

**WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES**

Minutes of the first July meeting

July 14, 2020

This was a hybrid meeting with participants attending both in person at the Township Building and on-line via Zoom. Individuals attending via Zoom are marked with an asterisk.

Members Present

Anita Nardone, Chairman
Joe Altimari*
Dan Cote*
Mark Gordon
Jeff Glisson
Mary Frances McGarrity
Ray McKeeman

Township Personnel 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

Anita Nardone called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. She explained that due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, tonight's meeting is a "hybrid" meeting with some attendees at the Township building and others attending virtually via Zoom. She explained the "raise hand" feature of Zoom and asked that any public wishing to make comments use this feature.

II. REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES

Ray McKeeman made a minor correction to the minutes.

MOTION: To approve the minutes for the meeting of June 16, 2020, as amended.
(Altimari/Gordon)

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. **West Whiteland Township Public Works Facility**
Address: 215 Valley Creek Blvd.
First Review: Conditional Use
Request: Construction of a Township facility and ambulance station

Ted Otteni represented the Township in the capacity of Applicant; the project was also represented by Jack Robinson, PE, of JMR Engineering and Dan Sevick of Whiteland Holdings, LP. John Weller described the project as the construction of three buildings with a total footprint of 44,105 square feet on a 25-acre vacant lot on the east side of Valley Creek Blvd. The site abuts the Chester Valley Trail to the north and East Whiteland Township to the east. The site is heavily constrained with wetlands and flood hazard areas as well as an electric company right-of-way and a pipeline right-of-way. A previous plan in the mid-2000's proposed to combine this property with adjoining land in East Whiteland to develop a continuing care retirement community, but this was never built, and the developer withdrew the plan and restored the property to its current state.

The plan shows of a building with 3,000 sq. ft. of office space and 21,100 sq. ft. of garage space, a separate garage building of approximately 15,400 square feet, outdoor storage areas, and a fueling facility. A 4,600 square foot ambulance substation is also proposed which may be constructed at the same time or at some future date.

The property is in the Office/Laboratory (O/L) zoning district and is also eligible for development under the provisions of the Institutional (IN) overlay district. Municipal uses are permitted by-right in the IN district, and the plan complies with the area and bulk standards of that district. Conditional use review is required due to the size of the proposed buildings and for disturbance of steep slopes.

Mr. Weller noted that most of the consultant concerns can be addressed during the land development stage of the project. The review from Theurkauf Design and Planning review noted that there was no connection to the Chester Valley Trail, but Mr. Weller responded that this was intentional for security reasons; also, there is easy access to the Trail at Valley Creek Blvd. Theurkauf also noted the lack of buffers along the East Whiteland property line. The median on Valley Creek Blvd. will be modified to allow for left turns into and out of the site. No open space fee is required, and Traffic Planning and Design advised that the traffic impact fee may be waived in the interest of the Township.

Mr. Weller explained that the Zoning Ordinance does not provide a specific parking requirement for municipal uses or ambulance facilities, so while the Applicant's use of the standard for "warehousing, wholesale storage or distribution" was a good-faith effort to find a reasonable equivalent, as Zoning Officer he determined that the resulting requirement for 45 parking spaces was excessive, particularly since much of the new space will be used for vehicle storage. Instead, he found it more reasonable to base the requirement upon the office space and vehicle repair bays, which results in a requirement of 19 spaces for the Public Works Facility and 10 spaces for the Ambulance Facility. The plan shows 22 spaces for the Public Works Facility and 12 spaces for the Ambulance Facility, so he concludes that the parking requirement is satisfied.

Mark Gordon asked about ownership of the property. Mr. Otteni replied that the Township will enter into a lease agreement with the property owner (Whiteland Holdings, LP) whereby the Township will take possession of the improvements and the property at the end of the lease term, which he expects will not be more than three years. The final terms of the agreement are still being worked out.

Ms. Nardone asked the Applicant to provide some background on the need for the Facility and how this site was chosen. Mr. Otteni responded that the Township started looking for a site at least ten years ago and did due diligence on several locations, none of which proved viable. For most, the acquisition cost was prohibitive. The Township also explored options for the current Public Works site at 222 N. Pottstown Pk., including a land swap arrangement with the owner of the adjacent Mattress Giant property, but it was not possible to accommodate all the department's needs. The deficiencies of the existing facility require much equipment to be stored outside, with no protection from the elements and less-than-ideal security, there is no proper cover for road salt, and no water recovery system for when they wash equipment. The Township also considered a site along Whitford Rd. and a parcel in East Caln Township adjacent to the Clover Mill pump station, but the conclusion remained that the Valley Creek Blvd. was the best alternative.

The Applicant showed architectural renderings of the proposed building. The administration building will contain an employee break room, lockers, showers, and restrooms. Vehicles and large equipment will be stored in the garages, there will be a tank to store brine, and open-sided storage bays will be used for storing salt, mulch, and similar materials. The wash bay will have a wastewater recovery and filtration system that will discharge into the sewer system, not Valley Ck. The buildings are designed to be energy efficient.

Ms. Nardone next asked about the perimeter buffer waiver along the East Whiteland line. Mr. Sevick, representing the owner of both the subject property and the adjoining lot in East Whiteland, said that

industrial use is proposed for the East Whiteland site and he therefore has no objection to the waiver. Mr. Gordon noted that there needs to be some justification for a waiver and expressed concern about the reaction to granting it since the Township requires other developers to provide such landscaping. Mimi Gleason explained that the facility was pushed to the property line in the interest of environmental protection as the Township thought that a higher priority than landscaping. Ms. Nardone expressed concerns with the numerous constraints on the property relative to the conditional use criterion that "...the natural features and processes characterizing the proposed site and its surroundings shall not suffer unmitigated degradation...".

When asked why the lot north of Swedesford Rd. was not considered, Ms. Gleason responded that it was part of the Valley Creek Corporate Center and restricted from such use pursuant to the terms of the approval of their plan.

Joe Altimari asked about the effect on Church Farm School during a severe snow event, when plows would likely be using the Facility on a continuous basis. Mr. Otteni responded that students are housed on the south side of Lincoln Hwy. and would not be affected by any activity at the Facility. Mr. Weller added that all property owners within 300 feet of the project will receive notice of the plan.

MaryFrances McGarrity asked about screening from the Chester Valley Trail. Mr. Otteni said there is good screening there now and, in combination with 8-foot to 10-foot berm, the facility will be well-screened from the Trail.

Mr. McKeeman asked if there was enough parking for employees. Mr. Otteni replied that 14 employees would work out of the Facility and 22 parking spaces are provided. Mr. McKeeman added that he thought there was sufficient justification for waiving the perimeter buffer requirement and that the plan was strong and doable.

Jeff Glisson stated that while the property does have constraints, there will be fewer sites available for a Public Works Facility as time goes on; he felt it was a great use of the property.

Dan Cote asked if there were any environmental issues with the 222 N. Pottstown Pk. property. Mr. Otteni said there were not, adding that an underground fuel tank had been removed some years ago and we have a documentation from DEP that it was done properly.

Mr. Gordon questioned the large size of the stormwater basins. Mr. Robinson said this to accommodate runoff from property in East Whiteland Township. Mr. Gordon then expressed concern about having enough room for left turns into the Facility from Valley Creek Blvd. Mr. Otteni said they are exploring use of one of the existing southbound lanes rather than a new turning lane, noting the excess capacity on Valley Creek Blvd. and the need to maintain a safe crossing for the Chester Valley Trail. The final design will be reviewed by Traffic Planning & Design. Mr. Gordon suggested including in the lease agreement that Whiteland Holdings supports the waiver of the landscaped buffer requirement.

Ms. Nardone asked if there was a construction budget yet. Mr. Otteni replied that it is not yet final but is expected to be approximately \$9,000,000.

Mr. Altimari asked if diesel fuel could also be purchased offsite as is currently the practice for gasoline. Mr. Otteni said the diesel fuel dispenser is kept onsite for emergency situations and for equipment that cannot be driven on public roads.

MOTION: To recommend to the Board of Supervisors approval of the conditional use application of West Whiteland Township Public Works Facility with the following conditions:

1. Resolution of all outstanding consultant concerns to the satisfaction of the Township, including but not limited to the stormwater management issues noted

in the Spotts, Stevens and McCoy review and the landscaping concerns noted in the Theurkauf review.

2. The median in Valley Creek Blvd. shall be reconfigured to facilitate left turns into and out of the site, pursuant to the review by the Director of Public Works. This revision shall be shown on the land development plan for this project.
3. As part of the land development plan submission, the Applicant shall provide a report documenting all restrictions on the use of this property associated with the existing utility easements. The development shall comply with any such restrictions.
4. The Commission supports the decision not to provide direct access to the Chester Valley Trail in the interest of security.
5. The Commission supports waiver of the traffic impact fee as being in the best interest of the Township, pursuant to the review by Traffic Planning and Design.

(Gordon/Glisson)

ACTION: A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed 6-1 with Ms. Nardone opposing.

2. Columbia Cottage at Boot Road

Address: 936 E. Boot Rd.

First Review: Sketch Plan

Request: To amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow development pursuant to the Institutional (IN) overlay district in the Neighborhood Commercial (NC) zoning district; also for an assisted living facility.

Mr. Weller provided an overview of the sketch plan for reconfiguration of two lots along E. Boot Rd. to accommodate an existing multi-tenant commercial building and construction of a senior care facility. The project requires an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance allow the regulations of the Institutional (IN) overlay district to be applied to the Neighborhood Commercial (NC) district. There are currently four areas totaling about 60 acres that are zoned NC; the requested change would affect all of these. Mr. Weller also reviewed the purpose of the NC district, some of the existing uses that are there, and opined that the additional uses allowed by the IN overlay would be consistent with the purpose of the NC district, although such uses would need to be carefully designed to match the scale of the smaller commercial uses. Regarding this particular property, Mr. Weller noted that the proposed use makes good use of the awkwardly shaped lot, would generate less traffic than a commercial use, and would also be more compatible with the adjacent residential lots. He also reminded the Commission that our experience has been that uses of this type create a significant demand for emergency services and ambulance service in particular, which may be due to improper or inadequate staffing. If this project proceeds to conditional use review, this issue should be discussed thoroughly.

Steve Janiec and Steve Schmid were in attendance for the Applicant. Mr. Janiec provided a brief history of the site, and Mr. Schmid presented architectural renderings of the proposed facility, which will consist of 73 units in one-story buildings.

Ms. Nardone explained that a zoning amendment needs to show some benefit to the Township. She indicated that a senior care facility provides a benefit to Township residents but would like to see an analysis of the other NC district parcels that would also be affected by a zoning change. Justin Smiley will do that analysis and provide it to the Commission.

Mr. McKeeman felt the zoning change requested was relatively minor and that the proposed location for the project was good.

Mr. Gordon also asked to see how other NC parcels will be affected; he does not want to see commercial uses pushed out by institutional uses.

Mr. Altimari expressed concern with emergency vehicles being able to access the interior units.

Ms. McGarrity liked the product, felt the location was good, and was in favor of the requested zoning amendment. She asked about the number of employees and stressed the need to be sure the facility was properly staffed. She asked about the impact the facility would have on traffic, and Mr. Schmid responded that they had provided the Township with a traffic study showing that the facility would generate 187 trips per day; a maximum of 36 parking spaces would be used at any one time. He added that he will get firm staffing numbers for future discussion.

Ms. Gleason encouraged the Applicant to reach out to Good Fellowship Ambulance early in the process to discuss ambulance needs. She advised that if facilities such as this are not properly staffed, ambulances are called more frequently, which creates pressure on the provider since the Medicare allowance for responding to the call does not cover their expenses.

There was no public comment on the plan.

Since this was a sketch plan, there was no action by the Commission. The Applicant thanked the Commission for their time and advised that they planned to proceed with applying to the Board for an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance.

V. ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The agenda for the next meeting, scheduled for August 4, includes a new proposal for 4 Tabas Lane, the Fedor tract, and a revised sketch plan for the Weston tract.

The ULI TAP project is moving forward. Staff has a conference call with ULI staff scheduled for Thursday, and we anticipate that the project will be scheduled for the fall.

We have no further information regarding the PREIT plan for another apartment building on the Exton Square property. They gave no reason for withdrawing from the Commission's June 30 agenda; they also withdrew from the August 13 agenda of the Historical Commission.

Those attending the Hanover tour this Thursday should meet at the Hanover building.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:45 p.m.

Recording Secretary,



John Weller, AICP
Director of Planning & Zoning