

WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP
Planning Commission
Agenda
Tuesday, September 15, 2020
7:00 P.M.

This Meeting will be held by teleconference via Zoom

CALL TO ORDER

REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes: September 1, 2020

PUBLIC COMMENT/CONCERNS/QUESTIONS

PLANS

1. Valley Creek Homes LLC. – McKee Builders LLC.
Address: Northeast Corner of Swedesford Rd @Church Farm Ln.
First Review: Sketch Plan
Request: Construction of 344 unit active adult residential community including: single-family detached dwellings, carriage homes, and villas.

NEW BUSINESS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

Next Meeting: October 6, 2020

Directions to access the Zoom Meeting

Option 1:

Click this link to register:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMocOyvpz0iHdxQoiM3KnfzScUx9jg8c0y>

Option 2:

Use your phone and call +1-646-558-8656. When asked, enter the Meeting and Password.

[Virtual Meeting Etiquette](#)

[Zoom Instructions](#)



MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 11, 2020
TO: Planning Commission
FROM: John R. Weller, AICP
Director of Planning and Zoning
SUBJECT: Valley Creek Homes
Sketch plan

APPLICANT: McKee Builders, LLC
940 W. Sproul Rd., Ste. 301
Springfield, PA 19064

SITE ADDRESS: n/s Swedesford Rd. at Valley Creek Blvd.
Exton, PA 19341

TAX PARCELS: 41-3-8, 41-3-8.1, 41-3-8.2, and 41-3-8.4

ZONING: O/L, Office/Laboratory

DESCRIPTION: Consideration of two new development options and possible request for Zoning Ordinance amendment.

Background

The subject tract comprises four undeveloped lots covering a total of 100.47 acres within the Valley Creek Corporate Center and is currently owned by Rubenstein Partners. The tract lies along the north side of Swedesford Rd., opposite the intersection of Valley Creek Blvd., between Church Farm La. and Exton Park to the west and the Malvern Hunt community in East Whiteland Township to the east. The north boundary is Old Valley Rd., which is improperly labelled "Church Farm Road." Adjacent to the tract, at the southeast corner of Church Farm La. and Old Valley Rd., there is a 10.4-acre lot owned by the Township. Most of the tract is vacant, but there are several homes along the Swedesford Rd. frontage that were formerly used as housing for Church Farm School staff, including the historic "Pickwick" house (Township Site #327, Class I).

The 100-year floodplain intrudes into the tract along its western edge (most clearly seen on the drawing for the Life Care Community), and there are some small areas of steep slope, mostly along the northern edge of the site. Generally, the tract slopes down gently from Old Valley Rd. to a tributary of Valley Ck. that bisects the tract north of Swedesford Rd., then it rises again - a bit more steeply - to the Swedesford frontage. There are woodlands between the stream and Swedesford Rd., but most of the tract has been recently cultivated and is therefore open.

On August 8, 2000, the Board of Supervisors approved the conditional use application for the Valley Creek Corporate Center ("VCCC"), which included the subject tract along with about

40 acres of land south of Swedesford Rd. On March 13, 2001 the Board approved the final land development plan for the first phase of the project - being the portion south of Swedesford Rd. - and memorializing the approved development for the remaining portion; that is, the tract we are considering tonight.

The overall plan for the VCCC called for the construction of 1.75 million sq. ft. of office space in 17 buildings of three, four, and five stories. To date, only three buildings with a total leasable area of about 257,000 sq.ft. have been built at the southwest corner of Swedesford Rd. and Valley Creek Blvd. As shown on the attached drawing, the development approved for the tract we are considering tonight included eleven office buildings with a total of 1.2 million sq.ft. of leasable space and over 4,800 parking spaces. Given that conditional use approvals have no expiration, the property may still be developed in this way.

The demand for suburban office space began to decline in the early 2000's and collapsed entirely with financial crisis of 2007-2008. Since then, there have been occasional expressions of interest in building more of the corporate center - usually on Parcel B at the southeast corner of Swedesford Rd. and Valley Creek Blvd., which remains vacant - but we have seen no serious interest in constructing the portion of the project north of Swedesford Rd.; that is, the tract before us tonight.

The Applicant has provided two development options for our consideration. Since the tract is in the Office/Laboratory ("O/L") zoning district, it is eligible for development pursuant to the provisions of the Institutional ("IN") overlay district as found in Article X of West Whiteland Township Zoning Ordinance ("Zoning"). The Applicant has accordingly provided a plan for a life-care facility that has been designed to comply with the existing regulations. This type of facility is permitted in the IN overlay district by §325-45.B(13) of the Zoning. Please note that while this use is permitted here by right - as indicated by the title on the drawing - this particular design would require conditional use review due to its size.

The Applicant has also provided a sketch showing development of this tract as an "active adult" community. This design lacks the care facilities shown on the sketch for the life care project and appears similar to a conventional residential community, including single homes on smaller lots, carriage homes, and townhouses along with a clubhouse, swimming pool, and a recreational trail system. Staff notes that both designs connect to the public road system just like what was approved for the office park: the main entrance is a large, boulevard-type driveway from Swedesford Rd. directly opposite Valley Creek Blvd. with a smaller, secondary access to Church Farm La. along the west side of the tract.

The principal features of each design are summarized below.

Office Park Development

- The Township approved the conditional use plan for this tract on August 8, 2000. The Applicant would need to get land development approval prior to construction, but they are entitled to build the project as shown on the attached drawing.
- The design features eleven office buildings (one 3-story building, eight 4-story buildings, and two 5-story buildings) with a total of about 1.2 million square feet of leasable space.
- The eleven buildings are grouped into three clusters arranged along the east side of an extended Valley Creek Blvd. Each cluster surrounds a landscaped courtyard area and is surrounded by surface parking for a total of over 4,800 vehicles.
- The Decision and Order that approved the conditional use includes 69 conditions addressing landscaping, traffic planning, building architecture, sanitary sewage disposal,

stormwater management, historic preservation, recreational facilities (including a pedestrian system), lighting, and public safety. Any development of this tract would entail a review of these conditions to determine which ones remain relevant and consistent with current Township policy.

Life-Care Community

- This use is permitted by right at this location pursuant to §325-15.B(5) and §325-45.B(13) of the Zoning. As noted above, conditional use review would be required prior to land development review due to the size of the facility.
- The design features a large building near the entrance from Swedesford Rd. to include housing for nursing, assisted living, and memory care residents along with community facilities and group dining along with administrative offices.
- Independent living is provided in six apartment buildings and 77 townhouse-type units. The independent living area includes a clubhouse and swimming pool separate from the facilities in the main building.
- The drawing states that there will be a total of 319 residential units, but no breakdown is shown for how many will be in the apartment buildings and how many in the nursing, assisted living, and memory care areas.
- No information is provided about the height or number of stories in the proposed buildings.

Active Adult Community

- The project appears similar to a Planned Residential Development, providing a total of 344 dwellings: 116 single-family homes, 96 carriage homes, and 132 townhouses (or “villas,” according to the drawing) along with a clubhouse, swimming pool, and recreational trail network.
- The Applicant intends to market and operate this project as an “active-adult community” for individuals 55 years old and older.
- The Township currently has no special provisions for active adult communities, although they are allowable under the law. We would allow as community such as this simply as a type of residential use.
- This project is not allowed on this tract by the current Zoning.

Staff Comment

We have an interesting situation here in that the subject tract is already approved for development, but for a use where there is currently little demand. Although Staff has heard anecdotally that the suburban office market may rebound somewhat due to COVID-19, we question whether it would revive to the extent necessary to make the approved office park feasible. Even if it does, is the approved design one that we still find desirable? Eleven low-rise buildings surrounded by acres (and acres, and acres...) of asphalt parking lot feels inappropriate for 2020.

As described on the attached correspondence from the Applicant’s counsel, their preference is for the Active Adult Community, which they acknowledge is not allowed under the current Zoning. They have provided the Life-Care Community design as a point of reference to show what our Zoning currently allows and how their desired project compares.

Staff suggests that our discussion tonight focus on the Applicant's two plans and whether you would support a Zoning amendment (and likely an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan as well) to accommodate the Active Adult Community. It is not clear if this Applicant would proceed with the Life-Care Facility if there is no support for an amendment. Staff offers the following observations.

- We find the approved office park plan the least appealing of the three plans. In addition to our concerns about the now-dated design, the use is less compatible with the adjacent Malvern Hunt residential community and park areas.
- While it may not be the Applicant's preference, the design of the Life-Care Community has a number of positive points. The main building may be imposing (depending upon its height), but it is set well back from Swedesford Rd. and landscaping could make it quite attractive. The scale of the buildings becomes more intimate as one proceeds north, and the existing stream is a fitting separator for the independent living section. Except for the memory care unit, all buildings are set back at least 200 feet from the tract perimeter, whereas the setback for the Active Adult Community buildings is only about fifty feet. The Life-Care Community also appears to provide more open and green space than the Active Adult Community.
- The Active Adult Community has 25 more dwelling units than the Life-Care Community. There appears to be little in the way of unconstrained green space, and the "villa" section south of the stream seems especially congested, with twenty units squeezed into the southwestern corner and all of the remaining villas sharing a single access to the main entrance drive. On a tract of this size, we hoped for a more creative layout. Even in the single-family area, there are several long streets that could result in a monotonous, unattractive streetscape.
- We expect that the two designs would generate a similar volume of traffic. While fewer residents in the Life-Care Community would be drivers, this would be offset by traffic generated by staff and visitors.
- While we prefer the design of the Life-Care Community, we have two significant concerns about the use. As we have noted before, uses of this type generate significant demand for emergency services, especially ambulance services. Should this project be submitted for conditional use review, the Applicant should be prepared to discuss staffing in detail. A facility of this size may even warrant its own in-house ambulance service.
- Our second concern about the Life-Care Community is the possibility of its being owned by a non-profit organization resulting in a loss of tax revenue to the Township.
- In contrast, it appears that the homes in the Active Adult Community would remain taxable, a number of the residents would likely still be working (and contributing an earned income tax to the Township), and there would be fewer school-aged children than in an unrestricted community.

