

The stated meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Abington was held on Tuesday, June 26, 2018 at the Abington Senior High School, Abington, PA., with Chairperson Lucy Strackhouse presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:34 p.m.

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

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Agenda Item PC1 – Sketch Plan – Robinson and Aubrey Avenues:

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

Mr. John Nystedt, Senior Landscape Architect with Eustace Engineering, 607 Easton Road, Building B, Willow Grove, PA, 19090, introduced the applicant Danielle Mancini, and presented a sketch plan of proposed three-lot subdivision showing existing conditions of the property located at Robinson and Aubrey Avenues. Proposed plan is for three new homes; two drives off of Aubrey and one drive off of Clearview Avenue. Also presented were existing water lines in the area and proposed is an onsite well.

In regards to staff review letter dated, June 15, 2018; Robinson Avenue is a public right-of-way and required to be fully improved and there is recommendation for installation of sidewalks for this project. The site is heavily wooded, so it would be a burden to survey every tree and the applicant is hoping there would be negotiation on how to survey for tree protection and replacement trees and suggested just a sample survey. Rear yard setback is 25 feet and the applicant would like to know where the side yard setback from the floodplain ends as compared to the rear. The applicant would like to have two lots off of Aubrey and a flag lot in the back and would like input on that. Driveways are proposed at 20-feet wide, but flare at the end and could the “flare” be a little wider. A planning module will be prepared and there is a well on one of the lots, but the applicant does not know the location and a “Right To Know” request was submitted, but there was not much information. Also, the applicant would like an interpretation as to whether in-fill development regulations apply to this property.

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

Ms. Gauthier questioned whether the junk vehicles on Aubrey will be removed.

Ms. Mancini replied those vehicles are not hers and does not know who owns them, but she will work to get them removed.

Ms. Gauthier asked currently, how many homes are on Aubrey?

Ms. Mancini replied two on Aubrey.

Ms. Gauthier said since it is a Township right-of-way would there be any discretion for proposed driveway off of Robinson to be smaller.

Mr. Penecale replied yes, the Board of Commissioners has discretion as it is a Township right-of-way and they can grant waivers from the SALDO (Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance). The driveway would need to be constructed to Township standard. Also, in regards to "Right To Know" request for wells, those permits are issued by Montgomery County Health Department and not through Abington Township.

Ms. Gauthier said in regards to the 25 ft. setback is that from the floodplain or side yard?

Mr. Penecale replied required setbacks are measured from any resource right-of-way, which is edge of floodplain, edge of steep slope, edge of streambed, etc.

Mr. Rosen asked for the applicant to identify what issues they are seeking input by the Planning Commission.

Mr. Nystedt replied input on Robinson Avenue and permitting wells on the property.

Ms. Strackhouse questioned whether the applicant is concerned that wells on the property would negatively impact the property and that buyers would be apprehensive in buying property with wells on it.

Ms. Mancini replied she does not feel it would negatively impact the sale of the property.

Mr. Russell referring to staff review letter that says "public water utility must be extended to service this development," and expressed concern that if something goes wrong with those wells in four or five years it could be a problem for the property owner.

Mr. Rosen said the applicant is asking for feedback from staff about wells.

Mr. Penecale replied there is no standard within the SALDO for running public water; however, any development proposed within 500-feet of a public water source has to extend that water service to supply their new development. There is that standard for sanitary sewers so that if you are within 500 feet of a sanitary sewer main you will extend it. In this case, the applicant has the ability to extend the public water supply down Robinson Avenue to a point along the frontage of Lot #3 and then could create an easement and run water laterals to service Lots # 1 and #2 without having to trench either Clearview or Aubrey Avenue. So there is the ability to supply public water to these homes, but it is 300-feet away, and if they create that utility easement to service the water source for Lots # 1 and 2, there is a portion of steep slope to go through or revise the side yard setback on Lot #1 to create a 20-foot easement. It is a heavily wooded lot and when trenching for utilities there will be tree and root disturbance.

This is a sketch plan and the applicant is looking for comments on driveway/roadway on Robinson Avenue; inventory on trees and well water for this particular development.

Ms. Gauthier said in regards to woodlands; the applicant will need show compliance with the ordinance as it ties into Township's Grove Park and she would like to see more detail on the trees especially so close to the floodplain.

Ms. Strackhouse said on behalf of the Planning Commission there is concern about well water and we would like to see inventory of the trees.

Agenda Item PC2 – BET Investments, Inc.

Ms. Strackhouse read agenda Item PC2 into the record, and asked the applicant to present their plan.

Mr. Michael Markman, President of BET Investments, Inc. said a plan was presented to the Board of Commissioners last year and they gave specific instructions to meet with the neighbors and the Planning Commission. Several meetings were held with the neighbors where feedback was received and we addressed concerns in writing and the plan was also presented before the Planning Commission. Tonight, we will present a revised development plan so as to get feedback from residents and then recommendation by the Planning Commission at its next scheduled meeting.

Currently, there is grant money to improve the intersection of Old York and Susquehanna Roads and BET Investments Inc. will contribute \$100,000.00 towards the Township's matching portion. Regarding traffic, the plan has been reduced from 225 units to 180 units that will decrease traffic from the site. New use peak hour weekday morning will have 195 less trips that are currently generated by the YMCA and weekday afternoon with the new plan of 180 units will have 179 less trips, so substantially less traffic during peak hours than currently generated by existing YMCA.

Plan has been revised so there is a right-in and right-out on Old York Road to allow for easier flow and there is now a ring-road around the property. Also, there is now one full curb cut on Susquehanna.

Density has been reduced substantially; originally it was 50 units to the acre and it has been reduced to 24 and with density bonus provision the plan shows a maximum of 36 units to the acre. Building coverage has been reduced to 50% and impervious surface has been reduced to 70%. Green area has been increased to 30% and height of building has been reduced to 50-feet, but if we are within the 100-ft. boundary of a residential neighborhood it is down to 40-feet.

Revised plan reduces the area that it covers and it is two separate and distinct buildings. We are under agreement to purchase the house shown on the plan and we intend to demolish it and create a pocket park or landscaped area or whatever is desirable for the neighbors living on that road. It would remain green area and there would be a deed restriction, so that it could never be developed.

Mr. Matt Johnson, Development Manager, BET Investments Inc., said in regards to building setbacks; there will be a 15-ft. setback from the right-of-way off of Old York Road as shown on the plan and 25-feet on Susquehanna that will allow for a more generous streetscape. We plan to keep existing low Quaker walls along Old York Road and then create a similar wall along Susquehanna. Side and rear yard setback will be 45-feet from residential properties and 25-ft. setback from the cemetery and create the driveway along the perimeter of the property that will allow for setting the building back from the neighbors.

Building height will be 40-feet as long as it is within 100-feet from residential property, and once we are more than 100-feet from a residential property, then the building height will be increased to 50-feet and plan of floor levels and parking below grade was shown. Style of proposed building will be contemporary-farmhouse, pitched roofs, stone and traditional siding.

Mr. Markman said the gravestones in the cemetery have not been maintained and there are restoration techniques that can be done. Also, the sidewalk around the cemetery has sunken and is a dangerous condition. We propose to repair/restore the fence wherever necessary around the cemetery and complete repair/replace the sidewalk around the cemetery wherever necessary mostly on Susquehanna Road. Also, we will survey the gravestones as they are falling down and create a map of every gravestone.

We will contribute \$25,000.00 and help raise money through businesses in the Township to create a program where high school students could help restore the writing on the gravestones, research the individuals and create a historical document that would connect back to the history of Abington Township.

Also, presented was a revised chart of taxes that will be generated by this project.

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

Mr. Baker expressed concern about one of the accesses that have been moved down the hill, which would be dangerous coming out of Huntingdon Road.

Mr. Peter Clelland, Vice President of Development, BET Investments Inc., replied the driveway is located farther down the road coming out of Huntingdon closer to the bend in the road on Susquehanna. Driveways have been consolidated to two locations; right-in and right-out driveway on Old York Road and one single full movement access on Susquehanna.

Mr. Rosen asked for the grade at Susquehanna Road entrance/exit and also about sightlines.

Mr. Clelland replied that section of Susquehanna Road is relatively flat and then it breaks down going farther down Susquehanna. Sightlines were not measured, but will need to comply with PennDOT's requirements.

Mr. Rosen asked for photos to be presented at the next meeting.

Mr. Baker asked for further explanation about the parking and venting for that area.

Mr. Markman replied the parking will mostly be underground and venting will be per building code.

Ms. Strackhouse asked has the plan for the cemetery been discussed with church officials.

Mr. Markman replied there is an individual who works for the church whose idea it was to setup a program for the cemetery as there is not enough funding to maintain it. Also, this individual is willing to attend the next Planning Commission meeting for further discussion.

Ms. Strackhouse asked for any public comments.

Gordon Lawrence, Vice President of the Rydal Park Residents Association, commented that this project is a pretty good one; however, for Rydal Park the potential is "scary" from a marketing standpoint. If and when this project is approved and they begin to sell units, it will have a "deleterious" affect on Rydal Park.

Antonio Schiavone, 1115 Rydal Road, said his property is located at the corner of Rydal, Susquehanna and Valley Roads and he expressed concern about stormwater runoff from this project that will negatively affect his property and its value. He provided photos of previous damage to his property from stormwater and he was opposed to the project.

Mr. Clelland said the water from the former YMCA site does not flow down Susquehanna towards Valley Road. It is collected in the parking lot and piped around the western side of the property and out to Old York Road and then crosses over towards Tookany Creek. Our proposal is to install stormwater facilities that do not exist today on the YMCA property and we will be required to comply with Township ordinances as it relates to stormwater reduction and controls.

Aaron Gross said he has been an Abington resident since 2009, and investing into the cemetery is a great idea, but he expressed concern about only a 10% decrease in green space as well as only a 10% decrease in impervious surface, and he asked the applicant if they can do better.

