

The stated meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Abington was held on Tuesday, April 26, 2022, via webinar with Chairperson Lucy Strackhouse presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:30 p.m.

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

Also Present: County Planner NARCOWICH
Township Engineer LEE

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Ms. Gauthier made a MOTION, seconded by Mr. Baker to approve the minutes of the Planning Commission Meeting of March 22, 2022.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

PRESENTATION: None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Consider approving the major subdivision for LD-22-01 DJS Associates located at 1603 & 1617 Old York Road:

Ms. Strackhouse said the applicant is proposing the consolidation of two existing parcels located at 1603 & 1617 Old York Road, yielding a total of 41,451 sq. ft., and with the lot consolidation of the two parcels would create a triple-frontage lot. The applicant plans on demolishing the existing brick masonry building located at 1617 Old York Road to construct a new 2,460 sq. ft. two-story building addition with an enclosed link connection to the existing parent building of 1603 Old York Road; construct a parking area located below and adjacent to the new building as well as new curbing, sidewalk, walkways, and retaining walls, landscaping, and stormwater management. The new building addition is proposed to continue being serviced by public water and sewer.

Mr. Doug Waite, PE, Gilmore & Associates, Inc., representing the applicant, presented the Existing Conditions Plan showing the previous project approved back in 2010 of a three-story building of 5,400 sq. ft. and parking for 36 vehicles with the main entrance off Hamilton Avenue that will remain. The southern portion of the property is the higher elevation on Old York Road, which is steeply sloped with a single lane driveway sloping downward with angled parking and a double bay parking area at the lower end of the site.

Proposed is to remove portions of the parking lot and impervious areas to make way for a new two-story building addition with a connector piece to go from the basement area of the existing building to the building addition. The lower level of the building addition will be a walkout at grade at the corner of Butler Avenue and Old York Road.

Stormwater management facility will be provided along the north edge partially underneath the parking area and there is an existing stormwater management system of an infiltration bed at the south side of the building that manages drainage from the consolidated parcels.

Proposed is the relocation of parking lights and some landscaping will be removed and replaced with a buffer fence, street trees and landscaping along the corner of Old York Road and Butler Avenue.

Mr. Justin Schorr, owner of the property, provided a summary of the history of the existing building lot noting that he and his family have been involved in this community for his entire life, and we worked closely with Township staff on the first development of their property.

Regarding proposed development project, he was taken back by some of the comments made in Township Engineer's review letter finding them cumbersome because having to address items that were addressed back in 2012-2013 would be additional work that does not make sense and not something he had envisioned, which disincentives him from moving forward. He hopes there is a more practical approach taken as compared to the "nuts and bolts" approach that he sees in their review letter.

Ms. Strackhouse replied many of the Planning Commission members were on this Board during the time of the first development and we were very supportive as it is a wonderful business to have in Abington, and we would like to help this project move forward as smoothly as possible.

Mr. Waite indicated that tonight the applicant is only looking for feedback from the Planning Commission before moving forward to the Zoning Hearing Board.

Ms. Allison Lee said Township Engineer's review letter dated April 8, 2022, indicates that an Executive Summary was provided noting the parking requirement needs to be based on the gross floor area and the plans shows gross leasable building area, which needs to be revised to provide the correct parking calculation.

Also, the applicant is proposing three (3) parking spaces to be located within the proposed building addition. These spaces will be located closer than five (5) feet from the proposed building. A variance from this section of the code will be required to provide parking closer than five (5) feet from the proposed building.

Regarding the parking aisle width, based on measurements the access aisle of the proposed parking area adjacent to the building addition is only twenty (20) feet wide measured between the edge of building and line striping of the four (4) new parking spots adjacent to the proposed planted area, and a twenty-four (24) feet wide access aisle for two-way traffic is required.

Mr. Schorr stated that the width of the drive isle to the existing garage is approximately 8 ft. and there is a one-way street that goes in/out of the garage, and proposed is a 20 ft. wide drive isle for the new garage, so why is there an issue with needing a 24 ft. drive isle?

Ms. Lee replied that the zoning code requires a 24 ft. wide drive isle for two-way traffic and there is also straight-in parking adjacent, so that is where the 24 ft. requirement is not met.

Mr. Waite said the applicant will need to review the updated zoning ordinance and request relief where needed.

Ms. Gauthier asked what will the three parking spaces be used for?

Mr. Schorr replied for vehicles owned by the company.

Ms. Lee continued that the applicant would need to add a decorative wall/fence along with the existing landscaping on Hamilton Avenue to provide better screening from the existing residential properties located directly across from the site as headlights would face in that direction. Also, proposed is a buffer fence along the Butler Avenue side, but there are gaps along the fence, which need to be adjusted.

Stormwater management, the applicant will need to provide infiltration testing and clarification is needed as to where the roof drains will tie in from the new building to the infiltration basin as well as clarify pre-and post-discharges for each storm design year.

Regarding sewer, the proposed building should connect to the existing lateral that enters the property from Old York Road due to a possible overload of hydraulic capacity of the building sewer line from the existing larger office building.

Also, the applicant should clarify screening for trash enclosure facing residential properties.

Shade Tree Commission made comments regarding street trees; the location of the two Sugar Maple (AS) trees located along Old York Road is too close to the overhead utility wires at thirteen (13) feet, but a minimum of fifteen (15) feet is required, and the applicant should space out the three Serviceberry (AC) trees along Butler Avenue and the planting schedule should be consistent with proposed plantings.

Traffic review, we need to clarify with the applicant on the projected number of new employees, and a trip generation study would account for the increase in staff, which should be provided.

Mr. Schorr replied that the expansion is not substantial enough to require a trip generation study, and we need more space for existing employees, and we are not adding more staff.

Mr. Waite indicated that infiltration testing was done since the plan was submitted and we will do our best to meet stormwater management ordinance requirements; also, there is not much room for street trees due to existing constraints.

Ms. Strackhouse asked the applicant to review suggestions made by the Shade Tree Commission as well as the EAC.

Ms. Gauthier noted that the planting schedule, tree location and identifications do not match. Also, regarding the planting island, there is an area where the new parking goes into the garage, which is proposed to be striped planting, so could that be made into green space and possibly plant another tree there?

Mr. Waite replied we will look into it.

Mr. Narcowich referring to his review letter dated April 11, 2022 regarding building foundation, the requirement is a minimum of 25% of the linear area between the building foundation and sidewalk, access drives, or parking areas shall be landscaped with building foundation landscaping.

And the planting schedule includes four Red Maple replacement trees, but they are not shown on the plans and suggested choosing an alternative to the proposed Sugar Maple green area plantings, as Sugar Maples have not adapted well to climate change and replacement trees cannot be counted as street trees. Also, the applicant should consider improving the streetscape along Old York Road noting there is a bus stop at the corner of Butler Avenue and Old York Road and the applicant should fill out the checklist for better bus stop planning.

Mr. Schorr replied regarding the streetscape, previously it was important to the Township that we keep as much of the existing stonewall as possible, and with this plan, we took steps to make sure that wall remains.

Ms. Strackhouse commented that we appreciate the applicant's efforts in keeping the attractive stonewall as it is in good condition having been there for decades.

Ms. Gauthier agreed that the stonewall should count towards the buffering/fencing requirement as it is a beautiful feature.

Mr. Narcowich said the plan shows a good portion of the stonewall being preserved and some removed, and how much will that be?

Mr. Waite presented the demolition plan showing that the existing wall wraps around the corner as a staircase going up as a top of wall elevation and we will be removing the corner portion and installing a decorative fence, and the entire length along Butler will remain. The grade behind the wall will be lower, so the improvements will be hidden behind the wall in the proposed condition.

Mr. Narcowich said the maximum height for decorative fences is 4 ft., so the applicant will need to meet that requirement. Also, regarding streetscape, he asked the applicant to consider what could be done in terms of street furniture and decorative verge to be more in line with zoning requirements in the MS-H District.

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

Mr. Russell suggested that the applicant not be discouraged and change the plan because this property remains one of the nicest developments on Old York Road and Mr. Schorr is a valued member of our community. Also, the street view shows that the parking lot facing Hamilton is lower than the properties on the other side of that street, so the headlights will be shining onto the ground and not into homes. And there is nothing wrong with the existing streetscape along Hamilton, which was designed with Township input albeit under different zoning, but it should remain as is. He is confident that if the new plan is anything like what is there today, it will be a valued addition to that corridor.

Mr. Baker clarified that the number of parking spaces does not include the three-car garage. Is that correct?

Mr. Waite replied that it does.

Mr. Baker asked if the additional three parking spaces in the garage part of the original required amount of parking.

Mr. Waite replied yes, they are meant to be, although there is confusion in the ordinance in which he will need to get clarification prior to going before the ZHB.

Mr. Baker said the crutch of the project is getting more green area onsite, and if the square footage used to calculate the number of spaces was included in the garage area, then possibly the applicant will not need as many parking spaces, and some of the outdoor spaces could be removed for green area.

Ms. Lee said the zoning code for parking use requirement F-5 - Professional Office requires one parking space for every 250 sq. ft. of gross floor area, so it was not clear what the total gross floor area is, and we need to confirm the actual required parking; also, the applicant has an opportunity to request a parking reduction because it is in proximity to a bus stop.

Mr. Schorr said given the surrounding area and limited amount of street parking, adding additional parking spaces versus green space would benefit everyone.

Ms. Strackhouse agreed that there are parking issues and suggested that the applicant may wish to request a variance.

Ms. Gauthier said she would like to see the applicant's completed stormwater management plan, which ties in with green space.

Mr. Waite replied that we will meet requirements of the Township's Stormwater Management Ordinance and make sure there is a solid place to tie into the sewer connection.

Mr. Brown clarified that the roof runoff tied into the underground storm tank will be via gutters/downspouts, and the materials and pop-up roof will be metal just like the existing building. Is that correct?

Mr. Waite replied yes, and that will be shown on the plan.

Peggy Hoffart added that the idea is to compliment and build on the appearance using the same materials of the existing building.

Mr. Brown said if this plan comes to fruition, it will be a value-add to the Township and the applicant should not be discouraged by the technical comments.

Ms. Strackhouse asked for any public comments.

Karen Milovcich, resident, commented that she would like the applicant to build in her area because it looks so beautiful; also, she expressed concern about the constant activity in the Hollywood section such as lights, noise, traffic, and crime as well as trash all over the area.

Lora Lehmann, resident, questioned whether the neighbors were notified about this meeting.

Ms. Strackhouse replied that Planning Commission members have met with Township staff on how to improve communication with the neighbors. Tonight's agenda includes a link directly to the agenda packet that will be on every agenda going forward, and we are considering various methods for property owner notification of subdivision and land development projects that may affect residential neighborhoods, perhaps a proposed amendment to the SALDO for consideration by the Board of Commissioners at a future date.

Lance Weatherly, resident, commented that it was easy to get into this meeting and he applauded the Planning Commission members who volunteer to look out for our community.

ADJOURNMENT: 9:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary