

**WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES**

Minutes of the first February meeting

February 5, 2019

Members Present

Anita Nardone
Glenn Marshall
Raymond McKeeman
Joe Altimari
Rajesh Kumbhardare
Jeff Glisson
Mark Gordon

Township Personnel Present

John Weller, Director of Planning & Zoning
Justin Smiley, Township Planner
Mimi Gleason, Township Manager
Ted Otteni, Public Works Director
Pam Gural-Bear, Asst. Township Manager

I. CALL TO ORDER

Anita Nardone called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

II. REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: To approve the minutes for the meeting of January 22, 2019
(McKeeman/Kumbhardare)

ACTION: 5-0-1 (Mr. Gordon abstained as he had not attended that meeting; Mr. Marshall arrived late and was not present for the vote.)

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments on items not on the agenda.

IV. PRESENTATION

1. Ship Road Couplet and proposed development of commercial and residential uses at 500 & 690 E. Lincoln Hwy.

Ms. Nardone opened the meeting thanking everyone in the audience for coming with their concerns and comments. She explained that the Planning Commission works with Township staff and consultants in an advisory capacity to the Board of Supervisors. She emphasized that neither the zoning amendment nor the development plans presented this evening have been approved. The Township is still in the information-gathering process.

Mr. Weller then explained that the presentation will be given in 3 parts: Staff will give a summary of planning and development activity within the Township, the Township's transportation consultant will explain the proposed Ship Road Couplet design, the developers will present sketch plans of their projects, and the meeting will conclude with questions and comments from the Commission members and the audience.

Mr. Weller explained that the former Entenmann's bakery property and the southern part of the adjacent Laborers' Training Facility ("LTF") property are for sale. The current zoning allows townhouses, single-family homes, apartments, office buildings, and institutional uses like churches and schools on these properties. The Township received applications from two developers, NVR Homes and 690 East Lincoln Associates (headed by Eli Kahn) to amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow a Wawa convenience store with a gas station on the Entenmann's site and single-family homes on lots smaller than currently allowed on the LTF property. He emphasized that tonight's discussion would address

amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to allow the developers' plans, not the plans themselves. Mr. Weller further explained that the Planning Commission can only make recommendations regarding the amendments and plans to the Board of Supervisors - the elected officials - and that only the Board has the authority to approve or deny them.

Mr. Weller next gave a summary of development in the Township since 2006, noting that only ten housing units were approved between 2007 and 2013. This created pent-up demand that - in combination with more readily available financing, our geographic location at the center of the County, and the increasing regional population - resulted in the multiple residential projects now under construction. He explained that the Township has the authority to regulate and control what kind of development occurs and where it can occur, but the Township cannot prohibit development, which is one of the rights attached to the ownership of property. Mr. Weller then reviewed the development that is happening in the surrounding areas and noted that even if the Township could stop development in West Whiteland, surrounding development would still result in increased traffic traveling through West Whiteland. He added that the Chester County Comprehensive Plan focuses development along major roads and where sewage capacity is available in order to preserve more rural areas. Mr. Weller then showed maps of current and proposed bicycle and pedestrian paths, noting that many of these have been or will be built by developers at no cost to the public.

Mr. Weller explained that the lull in the pace of development between 2007 and 2013 gave the Township the time to prepare various plans, including the Transportation Capital Improvements Plan, adopted in 2015. Also referred to as the Act 209 Plan, this document identifies road improvements needed to accommodate the traffic that would result from development as permitted by the zoning. The Act 209 Plan also allows the Township to require developers to make off-site improvements or pay an impact fee based upon the traffic that the proposed development will generate. Mr. Weller stated that the concept of the Ship Road Couplet came out of the Act 209 Plan - not from any developer - as a way to increase the capacity of the Ship Rd./Lincoln Hwy. since it was not possible to add lanes without adversely impacting the surrounding historic structures.

Mr. Weller addressed previous comments that the Township was rushing the process, reiterating that nothing has been approved and explaining that this is merely the first step in a process that will take several months moving through the conditional use and land development processes. He added that Township staff does, however, support the proposed zoning amendment because they believe it is in the best interest of the Township and presents a rare opportunity to have two developers work together to provide a substantial public improvement at no cost to the Township. Since these properties are along a major road, some development is inevitable. If these projects are not built, something else will be. Staff therefore sees this as a choice between allowing these projects and getting the improvements or getting by-right projects that would only pay the transportation impact fee, which would be insufficient to cover the cost of the couplet.

Kevin Johnson, of Traffic Planning & Design, then presented the couplet design. The couplet involves constructing a new road segment around the Lincoln Hwy. intersection for southbound traffic while making that portion of the existing alignment northbound. Southbound traffic would be diverted to the west after crossing the Chester Valley Trail, cross Lincoln Hwy. at a new signalized intersection, and re-join the existing cartway north of the Route 30 bypass. The existing alignment will accommodate northbound traffic, although the section south of Springdale Dr. will remain two-way traffic to allow vehicles entering Ship from Springdale to make a left turn to go south. Mr. Johnson then presented animated traffic simulations showing the impact of both by-right development and the developers' proposals, with and without the couplet. The animations showed a significant reduction in congestion with the couplet.

Lou Colagreco, attorney for NVR Homes, then presented the proposed residential plan. He stated that a by-right plan could potentially yield 300 townhomes on the site, but the developer was proposing 90 single-family homes on smaller lots. This requires the proposed zoning amendment. He noted that Ship Rd. and Lincoln Hwy. are both state roads, and that PennDOT would only require that the

development not make the traffic worse than the current condition. Mr. Colagreco said the Township is trying to make the traffic situation better and has asked the developer to contribute to the cost of building the couplet. NVR Homes is working in cooperation with Mr. Kahn, and the two developers are willing to pay for the southern portion of the couplet, but since they are only equitable owners of the property, they have time constraints.

Mr. Kahn then described the proposed commercial plan for a Wawa with gas station. He said that while he is willing to contribute to the couplet, the property will be developed with or without the requested amendment.

Ms. Nardone asked for comments from the audience.

Robert Catone, owner of Tri-State Equipment Rental at 120 S. Ship Rd., expressed concern about anything that restricts or complicates access to his building, noting that stopping tractor trailer access would be catastrophic for the businesses on Ship Rd. He added that the businesses start early in the morning, so any new residences should be placed further away.

Matt Burns, representing Church Farm School and SS. Philips and James Church, asked that adequate buffers be provided to protect the peace and tranquility of St. Mary's Chapel. He also requested that the church and the school be consulted throughout the process as both will be impacted by the proposed developments and changes in traffic flow. He said a letter detailing their concerns has been sent to the Township.

Tim Hubbard, of 697 Stonegate Court, thanked staff and the Commission for their work thus far. He expressed concern that while the couplet will move traffic through the intersection more quickly, it will create bigger backups for residents on local roads such as Pullman, King, Swedesford, and Valley Creek. He asked when the northern section of the couplet would be built as this is needed for the couplet to function as designed. He did not think the definition of convenience store should include serving alcoholic beverages, and expressed concerns about how the proposed plans will affect emergency services and schools.

Township Manager Mimi Gleason responded that the Township would be responsible for building the north leg of the couplet, adding that staff has met with both Sunoco representatives and the owner of Ship Inn about necessary rights-of-way; both are open to working with the Township. Details of any property acquisition have not been finalized as it is not yet certain that the couplet will be built. If the Zoning amendment is approved, then Staff would ask the Board of Supervisors for authorization to proceed with discussions with Sunoco and Ship Inn. Ms. Gleason added that some Act 209 fees have been accumulated from other developments which the Township could use as a match if the Township applies for grants to fund the northern portion. She stated that this would be a competitive application not only because the southern leg would already be funded but also due to the project including bicycle and pedestrian accommodations to connect the existing Chester Valley Trail to the planned extension on the former Norfolk Southern line. Also, PennDOT has indicated support for the project.

Ryan O'Malley, of Bowen Drive, asked if the School District has any input into the project. Ms. Nardone explained that there is a free flow of information back and forth between the Township and the School District. Mr. Weller said the School District, like the Township, has no authority to say "no" to development, but they are party to the process with an annual call to see what developments are proposed and transmittal of a formal notification once plans are approved. Mr. O'Malley asked why the Township could not simply re-zone the property so as not to allow large numbers of apartment units. Tom Oeste explained that any proposed zoning change is required to be advertised. Upon seeing that a property is to be down-zoned, developers would immediately file an application to protect their rights under the current zoning, and the Township would lose that race. Mr. O'Malley added that he felt a convenience store would generate too much traffic for the intersection.

Tom Baschoff, of 1429 E. Woodbank Way, said a traffic light will be needed at the end of Springdale Drive and also to access the corporate office park at Lincoln Hwy. Mr. Weller said that a new signal at the intersection of Lincoln Hwy. and Belden Blvd. will be provided as part of another plan now under review. Mr. Baschoff said that Wawa should pay the cost to move St. Mary's Chapel to the SS. Philip and James campus.

Michelle Moll, West Whiteland Supervisor, questioned how the southern portion of the couplet would operate in the event that the northern portion was not built. Mr. Johnson said until the northern portion is built, the southern portion would operate as a loop road.

Maria DeMarco, of Ryerss Hunt, said that two lanes travelling in one direction feels like a highway. Mr. Johnson noted that the one-way couplet allowed for timing of traffic signals so that there would be no oncoming traffic for drivers turning left.

Pat McCabe, of 410 Hartford Sq. and Vice-President of the Exton Station Homeowners' Association, said he does not like the development and wants less density and more open space.

Joe Roscioli, of 1421 Gary Terr., asked several questions about the project and suggested consideration of a road connecting the existing LTF driveway on Lincoln Hwy. with the southern portion of the couplet.

Carmela Coudere, of 1286 Copeland Rd., is a frequent user of the Chester Valley Trail and asked about the crossings at Lincoln Hwy. and Ship Rd. Mr. Marshall said the County is looking into that.

Matt Kozsuch, of 1405 Full Cry Ct., does not like the couplet but understands why it was proposed. He asked what alternative improvements could be made at the intersection. Mr. Johnson said a right-turn lane westbound and a left-turn lane on southbound Ship Rd. that would align with the left turn lane on the southern leg would be needed, but there is not enough room on the north side to do that. Mr. Kozsuch added that he thinks the school zone is not warranted and its removal could speed up traffic.

Theresa Santalucia, West Whiteland Supervisor, said there is a similar couplet in Gap and encouraged people to go there and see how it works. Mr. Johnson said he will see if he can get pre- and post-construction data from PennDOT on the Gap couplet.

Ms. Nardone thanked everyone for coming and participating and encouraged residents to send any remaining comments or concerns via e-mail listed on the Township's website. She said the next step in the process will be decision on the proposed zoning amendment expected to take place within the next month.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:50 p.m.

Recording Secretary,



John R. Weller, AICP
Director of Planning & Zoning