

The stated meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Abington was held on Tuesday, July 27, 2021, at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA, with Chairperson Lucy Strackhouse presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:33 p.m.

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

Also Present: County Planner NARCOWICH
Township Engineer LEE
Administrative Manager WYRSTA

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. DiCello made a MOTION, seconded by Mr. Rosen to approve the minutes of the May 25, 2021, Planning Commission Meeting.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

Ms. Gauthier made a MOTION, seconded by Mr. Rosen to approve the minutes of the June 3, 2021, Planning Commission Meeting.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Consider the request by Penn State University (PSU) for enactment of zoning map and text amendments:

Dr. Margo DelliCarpini, Chancellor and Dean of Penn State Abington, said that we are working towards building a new academic building for the campus, which will be the first academic space built on campus since 1973. It will provide state-of-the-art and modern learning space for existing students and provide working space that meets today's professional expectations. It will be a "green" building, LEED certified and will support current student enrollment.

Based on years of feedback, feasibility studies, working with Township staff and Penn State experts, we submitted a map/text amendment for consideration by the Board of Commissioners Committee of the Whole on July 8th and they referred request to consider our proposal to the Planning Commission for review. We are requesting a recommendation of approval to forward proposal to the Board of Commissioners to consider adoption of proposed map/text amendments.

The project began in 2014 with the completion of the campus Master Plan, and since then, Penn State conducted feasibility and traffic studies; held four Town Hall meetings where community feedback was received and their concerns were addressed, and we responded by adjusting the plans based on community feedback as well as from professionals.

An aerial view of the property was presented showing the campus site of three properties located in the R-1 Residential Zoning District that are proposed to be changed to CS-Community Service District, and that is the location for proposed new academic building.

Mr. Zachary Sivertsen, Attorney with Eastburn and Gray, representing Penn State University, said proposed is a zoning map amendment to change the three campus properties located on Cloverly Lane, School Lane and Woodland Road from existing R-1 Residential District to CS-Community Service District.

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

Ms. Gauthier questioned whether the three properties are used for residential.

Chancellor DelliCarpini replied they are not used at all as they need renovation, and once the zoning is changed, proposed is to use the bottom floor for offices and storage.

Mr. Sivertsen continued that in addition to proposed zoning map amendment is the proposed zoning text amendment that would change the requirements of the zoning ordinance to allow PSU to construct a new academic building.

Currently, the CS-Community Service District includes use E-14 - School or College that encompasses preschool and K-12 grades, so the text amendment keeps the E-14 use as being a school public/private and we created a new use E-18 – University Campus, which will specifically be applicable to universities and colleges located within the Township credited by the State Board of Education. In addition to creating the E-18 University Campus use, text amendment establishes various dimensional requirements and design criteria and procedures to be followed in PSU's efforts to construct the academic building, and the applicant requested a recommendation of approval of proposed map/text amendments by the Planning Commission.

Ms. Gauthier asked for an exhibit showing the map of the parcels including information such as the size of the property, etc.

Mr. Sivertsen replied we do not have an exhibit; but will provide one. Parcels are identified by tax numbers.

Mr. Rosen asked for renderings of the proposed academic building.

Ms. Stacy Thomas, KCBA Architects, representing PSU, presented conceptual renderings of the building showing the façade facing Cloverly Lane of two-stories with materials of natural stone and brick that will be in-keeping with surrounding existing buildings on campus as well as the neighborhood. Modifications were made from feedback of the community that includes a gable roof, scale of the windows and entrance door. Also, shown were existing street trees along Cloverly Lane that will be layered with landscape screening with a variety of plantings, and preliminary landscape plan showed locations of the plantings.

Mr. Rosen asked for the square footage of proposed academic building.

Ms. Thomas replied approximately 70,000 sq. ft.

Ms. Strackhouse questioned whether the Shade Tree Commission was consulted regarding the species of trees for the buffer.

Ms. Thomas replied she does not believe so.

Ms. Strackhouse noted that the STC has a list of preferred trees mostly native species.

Ms. Gauthier questioned whether the building could be constructed without the property being rezoned.

Ms. Thomas replied we would need to look at setback requirements.

Ms. Gauthier questioned whether the two homes across the street are owned by PSU.

Chancellor DelliCarpini replied yes; however, PSU is working on divesting from those properties.

Ms. Thomas continued that proposed is to expand the existing parking lot as well as install a new one.

Ms. Strackhouse noted there are proposed changes to the dimensional requirements of the CS District as compared to the existing such as impervious surface from 40% to 45% and green area from 62% to 55%.

Mr. Sivertsen replied that proposed dimensional requirements for use E-18 are to facilitate the development of the academic building and are more comprehensive than E-14.

Mr. Baker questioned whether this building could be constructed without changing the impervious surface?

Mr. Sivertsen replied what is listed in the text amendment is what is needed to construct the new building.

Ms. Gauthier asked for the baseline data of the existing campus.

Mr. Doug Waite, Project Manager with Gilmore & Associates, representing the applicant, replied that the baseline data for the existing campus has 7.2% building coverage, and by removal of a few structures and construction of the new building the net result will be 8.4% building coverage. Existing impervious surface coverage is 37% and proposed would be 40.2%, existing condition of green space is 63% and proposed would be 55%.

Ms. Gauthier commented that would be important information to submit to the Township.

Mr. Baker clarified that the 45% impervious surface ratio is only tied to the E-18 use. Is that correct?

Mr. Waite replied that is correct.

Mr. Narcowich said under Section 3 of proposed text amendment; he suggested deleting text that says, “a mixture of these uses, including retail, office, institutional, and residential may be located within the same building without being classified as a Use -J-1, Mixed Use Building,” because the regulations related to university/college envision accessory uses such as campus bookstore, dining facilities, etc.

Mr. Sivertsen said we want certainty in terms of uses in that if we want to add a bookstore or coffee shop in one of the buildings in the future, the language in the text will be clear.

Ms. Gauthier agreed that language is not needed.

Mr. Rosen clarified that the Dormitory Use is not envisioned in this plan. Is that correct?

Mr. Sivertsen replied that is correct.

Ms. Gauthier commented that Use E-18 mentions faculty housing, but nothing about students, so should that be specifically excluded?

Mr. Narcowich replied that Dormitory is Use E-5, which is a separate use.

Mr. Rosen commented that there are no plans for a dormitory in this location; however, he does not want there to be any ambiguity in the proposed text amendment.

Mr. Narcowich noted the CS-Community Service District does not permit dormitories, which is clearly stated in the Use Matrix.

Ms. Gauthier suggested creating a new paragraph for the language in Section 3 that says, “The following additional standards shall apply and shall supersede any conflicting requirements in the Zoning Ordinance.”

Mr. Narcowich continued that proposed ordinance states that “trash, storage, tanks, and loading shall not occur within 100 feet of a street,” and the existing Community Service District states that “trash needs to be within the building envelop,” which essentially is in the building. There was concern expressed by Township staff as well as the ward Commissioner that 100 feet is not acceptable, and they prefer that the Community Service District provision of trash being located within the building is the requirement.

Chancellor DelliCarpini replied we will incorporate that into the design.

Mr. Narcowich continued that proposed ordinance indicate setbacks from residential uses for certain outdoor activities such as graduation ceremonies, camp activities and active recreational fields or structures of 100 feet and he suggested changing that to 300 feet and clarify that it does not apply to buildings or indoor activities, only outdoor activities.

Mr. Rosen questioned whether this issue has been vetted with the neighbors.

Chancellor DelliCarpini replied that the change to 300 ft. setback was just recently suggested, and that requirement would be challenging for events such as commencement ceremonies.

Ms. Strackhouse said setback requirements will need further discussion.

Mr. Narcowich continued that regarding steep slopes; the applicant's ordinance says, "Excavation in or disturbance of a steep slope area shall be permitted if the development within the area includes engineered slope stabilization, retaining walls, and/or foundation walls, and provided approval is obtained from the Township Engineer, the landowner shall submit an erosion and sedimentation control plan during land development," and Township staff recommends that should be deleted from proposed text amendment because the applicant needs to meet existing ordinance regulations. Also, Ms. Allison Lee, Township Engineer, wrote a memo clarifying her position.

Ms. Gauthier agreed with Township Engineer's recommendation in not allowing an exception to existing regulation.

Mr. Sivertsen replied that the language of the ordinance was a result of numerous meetings with staff and Township officials so that the applicant will have an expedited process for constructing the proposed academic building, and without this language in the ordinance, it puts the entire project at risk of not moving forward.

Ms. Allison Lee, Township Engineer, commented that after review of the steep slope regulations, the applicant should meet existing requirements and add to the language of proposed text amendment – "Should the disturbance area be located within the steep slope conservation overlay district, the landowner shall comply with the provisions of Article XVI – Steep Slope Conservation District of the Zoning Ordinance." The definition says, "it would be considered a steep slope conservation district if an area spans five contiguous, 10-foot contour intervals."

Mr. Waite replied based on our exhibit, the parking lot of proposed new building falls within the steep slope area and Section 1604 limits certain uses within the conservation area, so it would require a variance, and to avoid variance requirements, we proposed this text amendment.

Ms. Gauthier commented that the steep slope ordinance does permit some encroachment if the rest is preserved, and the applicant should meet the existing steep slope ordinance requirement or obtain a variance from it.

Mr. Narcowich said steeper slopes create greater velocity of runoff and greater volumes at certain times making it more difficult to manage stormwater as well as impacts vegetation and stream quality. In the Township, PSU has some of the steepest slopes on one property, so this is a significant area of steep slopes remaining that has not been graded.

Mr. Sivertsen commented that any stormwater runoff needs to be controlled and we will engineer ways to address it.

Mr. Narcowich read from the Intent Section of the Steep Slope Ordinance that says, “The purpose is to reduce sedimentation degradation water quality and other damage to streams and wetlands that result from construction, erosion and stormwater runoff on steep slopes and to preserve the natural topography, drainage patterns and vegetative cover, wildlife, habitats and scenic views of those areas.”

Mr. Sivertsen said in obtaining a variance from the ZHB, there are five statutory requirements that will be difficult to meet. This ordinance is only applicable to the E-18 use and the request is for an expedited process to allow this project to go forward.

Mr. Baker agreed that the applicant should meet the existing steep slope requirement.

Mr. Sivertsen said we are proposing best practices in having the engineer review making sure there is a minimum amount of disturbance and the mechanism used is appropriate, but if the steep slope district applies, we cannot construct proposed building.

Ms. Gauthier asked for the existing setback requirement for parking lots in the CS District.

Mr. Narcowich replied 75 ft.

Mr. Sivertsen commented that Cloverly Lane has an existing 12-ft. setback from the road, and we propose to continue that as well as additional buffer screening.

Ms. Gauthier asked about a traffic study.

Mr. Pete Spisszak, Traffic Engineer with Traffic Planning & Design, Inc., representing the applicant, said PennDOT’s requirements for a traffic study is that we identify the use and then review the IT Trip Generation Manual, and if it is over 3,000 trips per day, a traffic study would be required. For a university use, it is generated based on the number of students and the number is not proposed to be increased, so therefore, it would be a redistribution of existing trips and no additional.

Ms. Gauthier asked then why is there a need for more parking?

Mr. Spisszak replied for the convenience of the students to park at the new building.

Ms. Moira Baylson, representing Penn State, added that the Township’s Zoning Ordinance requires adding parking spaces based on square footage and the usage of the new building and one of the issues on campus is not enough parking.

Mr. Brown clarified that the threshold for the applicant to submit a Master Plan is construction of two or more buildings. Is that correct?

Mr. Narcowich replied that is correct.

Ms. Strackhouse asked for any public comments.

Lora Lehmann, Meadowbrook, requested that residents be able to participate in public meetings by phone. Also, she expressed concern about steep slope disturbance and stormwater runoff on neighboring properties; and she asked how many other properties this ordinance could apply to?

Ms. Moira Baylson, representing PSU, replied that this is part of the master plan for the campus, and this is the only site where we plan to construct a new building.

Ms. Strackhouse commented that she attended one of the neighborhood meetings held in June and she did not hear any concerns about stormwater runoff during that meeting; also, the Chancellor noted that she does not plan on increasing current enrollment.

Mr. Baker commented that overall, it is a great project; however, we need to look at the bigger picture in terms of safety of the community making sure it is done properly, and he would like to see more detail.

Mr. Sivertsen replied this is just a concept plan with details to be provided in the land development process.

Ms. Gauthier suggested E-14 and E-18 be separate uses for college/universities versus elementary school, etc.

Ms. Strackhouse suggested bringing this back before the Planning Commission in August for further discussion.

Mr. Sivertsen agreed to come back in August to present additional information.

Ms. Gauthier clarified that the outstanding issues on the proposed text/map amendments to be discussed further are as follows:

1. Maximum impervious surface change from 40% to 45%.
2. The green area reduction from 62% to 55%.
3. The Board of Commissioners should be provided with existing baseline data for the entire site including the three parcels proposed to be rezoned, so the maximum impervious surface and green area can be compared.
4. Section 3 regarding the J-1 use, decide whether it should be deleted, or the language changed, or specifically exclude use E-5 – Dormitory.
5. In Section A-6 - add the parenthesis at the end of “2 acres.”
6. Section A-7 - there was discussion regarding 100 ft. setback from the property line rather than making it the standard 300 ft. setback for outdoor events such as graduations, etc.
7. Item B – Excavation - the Township’s Engineer language should be included in this section, and more discussion is needed.
8. Parking setbacks still need to be clarified regarding the 12 ft. buffer for existing parking versus proposed parking.
9. Identify other parcels within the Township that the proposed text amendment could be applied to.
10. Regarding the map amendment, the acreage should be included for the parcels proposed to be rezoned such as a clear parcel map included as an exhibit.

Mr. Rosen made a MOTION, seconded by Mr. Russell to suspend this meeting, and reconvene on August 24, 2021, to address the issues as listed.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0. Ms. Robinson was absent.

ADJOURNMENT: 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary