

**WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES**

Minutes of the second June meeting

June 16, 2020

Members Virtually Present

Chairman Anita Nardone
Joe Altimari
Dan Cote
Jeff Glisson
Mark Gordon
MaryFrances McGarrity
Ray McKeeman

Township Personnel Virtually Present

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

Rajesh Kumbhardare, Board of Supervisors Liaison

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Anita Nardone called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. She explained that due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the Commission has been meeting via Zoom. Tonight's meeting is "hybrid" meeting with some members attending in person at the Township building and others attending from remote locations. She further explained the "raise hand" feature of Zoom and asked that any public wishing to make comments use this feature.

John Weller said that he received an e-mail from Carla Zambelli, a resident of Tom's Circle in East Whiteland Township, in opposition to the Weston Tract project based on the proposed density, traffic impact, the existing pipeline running through the property, and the loss of woodlands; she also stated concerns regarding the Exton Knoll project. A second e-mail was received echoing similar concerns. Mr. Weller took this opportunity to explain that these two projects are in different stages of the review process: the Weston Tract project is a sketch plan, which is a very early step and is presented only for discussion; no action will be taken by the Commission. In contrast, Exton Knoll already has conditional use approval and is therefore entitled to approval of a land development plan, provided it is consistent with the conditional use plan.

II. REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES

Ms. Nardone made an amendment to the minutes.

MOTION: To approve the minutes for the meeting of June 9, 2020, as amended.
(McKeeman/Glisson)

ACTION: A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed 7-0.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

IV. PLANS

1. **Weston Tract**
Address: 1400 Weston Way
First Review: Sketch Plan
Request: Construction of 104 single-family homes

Mr. Weller noted this was the Commission's first review of this Applicant's sketch plan to construct 104 single-family homes on the office campus currently occupied by Weston Solutions; it is, however, similar to a sketch plan for this tract presented about a year ago by a different Applicant. The 54-acre tract is bounded by King Rd. on the north, US Route 202 on the west, and residential neighborhoods to the south and east. The property currently has three historic structures: the Morstein Manor House, Morstein Station, and the Morstein Gatehouse, all of which will remain. The northern portion of the lot is heavily wooded, and two pipeline rights-of-way cross the tract.

The plan proposes detached homes on lots ranging from 7,800 sq. ft. to 17,500 sq. ft. resulting in a gross density of just under 2 dwelling units per acre. Weston Way will remain the principal point of access to the site. The property is currently zoned O/L, Office/Laboratory, which does not allow residential use. The plan will therefore require an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance.

The Commission has reviewed other concepts for this site, most recently at the meeting of June 4, 2019. While the current design is similar to what was reviewed then, this one has fewer units and slightly larger lots. Consultant reviews from Spotts, Stevens and McCoy and Theurkauf Design and Planning question how the community will connect to the sanitary sewer system and express concern about the impact on existing woodlands.

Mr. Weller said the present plan shows incremental improvements from the previous version, but he questioned whether the plan justifies a Zoning Ordinance amendment.

Alyson Zarro, attorney for the Applicant, introduced Matt Caffrey and Tench Tilghman of Lennar, the equitable owner of the property. Mr. Tilghman noted other projects that Lennar is currently working on within the Township including the Waterloo Reserve and Lochiel Farm townhome communities.

Addressing the consultants' comments, Ms. Zarro said the historic structures will be retained with the Gatehouse being converted to a single-family detached dwelling and a possible condo conversion for the Mansion. She noted that sewer and water will be public with a connection on King Rd. A conceptual stormwater design will be provided later in the review process. She said the Applicant will look at improving the alignment of the secondary access drive with Old Phoenixville Pk. and will provide sidewalks and bike paths.

Ms. Nardone said that while she recognizes that there may be a desirable market for single-family homes, she questioned what drives the need for a zoning amendment. She added that to justify a zoning amendment, there needs to be a great benefit to the Township and questioned what that would be in this situation.

Mark Gordon feels the site is underutilized and recognizes the need for single-family homes. He expressed concern about re-use of the Mansion and recommended eliminating the section of Weston Way leading to the Mansion to avoid homes having road frontage both in front and behind.

Mary Cay Cousart of 1400 Whiteman Way asked if there was only one proposed access to the site. Mr. Weller responded that the main access will be from Weston Way with an emergency access to Old Phoenixville Pk. Ms. Cousart also expressed concerns with density and asked if the number of homes could be reduced and placed farther from her property. Mr. Caffrey said he can take another look at the setbacks.

Carla Zambelli of Tom's Circle in East Whiteland Township has concerns with stormwater runoff, traffic impacts, and the pipeline easement in light of the karst geology of the area. She further expressed frustration with so much development in the area.

Ms. Nardone noted the property owners have rights to develop their property and cited the job of the Planning Commission is to be sure to get the best development possible considering the property owners' legal rights and the Township's Ordinances.

Mark Sharpelletti of 1314 N. Tulip Dr. agreed with Ms. Zambelli and expressed concerns with buffering and density. Mr. Caffrey said he will look into increasing buffering. Ms. Nardone suggested the Applicant meeting with adjacent property owners one-on-one to discuss buffering.

Tom Bogusch of 1318 Amstel Way noted the steep hill between the proposed and existing homes and also expressed concerns with density and the loss of trees.

Joe Tapper of 942 Elmwood Ave. asked why the Township would even consider a zoning amendment when most residents are against it. Ms. Nardone said that is the question currently before the Commission and Board of Supervisors.

Josephine Kinney of 1396 King Rd. noted that the proposal is not consistent with the Township's Development by Design presentation whereby major development is encouraged in the vicinity of the Exton Crossroads and less density in the outer areas of the Township. She added that the proposed plan will change the existing character of the neighborhood.

Ms. Nardone polled the Commission members for comments and questions:

- Mr. Altimari was concerned that granting a zoning amendment for this tract may set a precedent for other owners of commercial and office properties. He felt the plan may affect the property values of the adjacent homes on larger lots and expressed concern for the pipeline easement.
- Mr. Gordon expressed the opinion that zoning is a living, breathing thing that can change over time when conditions warrant. He felt the subject tract was underutilized under the current zoning and said the Applicant has the right to ask for a change.
- Mr. Glisson agrees that Weston Way should not run behind the dwellings and felt that the addition of stormwater basins and other required facilities and amenities will change the entire look of the plan and force a lower density.
- Mr. McKeeman noted that traffic from the development will change the area significantly; Ms. Zarro responded that the proposed residential development will generate fewer trips than the existing office campus did when it was at full capacity.
- Mr. Cote favored less density to be more compatible with the adjacent residential areas and was concerned with the traffic impact.
- Ms. McGarrity opined that smaller lots with single-family dwellings was not the typical Chester County home. She had concerns with the proposed ingress and egress, as well as stormwater management, citing existing flooding in the area.
- Mr. Gordon asked if the Applicant has considered the R-2 option. Mr. Caffrey said the proposed design does not lend itself to R-2 requirements. Mr. Gordon requested market data to support the Applicant's claim of a market for single-family detached dwellings on smaller lots.
- Ms. Nardone agreed with Ms. Kinney in that the Applicant's plan is not consistent with the Township's overall policy and vision to restrict higher density development to the Exton Crossroads area. She also agreed with Mr. Gordon in that zoning should change over time when prudent to do so, but she is not convinced that a zoning amendment is warranted for this tract at this time.

Mr. Caffrey said he understood the members' concerns about lot size but maintained that buyers' preferences are changing to smaller lots that require less maintenance. He thanked the Commission for their feedback and will see if an alternate configuration can be developed.

The Commission took no action on the plan.

2. **Exton Knoll**
Address: 891-921 E. Lincoln Hwy.
First Review: Land Development
Request: Construction of 319 townhouse and apartment units on a tract of 56+ acres

Applicant Tom Bentley, Attorney Ross Unruh, and project engineer Dave Gibbons were in attendance on Zoom to present the project.

Mr. Weller provided a summary of the project to construct 99 carriage homes for sale and 220 townhouse and apartment rental units on a tract of about 56 acres along E. Lincoln Hwy. adjacent to the Church Farm School campus and Exton Park. The Board of Supervisors granted conditional use approval for the plan on April 8, 2020. Due to the extent of the consultant concerns, Mr. Weller did not support approval of the land development plan until it is confirmed that resolving the outstanding issues will not impact the overall design.

The Commission reviewed the conditions of the conditional use Decision and Order as summarized in Mr. Weller's analysis. Regarding the unmet conditions:

- Condition 6 - Mr. Bentley said that he has met with representatives of Church Farm School to review buffers and fencing between their properties. Rev. Ned Sherrill, Head of the Church Farm School, was in attendance and noted that the School has concerns about security and preventing unauthorized use of their recreational facilities, particularly the tennis courts and ballfields.

School staff member Karen Wertz was also in attendance and asked what is being done to address traffic issues on US Route 30, noting that the School has relocated its entrance to Valley Creek Blvd. due to safety concerns. The Applicant's traffic engineer, Chris Williams of McMahon Associates, was not in attendance to respond, but Mr. Unruh said they will meet to resolve any issues not addressed during the conditional use process. He added that the Applicant will be paying a traffic impact fee that can be used to pay for improvements to mitigate traffic impact. Mr. Weller noted that the Ship Road Couplet (soon to be constructed as a part of a nearby development) will significantly improve congestion in this area.

Mr. Bentley responded that a fence extending all the way to the Chester Valley Trail would be underwater during flood events and therefore difficult to maintain. He further proposed signage and education of the residents by the Homeowners' Association that access to the School property is not allowed. Mr. Sherrill noted that signage has not helped thus far but was in favor of larger buffers of natural vegetation.

Ms. Wertz asked if any effort has been made to make the plan less dense. Mr. Bentley responded that there were 4 units less than what was approved by the conditional use.

- Condition 7 - Regarding the design of the proposed traffic circle in relation to future widening of Lincoln Hwy. Mr. Gibbons said that widening was taken into consideration during the design process and would not noticeably affect the traffic circle, adding that the road to the east has been moved 11 feet farther from the highway than was shown on the conditional use plan. The Applicant is also providing an ultimate right-of-way to accommodate future widening. Mr. Gibbons advised that PennDOT may ask that the eastern right-in/right-out access be limited to right-in only, but they will push to keep the design as currently shown.

- Condition 8 - Regarding trails. Mr. Gibbons said that most of the sidewalks in the development are 5 feet wide, although there are narrower sections that are 4 feet wide. The asphalt path down the middle of the site is 8 feet wide and is intended for both pedestrians and bicyclists. There is also a natural, mowed path 8 feet wide. He will add labels to the plan to clarify the various trail types.

Discussion turned to page 5 of Mr. Weller's Memorandum dated June 12, 2020, to offer the Applicant guidance on the following matters:

- Recreational amenities - Mr. Bentley said that locating the play areas toward the back of the site was intentional, as he has found that residents prefer not to be next to these areas due to noise. He is considering adding some smaller play areas and a dog park.
- Placement and design of on-street parking near the traffic circle - Mr. Otteni said he has no objection to the traffic circle, but he will not approve perpendicular parking along a public road for safety reasons. Mr. Otteni revisited the subject of sidewalk along Lincoln Hwy. He understands the School's security concerns but stressed the Township's goal of pedestrian connectivity. Mr. Sherrill said that the School would prefer that people use the Trail to the north to keep the School secure. Mr. Otteni requested that the area at least be graded to accommodate sidewalks in the future.
- Need for traffic calming measures along Road A - The Commission agreed that no additional measures were needed since existing design features (narrower cartway, tight curve radii, street trees) would discourage excessive speeds.

Mr. Bentley reviewed the phasing shown on the plan. The eastern "for sale" portion will be built in two sections for financing purposes, with public improvements being built first. The western rental section will all be built at one time. Construction of both sections will begin simultaneously.

Township resident Thomas Keyes asked why all developers along Lincoln Hwy. could not be required to widen their frontage to four lanes. Mr. Gordon responded that the current volume of traffic was not likely to meet PennDOT's warrants for such a project; Mr. Weller added that PennDOT was not likely to approve a piecemeal approach like this for a major road. Mr. Bentley noted that the plan was designed to accommodate widening should PennDOT decide to do so.

The Commission took no action on the plan.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

MOTION: To appoint Dwight Yoder of Gibbel, Kraybill & Hess as Special Counsel to the Township Planning Commission in the matter of the conditional use application of PREIT for apartments at Exton Square. (Glisson/Altimari)

ACTION: A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed 7-0.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Conditional Use application of PREIT for an apartment building at Exton Square is the only plan on the agenda for the next meeting on June 30.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:05 p.m.

Recording Secretary,



John Weller, AICP
Director of Planning & Zoning