

The stated meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Abington was held on Tuesday, January 23, 2018 at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:30 p.m.

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

Planning & Zoning Official PENECALE
Office Manager WYRSTA
Commissioner MYERS
Community Director STROTHER
County Planner NARCOWICH

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

REORGANIZATION:

Planning & Zoning Officer, Mr. Mark Penecale opened nominations for Chairperson of the Planning Commission for calendar year 2018.

Mr. Rosen nominated Ms. Lucy Strackhouse as Chairperson of the Planning Commission, seconded by Ms. Robinson.

Mr. Penecale asked for any other nominations. There were none.

By unanimous vote of 6-0, Ms. Lucy Strackhouse was appointed Chairperson of the Abington Township Planning Commission for calendar year 2018 on this 23rd day of January, 2018.

Chairperson Lucy Strackhouse opened nominations for Vice Chairman of the Planning Commission.

Ms. Robinson nominated Mr. Ron Rosen as Vice Chairman of the Planning Commission, seconded by Mr. DiCello.

Chairperson Lucy Strackhouse asked for any other nominations. There were none.

By unanimous vote of 6-0, Mr. Ron Rosen was appointed Vice Chairman of the Abington Township Planning Commission for calendar year 2018 on this 23rd day of January, 2018.

Agenda Item PC1 – Conditional Use Application of the PREIT, Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust:

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

Tyler W. Mullen, Attorney with Stradley, Ronon, Stevens & Young, LLP, Suite 2600, 2005 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA., representing the applicant, said we are proposing to put in a studio movie grill that will occupy the first and second levels of the former J.C. Penney space at the Willow Grove Park Mall. There will be internal construction associated with it, but the footprint will not change. We had several meetings with Township staff about this project.

Mark Gambill, VP Development of PREIT, 200 South Broad Street, Third Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19102, gave a power point presentation of the plan noting that we propose to cut the floor between the first and second levels of the former J.C. Penney store and create approximately 50,000 sq. ft. of theater space. Polls showed mall shoppers would attend a movie that was closer to them in the area. Studio Movie Grill will have a full service restaurant and show first run movies with 1,100 seats and access to the theater through the mall and there is more than adequate parking for this use. There is mall security and Abington Township Police will have a special officer on duty when needed, and the theater will have its own security. We estimate hiring approximately 250 employees, and once that process begins, we will advertise on social media.

Referring to the site plan; we will turn some of the parking into queue parking for drop-off of movie-goers. We will be working within the footprint of the building, so there will not be any land development-type issues.

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

Mr. Rosen questioned where the movies will come from and will they be similar to movies shown at the Regal, etc., and how much alcohol drinking would there be?

Joseph Harberg, Partner, HWGA Group, 11700 Preston Road, Suite, 660-411, Dallas, TX 75230, replied we are the 10th largest movie theater chain by screens; the 6th largest by volume and we have been in operation for 25 years, so our first run movies are the same as Regal, AMC, etc. We program for families and adults showing movies such as romantic comedy and blockbuster same as the Regal. Also, drinking of alcohol would be the same as what is done at the Cheesecake Factory.

All other of our locations are profitable and meeting expectations and we work with charities and sell them tickets at half price and then the charities sell the tickets at full price keeping half of the ticket sales. Also, once a month on Saturdays, we open the theater to families of special needs children and their siblings for free to see a movie.

The “studio movie grill” concept has been very successful and all food is made to order and we aspire to be upper-casual dining such as Cheesecake Factory level, but we are charging Chili’s level pricing and we charge less than Regal and AMC for a movie ticket with reserved seating.

Romaine Crawford, General Manager, Willow Grove Park Mall, said there are several tiers for security at this regional mall; there are security officers in the mall as well as an assigned fulltime police officer during the week and an excellent response time by the Abington Police Department. We do not have a lot of crime at our mall, although on the weekends, we do have a surge of young people hanging out at the mall. She is very optimistic about having the studio movie grill come into the mall and she feels it will generate interest from a leasing perspective incoming to Willow Grove.

Joe DeSantis, Traffic Engineer, McMahon Associates Transportation Engineers and Planners, Fort Washington, PA, said we were asked to review traffic impact for the theater at the mall and the theater will replace approximately 1,000 sq. ft. of retail space. We compared how traffic would be generated from a 1,100 seat movie theater and the 1,000 sq. ft. of retail space and we found that it is essentially the same volume of traffic, which are 250 trips during afternoon peak hour and Saturday peak hour. Saturday nights, the movie theater is higher than the retail space would generate, but traffic around the mall during that night is reduced, so our conclusion is that the intersections around the mall can handle traffic generated by the movie theater.

Once the movie theater opens and is operating, if there are any problems during certain peak times, the applicant agreed to modify the driveway if needed.

Mr. Penecale noted the traffic study done by McMahon Associates has been forwarded to Traffic Safety Officer Freed for review, and if this application is approved, Officer Freed would like to see the intersection stay in its current configuration for at least a six-month period to review traffic data, and if there is any concern, the mall can make modifications to the island if needed.

Also, referring to the site plan; due to hours of operation and how well illuminated the building will be in the front, he suggested additional landscaping to buffer homes within the existing 20-foot buffer area on the mall’s side of the fence.

Mr. Gambill replied we will have our landscape architect review that area.

Mr. Penecale continued that there is no increase in impervious surface coverage; no increase in stormwater runoff and the applicant has been in contact with Mr. Wrigley, Director of W.W.T.P. in regards to any increase in sanitary sewer flow.

