

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
AUGUST 23, 2017

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

ATTENDANCE:

Mark McKee, Vice-Chair
Vivian Peikin, Secretary
Jaque Camp, Member
Todd Brown, Member
William Jenaway, Liaison to the Board of Supervisors
Kyle Brown, Associate Planner
Maudy Hedlund, Recording Secretary

ABSENT:

Matt Popek, Chair
Rob Loeper, Township Planner

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL:

Ms. Camp, who did not attend the July 12 meeting, abstained. On a motion by Ms. Peikin and seconded by Mr. Brown with three members voting “aye” the Minutes of July 12, 2017 were approved as presented.

Mr. Brown, who did not attend the August 8 meeting, abstained. On a motion by Ms. Camp and seconded by Ms. Peikin, with three members voting “aye” the Minutes of August 9, 2017 were approved as presented.

PLAN:

DP 2017-10 MONTCO Dept. of Public Safety: 310 Hughes Rd. Construction of a 150’ wireless emergency management communications tower and supporting equipment, 2.9-acres, R-1 Residential. Zoning Relief granted March 1, 2017. Plan expiration: October 10, 2017.

PRESENT: Michael Stokes, Assistant Director, Montgomery County Planning Commission.
Richard Lohwasser, Radio System Coordinator, Montgomery County 9-1-1 Dept. of Public Safety.
Joshua M. Stein, First Assistant Solicitor, Montgomery County Solicitor’s Office.

Mr. Stokes thanked the Planning Commission’s members for the advice and insights they presented at the previous meeting.

The following are highlights of Mr. Stokes’ and Mr. Lohwasser’s presentations.

The applicant offered the following seven conditions of approval.

1. Prior to construction the County will remove fallen branches and dead trees from the site.
2. Once the construction is completed, the County will continue to maintain the property and plant replacement trees.
3. Cellular communications systems will not be added.
4. Any future potential to adjust the emergency management facility will be subject to a land development process.
5. In order to blend the tower into the area it will be surrounded by a fully-opaque chained-fencing system, clad in pressure-treated wood.
6. A rapid-growing Leyland Cypress will be planted in front of the fence as a buffer. Pieris Japonica, American Holly and Bayberry, will be planted on-site.
7. The modular-built building will receive an exterior brick facing and a simple shingled-roof system.

Members appreciated the applicant's much-improved design for the modular, concrete building and the fence.

Existing structure:

The existing, obtrusive shelter will be demolished after the new building is equipped and operational.

Security:

Security is supported by a gate at the driveway and a double-wide gate within the fenced-in area and by environmental, equipment, smoke, high temperature and intruder alarm systems. The applicant is proposing to place a camera inside the building and on the tower.

Antennae:

The County and the PA State Police will each receive five light-blue/gray antennae. To avoid interference, they will be mounted to the tower at varying heights. The County and State will each receive one microwave dish that will be mounted at lower heights.

Tower:

No lighting will be added to the gray, stainless steel tower.

Meeting with the Board of Supervisors:

The applicant will appear before the Board of Supervisors on September 14.

Motion:

Mr. McKee made a motion that the Planning Commission recommends approval of DP 2017-10 for the 310 Hughes Road emergency management communications tower. He thanked the County for substantially addressing the comments of the Planning Commission and the neighbors by making the building much more residential in appearance; for beefing up the privacy screening with the fence; for

improving the landscaping; for the commitment to maintain the property; and for assuring that no commercial uses would be added on in the future without a full development process. Mr. McKee expressed an interest in incorporating the County's offers and seven potential conditions of approval as part of this development plan and, with that, recommended approval. Todd Brown seconded. A 4-0 vote, in favor, carried.

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ZONING ORDINANCE: Overview of Neighborhood Mixed-Use (NMU) Ordinance

Prior to giving his presentation, Mr. Brown introduced Mr. Uil Karademir, an area resident who has been vital in advocating for this zoning change.

From Mr. Brown's presentation:

The Neighborhood Mixed-Use Ordinance is currently under review by the County. The Township's zoning update was undertaken by the Board of Supervisor's Zoning Workshop. It was recommended at their April meeting to move forward. The finalized version that comes out of the township and county planning commissions will be advertised to all property owners thirty days in advance of the formal hearing.

