

Planning Commission Meeting Minutes – October 21, 2021

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

Call to Order: 7:30pm

Approval of Minutes: not applicable

Proposed Amendments- Township Landscape Ordinance – Valerie Liggett of Gilmore Associates presented to the Planning Commission the recommended amendments to the Township's current landscape ordinance. The proposed amendments focused on bringing the ordinance up to date and having more performance based standards rather than straight calculations and quantities, thereby increasing the function of the plantings required instead of just the number of plantings required (per linear foot). This allows for better landscape design with more purpose considering future growth and performance of the required landscaping. The updated ordinance is also designed to reduce the number of waiver requests due to the current ordinance requiring large quantities and required plantings in different areas overlapping. The proposed ordinance amendments changes the required screen buffer installed to provide 100% screening at 8 years of growth. The Commission questioned the 8-year provision. Valerie advised them it was due to the current industry standard and research. If required 100% screening after 1-2 years, future overcrowding would occur. In general, smaller trees recover quicker and grow faster. Valerie will look into adding berm and fencing requirements for additional buffering. After some discussion, the Commission recommended reducing the number of years for those projects abutting residential properties.

The current list of trees in the ordinance was not updated at this time. Currently the applicant selects species from the list and the Township reviews the selections for appropriateness to the site and proposed locations.

On a motion made by Jay and seconded by Frank, the Commission recommends that the Board of Supervisors approve the proposed landscape ordinance amendments with a modification that any non-residential project abutting residential reduce the 100% screening at 4 years of growth.

Westrum Lifestyle Apartments Conditional Use Application – The applicant proposes the construction of a 225 unit lifestyle apartment building with associated parking. The existing 10 acre parcel sits within the LI-Limited Industrial district and is currently vacant. The lot does not have frontage along Bethlehem Pike or Stump Road. It sits behind the Rodeway Inn. Access is provided by proposed easements over adjacent properties to Stump Road and Bethlehem Pike (emergency access only to Bethlehem Pike through the Rodeway Inn parking lot). The plan also includes pedestrian connectivity to Stump Road and Bethlehem Pike.

The applicant's attorney, Carrie Nase-Poust, presented the application to the Commission members. Westrum has an agreement of sale to purchase the property. A text amendment was adopted earlier this year to allow the lifestyle apartments by Conditional Use meeting specific criteria. The applicant's Engineer reviewed the proposed project including storm water management, the proposed pedestrian connections at Stump Road and Bethlehem Pike. The applicant's Traffic Engineer reviewed the traffic improvements at Bethlehem Pike and Knapp Road and discussed the traffic implications for the proposed new development in regards to Stump Road and 309.

The Planning Commission had two concerns with the proposed project:

1. Stump Road Access – The only access into and out of the complex is at Stump Road. Re-striping and widening of Stump Road is proposed for entering the site. It is a single lane to exit the site onto Stump Road. Traffic will be able to turn left onto Stump Road to exit the site and head towards Horsham Road or turn right onto Stump Road towards Bethlehem Pike/309. Concerns were raised about adding 300 additional cars onto Stump Road from this site, especially during peak times as this road is already heavily travelled and congested.
2. Proposed Pedestrian Crossing at Bethlehem Pike & Knapp Rd – The applicant proposes a crosswalk area across Bethlehem Pike/309 to Knapp Road and pedestrian connectivity to Stump Road in order to comply with the pedestrian connectivity requirement. The Commission had concerns with the 309 crossing. The crosswalk area would be accessed through the Rodeway Inn parking lot. No refuge island was proposed between the northbound and southbound lanes on 309. The Commission members questioned whether this created an unsafe situation, especially for those who could not complete the crossing in the time provided. They also had concerns with accessing the crosswalk through the Rodeway Inn parking lot.

The applicant withdrew their request for recommendation by the Planning Commission to further review their concerns and discuss alternatives. They requested to be placed on the November 18th agenda.

Adjournment: There being no further business to come before the Commission and on a motion made by Jim Rall and seconded by Leon McGuire, the meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm. The next meeting will be held at 7:30 pm on November 18, 2021 at the Montgomery Township Building.