

The stated meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Abington was held on Thursday August 4, 2022, via webinar with Chairwoman Lucy Strackhouse presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:00 p.m.

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

Also Present: County Planner NARCOWICH
Township Engineer HASSAN

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Ms. Gauthier made a MOTION, seconded by Mr. Cooper to approve the minutes of the Planning Commission Meeting of May 25, 2022.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Review and discuss the request by Toll Mid-Atlantic, L.P. Company, Inc. (Toll Brothers) for a Zoning Text Amendment to create the AR-Age-Restricted Carriage Home Overlay District and a Zoning Map Amendment to rezone certain parcels on the northeast side of Fox Chase Road as AR-Age-Restricted Carriage Home Overlay:

Ms. Strackhouse asked the applicant why they feel a zoning text amendment and map change is necessary as she does not see any substantial differences with the existing SNR-Senior Neighborhood Residential District.

Mr. Lou Colagreco, Attorney representing Toll Brothers, replied the school is under agreement of sale with Toll Brothers and we have reviewed existing zoning of the property and explored two development schemes; one is CCRC (Continuing Care Retirement Communities) that would not require rezoning of the property as well as age-restricted housing, which is the plan being presented tonight. The CCRC plan was rejected by the community, which was a denser plan than what is being presented tonight.

Also, we explored the possibility of connectivity to abutting residential communities on either side of St. Basil's campus and the residents were not excited about it as the existing road network in both communities is not up to standard specs now, so we felt it was not a great idea and were asked to eliminate the connectivity, except for perhaps emergency vehicles to abutting communities. This is the third proposed plan that consists of approximately 150 carriage home units on St. Basil's campus.

Mr. Brian Thierrin, representing Toll Brothers, presented a rendering of 30 ft. wide, 70 ft. deep carriage homes units with first-floor master bedrooms and architecture that will blend in with the community.

Mr. Colagreco added that in comparing our proposal with the existing SNR District, we agree that density limitations are similar; however, it is the area in bulk requirements in the SNR that seems to be dated, so we would need to amend certain design criteria in the SNR to accomplish this plan or we could just come up with a new zoning district. We are not married to either approach. Also, the existing SNR has a building length limitation of 120 feet.

Ms. Erin DeRocini, representing Toll Brothers, noted that the "townhome" use is not permitted in the SNR and our proposed carriage home with a front entry does not fall in line with the definition of townhome.

Mr. Colagreco continued that from meetings with residents, the proposed buffer between our community and their communities has grown. So, the ordinance that Toll Brothers is now presenting has a requisite buffer of 125 ft. from abutting communities and the SNR requirements are 20-30 ft.

Ms. DeRocini added that some residents like the idea of a trail and some did not, so we are open to whatever the Township would like to see, and there is an existing trail across the street.

Mr. Colagreco said this is a zoning exercise and we are not seeking approval of any land plan at this time. We were asked that proposed ordinance show dimensional and area in bulk requirements that were represented to the residents, so the 125 ft. buffer is included. Proposed density is 3.3 dwelling units per acre on approximately 45 acres and we compared it with abutting communities to show that we are not proposing something that is denser for the neighborhood.

Also, there will be HOA fees and the buyers who are on fixed income or limited resources will expect the amenities to be reasonable and that is why you will not find communities with less density. Open space calculations were provided, and traffic and fiscal reports were submitted by Toll Brothers.

Mr. Khal Hassan, Township Engineer, said the applicant is proposing to amend the current CS-District and establish a new AR-Age-Restricted Carriage Home use category. The site is approximately 46 acres, and the applicant made several presentations regarding density, open space, and 150 dwelling units with front-facing two-car garages are proposed. Referring to the Abington Comprehensive Use Matrix Section E-15 – Senior Living Community and the H-9 Townhome Dwelling Unit (single family attached) are not permitted uses within the CS-Community Service District; however, the E-15 Senior Living Community is permitted within the SNR District.

Also, the applicant has not provided the base zoning district on the conceptual plan. After review of proposed text amendment, he provided several comments relating to dimensional regulations that align with the SNR District. The applicant provided information on the dimensional requirements for minimum front yard setback as well as the maximum building dimension proposed at 160 ft. as opposed to the SNR that has a maximum length of 120 ft. Open space requirements still needs to be determined to see if it meets the intent.

The minimum 24 ft. wide carriage home width appears to be too narrow for a carriage home and more in line with a townhome width. The minimum 20 ft. building separation is double the existing 10 ft. SNR maximum dimensional building separation distance, so he suggested a 30 ft. separation to align with residential cluster development guidelines. The minimum 20 ft. building separation is double the existing 10 ft. SNR maximum dimensional building separation distance, so he suggested 30 ft. separation to align with residential cluster development guidelines.

The building height as shown on the rendering is misleading as it does not show scale associated with the elevation, and when comparing proposed density to an existing neighborhood, the existing area was not developed the same way as what is being proposed. Also, the applicant's traffic impact study needs to be evaluated.

Ms. Strackhouse asked for clarification on the width of proposed carriage home.

Mr. Thierrin replied all units are proposed to be 30 ft. X 72 ft. wide.

Ms. Gauthier clarified that the street width (cartway) is proposed at 30 ft. wide. Is that correct?

Mr. Hassan replied yes.

Ms. Gauthier questioned whether there will be additional rights-of-way for utilities and sidewalks.

Mr. Hassan replied most likely a project such as this will be an HOA and not a public road and all utilities would be within the cartway.

Ms. Gauthier clarified that the 30 ft. setback would comply with existing zoning ordinance as a private development. Is that correct?

Mr. Hassan replied there is an ordinance being proposed with that language, so it would be a standalone setback requirement.

Ms. Gauthier questioned whether there will be one or two-car garages and will there be sidewalks proposed next to the roadway?

Mr. Thierrin replied each unit will have a two-car garage.

Ms. DeRocini replied we are not showing sidewalk at the present time; however, there is room for it.

Mr. Hassan commented that sidewalk will not be discussed or approved under zoning applications as it is part of the land development process, so once the project moves forward, then it is subject to compliance with all SALDO requirements.

Ms. Gauthier said description of a carriage home has three stories and it sounds more like a townhouse, so a better definition for the carriage home is needed. Will any of the units be three stories?

Mr. Thierrin replied there would be two stories above-grade, and if they have a basement, it would be a level underground, so all homes are proposed two-story upgrade.

Ms. Gauthier said definition of a carriage home Use H-12 says, “three stories,” and that should be changed and further defined.

Mr. Narcowich noted that Township Solicitor indicated this is not “spot zoning.”

Regarding transportation and parking, best practices is interconnected street grids to provide alternatives for walking as well as for emergency access, and if there is no connection to the surrounding area, then we would warrant some emergency access to be provided.

The curving road intersections seem to be intended to calm traffic, although the design appears to be unnatural and possibly confusing and disruptive to traffic flow.

The Abington Master Bike Plan recommends a bike route, and he recommended consulting with Township staff.

Parking requirements for the use need to be clarified.

In many ways the open space calculation does meet the zoning open space requirements; however, it does not meet the spirit of the ordinance, and he understands that the neighbors want a massive track buffer to preserve their privacy, but it's long and would have little conservation value; little value in stormwater best management, no carbon sequestration, very little habitat, and by not taking advantage of having trails with nice landscaping, would be a lost opportunity. Also, open space shall be visible from dwellings and roadways, so he encouraged providing viewing space.

He questioned whether a trail could be in the stream corridor as Fox Chase Manor Park is just to the east along the tributary to the Pennypack, and he is not suggesting building a trail; however, show a possible connection on the plan and how it could interconnect with an onsite trail system.

Townhouse regulations are still current as it was written to encourage walking and deemphasizing the automobile; also, he suggested reorienting the garage faces so that they are not so front and center, although that would require making room on the side for access, and that would mean a reduction in units. Also, when sidewalks are installed, there will be less space, and Abington feels strongly about tree canopy, so street trees will be required.

Regarding the County's Comp Plan, the site lies within a suburban residential area so appropriate landscaping and street trees shall be provided as well as recreation facilities and central open space. And if the stormwater management basin will be located on Fox Chase Road, it could have a strong visual presence, so he recommended intense naturalization with appropriate vegetation and using it as an aesthetic amenity. The riparian corridor and buffer zones should be noted on the plan. Also, he suggested benches and community gardens to be strewn throughout the community and the buffer should be high intensity or medium intensity – multilayered.

Ms. Gauthier said she agrees with pedestrian connections because 85 ft. of grass will result in high mowing, maintenance, and pesticide costs, and she strongly favors a trail and possibly a connection to Montgomery Avenue so pedestrians can walk down to the shopping center as well as for emergency access.

Ms. Strackhouse said she attended a meeting with the developer and neighbors, and it was clear that they did not want the streets to connect and there were mix messages about a trail, so is a trail being proposed?

Mr. Thierrin agreed there was a mixed opinion on whether a trail is a good idea. It is not shown on the sketch plan because some residents indicated they did not want it, but we are open either way.

Mr. Colagreco presented the Fiscal Impact Analysis showing annual net fiscal impact of the proposed development is projected to be highly favorable for the Township and School District, creating annual net surpluses for each entity. Annual net Township impact is \$332,698 and \$1,420,251 for the School District. The annual net combined fiscal impact for the proposed St. Basil's active adult development is projected to total positive (or surplus) \$1,752,949, or positive \$11,686 per unit. The annual combined revenue is projected to exceed the annual combined expenditures by 3,410.4 percent.

Ms. Sandy Koza, McMahon Associates, presented the Traffic Impact Study noting that traffic counts were taken at Fox Chase intersections with Horace Avenue and Manor College and Cedar Road, and we grew out the existing traffic volumes to projected 2029 buildout year based on regional percentage of growth of traffic over that seven-year period and overlaid projected traffic for the 150 age-restricted units based on the Institute of Transportation Engineers Trip Generation Manual on their senior housing land use code.

So projected are approximately 836 total trips on a weekday; total of 53 trips generated during the one peak hour of generator in the morning and a total of 61 trips in the afternoon peak hour.

We propose to tie into the existing signal with Manor College so that it would become a fully signalized intersection and we anticipate that all intersections will operate at acceptable levels of service.

Mr. Baker commented that he is not a fan of overlay zoning and would prefer to see the zoning changed to the SNR District and add the specific use of "townhome" to it. It's close to "spot zoning" and would be setting a precedent. So, he would approach this project from the perspective of the SNR's requirements, and although he appreciates the larger setback from the other neighborhoods, the 3.2 density of the SNR would result in 146 units as opposed to 150, which would be nicer. So, he would be in favor of 120 ft. length, 3.2 density, keep extended buffer and he agreed with a pedestrian walking trail between the green space where trees could be planted, so there would be some privacy for the back of the units.

Mr. Brown agreed, and his preference would be a land development that "jumps off" the existing zoning. And he would prefer façade designs with garages on the side of the units. Also, the resident's concerns were about privacy in their backyards, so it will be about setback and buffering, although incorporating a trail will benefit the community, it could be done while keeping concerns of the neighbors in mind.

Mr. Rosen asked for the average square footage of each unit above-grade.

Mr. Thierrin replied 2,000-2,300 sq. ft.

Mr. Rosen clarified that this will be owned by residents and not a rental community. Is that correct?

Mr. Thierrin replied yes, it is homeownership that will need to comply with age-restricted qualifications per the HOA documents in perpetuity.

Mr. Rosen continued that we need age-restricted housing in our community, although the units are too self-contained and he would like them to be more open where residents can walk around and communicate with each other in a more organic way, and he would like it to be more visually appealing.

Ms. Strackhouse asked for any public comments.

Nicole Lauria, resident, commented that the community has spent a lot of time with Toll Brothers making sure that what they are building will not take away our privacy. She heard a lot of suggestions from the Planning Commission about what they would like to see, but at the end of the day, we live here now, and we should be the priority, not the people who one day will live here. If what we worked so hard for will be taken away, what is the point of all the meetings the residents had with Toll Brothers who have done a great job listening to our concerns and accommodating the residents.

Mike Tobin, resident, said his property backs up to St. Basil's, so who will be able to access the walking trail?

Ms. Strackhouse replied that it has not yet been determined; however, there could be an internal trail around the perimeter of the proposed subdivision for the residents and/or it could connect to surrounding neighborhoods.

Mr. Tobin said if a walking trail is accessible to the general public, then he is absolutely opposed to any type of trail behind his house, and if walking trails are so important to Abington Township, why is Alverthorpe closed? Also, who would be liable if someone gets hurt on the trail? Regarding opening roads, they are 25 ft. wide, and if a vehicle is parked on either side of the road, a fire truck will not be able to get through, so please do not open Gibson and Montgomery because it makes no sense, and those roads were never meant for traffic, and we do not want it in our neighborhood.

Mr. Thierrin replied there has been various discussions about a trail and we have no issue either way. Regarding access, typically if a trail connects to a public road anyone can enter.

Mr. Colagreco added that it would best to limit access of the trail to the age-restricted community. If there is a public easement over the trail, the HOA will not be interested in insuring it.

Liz Kerr, resident, asked will there be a retention or detention basin and will safety guidelines be followed.

Mr. Hassan replied that the plan is nothing more than conceptual and Abington Township has a stringent stormwater management ordinance and abides by PADEP regulations.

Ms. Gauthier questioned whether additional EDU's will be needed.

Mr. Hassan replied that is yet to be determined.

Ms. Gauthier said age-restricted development is a great use, although the proposed carriage homes seem too large. And there should be pedestrian connections and the Township's Zoning Ordinance says, "encourage a safe attractive and inviting pedestrian system to make the Township more walkable and provide the young and elderly with the independence of moving." If a trail is just for those who live there, it will be a lost opportunity for the surrounding neighbors, so if a mutual arrangement could be made that would be extremely beneficial. Also, 85 ft. of grass area will increase flooding.

Ms. Gauthier made a MOTION, seconded by Ms. Robinson to TABLE any recommendation of the Toll Brothers proposal and bring the matter back before the Planning Commission at their regularly scheduled meeting on August 23, 2022.

MOTION was ADOPTED 8-0.

Ms. Strackhouse asked that the most recent proposed draft text amendment have a date on it to be considered at the next Planning Commission meeting.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary