

**WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES**

Minutes of the second March meeting

March 19, 2019

Members Present

Anita Nardone, Chairman
Joe Altimari
Jeff Glisson
Mark Gordon
Glenn Marshall
Raymond McKeeman

Township Personnel Present

John Weller, Director of Planning & Zoning
Justin Smiley, Township Planner
Mimi Gleason, Township Manager
Ted Otteni, Director of Public Works

I. CALL TO ORDER

Anita Nardone called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: To approve the minutes for the meeting of March 5, 2019. (McKeeman/Glisson)

ACTION: 6-0

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment on items not on the agenda.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

1. Proposed Zoning Amendment to O/R District for Ship Rd./Lincoln Hwy. Development

Ms. Nardone opened the meeting by explaining that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to educate and allow the Planning Commission members to ask questions of staff, consultants, and the developers to regarding the discussion at the meeting of February 5, 2019, when the proposed Zoning Ordinance amendment was last discussed. She said John Weller will begin with an overview of the proposed amendment, Kevin Johnson and Jerry Baker of Traffic Planning and Design (TPD, the Township's traffic consultant) will present simulations of how the proposed Ship Road Couplet would work, the Planning Commission members will ask their questions, and then the Commission will hear comments and questions from the public.

Mr. Weller explained that the proposed ordinance amendment would accommodate a proposed development at the southwest corner of Ship Road and Lincoln Highway. He emphasized that there would be no approval or denial of a particular plan tonight, but rather a recommendation from the Planning Commission to the Board of Supervisors to approve or reject the changes to the Zoning Ordinance that would allow this plan. The Board of Supervisors will the make final decision. He further added that even if the Board of Supervisors approve the amendment, the plan will still need to go through the conditional use and land development process.

There are two potential developers involved: one proposing a Wawa and commercial area and the other proposing a residential community. A conceptual plan for these projects was presented at the Planning Commission meetings of January 8 and February 5 of this year. At those meetings, traffic was cited as the principal concern. Mr. Weller said that the proposed Ship Road Couplet is designed to mitigate the impact of the traffic, noting that the Couplet concept was first introduced in 2015 in the Township's Transportation Capital Improvements Plan, also known as the Act 209 Plan. Mr. Weller

noted that the volume of traffic estimated by the Act 209 Plan is nearly the same as what our consultant estimates would be generated by the proposed development. For this reason, Staff believes that the Couplet will satisfactorily accommodate traffic from the developers' proposals. Mr. Weller added that this is an unusual situation with two developers working together to provide a significant piece of public infrastructure, including not only the Couplet but also a bike and pedestrian path that will help link the Chester Valley Trail with a new Trail segment that the County is planning. He stated that the required transportation impact fee for these projects would be far less than the Township's cost to build the Couplet.

Mr. Johnson reviewed how the Couplet would work and showed simulations of traffic flows both with and without the proposed improvements. The simulations included the effect of traffic generated by the significant growth now underway in neighboring municipalities. The simulations showed that congesting and queues at the Ship Rd./Lincoln Hwy. intersection would be significantly reduced with the construction of the Couplet.

Mr. Johnson then directly addressed concerns that were brought up at the previous meetings:

- The Gap Couplet - TPD flew a drone over this area during am and pm peak hours to create a video showing how this existing couplet in Lancaster County keeps traffic moving in a previously congested area. Aspects of the Gap couplet were compared to West Whiteland.
- Roundabouts - TPD superimposed a design for a two-lane roundabout over the intersection, showing that it would have severe adverse impact upon the historic structures adjacent to the intersection.
- If only the southern portion of the Couplet is built, congestion will be worse than with the full Couplet, but it will still be a significant improvement, particularly in comparison with the scenario where there would be limited improvements to the intersection (no Couplet) and development proceeded under the current regulations.
- The need to evaluate other intersections along Ship Rd. - Mr. Johnson stated that the other intersections are too far away from the Lincoln Hwy. intersection to be reliably examined as part of this project; however, the Township will budget funds in 2020 to study them.

Joe Altimari questioned the comparison to the Gap Couplet since there is no school or church near the Gap location and the surrounding population density is less. Mr. Johnson responded that traffic volume is the critical factor to be considered, and that the Gap location 40,000 vehicles per day compared to 23,000 for the West Whiteland location; Gap also has more truck traffic. Mr. Johnson added that the traffic created by the proposed Wawa was factored into the simulations.

Glenn Marshall said he felt the requirement in in Section 4(3)(d) of the proposed ordinance amendment that at least one-third of the proposed dwellings be single-family detached was too low. Mr. Weller said Staff was open to a higher number, noting that the conceptual plan shows that 58% of the proposed dwellings would be single-family detached homes.

Jeff Glisson questioned how the three proposed traffic signals will be coordinated with one another. Mr. Johnson said that is done through PennDOT's signal permit process. The signal erected last will have to coordinate with the previous two signals.

Mark Gordon asked Mr. Johnson what he would recommend if he were working for the developer. Mr. Johnson said a developer would design the project to provide the fewest improvements that PennDOT would accept, noting that PennDOT only requires that a development not increase delays by more than ten seconds. Mr. Gordon then asked if the developer had considered how to mitigate the impact of the existing commercial and industrial uses along Ship Rd. upon the proposed residences. Lou Colagreco, attorney for the residential developer, responded that the plan is too conceptual at this

stage for that level of detail, but they would likely provide buffering through a combination of landscaping and fencing.

Mr. Gordon asked if the Township could fund the northern portion of the Couplet on its own if grant applications are not successful. Township Manager Mimi Gleason responded that while she has not discussed the matter with the Board of Supervisors, the Township does have a transportation fund that has built up over the years through contributions from developers that could be used; she added that she is confident that any grant application for the north part of the Couplet would be very competitive due to factors such as the significant private match (i.e., the southern portion) and the inclusion of pedestrian and bicycle connections to the Chester Valley Trail.

Mr. Gordon felt that a one-way flow past the three existing commercial properties on S. Ship Rd. was the best design, noting that allowing two-way traffic was in response to concerns expressed by the property owners. Mr. Johnson agreed that the original one-way design was better, but he added that the Township was working with the property owners and that allowing 2-way traffic south of Springdale Dr. would help these businesses. Mr. Johnson said it was a minor compromise.

Ms. Nardone provided some background on zoning, noting that the general policy of the Township is to have the most intense development along Lincoln Hwy. and Pottstown Pk. because that is where the larger roads and infrastructure are; the outer corners are less intensely developed. Growth is coming to Exton as a suburban area in the center of Chester County. She said the question the Commission needs to consider is whether the proposed zoning amendment will help the Township take advantage of an opportunity to grow smartly and preserve as best we can a Township that is desirable to live in from a traffic standpoint. She urged the Commission to make sure that the amendment represents good planning and is not just a reaction to an opportunity. With that said, she asked Mr. Weller how the amendment would apply to other areas within the Township. Mr. Weller responded that since the proposed residential development option had a minimum tract requirement of 40 acres, there were only one or two other parcels where it could be applied: a parcel east of the recently approved Lochiel Farm project and another along S. Whitford Rd., although the latter is currently being developed for apartments. He noted that it was also possible - but unlikely - for someone to acquire and consolidate multiple lots in the Whiteland Business Park to make a 40-acre tract.

Ms. Nardone asked the representatives for the developers how the commercial portion of the proposed plan affects the marketability of the homes. Mr. Colagreco replied that the plan is designed for pedestrian connectivity and sees that as a plus for residents to be able to walk to the commercial areas. Ms. Nardone then asked if Wawa would consider putting the store along Lincoln Highway with the fueling islands in the rear. Tom Oeste, the attorney for the commercial developer, responded that the gas pumps would need to face Lincoln Highway. He noted that this plan proposes only eight fueling stations while other Wawa stores have ten or twelve, adding that the proposal provides separation from St. Mary's Chapel.

Ms. Nardone asked about the overall impervious coverage limits. Mr. Weller said it would depend on whether the plan was submitted as one plan or two separate plans noting that the subdivisions have not yet been completed.

Ms. Nardone asked if the Commission members had any more comments or questions. There being none, she then asked for public comment.

Matthew Burns from Ss. Philip and James Church stated that he opposed the amendment, citing concerns for St. Mary's Chapel, the 8,000 parishioners of the Church, and the 500 students who attend the school. He feels that any benefit to the Township is at the expense of the Parish and expressed concern that the proposed commercial development would make St. Mary's Chapel unusable at some point. He expressed safety concerns for the school children and speeders trying to beat the lights. He feels the proposed amendment amounts to spot zoning and thinks more consideration is needed and doesn't believe the Township has done much regarding the northern portion of the Couplet. Ms.

Gleason responded that the Township has not acquired right-of-way because it cannot until it's known whether the amendment will be approved. She added that the Township has started surveying the property and will be able to move quickly if needed. The Township has had conversations with the two affected property owners, and they are open to talking, but there are not enough details at this time to go further. Mr. Burns suggested using other funding to build the Couplet. Ms. Gleason responded that if there are no matching funds and if the project is not filling in a gap, the grant application will be much less competitive. The process will then take much longer and will likely be more difficult if the land has been developed for residential use.

Ryan O'Malley of 413 Bowen Dr. asked how the proposed amendment would affect the existing Reilly and Sons fuel station on Lincoln Hwy. Mr. Weller said it would not be affected and would remain a legally non-conforming use. Mr. O'Malley then thanked the Township staff and Commission members for the time and effort spent studying this matter. He asked what assumptions are built into the trip generation figures. Mr. Weller explained the number of peak hour trips, as determined by the Township's traffic consultant, was 676 pm peak-hour trips, including the Wawa, the other commercial buildings, and the residential units. Mr. O'Malley felt the traffic assumption was not capturing the many left-hand turns in and out of the Wawa and asked to please reconsider the traffic assumptions. He said that the Township is heading in a high density direction and asked if residents are allowed input in that decision. Mr. Weller explained that when the Lincoln Highway Corridor Study was conducted and an amendment to the Township's Comprehensive Plan was made to establish development policy, numerous public meetings were held and were well attended by residents. Mr. Weller added that high density is not everywhere within the Township but is focused along major roads that can accommodate it such as Lincoln Hwy. and Pottstown Pk.

Tim Hubbard, of 697 Stonegate Court, thanked everyone for their efforts. He expressed concern for school students who will be crossing the intersection to go to the Wawa. He also felt that a Wawa would generate more traffic than what was being projected. He believes that PennDOT would require improvements to the existing intersection and didn't think the existing traffic was as bad as many think. He liked the residential portion of the plan, but not the Wawa.

Rob Cottone, owner of Tri-State Equipment Services at 120 S. Ship Rd., thanked everyone for listening to the residents. He said the two-way flow in front of his existing business helps but wants to make sure that nothing disrupts the tractor-trailer traffic that his business needs to survive, expressing concern with left turns and elevations in the area.

Larry McGinnis, a 45-year resident of 1439 Ship Rd., said that Ship Rd. was never designed to be a major thoroughfare. He said he does not feel that the proposed Couplet will benefit residents until other traffic issues elsewhere on Ship Rd. are addressed.

Nancy Carville, of 117 N. Ship Rd., expressed concern with the number of traffic signals in the area, speeding along Ship Rd., and the potential for stormwater backups in the Meadowbrook Manor area. She feels the Couplet will divide Exton and encouraged more thought be given to the plan.

Roberta Eckman, of 229 Cambridge Chase and member of the West Whiteland Historical Commission, expressed concern for the impact of the plan on the historic resources located on three corners of the intersection. She also noted that the definition of "convenience store" in the proposed amendment included customer seating which could allow restaurants. She felt the proposed density and increased traffic from a convenience store would negatively impact the historic resources.

Jon Reilly, owner of the fueling station at 601 E. Lincoln Hwy., does not think a Wawa is needed in this area and noted concern that the definition of "convenience store" includes the sale of alcoholic beverages.

There being no more comments, Ms. Nardone requested a motion.

MOTION: To recommend that the Board of Supervisors approve the Zoning Amendment as listed in John Weller's Memorandum dated March 15, 2019 with a revision to Section 4(3)(d) changing "one-third" to "fifty percent." (Gordon/Glisson)

ACTION: 3-3,

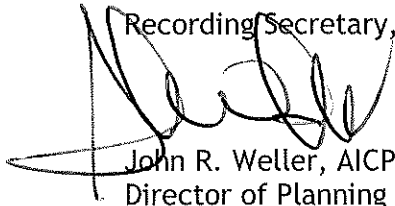
Mr. Gordon - yea
Mr. Glisson - yea
Mr. McKeeman - yea
Ms. Nardone - nay
Mr. Marshall - nay
Mr. Altimari - nay

Township Solicitor Mark Thompson noted that a tied vote means that the motion does not pass.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:20 p.m.

Recording Secretary,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John R. Weller", is written over the typed name and title.

John R. Weller, AICP
Director of Planning & Zoning