Mr. Brown provided a visual of the South Gulph corridors' NMU District proposed along the south side of South Gulph Road between Croton and Henderson.

Goal:

As a new neighborhood-scale mixed-use district, the NMU District's goal is to preserve a low-intensity landscape character and encourage institutional uses along the residential area which are currently not allowed. It would allow residential above retail among other combinations of uses and provide flexibility for development, while creating additional controls to prevent significant traffic impacts to the public. Much of its drive has come from owners who have seen a decrease in their property values as a result of the gradual increase in traffic intensity along South Gulph.

Intent:

- Develop a walkable, bike-able development that promotes physical activity and improves public health.
- Alleviate the impact of development on nearby existing residential areas by controlling for scale, design, traffic access, and orientation.
- Decrease the impact of new development and redevelopment of existing structures on the environment by encouraging more dense residential and business uses with walkable amenities.
- Encourage the growth of small-scale commercial and institutional uses as well as a diversity of housing options.
- Encourage a sense of community and a sense of place, which promotes civic engagement and social interaction.

Mr. Brown offered to go into more detail at the next meeting.

Use flexibility for residential:

The current form of the Ordinance allows attached and detached single-family residential and row homes to remain conforming uses. Multi-family would be added as a permitted use.

Use Flexibility for retail/commercial:

Some ground-floor commercial uses would be permitted. Maximum building coverage can only be 35 percent of the parcel area. Gross floor area for certain retail is limited to 15,000 square feet.

To encourage mixed-uses within the same building:

Multi-family dwellings and offices are permitted on all floors. To encourage density, single-story buildings are not permitted. Retail is only permitted on the ground floor. Mr. Brown offered to provide more data on retail with residential above to the next meeting.

Basements:

Mr. Jenaway stressed the importance of managing a basement's occupancy and use, as they are generally included with the use on the first floor. Ms. Camp noted that a manufacturing operation with one main egress and 20 working in the basement pose life-safety concerns. Mr. Jenaway recommended taking a look at split-level basements. Members questioned whether we want or don't want a lot that, by allowing walk-out basements from the back, creates the opportunity for multiple levels of retail having a ground-level access. Mr. Brown offered to look into these concerns.

8-Foot sidewalks:

The unique requirement allows people to pass and use a bike.

Architectural articulation:

Mr. Brown commented that this is the first time architectural articulation has been added to the Code. Members agreed that to promote good design, it helps to have a certain amount of architectural

articulation required by the Code, in that it's going to get value-engineered out if it is not required.

No parking in the front yards:

The Planning Commission discussed how to control for parking lots in the front yard and limiting the access points for residences.

Mr. Brown stated that in our residential code an 18 feet driveway is the maximum width – that's a great point – worth adding.

Fire Access:

For fire access safety, buildings will be sprinklered.

Access easements:

In an effort to reduce access points, a developer who creates parking lots and driveways on his property has to record a public vehicular access easement to those drive aisles and to adjacent properties, should they be developed in the future. The Planning Commission discussed the benefit of negotiating a shared easement with a neighboring property.

Shared Parking:

Mr. Brown stated that shared parking was a way to incentivize mixed uses and described the applicable ratios for residential, commercial, and office use.

Parking:

Parking is not permitted between a building and a non-local street unless set back 10 feet from the road's right-of-way and screened with a softening buffer.

Highway Classifications:

Mr. Brown explained that "non-local" referred to the highway classifications of different road types. They have certain design speeds and certain right of way requirements for future development. Croton and South Gulph are "non-local" streets.

Traffic Access Easements:

Mr. Brown stated that they will be discussed at the next meeting.

Mr. Karademir's comment:

Mr. Karademir stated that he wants to use four acres to build a little village that supports residential, business and retail uses and provides parking for each.

The Planning Commission's opinions varied from traffic concerns on an arterial road to promoting mixed use development which, by creating small pockets prevents people from getting in their car. One member referred to mixed-use developments between Ardmore West and Suburban Square where businesses use the first floor and residential uses the second and third.

Members confirmed the Ordinance's potential for consolidation and re-development.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no additional business, the meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Sincerely yours,

VIVIAN PEIKIN, SECRETARY