

Lower Salford
Township Planning
Commission Meeting
June 28, 2023

Planning Commission Chair Manus McHugh called to order the Lower Salford Township Planning Commission meeting at 7:35pm via Zoom. Other Planning Commission members in attendance were Brad Landis, David Bowe, Joe Harwanko, David Goodman, Andy Shields, and Scott Bamford. Also in attendance was Mike Beuke, Director of Building and Zoning, Michele Fountain, P.E. of CKS, the Township Engineer's office, and Claire Warner of the Montgomery County Planning Commission. Excused from the meeting was Stephanie Butler, P.E. of Bowman/McMahon Associates, the Township Traffic Engineer's office and Vice Chair, John Kennedy.

Mr. McHugh welcomed Scott Bamford as the newest member of the Planning Commission.

Minutes

The minutes from the April 26, 2023, meeting were reviewed. Mr. Goodman made a motion to approve the minutes; Mr. Bowe seconded the motion. Mr. Bamford abstained.

Motion 5 Yes; 0 No; 1 Abstain

A brief discussion took place regarding the date of the joint July/August Planning Commission meeting; the meeting has been scheduled for August 16, 2023.

Plan Reviews

196 Main Street – Conditional Use Application for Apartments and Retail Store

Present to review the application on behalf of the applicant was Rick Mast, P.E. of RCMA.; joining him were applicants Bryan Hunsberger and Leo Orloski. Three review letters were prepared, one from Michele Fountain, P.E. of CKS Engineers, dated 4/24/2023, one from Claire Warner of the MCPC dated 4/3/2023 and one from Stephanie Butler of McMahon, dated June 21, 2023.

Mr. Mast gave a brief overview of the property and mentioned that he and his clients have met with the Building and Zoning Committee. Following the meeting, they have reduced the number of apartments units to 29; a bank with a drive-through and a retail store, Auto Zone, are also proposed.

The proposed apartments are now smaller than originally proposed; however, they are proposed to be three-story units with garages except for the units closest to the neighboring, existing home are proposed to be two-story without garages.

It was also noted that Mr. Hunsberger met with the owner of the neighboring property to review his proposal.

Addressing the CKS letter, Mr. Mast believes that there was an omission in the ordinance and that a bank should be allowed in the RO District. His client is proposing a bank with a drive-through ATM and Mr. Mast is requesting that the Township amend the ordinance to allow a bank, as a bank is a less intense use than a restaurant which is allowed.

Mr. Goodman agreed on the intensity of the uses.

It was mentioned that the drive-through would still require Conditional Use approval and the drainage channel, storm water basin, run off, and floodplain were all discussed.

Mr. Mast stated that the County record is inaccurate and that his client had testing done that showed no alluvial soils, therefore no FEMA floodplain exists on the site.

Regarding access, on a corner lot, access must be taken from the road of lesser classification, Quarry Road. The applicant concurs but is also proposing limited access on Main Street with a right in/right out driveway. Shared access driveways and the requirement of a driveway to be within 30' of a side lot bordering a property zoned RO were also discussed.

Addressing the Bowman/McMahon letter, the applicant has hired traffic engineer Dave Horner to do a traffic study. Mr. Mast stated that the issues in the McMahon letter are primarily issues that will be resolved during land development.

The McMahon letter states that the proposed driveway should be aligned with the potential future driveway to the Allebach property that is across Quarry Road; Mr. McHugh agreed it is best to align the driveways.

Mr. McHugh opened a brief discussion regarding the culvert, retention basin, and repositioning the driveway further away from Main Street.

The County review letter states that it generally supports the application but notes that a bank is not currently allowed in the RO District. Ms. Warner discussed connectivity, pedestrian crossings, sidewalks, and roof slopes. Ms. Warner also discussed concerns about the compatibility of a bank and Auto Zone with a residential development; she feels that perhaps these uses are not neighborhood friendly.

Mr. Mast argued the compatibility issues for a bank and explained that Auto Zone is retail and allowable.

Mr. Goodman brought up the issue to Auto Zone customers potentially changing their oil and doing auto maintenance in the parking lot; this type of behavior would be frowned upon.

Mr. Bowe questioned the proposal of a bank, questioning its longevity.

Mr. Hunsberger stated that he considers the bank to be more of a financial institution managing more investments than anything else. The proposal would include a drive-through for an ATM only and not drive-through teller service.

Mr. Goodman acknowledges that credit unions and some banks are currently growing and expanding.

Mr. Landis questioned why banks are currently excluded. It was discussed that prior, perhaps a bank previously would have had too much of an impact in the RO District.

Both Mr. Bamford and Mr. Harwanko stated they would not have an issue with a bank in the RO District. The other members concurred.

Mr. McHugh would prefer to see an Auto Zone over a restaurant.

Mr. Goodman added that an Auto Zone is a good fit for a parcel with limited parking.

Mr. McHugh suggested the applicant take into consideration the possible development of the property across the street when moving forward.

A brief discussion took place regarding the clarification of the floodplain mentioned earlier.

Based upon Mr. Mast's request stated earlier to amend the ordinance to allow a bank use, Ms. Fountain suggested the applicant submit an ordinance for the Township to review and use as a basis for an ordinance revision.

Mr. Beuke stated that it is customary for the applicant to address all zoning issues before there is a Conditional Use hearing.

355 Maple Avenue – Revised Plan – Convert Courtyard to Building Space

Present to discuss the plan was Christen Pionzio, Esq., Lindsey Breylinger, P.E. of Bohler Engineering and John Fiore of VV 355, LLC.

Ms. Pionzio stated that she and her client were present as a courtesy to show the changes to the building that were not on the approved plan.

Mr. McHugh stated that the plans were unclear and sloppy and even though the building coverage was shown on the plan, there are notes on the plan that state there will be no change to the building. He also mentioned that the Planning Commission will take comments this evening, but no vote or action will take place.

Mr. McHugh reminded the applicant that the Planning Commission requested that the proposed trail be reviewed by both the township engineer and the traffic engineer.

Mr. Beuke stated that the Park Board and Trail Committee are to both review the plan before it goes back to the Board. He added that the Park Board has concerns about the trail location and that they would like to see the trail extended to Route 113 and not include a mid-block crossing.

Mr. McHugh reiterated that he was not certain why the applicant returned to the Planning Commission and that he would like to see more cooperation between the applicant and the Trail Committee.

Ms. Pionzio stated that her applicant is willing to work with the Township but noted that she and her client were not made aware of the last Park Board meeting.

Proposed Ordinance Amendments

Temporary Sign Ordinance

Mr. Beuke headed up the discussion on the ordinance, stating that the existing ordinance needed to be cleaned up, as temporary signage tends to be challenging.

Discussed was content neutrality, limited durations signs, personal expression signs, flags, and banners. Also discussed was sign size, display duration, location, constitutionality, and freedom of speech. Mr. Beuke's draft is a pared down, simplified version of the County model ordinance. Mr. Beuke will take tonight's comments and the draft to the Board of Supervisors for additional comments and will return to the Planning Commission with a clean copy for recommendation of adoption.

Zoning Ordinance Amendments

Ms. Warner presented the most recent draft of the Village District ordinance. A discussion followed regarding building frontage, minimum and maximum front yard setbacks, and maximum building height.

Mr. McHugh continued the discussion on maximum building height and the definition of mean grade.

Ms. Warner will update the documents and return to the next meeting with new drafts.

There being no public comment, Mr. Landes made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Harwanko seconded the motion. With all members in favor, the meeting adjourned at 9:09pm.

The next meeting of the Planning Commission is scheduled for 7:30pm on Wednesday August 16, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

Patti Reimel
Administrative Assistant