Ms. Strackhouse asked for any public comments.

Cathy Gauthier expressed concern about left turns onto Cummings Avenue especially during the nighttime as well as the three-way stop sign intersection, and she questioned whether traffic engineers looked at internal traffic flow.

Mr. DeSantis replied that can be addressed with correct striping and correct sign locations.

Van Strother, Abington Township Community Director, 1707 Cummings Avenue commented that he lives 300 feet from the three-way intersection and Cummings Avenue at peak times is a “dicey” intersection. There was an accident recently at this intersection and he shared the photos with the applicant and he feels confident they will respond to the issues.

Also, he supports this application and Willow Grove Mall has been a great partner in supporting many community events. There is a strong security presence at the mall and he feels confident about that as well. Also, the applicant indicated in their community impact statement that they will consider hiring local minorities and local contractors; is that correct?

Mr. Gambill replied yes, we hire local young people and minorities and hold job fairs to attract a lot of people.

Mr. Penecale suggested that the applicant contact Mr. Strother about when job fairs will be held and Mr. Strother could get the word out through Township network.

Mr. Narcowich noted new zoning of the BC District includes creating strong pedestrian and bike connections onsite and the surrounding area, and although it is premature to delineate any specific mechanism at this time, he would like to get the conversation started such as an informal commitment by the applicant to pursue that further during the land development process.

Mr. Rosen said the combination of bike traffic and high volume parking would be a challenge he does not want to consider at this time.

Mr. Narcowich said issues that would be easier to target are crosswalks directly in front of the building and crosswalks at the main intersection as well as pedestrian linkages along Old Welsh Road due to potential concerns with children walking to the mall to see a movie.

Commissioner Peggy Myers of Ward 8, said the mall borders her ward and there was a mall-sponsored neighborhood meeting held at the former Bravo Restaurant that was well-attended by neighbors. Many issues were discussed about traffic and crosswalks, and we are working with the mall on crosswalks, but there is an added complication in that Old Welsh Road is a State Road down to Fitzwatertown Road. From Fleming Avenue almost right across from Willow Hill School down to Fitzwatertown, there are no sidewalks on either side of the road and it is extremely narrow. The Board of Commissioners has been in conversation with mall representatives in trying to get sidewalks on at least one side of the street.

Mr. Rosen made a MOTION, seconded by Ms. Robinson to approve Conditional Use application filed by Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust (PREIT) for the Use-G7B Movie Theater/Multiplex at the Willow Grove Park Mall, located at 2500 Moreland Road, Willow Grove, PA 19090, subject to the following conditions:

1. A traffic study is conducted at the intersection of Cummings Avenue and the mall entry within the first year that the movie theater is in operation. PREIT would be responsible for any alterations to the intersection.
2. Additional landscaping should be added along the shared property line with the Preston Avenue residential properties.
3. The applicant will notify the Community Development Officer prior to any scheduled job fairs associated with the proposed new use.

Also, the Montgomery County Planning Commission requests that the Board of Commissioners consider adding crosswalks at the intersection of Reservoir Avenue and Old Welsh Road as well as adding additional crosswalks within the parking field of the proposed new use.

MOTION was ADOPTED 6-0.

Mr. Penecale said he will draft recommendation made by the Planning Commission and forward it via email to the members of the Planning Commission for approval and then forward it to Township Manager so it can be distributed to the Board of Commissioners for their review prior to Conditional Use Hearing being held on Wednesday, January 24, 2018.

Agenda Item PC2 – Proposed Ordinance No. 2150 – Wireless Communication Ordinance:

Ms. Strackhouse read agenda item PC2 into the record and called on Mr. Penecale.

Mr. Penecale said last year there was a validity challenge to Township's telecommunications ordinance indicating it was unconstitutional and too restrictive and was not up-to-date with Federal and State mandates by the FCC. Ordinance No.'s 1793 and 1800 date back to early 2000's, and since then, there has been a lot of new technology.

Proposed Ordinance No. 2150 pertains to communication equipment installed in public right-of-way such as existing utility poles throughout the Township to eliminate the 150-foot monopoles as there was no provision for installations within public right-of-way. It amends existing Telecommunication Ordinance No.'s 1793 and 1800 as they were for monopoles and for placing of equipment on existing facilities. Also proposed ordinance includes a licensing agreement and permission to install within public right-of-way on existing utility poles and new technology is being installed because of data. This new ordinance provides mechanism for control; construction standards of poles being installed including height and size limitations.

Mr. Rosen questioned what assurances are there that the dimensional and height requirements are in compliance with Federal and State requirements.

Mr. Penecale replied Township Solicitor indicated that by the year 2019 local municipalities will be out of the "communication regulation business" and communication equipment will be regulated by the PUC (Pennsylvania Utility Commission).

Mr. Rosen made a MOTION, seconded by Mr. DiCello to recommend approval of proposed Ordinance No. 2150.

MOTION was ADOPTED 6-0.

Mr. Penecale noted that a formal hearing on proposed ordinance will be held on February 8, 2018 by the Board of Commissioners.

Planning Commission Meeting

January 23, 2018

Item PC3 – Approval of Minutes of the November 15, 2017 and December 13, 2017 meetings of the Planning Commission:

Mr. Rosen made a MOTION, seconded by Ms. Strackhouse to approve the minutes of the November 15, 2017 and December 13, 2017 meetings of the Planning Commission as submitted.

MOTION was ADOPTED 6-0.

ADJOURNMENT: 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Recording Secretary