

**WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES**

Minutes of the second September meeting

September 15, 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*
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 7:00 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

MOTION: To approve the minutes for the meeting of September 1, 2020
(McKeeman/Glisson)

ACTION: The motion passed 4-0-2 (Glisson and McGarrity abstaining)

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

IV. PLANS

1. **Valley Creek Homes LLC - McKee Builders LLC**
Address: Northeast corner of Swedesford Rd. and Church Farm La.
First Review: Sketch Plan
Request: Construction of 344-unit active adult residential community

John Weller provided a summary of the project noting that as a Sketch Plan, no action is required by the Commission. The subject tract comprises 100+ acres in the Valley Creek Corporate Center (VCCC) and lies along the north side of Swedesford Rd. opposite the intersection of Valley Creek Blvd. On August 8, 2000, the Board of Supervisors approved the conditional use application for VCCC, of which the subject tract is a portion. The Board's approval allowed for the construction of 1.75 million sq. ft. of office space in 17 buildings; to date, only three buildings have been built at the southwest corner of Swedesford Rd. and Valley Creek Blvd. The development approved for the subject tract consisted of eleven office buildings with a total of 1.2 million sq. ft. of leasable space and over 4,800 parking spaces. Since conditional use approvals do not expire, the property may still be developed in this way, but with the decline in demand for office space, the Applicant has provided two development options for consideration. The first is a plan for a life-care facility or Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC). This use is currently allowed by right at this location, which is in the Office/Laboratory (O/L) zoning district subject to the provisions of the Institutional (IN) overlay district, but the project would require conditional use review due to its size. The second option is for an "active adult" residential community for individuals 55 years old and older. This project lacks the care facilities characteristic

of a CCRC and is similar to a conventional residential community, featuring single homes on smaller lots, carriage homes, and townhouses along with a clubhouse, swimming pool, and recreational trail system. This project would require an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance. Both designs preserve the connections to the public road system that were approved for the VCCC with the main entrance from Swedesford Rd. directly opposite Valley Creek Blvd. and a smaller, secondary access to Church Farm La. along the west side of the tract.

The Applicant prefers the active adult community: the CCRC design was provided only as a point of reference to show what the Zoning currently allows. Mr. Weller opined that the approved office plan was dated and, of the three plans, was the least compatible with the adjacent uses. While he preferred the CCRC design for its layout and extensive green space, he expected that it would be operated by a non-profit organization, and therefore be tax-exempt, resulting in a loss of revenue to the Township; it would also significantly increase demand for emergency services. In contrast, if developed as an active adult community, the property would remain taxable and there would likely be some EIT revenue, since at least some of the residents would still be working.

Lou Colagreco, attorney for the Applicant, introduced Eric Schiela of Rubenstein Partners (owner of the property), Mark McGonigal and Kevin McLaughlin of McKee Builders, and Lisa Thomas of Glackin Thomas Panzak, project planner - all of whom were attending in person. Mr. Colagreco said the Applicant is not interested in the approved office plan and confirmed that their preference is for the active adult community. He noted that of the types of dwellings proposed for this option, only the single-family detached dwellings were not allowed by the current zoning. Ms. Nardone said she did not see where residential uses were allowed by the regulations. Mr. Weller responded that they were listed with the provisions for "life care facilities," which is the term used in the Zoning Ordinance for CCRC's, adding that those regulations reflected the life care model of that time, which did not include single-family homes. Mr. Colagreco said the active adult plan merely removes the medical component found in the CCRC plan and replaces it with a clubhouse and recreational amenities. He added that the age restriction would be legally binding and could not be reversed.

Mr. McLaughlin gave more details about the active adult concept: declarations protect and regulate the community; no school-aged children are allowed; about 50% of the residents still work; all maintenance, including landscaping and snow removal, is taken care of. The variety of dwelling types is provided to accommodate both buyer preferences and different price points. Mr. McLaughlin said McKee Builders is experienced in the active adult product, having built examples nearby in Delaware County and The Preserve at Marsh Creek in Upper Uwchlan Township.

Ms. Nardone noted that the Commission has seen several Sketch Plans this year that require Zoning Ordinance amendments. The Commission takes any zoning change very seriously, and in each case looks to see how the amendment will benefit the Township and what is best planning practice.

Mr. Weller stated that the Decision and Order approving the conditional use for the VCCC includes 59 conditions that will need to be addressed or revised. Mr. Schiela said much of the infrastructure that had been required is already in place; in addition, and the proposed active adult plan will generate less traffic than the approved office park. Further discussion was made regarding the Land Exchange Area shown on the plan, which was an exchange of 10 acres between the developer and Township for the purposes of stormwater management.

Ms. Thomas reviewed the existing conditions on the site, including roads, woodlands, historic resources, slopes, floodplains, and streams; there was discussion about plan note #5 regarding the mapped floodplain to be eliminated and the need for a floodplain study and a possible FEMA Letter of Map Amendment. Ms. Nardone had concerns about the how the headwaters of the Valley Creek tributaries, which travels south and west through other significant developments in the Township, would affect/impact properties downstream that already have problem with flooding. Mr. Otteni* echoed these concerns.

Mr. Otteni* was asked about the sewer capacity and said the Township is aware of and is carrying sewer capacity for the site, as this was previously paid for by Rubenstein's as part of the VCCC project.

Ms. Nardone discussed the road status where connections are proposed: Swedesford Rd and Old Valley Road are Township roads. But Church Farm Lane is a private road. How will the proposed accesses be handled? Old Valley Road is an 8' wide dirt/gravel road at present. No response from the development team was given.

Ms. Nardone asked the Commission members for their comments:

- Ms. McGarrity - McKee has a reputation for good quality, and the active adult community is a product not currently available in the Township. She felt the plan has potential.
- Mr. McKeeman - felt the active adult plan was reasonable and do-able.
- Mr. Glisson - favors the active adult plan but wants to see more detail.
- Mr. Altimari* - noted an age-restricted community in Maryland that opened up 50% of its units to younger buyers when it could not sell all of the units. He asked about the proposed price point for the various dwelling types. Mr. McGonigal said the villas and carriage homes will have a base in the high \$400,000's going up to about \$550,000. The single-family dwellings will have a base in the low \$500,000's with premium packages up to the low \$600,000's. Mr. Altimari questioned the marketability at those price points.
- Mr. Cote* - agreed with Mr. McKeeman that the active adult plan was reasonable.
- Ms. Nardone - felt the active adult concept was good, noting that connectivity and creativity will be important going forward.

There were no comments from the public.

Mr. Colagreco said he will talk with Staff about the best way to proceed with the process. Ms. Nardone asked Staff to prepare an analysis for the Commission to consider of how a proposed zoning amendment would affect other districts within the Township. The Commission took no action.

V. OLD BUSINESS:

Mr. Smiley said the ULI TAP project is moving forward with responses received from 23 stakeholders for interviews. More local business owners are needed. Ms. McGarrity will help with that effort.

Mr. McKeeman reported on the meeting held between the developers of the Weston Tract and adjacent property owners. He said the meeting went well and was productive. The number of proposed dwellings was reduced from 104 to 75, buffers and open space was increased, more room was provided around the Mansion, a portion of Weston Way will be vacated, and sidewalks and trails were added throughout the site.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The agenda for the next meeting, scheduled for October 6 includes the Weston Tract sketch plan, the 4 Tabas Lane land development plan, and a subdivision of the Boot Road Storage property.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:45 p.m.

Recording Secretary,


John R. Weller, AICP
Director of Planning & Zoning