

The stated Working Session of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Thursday, January 11, 2024 via webinar and in-person at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA, with President Hecker presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:47 p.m.

PRESENT: Commissioners BRODSKY, ROTHMAN, DiPLACIDO, LANEY-MARTIN, BROWNE, WINEGRAD, HENRY, ZAPPONE, CARSWELL, SPIEGELMAN, BOLE, SCHREIBER, VAHEY, HECKER
Excused: Commissioner BOWMAN

Also Present: Township Manager Manfredi
Assistant Legal Counsel Gallagher

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Browne to approve the minutes from the Working Session of November 9, 2023.

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Discuss Single-Use Plastics & Expanded Polystyrene Products Ordinance:

Manager Manfredi noted that Ms. Rosen from the EAC is not in attendance tonight; however, the purpose of this item is for the Board to consider the specifics of the ordinance as well as any next steps.

President Hecker expressed concern that by not having EAC representatives in attendance, the Board will not have context as to why specific items were included in the ordinance, which may hinder the discussion.

Manager Manfredi replied they are relying on what has already been presented; however, we can hold future sessions.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Brodsky agreed that he would prefer to have a representative present and suggested deferring it to the next meeting.

Commissioner Bole said on behalf of a resident of Ward 13 who was not present this evening expressed concern that ‘this ordinance is unscientific and needs more research and she is not convinced that the case that it is “*better for the environment to get rid of single use plastic bags*” is legitimate, and further education is needed about reusing, saving, and recycling single-use plastic bags.’

Commissioner Bole said that although there is an implementation plan, he did not hear how this would impact small business owners, and agreed that further education is needed, so this ordinance needs a lot more work.

Commissioner Schreiber questioned whether Styrofoam has been investigated, which is also terrible for the environment, but there are places that recycle it. Also, single use plastic bags are recycled in creative ways that could possibly bring revenue for the Township.

Commissioner Zappone said this would be an undue burden on taxpayers. These plastic bags have been around for years, and then someone comes up with this brainstorm idea saying that they are ‘*bad for your breathing, sinuses and stomach,*’ which is a “bunch of crap.” Also, a few of his residents shopped at Walmart with \$300 orders and there were no bags, which is “ridiculous,” so he will oppose it to the very end.

Commissioner Browne said we need to have a very thought-out transition plan, and as we learn more about the harmful effects of plastics, we may want to decrease the use of them, but we need to be smart in how we transition away from it. We do not want to burden taxpayers and small business owners, so by having intentional discussions with EAC members and other experts as well as economists who may be able to help the Township develop a transition plan that we can be confident in, should be the next step.

Commissioner Rothman agreed that we need to explore this with local business owners and the community as this most likely will move forward sometime in the future; however, it is important that we figure out the correct way to transition to lessen the burden on them.

Commissioner Spiegelman said we need to make sure we do not unduly burden taxpayers and small business owners. And almost every municipality bordering Abington Township has enacted a ban such as this one, so there are many case studies to review, and we can learn from the experiences of our neighbors.

Vice President Vahey said he does not need any convincing that this is a good thing, and that the community could handle the change; however, it does not make sense that businesses cannot provide any type of bag to consumers. Regarding provisions for paper bags and the charges for using them, he would like to learn more from the EAC and/or Solicitor's office about the definition of paper bags; how hard would it be to comply with; and how available are the bags that would be compliant. Also, he would oppose any mandatory charge on using paper bags, but if a business owner wants to impose a charge, they are free to do so, but that should not come from the Township.

Commissioner Winegrad said it would be helpful for members of the EAC to be present to answer questions about their proposed ordinance, and then the Board can decide how to proceed.

Commissioner Carswell said she absolutely supports it, although we need to investigate whether it makes sense and fits our community. She encouraged the EAC to continue bringing these proposals to the Board as they have been incredible leaders in improving our environment.

President Hecker said the Board would like to continue this discussion but with members of the EAC present, and then decide on whether to move forward to advertise or not. This matter will be brought back to the February working session.

NEW BUSINESS:

Presentation of the Preliminary/Final Major Land Development Plan for LD-23-04 – 640 Cedar Road (Hopewell Vet):

Mr. Chad Brensinger with Charles E. Shoemaker Inc., PE, introduced Mr. and Mrs. Rutkowski, owners of the property and operators of Hopewell Veterinary Hospital.

Previously, the applicant appeared before the Zoning Hearing Board and variances were granted for dimensional relief and minimal setback relief. The plan was presented before the Planning Commission in December and there are eight waiver requests as part of the land development plan.

The plan is to build a 1,048 sq. ft. addition to the existing facility, making their operation more successful and efficient. Proposed are 28 parking spaces; there will be 8,200 sq. ft. of impervious area with a stormwater management system located under the parking lot; and minor landscaping. Existing parking spaces will be restriped and rebuilt for ADA compliance and there is a parking lot proposed for the rear of the site; and we will supplement existing vegetation with proposed vegetation, which was discussed with the neighbors. Review letters from Pennoni & Associates, Traffic Planning & Design, and the Shade Tree Commission were received, and the applicant will comply.

President Hecker clarified that Pennoni recommended approval of preliminary/final land development plan pending resolution of issues regarding traffic and parking, and the applicant will comply. Is that correct?

Mr. Brensinger replied yes.

Mr. Khal Hassan, Township Engineer, added that the proposed 1,048 sq. ft. building addition will be in the rear of the existing two-story building, and the applicant proposes to remove the existing detached garage, the existing landscaping, stone wall, and walkway adjacent to the garage. They propose to install stormwater management facilities of an underground infiltration bed as well as a 4 ft. high chain-link fence.

The applicant is requesting eight waivers that pertain to existing features, utilities, slopes, and drainage as well as a waiver to consider the plan preliminary as final major land development plan. Also, there is a waiver request from Section 146.11 J. – that requires a recreation of facilities plan to be provided, and the applicant is not proposing any recreation of facilities as part of their land development project, and they are requesting a waiver from this requirement. He recommends approval of the waivers and requests the Board of Commissioners to consider approval as well.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Rothman said as ward Commissioner, he supports this project as this business owner has been a good neighbor and respected part of the community for many years.

President Hecker said this agenda item will move forward to the Board of Commissioners Regular Meeting in February.

Presentation of Galman Group request of Zoning Map Amendment:

Mr. Marc Jonas, Attorney representing the applicant, introduced John McShea of Eastburn & Gray and Jerry Slipakoff of the Galman Group. The applicant proposes a zoning map amendment for part of the Galman Group property in shifting a zoning line that would not entail any changes to the zoning regulations in terms of what uses are permitted.

The applicant has been working on a Master Plan for the Pavilion that includes gathering spaces, traffic calming, pedestrian connectivity, streetscape improvements and green area, which is just conceptual as it would need to go through the land development process when details of the new construction including stormwater management and landscaping would be reviewed.

The plan as presented showed the 2.5-acre property that would be affected from the map change along with an aerial view of the existing office building and proposed medical office building. Regarding green area and landscaping, the applicant proposes adding approximately 48,000 sq. ft. of new green area to the existing site, which would be a net gain. The Township's 2017 ordinance does not consider signage for multi-use properties, particularly one of this size, so we drafted an ordinance that was sent to the Township for review and consideration.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Winegrad clarified that part of the golf course owned by the Galman Group will be used for the parking lot of the proposed medical office building. Is that correct?

Mr. Jonas replied that is correct.

Commissioner Winegrad expressed concern about how this will affect the neighbors on Lenox and Meetinghouse Roads as well as the existing green space, although he appreciates that the applicant will add green space to the property. He has discussed this project with residents from Lenox and Meetinghouse Roads and there were no major objections from any of them, so he has no objection to this proposal moving forward. Also, what are the hours of the proposed medical office building?

Mr. Jonas replied business office hours with limited hours on Saturdays and most likely closed on Sundays.

Commissioner Winegrad expressed concern about protecting the neighbors on Lenox with buffer plantings.

Mr. Jonas replied we will ensure that will take place.

Commissioner DiPlacido asked how many floors is the proposed building?

Mr. Jonas replied three floors.

Commissioner Browne noted there is a robust tree line abutting the neighbors on Lenox, so would those trees remain?

Mr. Jonas replied we can save existing trees on our side of the property line, which would benefit the development; however, that will be explored during the land development process as to which are healthy and can remain or those that need to be replaced and replenished.

President Hecker suggested consulting with the Township's Shade Tree Commission as part of the review.

Commissioner Henry asked why the applicant is proposing to amend the zoning map as opposed to seeking variances.

Mr. Jonas replied variances require proof of hardship and would create an unnecessary burden on the applicant, this project makes sense for the Galman property, so we feel a map amendment would be the appropriate route to take.

President Hecker said this item will be moved to the Board of Commissioners Regular Meeting in February for consideration of sending it to the Township and County Planning Commissions for review.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS:

Adele Kubel, resident, expressed concern about the amount of trash at the WAWA in Jenkintown; also, about trash cans overflowing and there is no maintenance in the shopping areas. And plastic bags are 100% recyclable and bag bans do not reduce overall litter and waste.

Joe Rooney, resident, commented that plastic bag bans hurt the poorest residents, the elderly, and minorities as well as increase costs and are inconvenient. Also, he asked for existing ordinances to be enforced making businesses clean up their property.

Karen Milovcich, resident, commented that if there is concern about the environment then stop overdevelopment in our Township, and businesses should have their trash cans emptied so trash will not be all over the ground. Also, she is opposed to plastic bag bans, and concerned that citizens do not have input on development plans before moving forward.

Lora Lehmann, resident, commented that the plastic bag ban is important for the environment, and she asked for documents to be provided prior to the Board making any decisions.

Commissioner Carswell announced that she will be resigning as Ward 10 Commissioner. She is grateful for the education, collaboration, and growth that she has experienced in this role. She is deeply humbled by the work of the Board of Commissioners and thanked them for it.

President Hecker said it has been a pleasure working with Commissioner Carswell and we look forward to honoring her service in the coming weeks as well as to her continued service to the community in a new way.

Commissioner Zappone commended Commissioner Winegrad as he deserves a lot of credit for always meeting with his residents to address their concerns.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary