO of David's Bridal to review this. There are also 11 spaces on their property for David's Bridal which means they have to cross their property in order to get to the spaces. They offered to take out the block walls, repave and re-stripe their parking to make it more efficient which will result in widening the road. Mr. Doran spoke about the SEPTA parking issues at the 3 stations in this area, that there is not a single parking space at any of these locations. He asked that the applicant be cognizant of this as we encourage public transit but residents can't get to it. The applicant is proposing several methods as a way to walk to the (Spring Mill) station.

Greg Newell discussed the floodplain. They are proposing to build at the same elevation that the building existed which is roughly 5 feet higher than the surrounding areas. Their goal is to rip up the concrete and put it back but keeping the elevation. Historically there has been 4 times in the last 90 years where the river reached an elevation 1 foot above that pad, all from hurricanes. The challenge from a flooding prospective is not from immediate danger along the Schuylkill River, it is the short duration high intensity storms. They spent a lot of time on the Evacuation Plan paying attention to specific details, what is the safest way, how the people would be notified and how do we keep them alerted. Mr. Doran mentioned that historic trends have blown up due to changing weather events, is there anything else we can look at for predictions for the future; we have to plan for major change. Mr. Newell stated the issue professionally is much more on the smaller drainage basins that have less ability to absorb those changes; numerically this specific spot has never come

close to reaching its 100 year storm event. Mr. Quitel stated that things are changing and just because that site hasn't been hit yet, that shouldn't give anyone comfort. Mr. Newell stated the units are well above the flood elevation. Mr. Doran wanted to know why not build the pad higher, in response you can't fill in a floodplain above existing conditions. Mr. Cornog mentioned that between 2000 and 2010 there were 2 documented 100 year storm events, but there is no documentation about the elevations of these events at this particular site. Mr. Dambman asked that Mr. Hersh, Township Engineer and Floodplain Administrator, find information on the heights of flooding and report back to them. Mr. Newell will provide their data.

Mr. Newell also discussed the stormwater management. Currently the impervious coverage on the site is at 93% and they will be lowering it to 62-63%. They are proposing a series of 5 rain gardens that are situated as a way to provide water quality and treatment before discharging into the river. Ms. Peck's changes to the plan have allowed the water to runoff through the parking lots and down through the grass areas into the rain gardens. Compared to the office this is a beneficial and helpful change. Mr. Doran mentioned a waiver was requested for no retention basin, should infiltration be provided for cleaning the runoff? In response, they can't infiltrate on this site which is why there are so many rain gardens. It was asked if the Township Engineer had a chance to review the stormwater management plans and in response, he did not but T & M did; he will review the next plan iteration.

Greg Richardson, with Traffic Planning and Design, stated the office building as proposed would generate around 5x more traffic; this is a low generator of traffic not only because of the number of units but its location near the train station. This is a low traffic area at a peak hour basis (generates around 30-35 vehicles during the peak hour; that is 1 every 2 minutes), plus the train station will reduce the number of trips that you would see in a similar development. A review was received from Andy Heinrich and there are a numbers of areas that need to be clarified, agreements were made on some of the items, and some areas they need to provide additional information. One issue mentioned by Mr. Richardson was disagreement over trip distribution; the study will be amended. Mr. Doran asked when the traffic counts were done; in response, it is required by PennDot that the study is done on a typical weekday, meaning a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday (these were done on Thursday, February 14, 2019). In response to questions about trip distribution, they look at the existing traffic patterns in the area; they show it to be 50/50 to be conservative (estimating only 35 peak trips). Mr. Richardson stated they will have more information on pedestrian access to and from the train station and the wayfinding signs the next time they come back. Mr. Doran asked how they are going to prevent other proposed developments from using the thru access; in response, the gate mentioned previously will prevent this.

Ms. Patchen asked about the adding a grass strip between the curb and the sidewalk (verge). Ms. Peck responded that it could be added but will reduce the berm adjacent to the SEPTA tracks.

Mr. Dambman asked if there is anything preventing bike and pedestrian access to get through the gate; in response, they will need to look at that.

Mr. Quitel suggested increasing the green frontage and a wildlife-friendly boardwalk would make a stronger show of respect to the environment; he supports the idea of the proposed boardwalk; Ms. Peck said there is a possibility to move some units to provide more area along the river.

Ms. Peck thanked the Planning Commission for their time and good questions; they intend on coming back with another submission once all comments have been addressed; they plan on meeting with the Shade Tree Commission February 4th and then hoping to come back to the Planning Commission February 11th.

Public Comment: Sydelle Zove, questioned the road width of this plan as opposed to the earlier townhome plan (road width 24' same as before & same as the office park); what does the SALDO require (36' required); what is the building height to roof (42'-43'; variance allowed 4 stories); the County review letter had concerns about opening up the pad due to contamination, she is concerned about what is left in the soil in proximity to the river; she is confused about the green swales between some of the rows to the rain garden and how do you get to the river; how will the rain gardens affect in-ground contamination; what happens when the rain gardens flood. She also suggested that access of specific project information to the public be more user friendly on the website. Linda Doll, appreciates the careful reading of the minutes and appreciates Mr. Dambman bringing up the Comprehensive Plan again because we do need to focus on it and get it done. Steve Kaufman, commented that he concurs with Mr. Quitel's suggestion for the riverfront by losing a few units; he suggested the applicant review Chapter 55 and relevant parts of Chapter 105 carefully. He also mentioned that the draft Chapter 55 draft amendments on the website were not reviewed by the Shade Tree

Commission. Finally he mentioned that there is no ‘burden of proof’ in Chapter 55 for granting waivers. Mr. Kaufman also handed out a write-up of his thoughts on amendments to Chapter 55. Donna Totarro, Spring Mill Avenue, commented the property is going to add fuel to the area and bring the community together and there is a lack of homes for first time buyers and appreciates what they are doing. Peter Gold, Almond Court, stated the plan has a lot of possibilities and that the website is done well but maybe a hotlink can be added to the agenda to find the plans.

8. CONDITIONAL USE APPLICATIONS: None

9. OLD BUSINESS:

- Mr. Dambman asked if there were any plans or comments for the Comprehensive Plan review. Mr. Guttenplan would like to have the Planning Commission finish their review, make any edits and comments to the rest of the body of the document and pass it on to the consultant to see if she needs to come back for another meeting for discussion or just produce a new draft for the Planning Commission to take a look at before it is sent out for review by the County, surrounding municipalities and school district. Once everyone is satisfied with the document, the Planning Commission will have an advertised public meeting per the Planning Code and once that is done and a recommendation is made the Board of Supervisors, the Board will hold as many public hearings as necessary and then they would adopt the Plan by resolution.

10. NEW BUSINESS:

- Discuss Joint Meeting with Shade Tree Commission for Coordinating Amendments to Chapter 55 (Tree Protection Standards) and Chapter 105 (Subdivision and Land Development). Mr. Guttenplan stated the Shade Tree Commission would like to have a joint meeting with the Planning Commission to discuss amendments to Chapter 55 and Chapter 105. When Chapter 55 was last amended in January 2014, related provisions in Chapter 105 were amended at the same time to avoid conflicts between the two ordinances. During 2019, the Shade Tree Commission considered some amendments to Chapter 55 but has deferred finalizing these until we could also discuss any amendments to Chapter 105 that might need to be considered at the same time. The next Shade Tree Commission meeting is scheduled for February 4, 2020 and hopefully we can have a number of representatives from the Planning Commission there to discuss how we want to move forward with these amendments. Commission members indicated their availability for this meeting.

11. PUBLIC COMMENT

- No public comments were presented on any non-agenda items

12. ADJOURNMENT

- There being no further business, meeting was adjourned at 10:08 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles L. Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning & Zoning

The Planning Commission is appointed as an advisory group to the Board of Supervisors and the Zoning Hearing Board with respect to comprehensive land use planning, existing land use, and various land use and zoning applications in Whitemarsh Township. No formal decisions are rendered by the Planning Commission. Formal decisions are rendered by the Board of Supervisors or Zoning Hearing Board, as prescribed by law, based on the type of application.