Attachments

1. Approved plan for Valley Creek Corporate Center (Sheet 7 only) dated November 19, 1999, most recently revised February 23, 2001.
2. Life Care Community: By-Right Plan dated July 15, 2020, no revision date.
3. Active Adult Community 55+ dated July 15, 2020.
4. Cover letter from Riley, Riper, Hollin and Colagreco, dated August 18, 2020.

Louis J. Colagreci, Jr.
Lou@rrhc.com
Extension 203



August 18, 2020

via Email and Hand Delivery

Justin Smiley, AICP, Township Planner
West Whiteland Township
101 Commerce Drive
Exton, PA 19341

Re: McKee Builders, LLC/West Whiteland
Our File: 6872-03

Dear Justin:

As discussed previously, this firm represents McKee Builders (“McKee”) in conjunction with the potential development of property in West Whiteland Township commonly known as the “Valley Creek North”. This property comprises Tax Parcel Nos. 41-3-8, 41-3-8.1, 41-3-8.2 and 41-3-8.4 and hereinafter shall be referred to as the “Property”.

The Property is in the OL – Office/Laboratory District. As such, institutional uses are permitted in the District pursuant to the Institutional Overlay District provisions of the Zoning Ordinance. One of the institutional uses permitted on the Property is “Life-care and personal care living facility(ies) for senior citizens” (“Life-Care Facility”). Through the current proposal, McKee would like to retain the residential option offered by a Life-Care Facility albeit in the context of active adult housing for those 55 years and older. By way of further information, McKee is the leading developer of active adult communities in the region and presently is in the process of developing an active adult community in Upper Uwchlan Township.

By way of background, many years ago, the legal owner of the Property obtained zoning approval for the development of over 1 million square feet of office space on the Property. It is my understanding that that approval is still valid. The purpose of the current submission, however, is not to focus on the approved office development plan, but rather to compare and contrast two (2) residential options for development. Enclosed with this correspondence are five (5) copies of a proposed Life-Care Facility that could be built under current zoning on the Property as well as five (5) copies of a sketch depicting development of an active adult community with area and bulk parameters similar to those of a Life-Care Facility.

Justin Smiley, AICP, Township Planner
West Whiteland Township
August 18, 2020
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The McKee proposal is a simple one: it carries forward the residential uses permitted within a Life-Care Facility (with the addition of single-family detached units) and proposes age-restricted development in a non-institutional setting. The institutional uses accessory to a Life-Care Facility including nursing care, congregate dining and other accessory medical uses would be replaced with community areas, open space and recreational facilities frequently found in active adult communities in our region.

It is my understanding that the active adult residential option offered by McKee is not presently available in West Whiteland Township and would present a much-desired alternative for housing arrangements for those active adult buyers who presently live in the Township and wish to remain in this area close to children and grandchildren but under a planned community setting.

The advantages of active adult housing are readily apparent. There is considerable tax revenue to be realized by the West Chester Area School District absent any expense, there is less burden on emergency services and local traffic and a desirable housing option for those wishing to remain in the West Whiteland community is provided.

In conclusion, the purpose of the instant filing is to open up a dialogue with West Whiteland Township regarding development options for the Property as presented above. The development proposal advanced by McKee retains the residential option of a Life-Care Facility absent the institutional uses associated therewith.

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss the benefits of an active adult community with the Planning Commission on September 15, 2020. In the meantime, if you have any questions regarding this proposal, or would like additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

/s/ Louis J. Colagreco, Jr.

LOUIS J. COLAGRECO, JR

LJC,JR/kch

Enclosures

cc: Mark McGonigle (via email)
Kevin McLaughlin (via email)
Lisa Thomas, RLA, AICP, LEED AP (via email)
Eric Schiela (via email)