

# **DOYLESTOWN TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION**

## **Regular Meeting**

**October 26, 2020**

The Doylestown Township Planning Commission Regular Meeting was held at 7:00 p.m., Monday, October 26, 2020 at 425 Wells Road, Doylestown, PA 18901. Members of the Doylestown Township Planning Commission in attendance included Chairman: Judy Hendrixson, Vice Chairman; Gregory Reppa with members; Ted Feldstein. Thomas Kelso and Jill Macauley. Others in attendance included, Board of Supervisors Liaisons: Jennifer Herring & Nancy Santacecilia, Township Planning Consultant; Judy Stern Goldstein, Township Manager; Stephanie Mason and Director of Code Enforcement; Sinclair Salisbury.

### **Review of Minutes**

On a motion by Mr. Kelso; seconded by Mr. Reppa the October 1, 2020 Doylestown Township Planning Commission meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

**Public/Commission Comments / Presentations** - None

### **Roundtable Discussion - Non-residential Properties, Redevelopment and Adaptive Reuse within the Township's 611 Corridor.**

Ms. Hendrixson welcomed participants: Rick Lyons, R & G Properties, Frank Lombardo, Green Street Real Estate; Mike Meister and Kevin Riley of County Builders and Adam Goodman (via phone) with Goodman Properties and Evan Stone, Executive Director Bucks County Planning Commission to tonight's meeting.

Ms. Hendrixson indicated that the Township Planning Commission is interested knowing how nonresidential commercial development will be viewed post COVID-19 and this is the purpose of tonight's discussion.

Mr. Lyons started with some general comments indicating that he is currently developing the Tabor Property with Westrum Development with a mix of office and an assisted living facility. He indicated that the two types of uses are working well together on that 19 acre property and commercial office space is doing well. He indicated that he is seeing a lot of businesses from the city moving out to the suburbs. The trouble that businesses are experiencing in the city is that the office buildings are large, have a lot of people and elevators. Many businesses are finding the smaller individual offices more appealing. He even indicated that he has some long time tenants that are actually doubling space in order to accommodate their work force.

Mr. Lombardo agreed indicating inventory is site specific and those areas that can have a direct connection, with no elevator tend to go quickly. The other thing he indicated was that people like to have facilities that have windows that open. He also indicated that during the shutdown

they received calls and inquiries where some businesses needed more space within 24 – 48 hours in order to accommodate their staffs.

Mr. Reppa inquired about the short versus long term situation.

Mr. Lombardo indicated that he believes that both in the short term and long term occupancy will be necessary for office space. Although some people are continuing to work from home and certain types of business may continue to do that, others are looking to have rental space available especially in the Doylestown Area.

Mr. Meister indicated that many young people, when it comes to residential properties are not looking for the large 1 acre lot with a single family home. They are looking for multi-family, they are looking for the age restrictive more in a town home. He referenced the University Place project they are doing in New Britain Borough and within a couple of months 70 of the 96 apartments were occupied in 90 days with renters. The age is from college students up to 93 years old.

Mr. Riley indicated that he wasn't surprised by the demographic of seeing older people moving into the complex. The cost is approximately \$1,500 for a one bedroom apartment. In addition, they have commercial space with a food market as well as offices, a hair salon and the like and a microbrewery coming.

The panelists agreed that having multiple uses within spaces office, retail, living, conveniences for those working in office settings is appealing.

The other area that was discussed was flex space. In most areas is it very large 80,000 sq. ft. of industrial building space, warehouse, being able to accommodate things like Amazon, those are becoming very popular as well. In addition, having accessibility to Bike/Hike trails, access to public transportation such as trains is also very appealing.

Ms. Hendrixson inquired of the model of small offices and storefronts if the parking requirement is necessary.

The panelists agreed that less parking is more desirable.

Mr. Lyons indicated helping change ordinances so that less parking is required is a plus.

Ms. Macauley questioned people continuing to work from home.

While Mr. Reppa asked about the types of businesses and whether they were in one area or a hodgepodge.

Mr. Lyons indicated that over 20 years ago the Farm Office Complex had national tenants and after the 2008 recession those markets went away, however, other markets and businesses

popped up. Today, it's a hodgepodge. For example you'll find doctors' offices, veterinarians, and banking all in the same complex. Daycare also is another area that is expanding.

Mr. Meister brought some plans of the University Place in New Britain Borough with their mixed use development going on. He also indicated he is working with Capital Health in Newtown for space. Again he stressed that young people don't necessarily want to mow large lawns and shovel snow off of big driveways.

In New Britain Township he is working on a mixed use with retail and offices as well.

Mr. Reppa asked about converting commercial to residential and what is the ideal for that?

Mr. Goodman indicated that it is not uncommon to see the malls changing over to multifamily.

Ms. Hendrixson questioned the height of the buildings? The panelists agreed that the lower level two story to three max is the height limits especially out here.

Mr. Goodman again indicated that retail is different and it is changing. Retail space needs to be viable overall, having delivery areas and drive thru's will be the norm. Centers are going to start to focus on that. Also, with institutions recovery needs to be able to address those things.

It could still be too early to figure out, but it is definitely the wave the future, retail the focus on no more of the big box stores but having residential as part of that scenario or warehouse is certainly worth consideration as they are all going to collide and how we handle it is going to be key.

Mr. Meister indicated an example might be to have the old Sears become an apartment building and convert parking to open space.

Ms. Goldstein asked about the retail trends prior to COVID-19 and experiencing a place to go and having more of an experiential vs. a retail experience.

Mr. Goodman indicated that is also appealing in the retail setting and that main street feel is what people are looking for and the experience is important. For example a DSW building with a hair and nail salon, while you shop for shoes could be a thing. It is the synergy in the environment for that retail space.

Ms. Santacecilia indicated that the Central Bucks School District and Doylestown Health are big employers in Doylestown Township. She inquired about the sweet spot for health care spaces.

Mr. Meister said he does not believe you would see another hospital other than Doylestown Health is so entrenched. Other doctors and offices such as there could be beneficial in partnering with Doylestown Health for example.

Mr. Lyons indicated that the key for the Township and the Planning Commission is to be flexible. Don't wait for the market because the market will go where the money is, but having zoning that is flexible is going to help the Township in the long run.

Mr. Stone indicated that he agreed with what everyone had to say, he indicated that he is seeing the same trends throughout the County. In the last three years residential, especially multi-family housing is up. He agrees with Mr. Meister on the diversity of the smaller lots for single family homes and the duplexes and smaller units economically affordable at 80% AMI.

Mr. Lyons indicated that the challenge will be to have the municipalities stay flexible and craft ordinances that are adaptable for mixed uses over time. You do not need a much parking was the consensus of the panelist.

Mr. Stone indicated that we are not going to see a lot of the retail come back as some will continue to be remote but open floor plans are going to be modified some retail space will need to take on new opportunities. He indicated that Middletown created adaptive reuse for 600 apartments at the Oxford Valley Mall. He indicated that before becoming director of the Bucks County Planning Commission he worked as a landscape architect and saw the transformation of critical areas in Media. The mixed use, walkability is important.

Mr. Kelso commented that the County has a large property as well in this corridor and connections for open space, bike/hike trails. In being able to review the County's Master Plan relates to this would be a good idea. He asked if perhaps at the next meeting or a future meeting conversation could be held regarding that.

Ms. Hendrixson thanked the panelists for being in attendance and for sharing their time with the Planning Commission.

### **Westrum/Arbour Square/Tabor Tract Landscape Review**

Mike Maier of Westrum Development was present.

Mr. Maier went over the proposed arboretum plans for the Westrum area of the Tabor Tract.

He indicated as they went through the land development process that it was explained to the Planning Commission and the Township that they wanted to do something unique and beautiful while still sticking with the requirements of the Township Planning Commission. He believes that the proposed arboretum plan addresses that. It addresses the reforestation requirements of the area in addition to providing some woodchip walking path areas, gazebo etc.

After some discussion on motion of Mr. Kelso, seconded by Mr. Feldstein the Planning Commission recommended the Board of Supervisors approve the amended landscape plan with the understanding the applicant comply with the Pennoni 10/26/2020 letter.

Motion carried unanimously.

### **60 Meetinghouse Road – Sketch Plan**

Mr. Ben Goldthorp of Pennington Property Group was present with his engineer Mr. Cunningham from Holmes Cunningham and Nate Fox his attorney.

Mr. Goldthorp provided the Planning Commission and those in the audience an explanation of the requirements under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and indicated that he is presenting a sketch plan for a 10 acre lot on Meetinghouse Road. He indicated that this is the first presentation of the proposed plan to the Planning Commission and if he moves forward with the project there will be additional meetings with the Planning Commission as he moves through the subdivision and land development process.

He indicated that he was in receipt of the attached questions from area residents, who were made aware of the project. His attached response memo dated 10/26/20 to those questions is included with the minutes.

He indicated that in reviewing the concerns, he believes that the area of concerns are wells and septic, storm water, traffic, trails, density, setbacks, open space, light pollution, noise and developer stability.

His response which is attached addresses the concerns raised regarding the R-1 project utilizing the Township's B-9 option under the R-1.

He also indicated that he had met with the Park & Recreation Board and they expressed that they were not interested in seeing the proposed 3 acre open space as a Township public park. He believes that that area will remain open, deed restricted for and taken care of by the HOA.

Ms. Hendrixson indicated that there obviously needs to be a sensitivity of the lay of the land and the stormwater management will need to be addressed as you go through the land development process. She indicated that she had been out to the site that day and did see some drainage issues.

Anthony Pino, a nearby resident questioned on the basin design and Mr. Goldthorp indicated that the detailed stormwater management has not been developed as of yet, but would be done in compliance with Township Ordinances when preliminary plans are submitted. He did indicate though that existing drainage can go into areas where it goes now, that is allowed by PA DEP.

Mr. Pino also indicated concerns for the night skies, street lighting etc.

Mr. Kelso asked what was found in the environmental review areas that were done.

Mr. Goldthorp indicated around lot 8, there were some glass bottles about 5'-8' down and depending on the development process those are addressed and excavated.

A resident from 56 Meetinghouse questioned the difference in the open space and also commented that Meetinghouse Road is very small in breadth, sometimes vehicles have to wait to pass, and snow gets piled up and makes it difficult for school buses and was concerned about the proposed detention basin on the property as well as noise.

Rick Spotts, 73 Meetinghouse Road, indicated that he is across from the proposed vacant area on the plan, he is concerned about run off, the open space at the highest point, ponding in the low areas, and he sees wash outs and drainage issues and sometimes even ducks.

Lindsay Miller, 69 Meetinghouse Road, across the street, she echoes Mr. Spotts' concerns for drainage and the drainage ditch that bisects their land, that she says sometimes is mushy and the narrowness of the road.

DeJesus Carabalo of 66 Meetinghouse Road indicated that she is upset, she believes the proposed lots are too close to her home.

A resident from 65 Meetinghouse Road concerned with the drainage and indicated that his father is in his 90's and is concerned for the disturbance of the proposed development.

Dave Snyder, 46 Hickory, indicates that the developer should do what's best for the neighbors, he should have knocked on all of the doors and walked and talked to all of the neighbors before submitting the concept plan to the Township. In his opinion he is willing to work with the developer and understands the developer has rights to develop the land. He also indicated that there are better examples of smaller lot developments in the Township such as Doylestown Greene and Tracy Drive. He believes that the proposed development is too dense, he believes the homes should be pushed closer to the road, that the impact should not be visually intrusive, he believes the developer should go back to the drawing board.

A resident from 33 Maple Leaf, discussed storm water runoff and some flooding that occurs. He indicated the open space is on the high point as well.

Peter Rockafellow of 30 Hickory Lane, has a concerns for the impact of lot #4 and the need for a buffer, more landscaping and storm water.

A resident of 63 Meetinghouse Road, is disappointed the lots aren't bigger, has concerns for losing value in the property and privacy .

Mr. Kelso asked about the legal right of way, it was determined that it's the traditional 33', on the opposite side of the road 25' there is a crossing to the other side and there is an easement that is established for drainage.

Mr. Kelso suggested that prior to going to preliminary plan stage that the Planning Commission walk the site and some additional information on the drainage be provided. Perhaps some sketches as well.

Mr. Goldthorp indicated that the larger lots have 8,000 sq. ft. of impervious where the smaller ones have 6,000 sq. ft. of impervious.

Mr. Kelso indicated that the cart way could be smaller. He also suggested that a loop road be considered, perhaps one way. He would like to see some pencil sketches and he also indicated that sometimes the small HOA's are too small and difficult. He would like to see some options.

Mr. Pino indicated that in the last six month several of the houses have sold within 3 or 4 days, so not everyone is against maintaining larger lots. He would appreciate it if the developer would address storm water, look at 1 acre lots and possibly a perimeter buffer.

Mr. Spotts indicated that relocating of the proposed road should be considered as well as the speed limit on Meetinghouse Road.

Mr. Rockafellow commented on the narrowness of the open space.

Mr. Pino indicated that the street is narrow and sometimes people have difficulty getting around trash cans.

Mr. Reppa asked if Pennington Property would be the developer as well as the builder. As they move through the approval process he asked if the developer could address the improvements, the footprint, specifically the size of the property.

Mr. Goldthorp indicated that he is the developer and indicated that he typically brings properties through the land development process and installs the public utilities, roads etc. The sells the lots. He anticipates these are based on 6,000 sq. ft. homes with at prices point of somewhere between \$600,000 and \$900,000.

Mr. Reppa continued that the surrounding drainage is a significant issue that will need to be addressed in the preliminary plan process. The roadway, lights etc. will need to be addressed. Sandy Ridge Road & Meetinghouse Road intersection should be addressed. He indicated that he lives in the area so is very familiar with it.

Mr. Goldthorp indicated that Meetinghouse Road has that hour glass effect but he's happy to refine his plans and address the questions before going to preliminary plan submission and that is why this is only a concept plan at this time to get input from not only the Planning commission but neighbors. He looks forward to further discussions.

Ms. Hendrixson thanked everyone for participating in the process and indicated that future meetings regarding the sketch plan would be on the Township's website.

### **Adjournment**

Being no further business the meeting adjourned at 9:18PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie J. Mason  
Township Manager