Dr. Van Hellerslia, 1047 Huntingdon Road, commented that the zoning ordinance was just updated in 2017 and relative to current standards the revised proposal by BET Investments Inc. constitutes a 100% increase in building lot size, 16% increase in impervious space and a 25% reduction in green space. She asked the applicant, "What will it take for you to meet the unmet need of a community service building and reestablish a community service institution?"

Susan Oohner, 1349 Warner Road, commented that she does not want the zoning changed to allow for a very dense, four-story building with increased impervious surfaces that will impede drainage. If the area must be developed, allow fewer units with fewer stories and much more green space.

Bethany Lipa, 1056 Huntingdon Road, said she lives in the "armpit" of the proposed development and on February 8, 2018 she sent a letter to the Board of Commissioners inviting them to her backyard and neighborhood. On February 11th, Commissioners Brodsky, Thompson and Rothman joined a handful of neighbors and toured our backyards and saw how a high density development could look from our perspectives and how in the future it could open opportunities for future development in the Township. We voiced our concerns about zoning, building height, safety, traffic and water.

Walter Draving, 1431 Bryant Lane, said he has lived in Abington Township for 38 years, and this project requires significant zoning changes in order for it to be permitted. It will dramatically change the character of the neighborhood and would be located at one of our most dangerous intersections, which would not be safe for seniors. The project will impact drainage to properties around it and has a drainage plan been submitted? This project is wrong especially at this location and he asked if there is adequate room for fire trucks onsite and whether the Fire Marshal reviewed the plan. "Once the zoning is changed, it is available to anybody."

Ann Gibson, 1079 Huntingdon Road, said when Penn State Abington proposed a dorm and when Rydal Park proposed Rydal Waters, we received letters asking us to a meeting and we have not received any letters from Mr. Markman or BET. Also, she expressed concern about increased traffic on her street, the lighting, density and stormwater, and at the last meeting, she requested to see an elevation to the neighbors' backyards and she does not see that.

Heidi Germaine, 1092 Huntingdon Road, commented that she appreciates the inclusion of the "historical walls," but she is not too sure about the graveyards as she feels they should be left alone. Also, she does not see any photos of her backyard or neighbors' backyards that border this property and expressed concern about increased traffic and she is still not satisfied and does not like it.

Jude Vigaly said she has lived for 50 years on Sewell Lane, and expressed concern about the ascetics and asked to see a color rendering of proposed building because she feels it does not look like it will fit in with the character of the neighborhood.

Amanda Detweiler, 1055 Huntingdon Road, questioned whether there can be a different zoning designation for a pocket park in a residential area; what is the percentage of green space increase for the entire property that is attributable to the pocket park and how would it be maintained and would it be designated as nonsmoking; also would it be accessible to the neighbors as there is a steep hill and would there be steps built. Also, she expressed concern that the new road would become a cut-through road and could there be a gate to stop the cut-through to the back of that property. She asked about the comments made about this project from the last Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. Penecale said there was no formal recommendation made by the Planning Commission; however, the minutes from the prior meeting are available to the public online.

Ms. Stackhouse added that will be the same for tonight's meeting.

Sarah Bastitch, 1016 Hollytree Road, asked that the variance not be granted for the project and expressed concern about stormwater.

Dr. Van Hellerslia, 1047 Huntingdon Road, read a letter into the record in opposition of the project.

Joe Rozak, 1927 Susquehanna Road, expressed concern about increase in traffic and pedestrian safety as well as the sidewalk is too narrow for pedestrians to walk on it. "Take care of that corner first for the safety of those living here now and then consider the project."

Tom Stone, 1535 Woodland Road, President of the Rydal Meadowbrook Civic Association, asked that prior to any approval of the project that it has the general support of the neighbors.

A resident of Adams Avenue asked, what if any, accessory uses are proposed for this district.

Cakky Evans, 1132 Lindsay Lane, said she understands this will not be a LEED certified building and she expressed concern about "green" features.

Mr. Markman said concerns about traffic and sight line will be addressed at the next meeting as well as renderings will be presented. There will be no access from our building to the pocket park and that is solely for the residents. The home will be demolished and the property landscaped in a way that is conducive to the neighbors and it will be an amenity for the street and no steps are proposed. It will be deed restricted and nothing would be built on that property for eternity. Traffic calming measures will be implemented, so there will be no cut-through, and the height of the building has been reduced.

We want to build a beautiful project that would cater to the seniors in this community and we are working hard to address all concerns. There will be heavily landscaped buffer and fencing as well as underground parking. We are willing to have the Township's Traffic Engineer to review our traffic study and we will report back at the next meeting. Age-restricted senior housing is being proposed because there is a need and it is a good spot for that type of use, and we did not send letters to residents as we communicated with the neighbors through the Board of Commissioners.

Revised plan and proposed text amendment will be reviewed by the Montgomery Planning Commission prior to the next Planning Commission meeting.

Michael Brahler, 765 Moredon Road, commented that this would be the "largest building in the area and it is inappropriate and it should be done with more sensitivity," and he expressed concern about aesthetics.

Ms. Strackhouse announced that the next Planning Commission meeting will be held on July 24, 2018.

Planning Commission Meeting

June 26, 2018

ADJOURNMENT: 9:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary