

Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

January 21, 2021

In attendance: Jay Glickman, Jim Rall, Steve Krumenacker, Dave Fetzer, Frank Davey, Rutuke Patel and Tom Borghetti. Also in attendance; Bruce Shoupe and Marianne McConnell.

Call to Order: 7:30pm

Approval of Minutes: On a motion made by Jay and seconded by Jim, the minutes from the November 2020 meeting were approved as submitted.

Public Comment: none

Westrum Development / Bethlehem Pike Proposed Project – Text Amendment – Ms. Carrie Nase, attorney for the applicant, Westrum Development, introduced the proposed project to the Planning Commission noting that they are not requesting any formal action tonight, but wanted to get some feedback on the applicant's proposed lifestyle apartment project. The property under discussion is a 10-acre vacant landlocked parcel behind the Rodeway Inn and sits within the LI – Limited Industrial District. The proposed apartment use is not permitted by right in this district. The applicant proposes a text amendment to the existing zoning ordinance to allow this use by Conditional Use.

Mr. John Westrum presented the proposed lifestyle apartment building to the Planning Commission members and others in attendance including residents, township staff, and township consultants. Mr. Westrum discussed the history of their business and other projects within Montgomery County that they have completed. The property they proposed to develop was a former swim club that has been vacant since the late 80's / early 90's. Westrum Development chose this parcel as it is close to employment, retail, recreation, and infrastructure. The proposed luxury lifestyle apartment building is a self-contained technologically advanced and socially integrated community. A full-time lifestyle coordinator is on site. The community includes a lobby area, outdoor courtyard, pool, dog park, byob bar area, lounge area, gaming and fitness areas. Half of the parking is outside the building and half is underneath the building. The units are smaller studio, one and two bedroom apartments. There are no balconies. Access to the site would be from Stump Road with an emergency access to 309. The proposed apartment building would sit, at its closest point, 299.5 feet to the residential area. The applicant intends to keep the existing vegetation / trees between the residential properties and the proposed apartment building. Mr. Westrum discussed the increase in taxes for the municipality, county, and school district should it be developed as proposed, traffic concerns, and stormwater management.

The following questions were asked by the Planning Commission members:

1. Do you plan doing any coordination with public transits, may have a bust stop at the apartment building to mitigate some traffic? - *That is something we have not looked in to, but we will. We can research if it is feasible or not.*
2. Do you market to millennials for specific parking spaces for ride sharing or food deliveries? *The building is designed that we never want parking immediately against the building, so Uber and ride-sharing, and deliveries. They would utilize visitor parking spots and be the resident meets them in the lobby area.*

3. Do you have plans to install charging stations for electric cars? *Yes, we do.*

4. There has always been talk about having access to 309 from this site and trying to get the roads to line up. Any plans to try to link to Knapp Road? *Knapp Road meets where the Neshaminy Creek comes in, so we don't believe we could match up to Knapp Rd. We know that there is a concern with coming out of the site and making a left onto Stump Road. That is an issue we are looking at. We do like the fact that you can come into the site coming up 309 North, passing Stump Road and turning into the existing jug handle and then make a left into the site.*

5. Is this traditional or modular construction? *Traditional*

6. There is 1.5 parking spaces per unit overall. Is the parking assigned outside or in the garage, or is it a first come, first serve basis? *There is assigned parking in the underground parking, there is an extra fee for the underground secured parking. In the outside area, they are not assigned spaces, but the resident has a sticker for parking.*

7. In regards to traffic, you are assuming less than 50% of the residents are going to be commuting during normal times. I think you had 100 out of 237 and then 80 out of 237. Those are peak hour pm and am peak hour trips? *Peak hours are 4:30 to 5:30 and 5:30 to 6:30*

8. I assume the building is all wood. Will it be sprinklered? *Yes. It's actually a steel podium with concrete and then four stories of wood over top of it. The podium is at ground level and then everything drops and your stream that going around. So, in our of a 10-acre site, were really only using about 4.5 acres.*

9. Were the figures that you had for the traffic usage, were they actual? Was a study done? Was it from an actual study or were they estimates? *The trip generation figures of the peak hour trips are calculated from trip rates from the Institute of Transportation Engineers trip generation manual. Not from local traffic studies. The standard procedure is to use the ITE triple A's for estimating traffic for the vast majority of land users. – Mr. Andy Hierarch, applicant's Traffic Consultant.*

10. Stump Road is pretty busy in the morning with commuter traffic; when someone exists the apartment building to make a right turn onto Stump Road, does that pose any problem? *It's going to be a stop sign controlled. With increased traffic, it'll take a little longer to get in and out. But, based on our studies, it is an acceptable level. We feel that we need a deceleration lane so that there would be the ability to feather the traffic in onto Stump Road.*

11. What kind of studies have you done with regard to the stream, and the impact of potential flooding on the building and the parking garage? *Extensive. We've identified all the wetlands that are there, all the stream corridors from an engineering standpoint. – Andy Heirarch. The floodplain limit associated with the stream was delineated in the filed by an environmental engineer. We're close to getting a jurisdictional determination letter from the State confirming the limits of the stream. There were some minimum wetland areas identified. - Mr. Anthony Campanegro, applicant's Civil Engineer*

12. Is there an acceleration / deceleration lane planned? *Yes, on Stump Road. Coming from 309 heading towards Horsham Rd, left turn lane.*

The following questions / comments from members of the public in attendance:

1. Resident / Jonathan Drive – Will this project affect property taxes in any way? *The property taxes are controlled by the County. I can't tell you if your taxes will every go up, but I can say that this particular project will not be a catalyst to have those taxes go up.*

A lot of wildlife, rodents start running towards our houses during the construction process. Is there anything that you can do about that? *We can certainly look into that and investigate the situation.*

2. Resident / Jonathan Drive – There is already a lot of construction noise from the old Harriet Carter building. We did not receive any letters about it. There is a lot of noise and vibrations. Also, the traffic on Stump Road is very heavy and you have a couple of accidents at the intersection. Every month we have accidents. I fear there will be a lot of disturbance. I bought the house here because it is secluded. I know this property may be used for industrial. Maybe, I thought trucking that's fine, but I don't know about the residential. I have some reservations.

The following questions / statements were submitted via email from residents to the Township:

1. Who is responsible for the maintenance of the access road? *That would be the owner of the building, up until where PennDot takes over. Outside of the PennDot Right of Way.*

2. What benefit is construed to be provided to the current residents of the nearby housing developments? Why should your neighbors be happy about this? Is there any concern for that? *This building, I believe, is smaller than what would be permitted under industrial use. It has bigger buffers from the actual building than would be probably for an industrial use. And we've tried to keep it as far away from the residential as possible. As well as putting the parking areas closer to the residential versus the building. The benefits is that it's not an industrial building.*

3. Are there any applications positive or negative to the neighboring developments? Any tax implications? *It's kind of a ratable and it really doesn't have school-aged children. All of the maintenance and operations are all handled privately, without municipal services.*

4. What is the expected impact to utilities from neighboring developments or structure? Has this been studied? I am concerned that our water, electric, and will internet availability be negatively impacted. *I do not have an answer to the impact of internet service. We do have to go through all of the regulations and agencies in order to get adequate water, sewer, and electricity.*

5. What is the expected impact from an environmental standpoint, i.e. groundwater, drainage, runoff? *The groundwater currently just flows off the property. When we develop this, it would have to be all in a controlled environment. There will be both surface and sub-surface detention basins on the property and they would have calculated water management counts. The post-development would have to be better than the pre-development. More stringent. So, it should actually provide for less storm water runoff than the existing conditions.*

6. What is the expectation for how noise and light pollution will be affected for neighbors? We currently have a natural buffer of foliage that helps to reduce the incidence of noise and visual stimulus from the busy 309 highway. *Our focus is to try to preserve as much of the existing buffer as possible, which I think we've done the way we've positioned this property. The lighting must comply with Township regulations and will be reviewed by Township Consultants. The community is self-contained and the only areas that are really outside where people would be gathering to have any type of noise, would be in the open-air courtyard which is surrounded by the building itself. The other activities are on the opposite side of the building. So, the building should actually act as a buffer for noise, and the building would act as a buffer for sound from 309 as well.*

7. Local traffic is a big concern. Slide 26 of the presentation provided on the website states that the apartment complex would produce less traffic than other permitted uses, such as an industrial warehouse or office building. Sources are cited to substantiate this claim, so let's assume that the data is corroborative. However, any increase in the traffic for the westbound side of Stump Rd to Route 309 is concerning. If Stump Road is the only way in or out of this proposed apartment complex, it seems that we should expect the traffic at this light to increase significantly as those residents commute and recreate. *We're clearly not going to help the situation, but we feel that this use is less than what it could be, is less than a permitted use currently. We will further discuss what type of modifications we could do there to alleviate any type of traffic.*

8. What studies have been performed concerning the impact of local wildlife, and how those animals will be forced to disperse into the nearby locations? *There's been no study on that. Unfortunately, we live in a world where properties are built. And whether it's this project or an industrial project that concern would be the same. The only thing I can say is that we're really impacting about 4 acres of this 10 acre site.*

9. Statement from resident on Jonathan Drive – "I oppose this request for rezoning amendment. The last thing we need is more traffic in this already congested area, we don't need the noise and this will decrease our property value. We have opposed this request previously and continue to oppose this request. Due to Covid and the limited number of people allowed to be present during this hearing I wanted my voice heard and my opposition to this request acknowledged. Please deny this request."

10. The parcel in question has environmentally sensitive areas. There is a huge wooded area and an unmapped tributary. The map shown in the letter does not show the tributary. Many houses in the Orchards Development are already facing flooding issues due to a number of new developments in the upstream areas of the township. Are you planning to authorize destruction of more wooded, pervious areas in the name of development and overburden the smaller tributaries? If a big housing development is allowed in this parcel, it will have a significant environmental impact in the Orchard Development. The township already has a significant amount of land dedicated to residential development. Why does the Planning Commission need to allow Conditional Use in an existing LI parcel and contribute to environmental degradation and sufferings to existing residential communities? *Comments were made that there has always been opposition to a project like this. It appears that this was a well thought out and well-planned project. The property is currently zoned for industrial use. If the property were developed under the Limited Industrial permitted uses there would be a lot more of the acreage used for industrial use. We would have heavy traffic from tractor-trailers, both coming in and going out. The property is going to be developed sometime. It has not been used for*

many years, but it's sitting there waiting for something to come along. We're going to have increase in traffic no matter what the use is. Unfortunately, anything that goes in there is going to have some impact on the environment.

There was brief discussion in regards to the calculation of the fee in lieu of recreation lands and the proposed text amendment ordinance. The items were not reviewed by the Planning Commission at this time as they would be reviewed by the Township Consultants and presented at a later date.

Ms. Judy Stern Goldstein of Gilmore Associates, Township Planning Consultant, discussed the importance of trail connections. The Township would like to see a connection to the existing trail system. There are two ways to access the trail system; (1) Stump Road has a sidewalk all the way to the municipal building, and (2) across Rte 309 where the light is. Access to the 309 trail connection would be through the easement across the hotel parking lot. The applicant expressed concerns in regards to feasibility to put a bridge across the Little Neshaminy and getting across 202 or 309, but they agreed to further study the options.

Mr. Dave Drummond of Gilmore Associates, Township Traffic Engineer, asked the applicant if they intended to put a pedestrian walkway or sidewalk to connect to Stump Road from the site. The applicant stated that the idea is being evaluated in terms of width of the easement / right of way area.

The presentation concluded. The applicant thanked everyone for their time.

At this time, the Planning Commission continued their regular meeting:

Reorganization:

Chairman:	Motion made by Jay Glickman and seconded by David Fetzer to appoint James Rall. Motion passed 6-0
Vice-Chairman:	Motion made by Jay Glickman and seconded by James Rall to appoint Tom Borghetti. Motion passed 6-0
Secretary:	Motion made by Jay Glickman and seconded by James Rall to appoint David Fetzer. Motion passed 6-0

Old Business: none

New Business:

2021 Comprehensive Plan Update – The last update to the Township's Comprehensive Plan was completed in 2008 as a brochure. The plan will be revisited this year and updated in traditional book format. The Township will be working with Gilmore Associates to complete this project.

Adjournment: There being no further business to come before the Commission and on a motion made by Jim Rall and seconded by Jay Glickman, the meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm. The next meeting will be held at 7:30 pm on February 18, 2021 at the Montgomery Township Building.