

SMITHFIELD TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
COUNTY OF MONROE, COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
REGULAR MEETING OF MARCH 12, 2020 AT 7:00 P.M.
MEETING MINUTES

1./2. Call to Order and Members Present:

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Township Planning Commissioner Chair Attorney Scott Amori. Three (3) other Commissioners were present; namely, Robert Moses, David Strunk and Douglas Schryver. Commissioner Michael Albert was absent.

In addition to the above Commissioners, Township Supervisors Robert Lovenheim and Jacob Pride, Township Engineer Jon S. Tresslar, PE and PLS and Township Solicitor, Ronold J. Karasek, Esquire, of the Karasek Law Offices, LLC, were present.

3. The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag: was recited.

4. Minutes of February 13, 2020: Upon motion of D. Schryver and second by R. Moses and on a unanimous vote of 4-0, the Meeting Minutes were approved.

5. Public Comments: None.

6. Plans to Act On: None.

7. New Business:

(A) Update on Smithfield Gateway Project

Jim DePetris (and his Planning Professionals) appeared before the Commission to discuss the "New" Smithfield Gateway Project. They had with them several maps and new renderings of the nature of the updated project.

Since the project was initially proposed, the retail market has become very volatile with various establishments (such as supermarkets and department stores) closing. Indeed, the proposed food market anchor for this project fell through. Accordingly, it was required to re-think the nature and scope of the project.

In the meantime, Mr. DePetris states that he has been working closely with the Pocono Mountain Economic Development Council and with his consultant (Joe Hogan) to secure funding for the new road improvements. It is necessary that these road improvements be installed as soon as possible since these improvements are necessary for both the project and the overall 209 corridor. At this point, there appears to be a single tenant that proposes to utilize 40,000 square feet of office space in Phase 1A.

The presentation was then turned over to Douglas Olmstead, P.E., the Plan Engineer. Mr. Olmstead discussed that the original plan for Phase 1A was for retail and commercial with residential being relegated to Phase 2A. The updated Phase 1A now proposes a restaurant/dinner house, hotel, lesser amount of retail and the aforesaid 40,000 square foot single tenant/Class A office space user. The gas station, convenience store and restaurant establishments (which were initially proposed for Phase 1A) have been eliminated from the updated plan. At this point, Mr. Olmstead turned the presentation over to Ted Herbert from Langan Engineering.

Mr. Herbert discussed the internal roads for the project i.e. Roads A, B and C. He explained that the establishment of Road C is critical in order to allow left turn movements since Music Center Drive will be a "right in and right out" only and Eilenberger Road is only one way going in. He also discussed storm drainage and that the NPDES permit will need to be revised. The stormwater pipe crossing Route 209 is one of the first items that will need to be addressed.

A question was asked by one of the Commissioners as to how many traffic lights would be installed and Mr. Olmstead responded two (2) if not three (3).

At this point, the presentation was turned over to two (2) architects from CI Design of Baltimore, MD i.e. a one Chris Bower and a one Dave Marcozzi (phonetic spelling). These individuals stated that their company works with mixed-use developments. The updated Smithfield Gateway Project will involve retail businesses with residential apartments on top of those businesses with separate parking for the retail and residential uses. The purpose is to allow a resident to walk down to the first floor of a building for shopping, dining, use of pool so forth. Further, the heights of the proposed residential buildings will be staggered because of the topography/slope of the land. Mr. Marcozzi stated that the plan is to develop a "dynamic sense of place" and a "synergy" where one can experience retail shopping with dining, gathering places, green areas and/or concert venues. Further, the hope is to save and update the existing farmhouse on the property that will be an attraction and/or centerpiece of the project.

Township Engineer Tresslar inquired as to where would be the location for the loading and unloading areas and his answer was that they would be on the backside of the retail area. Also, Commissioner Schryver inquired as to the location of the trash/garbage pickup.

Mr. DePetris emphasized that the updated project would have smaller style stores i.e. small retail, small boutiques, small entertainment and not the large big-box stores. He wants this project to be more than a shopping and living area ... he wants it to become a "focus point" for the area. He emphasized that "this product is not in the Poconos today". Although it may be found in some areas in the Lehigh Valley, various studies indicate that this type of mixed use format is very favorably received in the marketplace. He stated that this is a 50/60 million dollar project.

Mr. DePetris also stated that he was speaking with an investor/partner who would be very interested in this style of project. He re-emphasized that there are three TIF areas i.e. Phase 1A, 1B, 2A; and, he estimates the TIF payments to be approximately \$700,000/\$800,000 per year. While he said that some projects were funded by bonds i.e. Kalahari and Camelback, he advises that he is attempting to structure a "debt deal" with 3.5 million from a PA sponsored bank and 2.5 million from private investors.

Mr. DePetris stated that he is anxious to get going since grants, lenders, potential users and the like are hanging in the balance. He also stated that the updated Phase 1A would have not residential units, Phase 1B would have 236 residential units (50% single bed and 50% double bed), Phase 2A would have age-restricted residential which would be limited (because of the slope and topography of the area) with 180/190 units. Accordingly, the present ordinance would need to be modified to increase the maximum amount of residential units for this project from the 236 units (as initially proposed) to approximately 400-500 units.

Engineer Olmstead stated that a new Development Plan will need to be submitted for this revised project.

Mr. Charles Schmehl of Urban Research and Development Corporation then presented his Memo (of February 25, 2020 with revised date of March 12, 2020) outlining various revisions to the existing ordinance for the new project. He discussed some of the requested revisions.

Since he is aware that the Township is the process of amending its present Zoning Ordinance to establish an "Incentivized Overlay District", he is suggesting that the present Smithfield Gateway property of 125 acres be not included in the zoning amendments so that the updated project can proceed without further delay.

The zoning changes he proposed are necessary since (at the time of the original project) residential apartments over retail stores there not contemplated. He also suggested that the ordinance can be changed to address a larger tract of land i.e. a minimum of 50 acres (as opposed to 25 acres) that would be an easier version to adopt.

There was a significant amount of discussion regarding fire protection where residential properties are proposed to be located on slopes which involve limited access, inability of the present fire companies to access buildings in excess of 35' (the proposed revisions are to increase maximum building height to 45-65'), difficulty with access and escape by older persons in the age-restricted area. However, Mr. Schmehl says that all buildings will be sprinkled. Also, the buildings will be able to be accessed from at least one side and (as per the CI Representatives) the actual net heights are not 45' – 65' feet.

Mr. Schmehl stated that he would provide a draft zoning amendment containing the revisions and with comparisons to the present zoning ordinance provisions.

Finally, Mr. DePetris stated that the zoning changes need to be made now at least for the Phase 1A. A suggestion was that perhaps only the parking issue needs to be addressed now so as not to lose the 40,000 square feet Office Tenant.

At this point, the discussion regarding this project ended.

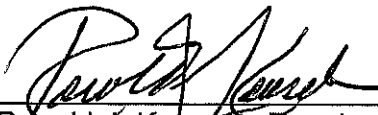
8. Unfinished Business: None

9. Public Comment: None.

(10) Adjournment:

There being no other business coming before the Commission and on motion by Commissioner S. Amori, seconded by Commissioner R. Moses and on a unanimous vote of 4-0, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Karasek Law Offices, LLC

By: 

Ronald J. Karasek, Esquire
PA I.D. No. 23233
Solicitor to Smithfield Township