

The stated meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Abington was held on Tuesday, April 10, 2018 at the Abington Senior High School, Abington, PA., with Chairperson Lucy Strackhouse presiding.

**CALL TO ORDER:** 7:08 p.m.

**ROLL CALL:** Present: DiCELLO, GAUTHIER, COOPER, ROBINSON, BAKER, ROSEN, RUSSELL, BOFF, STRACKHOUSE

Also Present: Planning & Zoning Official PENECALE  
Office Manager WYRSTA  
Commissioners: KLINE, SANCHEZ,  
MYERS, ZAPPONE, SPIEGELMAN,  
SCHREIBER, BRODSKY, GILLESPIE  
County Planner NARCOWICH

#### **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

##### Agenda Item PC1 – BET Investment, Inc.

Ms. Strackhouse said BET Investment, Inc. will present their proposed zoning text amendment for a new use category, Use H-12 Senior Apartment Units as a conditional use within Apartment/Office District. The zoning text amendment also proposes dimensional changes for the proposed new use; a list of new permitted accessory uses and other dimensional qualifiers for the proposed new use. In addition, the applicant will present their plan for how the proposed zoning text amendment will be applied to the site located at 1059, 1067 and 1073 Old York Road, Abington, PA.

This special meeting was scheduled tonight at the request of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington, so any comments put forth tonight are not a formal action by the Planning Commission. To-date, the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington has not elected to schedule required hearings on the applicant's proposed zoning text amendment. The Board of Commissioners directed the applicant to conduct neighborhood meetings and solicit comment from the Planning Commission.

In the event that revisions are made to the proposed zoning text amendment, the next formal action of the Township of Abington would be a presentation before the Board of Commissioners to determine whether a hearing would be scheduled to take action on the proposed amendment. If the Board of Commissioners elects to schedule a hearing on the proposed zoning text amendment those hearing dates and the date of any other review committees or commissions will be made public.

Michael Markman, President, BET Investments, 200 Dryden Road, Suite 2000, Dresher, PA, 19025, said following comments made by members of the Planning Commission as well as public comments, we will review the plan to make any modifications. Power point presentation on proposed “Abington Terrace” plan included project description; zoning overview; traffic study, Township services and economic impact; site planning and stormwater and architecture plan in which a copy was provided to members of the Planning Commission as well as the public.

Currently, the property is zoned CS-Community Service and R-3 Residential and we are proposing to rezone it to A/O Apartment-Office District and also proposed is text amendment to allow increased density for Senior Apartment units to be occupied by those who are the age of 55 and older with no school-age children.

Parcels currently being used are conforming and nonconforming, which include the YMCA gym, childcare and a funeral home. If the zoning is changed, the applicant intends to develop the parcels for luxury one and two bedroom senior apartments. Amenities include upscale gathering areas, resort-style pool and fitness center with expected average monthly rents to be in excess of \$2,000.

John H. Kennedy, AICP, Principal of Kennedy & Associates, Planners and Land Use Consultants, PO Box 175, Mainland, PA., 19451, said we have been retained by BET Investments to evaluate the site from a planning perspective and provide zoning recommendations. Site is the former YMCA property primarily and additionally the funeral home next door located at the corner of Old York Road and Susquehanna Road.

Zoning map was presented of surrounding districts and proposed text amendment is creating a new use available in the A/O District – H-12 – Senior Apartment unit. Criteria proposed in the ordinance includes that there must be a hospital located within 2,000 feet in which there are two; Abington Hospital and Holy Redeemer. Criteria also includes frontage on two roads and this property would have frontage on Old York and Susquehanna Roads and access to public transportation within 400 feet, and other criteria is noted in proposed text amendment. Financial impact for Township and School District is that taxes will be generated; however, no school-age children will impact the School District from this type of project.

Sandy A. Koza, P.E. Project Manager with McMahan Associates, Inc, Transportation Engineers & Planners, 425 Commerce Drive, Suite 200, Fort Washington, PA, 19034, presented traffic overview of the project. We were hired to do the traffic impact study for this site located on Old York Road where there are many SEPTA stops as well as a and existing sidewalk system, and as part of the redevelopment, the sidewalk would be extended along Susquehanna Road frontage.

Study areas were intersections of Susquehanna and Old York Road; Susquehanna and Adams Avenue and Huntingdon Avenue. Traffic counts were performed during the morning commute peak hours from 7 -9 a.m. and afternoon commute peak hours from 4-9 p.m. Old York Road carries 26,000-28,000 vehicles on a daily basis while Susquehanna carries 14,000-17,000 vehicles per day.

All of the volumes are entered in an analysis program and levels of service were graded A thru F. Existing conditions in terms of overall operations at those intersections were shown to be operating at a level service grade "D," which PennDOT considers to be an acceptable level of service. We also performed a trip generation comparison and proposed characteristics for 225 units of senior age-restricted apartments and they would generate between 45 to 56 new trips on each of the peak hours and compared them to the actual driveway counts of the YMCA, which were 231 and 224 trips, so site will be reduced in terms of impacts on roadway network.

Future conditions would be similar and somewhat improved conditions as compared to existing because we are reducing trip generation to the site.

Mr. Markman said in regards to fiscal impact to Abington Township; the YMCA did not generate any taxes as it is a nonprofit. Net impact to the Township would produce \$124,916 in revenues and fiscal impact to the School District would be approximately \$722,834 per year for annual net combined impact of \$847,750.

Peter J. Clelland, Vice President of Development, BET Investments, Inc, presented site plan showing a four-story building housing apartment unit with a parking deck below the building at grade and below grade relative to surrounding streets. Also, shown were amenity deck and pool deck and another amenity deck.

Currently, there is no stormwater control onsite and drains from the back of the property through a series of pipes around the YMCA building and out to Old York Road, which ultimately drains to the Tookany Creek. We will control stormwater onsite through a series of newer-style BMP's both underground detention as well as rooftop control including green roofs and other adaptive reuse of water onsite.

Matt Johnson, Development Manager, BET Investments, Inc. presented project renderings showing entrance along Susquehanna Road and what the proposed building will look like including high quality materials of brick, stone and Hardie panel, which is manufactured stone. 20-foot streetscape from the street will allow for landscaping on the street with some street trees and a six-foot sidewalk and additional landscaping along the building.

View along Old York Road was presented showing the various stepping of the façade of the building. Lining the cemetery are existing trees that will remain to provide a buffer from the cemetery and proposed project. BET is willing to help with the maintenance of the cemetery and provide upgrades to the sidewalk around the cemetery.

Mr. Markman provided a rendering of pool deck and amenities as well as interior amenities of a great room/fireplace; restaurant-style kitchen; library; gym and yoga room; game room and gathering rooms for community activities.

Also, we are aware of the issues at the intersection of Old York and Susquehanna Road, and as part of any zoning approval process, we would be willing to make a contribution to help with the intersection because we know there are plans in place to improve it. Sidewalk around the cemetery is in dangerous condition and the curb is almost sunken in and we would replace the entire sidewalk around the cemetery and work with the group who takes of the cemetery to assist with the upkeep of existing historic cemetery.

Ms. Strackhouse acknowledged that several letters have been received from the public that will be put into the official record of tonight's meeting. She asked for any public comments.

Carol Covert, 1515 The Fairway, Rydal Park, said she served on the Township's Planning Commission from 1990 until 2008, and she expressed concern about stormwater runoff because Rydal Park has extreme stormwater conditions when it rains and this project could exacerbate that. She also expressed concern about increase in traffic, and asked if a property has a senior designation now, will it have the same designation in the future.

Also, she suggested other uses such as a daycare, private school or fitness center as well as looking into historic preservation in which the YMCA is an attractive building and suggested maintaining and preserving it because reusing it would be an interesting concept. Also the cemetery has a war monument and she questioned what would happen to it.

Bruce Murray, 1035 Highland Avenue, said he lives three blocks from this site and he is excited about this facility and hopes it is built exactly as described. He has lived in Abington for 35 years and loves it here and this building will enhance the drive up Old York Road as it is aesthetically attractive; an improvement to the community and there will be less traffic than from the YMCA. Also, this is something he and his wife would like to live in the future and he asked for recommendation of approval by the Planning Commission as well as the Board of Commissioners.

Gordon Lawrence said he was a Cheltenham Township Commissioner for 20 years. He now resides at Rydal Park whose residents have circulated a petition opposing this development including 300 signatures because of stormwater runoff and increase in traffic. A large majority of residents of Rydal Park are vehemently opposed to this as it will have an adverse "toll" on Rydal Park.

Dr. Van Hellerslia, 1047 Huntingdon Road, said her property is located behind the YMCA and an extensive letter was written by the neighbors in opposition of this proposal and she was one the main authors of that document. The Township's Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2007 and the Zoning Ordinance was updated in 2017, and she feels BET's proposal conflicts with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, and she asked for a serious reconsideration of this proposal.

Amanda Deitweiler, 1055 Huntingdon Road, said she also lives behind the YMCA property, and the text amendment increases the density from 16 density units to 50 density units, so that is a 213% increase in density units, and in comparison to the Old York Road Corridor Study, that calls for a range of 15 to 25 density units. Other impacts of the text amendment is that the building height will go from 40 feet to 65 feet; building lot size increases from 25% to 75%; impervious surface goes from 60% to 80% and the reduction of green space decreases from 40% to 20%.

So in regards to the 2017 revised zoning ordinance, we ask the Planning Commission to consider the MCPC who said 'that these types of increases especially in density should only be considered along with an impact study and a new Comprehensive Plan.' So as a neighborhood, we reject the text amendment in its current form.

Herb McMahon, 1046 Huntingdon Road, expressed concern about traffic and safety. He is fully behind the eight page letter from the neighbors and vehemently opposed to the project. The traffic study done was over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend, so no school was in session and people may have been on vacation that week, so those numbers would be falsely low. Red light camera is located at Old York and Susquehanna Roads, and over two years, there were 6,618 violations at that intersection, which speaks to the volume and safety. Also, traffic study did not show impact on the community of Huntingdon Road, and he does not feel the threshold has been met to change the CS and R-3 to A/O and the text amendment is so dense that it defies any kind of logic.

Bill Schwarzchild, 1515 The Fairway, Rydal Park, commented that water runs downhill and some of it may run down Old York Road, but the back of Rydal Park is lower. One inch of rain on an acre is 27,154 gallons and the weight of that water is 113 tons, and since we are dealing with a little over four acres this equals 108,616,000 gallons or 462 tons of water, and source of this information is the United States Weather Service. Average rainfall in Abington Township for the past 10 years has been four to five inches a month and lately more than that. Rainwater is a serious issue and Susquehanna Road is downhill so drains would need to be put in and during freezing weather there will be more accidents.

Chet Poor, 909 Coates Road, said he lived in Abington since 1980, and he expressed concern that there is already diverted traffic onto residential roads, and if there is a change to A/O would the roads be able to handle the traffic.

Marilyn Schorsh, 1579 Warner Road, expressed concern that an entity for construction and profit is proposing to rezone our Township and it would not just be for this project, but future projects because changing the zoning for a few properties may change the quality of life of residents living nearby. She respectfully requested that our Township Commissioners and planners maintain their power from investment companies rezoning our Township for profit.

Don Marquardt, 1805 Brook Road, said he had the pleasure of previously chairing this Planning Commission. He expressed concern about precedent and mass. If this were to be developed, we would have a tall wall along two of the streets, and if the zoning change and precedent is created to allow this height and proximity to the streets, then eventually it will become the norm and we will end up with a canyon similar to Jenkintown and it would be a character difference affecting Rt. 611 in total. Also, he is concerned about the proposed amenity deck that overlooks the residential neighborhood and there has been lack of consideration for the neighbors.

Joyce Meter, 1200 Rosemont Lane, expressed concern about the traffic study being done on July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend and she was opposed to the project.

Joe Rosack, 1927 Susquehanna Road, agreed with most of what has been said so far, but he would like to speak about the cemetery. You cannot walk on that sidewalk two abreast or with an umbrella, so unless the sidewalk is widened, it is a problem. The cemetery is an historical site and proposed structure will cause all kinds of stress on that street.

Bethany Lippa, 1056 Huntingdon Road, said our neighborhood as a community reviewed the documents of the Abington Township Comprehensive Plan; the Montgomery County Comprehensive Plans; the Old York Road Corridor Study and the zoning documents, and she expressed concern about the protection of natural resource and green space. BET proposal's opposes that specifically, and in-lieu-of protection, BET proposes to eliminate one of the Township's remaining open spaces that could be used for conservation and recreational purposes. Additionally, there is a proposal of approximately 50% decrease in green space on that property.

This proposal also opposes the planner's suggestions to adopt U.S. Green Building Council LEED rating system for neighborhood developments. It also proposes removal of community service zoning, which eliminates an opportunity to meet an unmet need in the community for public recreational activities specifically the installation of a town center park to be considered in the future.

Joan Cass, 1234 Bockius Avenue, expressed concern about increased traffic and more accidents and also the YMCA is an historical building and she does not want to see it demolished and "turn our town into a city."

Patty Levenback, President of Rydal East, expressed concern about traffic on The Fairway and Susquehanna Road because traffic patterns are a "nightmare." Also, Rydal East sits at the bottom of the hill with a creek underneath the buildings and we cannot handle anymore water and recent rain and snowstorms have flooded out the property. She also expressed concern about the proposed height of the building.

Betty Good, 1136 Jericho Road, said she has lived in Abington for 45 years and this is a residential community. She does not like the tall building sitting so close to the sidewalk and street as it takes away the residential-look of our community. Also, the crossroads of Old York and Susquehanna is such an awful section right now that she "avoids it like the plague."

Nancy Poor, 1512 Mill Road, commented that the people in this area bought homes in this area and a rezoning would be a "betrayal."

Roy Gibson, 1079 Huntingdon Road, commented that one of the elevation documents shows the garage and the first house on Huntingdon Road and he lives at the third house across the street and the entirety of the property surrounding our homes drops off 10 feet at the property line. When the structure is built, the basement of the structure will be above the second floor of his home.

Bill Meckel, 1419 Lindsay Lane, suggested that the applicant be denied a variance because a precedent has already been set against multi-use in a single family residential community. He also expressed concern about traffic.

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Heidi Germaine, 1092 Huntingdon Road, said she and her husband live at the corner of Huntingdon and Susquehanna Roads and she supports the letter that her neighborhood put together and she is opposed to the project as it will “take her house right off of the map.”

Christopher Germaine, 1092 Huntingdon Road, said the problem that he has with the proposal is that it goes so far against what the Board has already dictated of “what the community needs and what the community deserves.” Also, he expressed concern about the height of the building; the density and the historic cemetery and this is not the type of development that we want or need in our community, so he encouraged the Board to reject the proposal.

Rune Hellerslia, 1047 Huntingdon Road, commented that the Abington community does not want BET in our neighborhood and in our backyards, and he implored the Board to listen to those who they represent.

Lora Lehmann, 1431 Bryant Lane, agreed with all of the comments made. She expressed concern about stormwater effecting residents of Rydal Park and the Tookany goes toward Cheltenham that is “fraught with major problems.” Also, she expressed concern about where the fire trucks turn around on the “tiny lane.” And, she “thanked the Board for turning this down.”

Ms. Strackhouse asked for any comments from members of the Planning Commission.

Mr. Rosen said he has been informed and educated by the comments made tonight. The community did a fabulous job raising their objections and Mr. Markman needs to consider carefully all of those objections.

Ms. Gauthier said she appreciates the community coming out tonight and a lot of her concerns are the same as the community’s concerns. She is especially interested in the adaptive reuse of the existing historic YMCA building on Old York Road. Density of proposed project is not in compliance with the intent of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Russell thanked those who made comments tonight. A lot of the issues with traffic at Old York and Susquehanna are not new and the Township is looking into grants for improvements at that intersection, which has nothing to do with tonight’s proposal. Stormwater management has to be contained onsite. There are 3-D tools architects use to create models as part of design to show to the community.

The Zoning Ordinance was just updated, but not taken into account by previous proposals as well as this one. This development would be great in some form, but not in the form as shown in these pictures and possibly something could be crafted more towards the updated zoning.

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Mr. Baker appreciated hearing all of the opinions and he feels this is a big project and hopefully there will be some resolution.

Mr. DiCello thanked the community for voicing their opinions and concerns. Regarding this project, he agreed with comments made by Mr. Russell about stormwater management. He understands residents concerns about buffering from proposed building as it is large and does not tie in with the ascetics of the community, although there is potential for something to be built that could be downsized.

Mr. Cooper thanked everyone for coming out as this is not an easy process. He does not feel anyone is happy that the YMCA moved away from this site, but something will be done on this property and there were some positives with proposed project. However, all comments made were sincere and have validity and we heard loud and clear some of the objections. He values everyone's input and hopes to move forward to get the best use for this property.

**ADJOURNMENT:** 9:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary