

The stated meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Abington was held on Wednesday, December 13, 2017 at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA., with Chairperson Lucy Strackhouse presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: DiCELLO, COOPER, SPEARMAN, ROBINSON, ROSEN, RUSSELL, GAUTHIER, STRACKHOUSE

Also Present: Planning & Zoning Official PENECALE
Office Manager WYRSTA
EAC Vice Chairperson MYEROV
EAC Member EVANS

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Agenda Item PC1 – Application of the Abington School District:

Ms. Strackhouse read agenda Item PC1 into the record, and asked the applicant to present their plan.

Dr. Amy Sichel, Superintendent of Abington School District, introduced Board members Tracy Panella and Raymond McGarry, along with Glenn Harris of Renew Design Group and Scott Adams of Gilbert Architects, and said presently, we are making changes to Abington School District and currently grade level configuration is one through six in elementary, seven through nine in Abington Junior High and ten through 12 at Abington Senior High.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education report there was enrollment of 8,115 children and over the last four or five years and we have gained over 100 children, and our schools are “busting at the seams.” In 2014, we began a Superintendent’s Committee made up of stakeholders, community members, teachers, parents and guardians to look at alternatives to deal with our space issue. After a year and a half of study, the committee recommended to the Board of Directors to change it so that K-5 would be elementary, 6-8 junior high and 9-12 for high school, which would open classrooms across the district providing more space for growth. It still leaves the junior high with three grade levels and moves the ninth grade to the senior high school level.

To accomplish this goal will be to construct a large new classroom wing and that wing will provide space for additional classrooms. So we would like to construct a new large classroom-two-story room as well as other alternations and renovations to the entire high school. We would focus specifically on the 1957 facility as there is a wing from 1996 where the gymnasium, auditorium, cafeterias and the library were renovated in the late 1990’s.

Our focus will be on the science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) department that would be located in this new wing creating a new vision for our high school. We see this as an innovative learning environment to insure students are well-prepared for these industries motivating our next generation of learners. Our objectives are to focus on are adaptable, analytical, technological and innovative success for accomplishing careers.

There have been 14 public meetings to-date and we received feedback from parents, community members and our educational community.

Specifics of the project are significant upgrades to the aging HVAC system and infrastructure and renovate all standard classrooms that are in the 1957 facility. New science labs are proposed for the second floor and we want large and small group rooms where multiple groups can get together to work as a team. Additions and alterations are needed for the areas of administrative and auxiliary gym; we need additional classroom space and we would like to renovate our music area so as to incorporate state-of-the-art technology.

Mr. Penecale said in addition to the 14 public meetings held by the School District, there was a mailing sent to 250 residents about this meeting tonight as well as the future schedule of this application.

Scott Adams, Architect with Gilbert Architects, 626 N. Charlotte Street, Lancaster, PA, 17063, presented a site plan showing proposed additions; large classroom addition; first floor additions and science lab on the second floor. An addition is proposed for auxiliary gym and we would like to expand the gym entrance and cafeteria space to be multifunctional. We also want to have large guidance and administration areas as well as an improved entrance to the building. The new classroom wings will tie into existing building to give the building an updated appearance bringing it into the 21st Century and those wings will be reconfigured. We propose renovating the music areas to allow the orchestra to have a space of its own. We proposed to renovate the lower level including fitness and weight-room as well as the gym and locker rooms as shown on the plan.

Also shown was an aerial photograph of existing site/ building and our plans were submitted in October to the Township for review.

Mr. Russell commented that using Revit for architectural models would make it easy to manipulate the views to show what the planned improvements will look like.

Mr. Adams continued that Ghost Road is the access point for the majority of buses to loop around and then park diagonally. There is a driveway with a turnaround for drop-off and buses cannot utilize that area, so we plan is to revise student pickup and drop-off areas and add new bus lanes with increased parking, and the plan meets zoning criteria for parking associated with this project.

Off of Ghost Road is a proposed driveway to provide service access to underground mechanical systems and a wide turnaround to serve as a fire truck access lane.

There is existing vegetation that we propose to maintain, but some will be removed in the vicinity of the service driveway. There is a retaining wall associated with the building and any disruption will be at a minimum with respect to those trees in that area.

Changes to the plan relate to the addition of the cafeteria area and the elimination of part of the work area indicated previously. As we began the process of stormwater management design, we are making slight adjustments to impervious areas.

Traffic study was done and our traffic engineer recommended improvements at Ghost Road and Highland Avenue intersection as well as at the main high school driveway at Highland Avenue. Those improvements are being added to the plan that will be resubmitted to the Township on January 2, 2018.

On Ghost Road, we propose to add a left hand turn lane and make some widening along the school side with curb adjustment for two lane turns as well as a right hand turn lane on Ghost Road. We would like to have a dedicated left hand turn and right hand turn exit at the egress from Ghost Road and at the high school driveway with a left hand turn loading bay. Canterbury comes in on an angle and there are two existing crosswalks on Highland Avenue and the loading bay and turning lane would be split, and we propose a flashing signal at the crosswalk area on Canterbury Road.

Mr. Penecale clarified that would be for school/pedestrian crossing. Is that correct?

Mr. Adams replied yes. He presented a grading plan for Ghost Road and along the service driveway. Site disturbances were taken into account for stormwater management calculations and underneath the ground are a number of stormwater systems being proposed and adjustments will be made as recommended by Township staff review letter in which we are taking into consideration.

Ms. Gauthier noted that the service road is located in the steep slope area on Highland and does it meet steep slope ordinance requirements? Also, she expressed concern that 15 to 20 trees will be removed as part of this development.

Mr. Penecale replied yes, it does because we still have the criteria for installation of retaining wall that negates encroachment into steep slope. There are four additional courtyard areas being proposed as part of this development and the trees being removed are close to 25% tree canopy along the frontage and Township ordinance requires protection of 50% of tree canopy or more, but trees to be planted in the courtyard areas offsets ordinance requirement.

Mr. Adams added that retaining wall varies in height and at the corner it is six to eight feet in height.

Mr. Spearman asked about screening.

Glenn Harris, RLA, Renew Design Group, 117 East Broad Street, Suite 4, Souderton, PA., 18964, replied the architects propose to use materials as a back panel for some signage and have not proposed landscaping other than tree replacement.

Ms. Strackhouse questioned how it was determined to change the school grade structure and she asked about funding for the project.

Dr. Sichel replied that three studies were done that confirmed that the size of student population will grow so we looked what could be done. Also, we did not borrow any more funds than what was needed for this project and we do not have all of the possible funding scenarios figured out yet.

Mr. Russell mentioned there are federal programs such as SRTS (Safe Routes to School), which is a grant program for improving pedestrian safety.

Ms. Gauthier expressed concern about sight distance on Highland Avenue due to the hill and it was stated that pedestrian flashing light will be installed; what about other traffic calming measures.

Mr. Penecale replied reps of the School District have been in contact with the ward Commissioners as well as Traffic Safety Officer and Township Manager, and the flashing light was a direct result from those discussions.

Ms. Gauthier said near the bus lane there are cones shown on the plan and will they be continued?

Mr. Penecale replied yes, and there are barricades there as well.

Mr. Spearman expressed concern about the height of the retaining wall along the service road and access for fire equipment.

Mr. Harris replied the wall is only about eight or ten feet high and shown on the plan was the service road and access provided for fire equipment.

Mr. Russell suggested that the applicant may want to consider texturing the retaining wall because smooth/flat walls can be targets for graffiti artists. From his experience, textured walls do not get tagged like smooth walls do.

Mr. Rosen questioned whether this plan is considered to be just a preliminary plan.

Mr. Penecale replied this is a preliminary as final plan. Also, two separate reviews were done on stormwater management; one from Township Engineer and the other from BCM Engineers, LLC as noted in staff review letter dated, November 8, 2017, and the plan was designed with higher standard.

Mr. Harris agreed and the higher standard is upheld by the NPDES permit.

Mr. Spearman asked about infiltration and rain gardens.

Mr. Harris replied there are six areas proposed for underground stormwater management systems and soil testing was done at all of these locations and there is favorable soil infiltration rates onsite.

Mr. Penecale said EDU's are available and both the applicant and Township have been in contact with DEP. Mr. Wrigley, Director of W.W.T.P. and Mr. Harris have been finalizing projected flow rates. There is additional engineering work that Mr. Wrigley has recommended concerning locations to existing laterals capacity flow onsite. Also, a planning module will need to be put together as flow rates go through Cheltenham Township as well. So a planning module will be reviewed for the high school and scrutinized by officials of Cheltenham Township as well.

Ms. Gauthier asked what will capture the stormwater from service access road that flows towards Highland?

Mr. Harris replied there are two underground systems that will manage the bottom part of the stormwater flow.

Mr. Rosen said this is a very large project with a lot of details and he expressed concern about safety and traffic flow and the implications of joining traffic patterns.

Mr. Harris replied we submitted a draft traffic study that included the signalized traffic intersections; high school driveway; left turn lanes and the two time periods when the school generates it highest traffic there is a 15 MPH speed zone. We also discussed what will be done at Canterbury and the idea of a speed table has been discussed, but further details need to be worked out.

Mr. Russell asked if signals on Susquehanna were interconnected.

Mr. Harris replied the Old York Road signals are and two of the signals on Susquehanna Road.

Mr. Russell suggested there are modern technological changes to the signals that could be implemented to improve operation of those signals, although there is cost associated with that.

Mr. Penecale said signals are controlled by Abington Township Public Works Department, but the timing pattern is mandated by PennDOT. There was an email dated October 26, 2017 sent by Traffic Safety Officer Freed in regards to his review of the applicant's traffic study and he had additional comments and questions noting that the speed limit on Highland Avenue is 25 MPH. Also his observations during the a.m. were that the majority of the traffic exiting onto Highland Avenue wants to go north on Highland, which has been addressed by adding two left hand turn lanes. The intersection of Highland and Canterbury is being worked on and without the installation of two left hand turn lanes the only alternative is additional traffic through the intersection of Susquehanna Road and Jericho Road causing additional backup in the left hand turn lanes.

Mr. Russell commented that Susquehanna Road is under PennDOT review and there are prescriptive elements of what PennDOT needs to see within the HOP (Highway Occupancy Permit) process; however, when there are known issues around traffic and signals, you can always go above and beyond what is required and propose solutions that can help the community. The School District should be working with Township staff to provide the best possible solutions for safety.

Mr. Penecale continued that the cut-through of Old York Road and Canterbury Road can be addressed with a traffic counter on Canterbury and no left turns should come out of Canterbury, which is something that the Board of Commissioners would need to consider.

Mr. Russell said from a traffic perspective, there could be unintended consequences on Highland as adding turn lanes may improve Highland, but may end up increasing traffic, and the applicant needs to be careful about what is proposed due to existing issues surrounding Canterbury Road.

Mr. Harris said we are committed to installing the left turn lanes on Highland Avenue and flashing signal at Canterbury, and as the project progresses, we will work on details of turn movements.

Timeline for Abington Senior High School additions and renovations project design schedule:

- Contract Award – November 2016
- Schematic Design – February 2017-April 2017
- Design Development – May 2017-November 2017
- Construction Documents – September 2017-February 2018
- Construction – July 2018-August 2022

Mr. Penecale provided a copy of the October 23rd traffic analysis that was sent to Traffic Safety Officer Freed and Mr. Micciolo for review along with the email sent by Traffic Safety Officer Freed to the Board.

Waivers from sections of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance of the Township of Abington requested by the applicant were voted on separately by the Planning Commission as follows:

Mr. Rosen made a MOTION, seconded by Ms. Strackhouse to approve waiver request from Section 146.11.A – Property Identification Plan – The plan is required to supply the tax parcel information, owner’s name & lot area for all properties within 400 feet of the site involved in this application.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

Mr. Rosen made a MOTION, seconded by Ms. Strackhouse to approve waiver request from Section 146.11.B – Existing Features Plan – The plan is required to plot the location of all utilities on the sites and within 400 feet of the properties involved in this application.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

Mr. Rosen made a MOTION, seconded by Ms. Strackhouse to approve waiver request from Section 146.11.H – Landscaping & Shade Tree Plan – The applicant is required to submit a landscaping plan that plots location of all trees proposed to be removed. The plan should also plot the location of tree protection methods to be used and the size, type and location of all proposed plant growth to be installed.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

Mr. Rosen made a MOTION, seconded by Ms. Strackhouse to approve waiver request from Section 146.11I – Phasing Plan – A phasing plan is required to be submitted that provides a clear timeline for the proposed development.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

Mr. Rosen made a MOTION, seconded by Ms. Strackhouse to approve waiver request from Section 146.11.K – Planning Module – The applicant has submitted an ACT 537 exemption mailer that has been forwarded to Mr. Wrigley for review.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

Ms. Strackhouse asked for any public comments.

Cakky Evans, Member of the EAC, thanked the School District for the superior student achievement outcomes, innovation and exemplary performance, which was essential in our Township's recent STAR Communities™ certification as a national sustainable community. The EAC was very pleased to learn that the project intends to incorporate LEED Silver features and the School Board Directors may be considering LEED certification. The EAC recommends to the Planning Commission and the Township Board of Commissioners that the School Board pursues LEED certification as green buildings enhance student health and learning.

Moreover, recognizing there are costs associated with certification, the EAC would like to partner with the School District by sharing outside funding opportunities as well as offer funding from its own accounts to assist with LEED certification should the ASD pursue it.

Mr. Rosen made a MOTION, seconded by Mr. Spearman to recommend approval of the land development plan as submitted for the addition and renovations to Abington School District's Senior High School facility, subject to the condition that final traffic safety measures be acceptable to Abington Township as approved by a third party traffic engineering firm as well as conditioned upon items listed in Township staff review letter dated, November 8, 2017; and subject to comments made by Cakky Evans, member of the EAC.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

Ms. Strackhouse announced that Mr. Spearman will no longer be a member of the Planning Commission in 2018 and she thanked him for his dedicated service on the Planning Commission.

Mr. Rosen added that Mr. Spearman has been a great attribute to our community for a very long time.

ADJOURNMENT: 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary