

The stated meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Abington was held on Tuesday, July 23, 2024 via webinar and in-person at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA, with Chairman Brown presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:33 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: BROWN, DICELLO, ROBINSON, BAKER, STRACKHOUSE, WEATHERLY, GOLDSTONE

Also Present: Township Engineer Lee
County Planner Narcowich

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Brown made a MOTION, seconded by Ms. Strackhouse to approve the minutes from the Planning Commission Meeting of June 25, 2024.

MOTION was ADOPTED 7-0.

PRESENTATION: None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Review Ordinance No. 2216 amending the Code of the Township of Abington at Part II [General Legislation], Chapter 162 [Zoning], by amending and restating Article XXII [Signs] to regulate the size of billboards;

Mr. Brown said billboards are permitted only in the Business Center District and the existing restrictions for billboards are as follows:

No more than one billboard is permitted in each of the five BC Business Center District areas - BC-Willow Grove Park, BC-Town Center, BC-Noble, BC-Foxcroft, and BC-Huntingdon Valley; permitted on properties at least 10 acres in size; permitted on properties having frontage of at least 200 feet on a street with a right-of-way of at least 80 feet; not more than one billboard is permitted per property or development tract; no billboard shall have more than two sides; shall be set back at least 40 feet from all property lines; the height of the billboard shall not exceed the setback of the billboard from the property line, up to a maximum height of 30 feet; and must be set back at least 200 feet from any property where zoning permits residential use.

The Township is proposing a zoning text amendment that would add a limit on the maximum area of billboards of 200 sq. ft.

Mr. Narcowich said when the Township adopted the code for billboards the size limit was not included, and he supports the proposed zoning text amendment. The MCPC's sign ordinance for maximum area of billboards suggests that it could be related to the maximum speed limit on the roadway in which the property fronts. A billboard should only be as large as it needs to be for the reader to take in the information efficiently and the sign should not be unduly distracting. Also, any sign larger than necessary detracts from the landscape, adds clutter and visual confusion.

The speed limit where most of the business centers are located is 40 MPH and it is recommended that a maximum billboard sign area be 100 sq. ft. although 200 sq. ft. is reasonable. Also, we recommend that there be a provision for a special exception when sizes larger than 100 ft. are permitted along with criteria such as visibility from nearby residential or institutional uses; the impact on the greater community; and a demonstrated need for a larger sign due to certain roadway conditions. Individual municipalities should incorporate specific conditions for granting a special exception for larger off-premises signs into their ordinance.

Mr. Brown asked for any comments from members of the Planning Commission.

Mr. Weatherly asked has other communities adopted similar language about the size of the sign correlating with the speed limit?

Mr. Narcowich replied yes, other communities have used the County's model ordinance as a guide for their new sign ordinances.

Mr. DiCello questioned where the 200 ft. maximum came from.

Mr. Narcowich replied it is the Solicitor's recommendation.

Mr. DiCello said he likes the suggestion that the size of the sign is based on the speed limit of the road as well as requiring a special exception provision for anything larger.

Mr. Brown supported the recommendations by Mr. Narcowich.

Ms. Strackhouse agreed that it is a practical solution for billboards, and she supports the recommendations made by Mr. Narcowich.

Mr. Baker also supported the maximum 100 sq. ft. size for billboards and the provision for a special exception for larger signs.

Mr. Weatherly asked if new language is adopted would there be any nonconforming uses of existing signs.

Mr. Narcowich replied there is at least one sign that is 300 sq. ft. in the Willow Grove area that is nonconforming, noting the sign can remain and the message can be changed, but it is not permitted to be reconfigured or the sign area made larger.

Mr. Brown clarified that the existing ordinance states that there can only be a maximum of five billboards throughout the entire Township. Is that correct?

Mr. Narcowich replied that is correct. The MCPC's model ordinance recommends that billboards have a separation distance to reduce clutter.

Mr. Baker asked for the technical difference between a billboard and building signage.

Mr. Narcowich replied billboards are defined simply by their inordinately large size; however, they are not defined in the existing definitions for billboards in the Abington Township Zoning Ordinance.

Mr. Brown recommended that a definition should be provided in the ordinance. He asked for any public comment.

Lora Lehmann, resident, expressed concern about the size of the billboard attached to the building at 100 York, and where does that fit in with this ordinance?

Mr. Brown replied he is not sure that sign would fall within this ordinance; however, the Planning Commission may wish to consider recommending to the Board of Commissioners to provide a definition for billboards in the ordinance.

Mr. Weatherly made a MOTION, seconded by Mr. Baker to support the Township's ordinance to amend the code along with the recommendations made by Mr. Narcowich, County Planner regarding signs being limited by the speed of the roadway; the provision for a special exception; and that a definition for billboards be included in the ordinance.

MOTION was ADOPTED 7-0.

Review SD-21-03 – 365 Cedar Road Final Major Subdivision Land Development Plan:

Mr. Brown said the Planning Commission previously reviewed this plan under preliminary land development submission back in 2022 and the current proposal has changed since then. The developer proposes to demolish the existing features onsite and subdivide the existing four-acre parcel into seven individual lots ranging from approximately 15,000 sq. ft. to 27,000 sq. ft. and construct a single-family detached dwelling on each lot. There are associated sidewalks, curbing, streets, driveways, streetlights, and stormwater management facilities along with a new cul-de-sac at Lincoln Lane.

Under this current final subdivision and land development plan submission, the applicant is proposing the same site improvements as noted in the Executive Summary. In addition to the proposed underground stormwater BMPs No.1 and 2 located to the rear of proposed Lots 6 and 7, the applicant has since modified the proposed stormwater pipe conveyance of the proposed new road, Lincoln Lane.

The applicant is now proposing to capture and convey a portion of the stormwater runoff on the new roadway in front of the proposed adjoining Lots 3 and 4 of the property line and discharge to the proposed vegetative swale located to the rear of these new lots. The entire stormwater pipe conveyance of the roadway was previously proposed to route to the proposed new inlet at the end of the cul-de-sac to discharge to the underground stormwater BMP located to the rear of new Lot 7.

Mr. Larry Byrne, Project Engineer, representing the applicant, Paul Yanessa, who was also present, said the applicant received preliminary plan approval by the Board of Commissioners back in January 2023 and then spent the past year obtaining the necessary permits from PennDOT and the Montgomery County Conservation District for the NPDES permit.

The plan was revised, and final plans were resubmitted in May 2024. The applicant received review letters from the Township Engineer dated June 7, 2024, the Fire Marshal on May 31, 2024, and the Wastewater Department on May 15, 2024, and the applicant will comply with comments as listed.

The applicant adjusted the location of the proposed new fire hydrant as shown on the plan, and the Fire Marshal approved it.

Mr. Brown said the Fire Marshal asked for clarification on the street parking plan. Has that been addressed?

Mr. Byrne replied two parking spaces will be permitted on each lot and there will be parking permitted on the street, but he has not contacted the Fire Marshal about it. The road is designed in accordance with the Township's requirements for road width, which is 30 feet.

Mr. Brown requested that the applicant follow up with the Fire Marshal to provide clarification about parking on the street.

Mr. Byrne continued that the applicant will comply with the Township Engineer's review letter regarding stormwater management. Also, there is a vegetated swale conveying water to an underground basin and the Township Engineer has requested piping the water down to the basin so it does not flow into neighbors' backyards, and we will comply. All revisions made to the plan regarding stormwater management are related to obtaining the NPDES permit.

Mr. Brown asked for any comments from members of the Planning Commission.

Mr. DiCello questioned whether there will be a sidewalk on both sides of the road or just one side where the homes will be.

Mr. Byrne replied sidewalk is proposed on only one side of the road, which is Lincoln Lane, and there will be replacement sidewalk along Cedar Road.

Mr. Goldstone asked for the size of the proposed dwellings.

Mr. Byrne replied approximately 1,500 sq. ft. for a one-story and 3,000 sq. ft. for a two-story with basements.

Mr. Baker asked will there be parking permitted on both sides of the street?

Mr. Byrne replied there are no plans to restrict parking on either side of the road.

Mr. Baker said parking on both sides of the road would be tight, especially trying to get a fire truck through, and that should be discussed with the Fire Marshal.

Mr. Byrne agreed to follow up with the Fire Marshal.

Mr. DiCello said parking on both sides of the street would restrict access to an 18 ft. cartway.

Mr. Byrne replied if cars were parked on either side there would be 14 ft. to get through. He does not see parking being a concern except if someone is having a large party.

Mr. Brown said parking on the street should be reviewed by the Fire Marshal as we need to make sure there is access for emergency vehicles, especially for instances such as large parties.

Mr. DiCello said that area is also busy with school pickup/drop off and it's possible there would be parking on Lincoln Lane waiting for kids to come out of school.

Mr. Brown questioned whether there is an issue with parking on one side of the street.

Mr. Byrne replied we never discussed restricting parking.

Mr. Weatherly asked what is the size of the pipe at the end of the cul-de-sac?

Mr. Byrne replied it is an 18-inch pipe sized for a 100-year storm.

Mr. Weatherly clarified there is an overland swale in case the pipe gets blocked. Is that correct?

Mr. Byrne replied yes, there is a swale between the buildings that will take the water down between them.

Mr. Weatherly clarified that one of the seven homes will be a walkout. Is that correct?

Mr. Byrne replied that the one at the end of the cul-de-sac is proposed to have a walkout and there will be grade drop from front to back.

Mr. Goldstone said the Fire Marshal indicated in his review that there should be 20 ft. of unobstructed width, so there needs to be consideration on limiting the parking.

Mr. Byrne replied he will discuss it with the Fire Marshal.

Mr. Weatherly asked will the homeowners be informed about the two lots with stormwater facilities located on them?

Mr. Byrne replied there are easements over the lots where the stormwater facilities are located, and a Homeowners' Association document will clearly identify that.

Mr. Weatherly suggested recommending approval contingent that parking is restricted on one side of the road unless the Fire Marshal waives it.

Mr. Brown clarified that the Wastewater Department proposed relocations of sanitary lines, and the applicant will comply. Is that correct?

Mr. Byrne replied that is correct.

Mr. Brown also noted that the Shade Tree Commission offered recommendations to be considered with the final landscaping plan.

Mr. Narcowich questioned whether a crosswalk is proposed across Lincoln Lane where it meets Cedar Road.

Mr. Byrne replied the School District prohibited a crosswalk from Lincoln Lane to cross Cedar Road; however, there is a crosswalk running parallel where the sidewalk is along Cedar Road as noted on PennDOT's plans.

Mr. Narcowich continued that the code requires frontloaded garages be setback at least 10 ft. from the front façade of the house. Also, he asked about connecting the two cul-de-sacs in which the applicant could reach out to the Valley Glen Condo Association about it.

Mr. Byrne replied we were not proposing an interconnection between Valley Glen and the new cul-de-sac for safety and security issues as homeowners do not want people walking in their back and side yards.

Mr. Brown asked for any public comment.

Lora Lehmann, resident, expressed concern that the plan does not show the turning radius for emergency vehicles, so it should not be approved.

Mr. Brown said that turning templates for emergency vehicles is one of the remaining comments in the review letters that will be addressed by the applicant and a note will be put on the land development plan.

Mr. Byrne said the turning radius has been addressed with PennDOT and we were requested to show one additional turning radius in which we will comply.

Mr. Weatherly clarified with Township Engineer that the plan complies with the SALDO and the Municipal Planning Code. Is that correct?

Ms. Allison Lee replied yes. The only outstanding items are minor zoning comments, and the applicant will comply.

Mr. Baker said the applicant will need to clarify whether parking will be on both sides of the street and that should be reviewed and approved by the Fire Marshal as well as the turning radius for the cul-de-sac.

Mr. DiCello made a MOTION, seconded by Mr. Baker to recommend approval of the 365 Cedar Road Final Major Subdivision Land Development Plan contingent upon that the Fire Marshal approves the street parking location and turning radius for the cul-de-sac and that the applicant addresses all comments as listed in the Township Engineer's review letter.

MOTION was ADOPTED 7-0.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary