

The stated meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Abington was held on Tuesday, October 24, 2017 at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA., with Chairperson, Lucy Strackhouse presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:32 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: DiCELLO, COOPER, SPEARMAN, ROBINSON, ROSEN, RUSSELL, GAUTHIER, STRACKHOUSE

Also Present: Planning & Zoning Official PENECALE
Commissioner KLINE
Office Manager WYRSTA

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Agenda Item PC1 – Application of Hightop Real Estate Development Group:

Ms. Strackhouse read agenda item PC1, and asked the applicant to present their plan for the project.

Denise Yarnoff, Attorney with Riley, Riper, Hollin & Colagreco, 717 Constitution Drive, Exton, PA., 19341, Attorney representing the applicant, David Landskroner, Hightop Real Estate Development Group, said the property is located on Old York Road and we have been working with Township staff and the neighbors on this project. The applicant has filed a Zoning Text Amendment for revisions to the Main Street High Zoning District and Apartment Use H-2 as defined by the Zoning Ordinance of the Township of Abington.

David Landskroner, applicant, founder of Hightop Real Estate & Development, said we do a combination of “for sale” and “for rent” housing and have a number of projects in Philadelphia at this time.

We met with the ward Commissioner, Commissioner Hecker to discuss an apartment building and we also met with neighbors, and over the past two years, have come to an agreement with them that this is a feasible for project.

Michael Skolnick, Architect, PZS Architects, LLC, 5312 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA., 19128, presented the plan to the Planning Commission. The property located on Old York Road on the northern side of Lee’s Hoagies, which is approximately one half mile to the adjacent Crestmont Train Station and a bus shelter is located on our property. A view of proposed building was presented of a five-story building with 28 residential units as well as 38 parking spaces. There are two different entrances for parking; one to the lower level and the other to the upper level.

View of the rear property was presented showing residential properties behind it, so at the rear of the building, we stepped it down one-story and created a terrace, which was a result of input from residents.

Plan also showed the lower parking level partially submerged as the grade slopes down significantly. Entrance/exit is from Old York Road and that would contain 19 parking spaces as well as an office and fitness area. First floor level is at grade although it is up a few steps from the sidewalk area and the secondary ramp would take traffic to the upper level parking area that would contain a lobby/resident entrance/exit and another 19 parking spaces. Proposed are two-bedroom and one-bedroom units and the upper level has units as well as a terrace.

Elevations of the building were presented and materials for the first floor would be brick and other materials would be a combination of metal and fiber cement panels. Site plan showed landscaping proposed as well as a driveway in front of the building and a drop-off for residents, and in addition, service vehicles such as trash trucks would use it and there is an interior trash area.

Ms. Yarnoff said we are at the conceptual stage and have not engineered any drawings because we are still working with Township staff on the ordinance making sure it will be permitted.

Ms. Gauthier commented that there is room on that lot to expand and the existing historic building should remain and that could be added onto with some type of retail or mixed use. How much marketing was done in regards to that?

Mr. Landskroner replied a tremendous amount of marketing was done and the only interest was massage parlors or tattoo parlor, so no viable retail prospect.

Ms. Strackhouse commented that there is a building on that lot dating back to 1700's and she prepared a one-page report on that building. She would like to see more thought put into reusing that building perhaps providing an amenity to those who would be living in this apartment building.

Mr. Landskroner agreed.

Mr. Spearman asked about the density shown in the scheme.

Mr. Landskroner replied the project needs to work from a financial standpoint as well as for the neighbors. Previously, it was a 60-unit scheme with the same amount of parking spaces and the ward Commissioner and neighbors felt that was unacceptable in their backyard. So we went back to the drawing board and kept reducing units while having several meetings with the neighbors and now they feel it is a good project that will help revitalize that stretch on Old York Road.

Ms. Strackhouse asked for the targeted demographic for these apartments.

Mr. Landskroner replied we do not have a target demographic. It will be market rate and it will not be age-restricted or just for students. It will be open to whoever wants to live in new apartment housing in Abington Township.

Mr. Rosen asked for the rent price range for these apartments as well as what the finishes would be for the apartments.

Mr. Landskroner replied \$1,400 for a one-bedroom unit and \$1,600 for two-bedroom units. All apartments are high-end luxury-type finish such as quartz or granite countertops; hardwood floors throughout; nice cabinets and electric appliances. We would build the units as if we would be selling them eventually because that is the type of clientele we want in our apartment buildings.

Mr. Rosen clarified that is the intention of the owner, operator and developer to maintain an ongoing vested interest and not packaging it for investment. Is that correct?

Mr. Landskroner replied that is correct.

Mr. Rosen expressed concern about putting any structure with any kind of density on a high volume road such as Old York Road and with such a narrow ingress/egress in a relatively concentrated area for these many units is disturbing to him. The traffic patterns and scale of this project is an issue for him.

Mr. Landskroner replied that we met with reps of Traffic, Planning & Design Inc. as well as PennDOT and TPD came to the conclusion that this project did not negatively impact existing conditions. We will discuss ingress/egress with PennDOT. Currently onsite, there are three curb cuts that will be consolidated to two curb cuts of 24-feet, which is an improvement to existing condition.

Mr. Penecale asked did reps of TPD project the number of trips per unit?

Mr. Landskroner replied we have a full report that can be provided.

Ms. Yarnoff provided a copy of the revised proposed zoning text amendment to the Planning Commission. The zoning text amendment is to the Main Street High Commercial District for Apartment Use H-2, and while the apartment use is permitted in this district, the density is much less.

Proposed changes to the zoning ordinance are as follows: the site has a minimum and maximum lot frontage on Old York Road; the site is within 25 feet of a SEPTA bus stop and .5 miles from a SEPTA train station; parcels immediately adjacent to the site with MS-H containing active businesses; the site has not been redeveloped within five years of submission of the land development application; and the site currently does not meet Township's stormwater management requirements and the goal is to improve stormwater management and become compliant.

Ms. Gauthier asked how was the measurement of 25 feet from a SEPTA bus stop determined?

Ms. Yarnoff replied it is measured from where the bus stop is to the property line. Also reviewed with the Planning Commission were requested modifications to dimensional standards; design guidelines; parking and landscaping as listed in draft zoning text amendment.

Mr. Rosen questioned whether there will be onsite maintenance and management and whether there will be elevators in this building?

Mr. Landskroner replied there will be someone who works internally in his company dedicated to the building, but not a fulltime maintenance person 24/7. There will be one elevator.

Mr. Spearman said many of the modifications are in regards to density, but the design guidelines could be met. Is that correct? Also, is there some intent to preserve the character that is compatible with most of the corridor?

Mr. Skolnick replied design guidelines are geared more towards different scaled buildings such as buildings with commercial elements as opposed to a residential building of this size. The intent is to create a certain image that we would like to have.

Mr. Spearman said the intent of the ordinance with respect to the character of the buildings is something that this proposed building will not easily attain to because density is higher.

Mr. Skolnick replied the function is significantly different. With the exception of the sloped roof, we can come up with a scheme that would mix with different options available to us.

Mr. Rosen asked about other apartment buildings that are similar to this proposed building that are located in Abington Township.

Mr. Landskroner replied there is nothing comparable.

Mr. Rosen said when we discussed the development of Old York Road; we were not talking about this. But maybe we need to rethink what is possible that may meet the demand that exists in our community going forward. Is there an operational model in regards to scale, number of units and price point?

Mr. Landskroner replied the Nittany apartments across the street is a similar type of product and College Station located in Willow Grove has a high occupancy and doing well as there is a need for it. Proposed building will be dictated by demand.

Mr. Rosen continued that this does not seem like the kind of unit that will attract older residents, but a young reasonably high turnover of people. He sees it as setting a benchmark that we will have to live with. His concern is safety, sustainability and the long term use of it.

Mr. Penecale referred to the proposed zoning text amendment and clarified that Item “Building Façade” should be removed from the list as it was previously stated by Mr. Skolnick who said, *‘with the exception of the sloped roof, we can come up with a scheme that would mix with different options available to us.’* Is that correct?

Mr. Skolnick replied that is correct.

George Ritter, Landscape Architect, of Ruggiero Plante Land Design, 4220 Main Street, Philadelphia, PA., 19127, said we located various high intensity zoning districts as well as the train and bus stations and looked at the lots that exist at 150 feet of frontage, not more than 200 or those that can be combined, and that is how we came up with 16 lots that this ordinance might apply to at some level.

Mr. Spearman questioned whether these lots are appropriate for future corridor involvement with this kind of a high density building.

Mr. Ritter replied the lot has enough depth to accommodate this type of use, and if it was deeper, it would be more beneficial, but it is not, and the buildings can be designed to fit within these dimensional criteria.

Mr. Skolnick commented that the loading dock would be at the discretion of the Code official and the amount of landscaping will be increased as a buffer, which was a response of input from neighbors.

Mr. Russell commented that he feels the applicant should try to get closer to some of the provisions of the newly revised zoning ordinance.

Ms. Strackhouse agreed with Mr. Russell and with all of the time and effort that was put into revising the zoning ordinance, it is a puzzle and an amazement that these text amendments are presented to us after all of the work that was done on this ordinance. However, she is excited that this parcel is being developed and long overdue as vacant properties are a huge problem for Abington, but it is about the zoning ordinance itself, and how we have to spend all of this time on another text amendment.

Mr. Penecale commented that he was asked by Commissioner Kline to remind the members of the Planning Commission that they are not obligated this evening to render any type of recommendation. This item will be on the Code Enforcement Committee meeting agenda and eventually the Board of Commissioners meeting agenda as a motion to advertise.

Next scheduled meeting of the Planning Commission is November 15th at which time the Planning Commission may consider rendering a recommendation, which would then be forwarded to the Board of Commissioners for consideration and action at its meeting in December.

Ms. Strackhouse agreed that is a good idea since members of the Planning Commission just received a letter from the MCPC, which is incomplete.

Mr. Cooper commented that he likes the project; however, he cannot name a building that is this tall on Old York Road other than Abington Hospital, so the height of the building is a concern.

Mr. DiCello expressed concern about the traffic in/out of the site onto Old York Road.

Ms. Robinson expressed concern about the driveway entrance not being wide enough for trash trucks as well as the height of the building and the use is too dense for this location.

Ms. Gauthier commented that she likes the project as well as the proposed green roof. She is concerned about the height and she would like to see some perspectives from Ferndale Avenue. She would also like to hear from neighbors about the height of proposed building. She also asked for the Historic Resource to be incorporated into this site. Buffer yard should not be reduced to 20 feet due to fire safety as she does not want to set precedent.

Mr. Skolnick replied that there is more than 20 feet of setback from the building and the parking structure will be three feet above grade.

Ms. Strackhouse commented that there is an opportunity to make this an interesting, vibrant streetscape and keeping the historic asset will contribute to it; however, she does not want to see a canyon of 55 foot apartment buildings, she wants to see different types of buildings.

Mr. Skolnick replied limited depth of this site precludes doing those things based on the way the ordinance is written.

Mr. Rosen said he questions whether this is the model of what we think would work on Old York Road and this is not a simple ordinance change. He gives deference to all who worked on the rewrite of the zoning ordinance and who contemplated the uses of this land, and this is a serious contradiction in the metrics of the zoning ordinance. The presumption is a radical change, although it may be the best we can expect, but may require much more reflection on the part of the Board of Commissioners.

Mr. Landskroner replied he understands all of the concerns, but this is the best we can do to make this project feasible and begin the revitalization of this corridor of Old York Road.

Mr. Rosen said this is of vital importance as it has the potential to set the stage for a catalyst of development.

Mr. Penecale noted this application will come back before the Planning Commission at its meeting next month.

ADJOURNMENT: 9:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary

