

**Planning Commission
Minutes
August 5, 2024
7:00 PM**

Present:

Brett MacKay, Chairman
Nancy Becker
Douglas Leach
Michael Main
Patricia Younce, Vice Chairman
Joseph Vavra
Ed Buonocore

Absent:

Matt Chartrand
Dennis McGeehan

Staff:

Mary Stover, Township Engineer CKS

Supervisor Mr. Kofi Osei was present.

Approval of the June 3, 2024 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Mr. Vavra made a motion to approve the June 3, 2024 meeting minutes and Ms. Becker seconded. All were in favor.

New Business

SLD 837 – North Penn High School Transportation Facility/Renovations (Sketch Plan)

Presented by Mr. Barry Stingel, T & M Engineers, Mr. Peter Nicholson from NPSD, and Mr. Dave Schrader, architect Schrader Group

Mr. Nicholson explained that the last time they were in front of the Planning Commission, over 6 months ago, they had been planning to present the North Penn High School transportation off site. Mr. Nicholson stated this is not possible, as it is beyond their means. He stated the sketch plan being presented tonight is a plan to keep it on the North Penn High School property along with a plan to add a larger addition.

Mr. Stingel went over the sketch plan on the overhead and showed a slide of the property as it exists today. The next slide was the sketch plan, and he explained that they have received some reviews regarding this plan. They believe most of the items on the review letters will be addressed. He stated there are a few zoning issues, and the township zoning officer will meet with them regarding these items.

Mr. Stingel explained the courtyard areas and the proposed new entrance with new travel lanes. He showed the school pick up and drop off areas, as well as some new parking. He showed the existing transportation facility and stated it will remain a parking area. The building will be demolished, and a new building will be built. The area will be fenced in much like the existing area. He showed the existing propane fuel area and showed where it will be relocated to. There will be a salt barn, the existing one will be moved. The transportation area will also house the school properties facilities.

As for the transportation area, it is not permitted by zoning, but it is the applicant's opinion that it is an existing accessory to the school. They will meet with township staff. Mr. Stingel stated the bus parking area is right up to the property line to Montco tech school, which does not meet the buffering, but they are proposing to maintain that same setback.

The applicant went over some of the other changes they are proposing. They plan to add a multi-athletic field to the other fields. Mr. Stingel showed the above ground storm water area, and stated they will look at underground storm water as well. They plan to install new sidewalk and new asphalt along Sumneytown Pike and create a new sidewalk. Mr. Stingel explained they are proposing to reserve an area for two new tennis courts, which will be in addition to the existing tennis courts. They plan to reorient the field for the band practice area, he explained this will create space for above ground stormwater. Mr. Stingel stated they are adding about 300 spaces to assist with the parking demands on site. They will not be adding to the student population or the staff/faculty. They are renovating the high school and doing what they can to improve the parking at the school and this will all be on the upcoming preliminary plan.

Mr. Schrader went over the building modifications plans on the slide show. He stated Snyder Road will still be the bus circulation route and parent drop off will be similar to what already exists. He also explained that adding the parking spots should help with the current issue. Mr. Schrader stated their goal is to attempt not to do the modular housing as the construction is happening. He showed the drop off areas for the fields and the pickup point for sports.

Mr. Schrader showed the different pods and explained the way they will re-use these areas and change things for the flow of the pods. He explained the phasing and the overall intent of this project. He stated there is a method in order to not impact one grouping of students. They intend to use the radio station property for a construction staging area, which will be extremely helpful.

Mr. MacKay asked if the Planning Commission members had any questions.

Ms. Becker inquired if the parking for buses is much larger, and Mr. Stingel stated there is not much of a difference. He explained he is not sure there are more spaces, but if there are it is to accommodate vehicles that aren't currently parking there.

Mr. Main inquired about the setback that isn't currently being met and asked the applicant to explain where this is located. Mr. Stingel stated it is all along the property line next to the Montco Tech school. Mr. Stingel explained the area on the slide and showed the new area. Mr. Main confirmed that this is the only non-conforming section and Mr. Stingel said yes.

Ms. Becker thanked the applicant for the sidewalks being on the plan and asked about the ball fields on Sumneytown Pike. Mr. Stingel stated the ball fields on Sumneytown Pike will remain.

Mr. Vavra wanted to go over the required parking spaces not being met and the addition of 300 spaces. Mr. Stingel stated the parking is non-conforming currently, and they are proposing to add some spaces as part of the land development to decrease the non-conformity. They can't add the number of parking required under the ordinance, but they are decreasing the non-conformity. Mr. Vavra mentioned he is familiar with Methacton High School where there are not enough parking spots, and the students end up parking in neighboring areas. He asked what will happen to the neighboring areas if this happens in this district. Mr. Nicholson explained the district already deals with this and once they are out of spots they deal with it again. They find the students parking in outside areas and walking and fine them. He stated the additional parking spots will be a better situation than before.

Discussion about present and future enrollment. Discussion regarding proposed additional development in this community and the impact this will have. Mr. Nicholson stated the population study they did included a projection for the next seven years and this would not really impact the parking. They will continue to do studies regarding enrollment.

Mr. MacKay stated they will see them back for the next submission and he thanked the presenters.

Old Business:

Township Comprehensive Plan – Meeting #4, Simone Collins

Presented by: Mr. Peter Simone and Mr. PJ Jobanputra

Mr. Simone stated that their connectivity study has helped by recommending the sidewalk and a walking area across Sumneytown and this could be implemented at the next presentation.

Mr. Jobanputra presented the meeting agenda. He explained they have had over 200 more responses to the survey, and they pretty much have stayed on the same trend. He went over the schedule. They will be back in a couple months with recommendations after they gather the rest of the information.

Mr. Jobanputra went over the scope and the plan vision on the slide show. He went over the suggested plan goals, the land use, current transportation, open space, recreation possibilities and community facilities. He also went over the results from the public opinion survey

Ms. Younce asked stated that the plan thus far speaks about significant development and yet the respondents to the survey ranked their top concern in many areas as open space preservation. Mr. Simone stated people wanted more recreational programs. He stated Towamencin has great facilities. He plans to have a meeting with Dave Kraynik and the manager of Upper Gwynedd. Mr. Simone believes if the managers and Board of Supervisors could cooperate informally with other townships, each township can offer more to the community. Discussion regarding preserving more open areas and Ms. Becker inquired about the county farmland. Mr. Simone

explained they had a meeting with the Seipts' who own Freddy Hill Farm. Discussion regarding the whole process of state money and a strategy they gave the Seipts' if they are interested. Mr. Simone explained it was an informal meeting and they were not ready to discuss any plans as they continue to be busy with planting and running the Fun Center. This discussion addressed the possibility of preserving open space by having the municipality purchase the property through various grants.

Mr. Jobanputra showed the plan for changing the uses on the zoning map to include more options. He showed the Freddy Hill Farm area and the plan for residential and preserving some of the areas. Mr. Simone stated that Freddy Hill is zoned R-175 Residential District, and it's about 120 acres. They could potentially get 150 units developed if they choose but the thought process is instead of having a minimum lot area of 30,000 square feet, it could be a minimum lot area of 15,000 square feet and then the other areas can create more open space. This potentially gives the developer an incentive to keep open space. That's the key and what they want to discuss with the people who own these larger lots or farmland. The PC members expressed concern for being careful to not end up with higher density housing in these areas than would be allowed with current zoning.

Mr. Buonocore asked if they knew the approximate current value of an acre. Mr. Simone guessed about 100,000 an acre. Mr. Simone stated he will send the Planning Commission members the same information that he saw with another farm. Ms. Younce asked if other townships have applied for grants to purchase some large tracts of land, and Mr. Simone stated there is information on the different methods to go about this type of venture. Mr. Simone stated that Mr. Poole will do an economic plan regarding future development.

Discussion regarding the old Clemens building and the office buildings on the corner of Bustard and Sumneytown Pike. There was discussion regarding a plan for the building center, a quick overview of the office buildings on the corner and if they can keep the building filled. Mr. Simone mentioned the possibilities for hotels or apartments depending on certain factors. Ms. Becker asked about the SKF building on Forty Foot Road and Mr. Simone stated they are looking for a tenant.

Mr. Jobanputra went over crash locations on the map and traffic volume in the township. He went over the connectivity study as well and there was a discussion regarding the crosswalk on Sumneytown Pike. Mr. Buonocore suggested a bridge.

Mr. Jobanputra went over the slide with preliminary transportation recommendations, as well as preliminary recommendations for open space and recreation areas. He also showed the proximity to the community facilities currently on the map.

Discussion regarding libraries or technology center that are needed in the township. Ms. Younce thought there might be a possibility for this type of thing in one of the PSDC buildings they are trying to fill, such as the former culinary facility.

Mr. Jobanputra went over the historic preservation preliminary recommendations as well as housing; and went over the survey and the aging in place population, etc. and housing prices.

Discussion regarding in-law suites, accessory apartments, and maintaining housing affordability. Mr. Simone stated they will be back in September with another presentation and more information. They will send this presentation to the Planning Commission and asked if they could please let them know any suggestions.

Supervisor Osei spoke and stated he has a complaint regarding the Planning Commission in general. He feels they over-plan in general. Mr. Osei stated that residents show up to Board of Supervisors meetings or the Planning Commission meetings and believe the current density is the correct one. He does not think that should be the case. Mr. Osei feels that some of these concerns on development are overblown and states this is particularly true in Towamencin. He explained there are three elementary schools in the township and with regards to the parking at the high school being non-conforming, Mr. Osei does not feel this is worth having a discussion over, the township is not going to deny this for the high school. He believes the parking is a useless regulation. Mr. Osei stated as far as the traffic issues, he feels we have too little traffic on Sumneytown, and cars go too fast in Towamencin because of how it is set up. The survey stated people were ok with longer drive if it is safer.

Mr. Osei explained that NP Water Authority and the township sewer authority have excess capacity. He is fine with infrastructure and feels it would get cheaper for each household with more capacity.

As far as private property, Mr. Osei stated this is not open space. He does not give a favorable response to purchase it a raise taxes. At a supervisors' conference they went over land uses and Mr. Osei stated there are no single bedroom renting options in this area. He explained it is frustrating to be elected and not be able to promote and get people to be in favor of the housing for the type of housing young professionals are looking for. Mr. Osei feels there is a homelessness problem. This might be Lansdale currently, but he stated they are our neighbors, so this means this township has one also. As far as changes, he is open to being conservative on empty lots, some of the buildings around the township, or veterans' park. He would also allow residents to build 1 to 2 units on their own properties. Mr. Osei thanked the Planning Commission members for their time.

Mr. MacKay thanked Mr. Osei and the presenters.

Mr. MacKay asked if there were any other issues. Hearing none, Mr. Vavra made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Becker seconded. All were in favor. 8:55 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Shisler
Towamencin Township
Zoning and Code Enforcement