

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
May 9, 2018

The Upper Merion Township Planning Commission met for their regularly-scheduled meeting on May 9, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. in the Township Building, 175 W. Valley Forge Rd., King of Prussia, PA.

Present: Matthew Popek, Chair; Mark McKee, Vice-Chair; Todd Brown, Secretary; Vivian Peikin, Member; Jaque Camp, Member; Kyle Brown, Associate Township Planner; and Maudy Hedlund, Recording Secretary.

Absent: Dr. William Jenaway, Liaison to the Board of Supervisors; Robert Loeper, Township Planner.

Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of the Minutes: April 11, 2018.

Mr. McKee made a motion to approve the April 11, 2018 Minutes. Mr. Brown seconded. Mrs. Camp abstained. A 4-0 vote, in favor, carried.

Discussion:

Neighborhood Mixed Use Ordinance:

Mr. Popek, Chair, provided a brief overview of the Neighborhood Mixed Use Ordinance and informed members of the receipt of the County's draft letter and review comments.

Mr. Kyle Brown, Associate Township Planner, stated that the Board of Supervisors approved the changes recommended by the Planning Commission at their April 5, 2018 Zoning Workshop. The Planning Commission's recommendations were "to change the maximum impervious coverage from 80 to 75 percent; to specify "ground floor"; and "to base the classification of roads on official highway maps."

The Board of Supervisors scheduled a Business Hearing for May 17, 2018. A letter was sent to affected residents on April 18, 2018. Kyle Brown stated that a handful of property owners who responded to the April 18 letter requested a copy of the Ordinance.

In response to Mr. Popek's request, members agreed to provide general comments prior to making an official recommendation.

Questions and comments:

Ms. Peikin questioned whether the Planning Commission needed to discuss what the County recommended. Mr. Popek commented that, in the future, we may be able to extend the definition so that the areas between South Gulph Road and the Expressway are included while still maintaining the less-than-an-acre for what we are trying to accomplish for the individual houses along Gulph Rd. Kyle Brown informed members that any changes to the Ordinance at this point would trigger another 30-day advertising period.

Questions and comments (cont.):

Mr. Popek asked why the larger property owners were not interested in being part of this or why the decision was made by the Township not to include the larger properties in the first go-round. Kyle Brown provided an attorney's concern that the current residential zoning triggers a requirement in the Administrative & Research District for a buffer between those buildings and residential uses. By making it a non-residential district property owners would be allowed more flexibility on their own parcels.

Kyle Brown informed members that:

- The Business/Industrial District which includes Administrative & Research will consolidate into fewer districts and take the place of the A/R.
- Parcels in a split-zoned area in the Residential District would be moved into the new Administrative/Office District.
- It would be reasonable to expect an ordinance on the back end of that process.
- It would be a good time to take another look at this map and to consider that the blue parcels should be added to the Neighborhood Mixed Use Ordinance, as the County implied with their first recommendation.

Kyle Brown commented that:

- The Neighborhood Mixed Use district would be the first zoning district of its type in the township.
- The Commercial and Mixed Use developments have not reflected that this type is permitted.
- This is the only way to see what it looks like before we start to flush out a more robust set of provisions.

Ms. Peikin questioned if a multi-step process would be more or less advantageous and recommended a more cautious route until we see how it works.

Ms. Camp replied that the County's first comment makes sense. It also sounds like the same thing will ultimately be accomplished as the process goes forward. She is comfortable with letting that play itself out.

Mr. McKee expressed concern that the Township's suggestion for the retail uses on S. Gulph Road will promote turning movements that negatively impact the two-lane artery that serves as the third lane of the Expressway. He does not want more retail.

Ms. Camp doesn't want to make it easier for people to use S. Gulph Rd. as the third lane of the Expressway for two reasons. That's not its use. People should not have to live on an expressway.

Mr. Popek commented that we are allowing the property owners on S. Gulph Rd. a little more flexibility to do something that will make their property work. He indicated an interest in treating this area as a pilot.

Mr. McKee stated that the property owners of the single-family homes have requested relief from the Zoning Hearing Board. They have trouble getting out of their driveway and feel that they can't live here as residents with an expressway behind them. They want to their zone changed to "Commercial."

Kyle Brown stated that property owners have been forced to bump out their driveways because making movements in and out of their property is dangerous and not conducive to residential use. Ms. Peikin did not consider it a safe environment for children.

Mr. McKee expects applicants to ask for waivers. Mr. Popek acknowledged that owners have to come in and request a waiver and that zoning should codify our ideals and intent.

Mr. McKee's major concern is that it's going to affect the viability of S. Gulph Rd. as an important arterial access, particularly with the by-right retail use. He added that we are not going to have a walkable community anywhere from Croton Rd. down here because it's disjointed. Ms. Camp commented that the viability of suburban community roads to handle suburban community traffic is a way bigger issue than any zoning section that we work on. Mr. Popek commented that it is a regional issue.

Ms. Camp commented that we're not going to fix the problems. There are too many cars. Every time you make the road bigger you just invite more cars to use it.

Ms. Camp thinks it will give people who want to use S. Gulph Rd. another option. She knows from personal experience that you cannot walk or bike to work from Hughes Road to the Business Park safely because S. Gulph is a terrible place for pedestrians. She wants to see it improved. She doesn't want to make it worse and she doesn't want to restrict people's ability to use S. Gulph Rd. as a pedestrian way. She wants to make it a pedestrian way.

Mr. McKee commented that we're not being honest with ourselves if we think that it's going be a walkable community. Ms. Camp responded that we're also not being honest with ourselves if we think that it is part of the Expressway. It's not.

Members suggested that their recommendation also consider the following: that if, in the future, the larger parcels behind the district being proposed are included, that other requirements for lot size, as they pertain to use, also be included.

Mr. Popek felt that the Commission could make a recommendation to go ahead, in that there are good comments about how this could be changed in the future. He encourages the Board to take it up at their earliest convenience.

Mr. Popek asked if Mr. McKee had a specific recommendation. He did not. Mr. McKee agrees with the County's recommendation that if we are going to permit all those uses, permit them where we have larger lots to encourage a consolidation. He felt it should be done before passage.

Mr. Popek asked if someone would like to make a motion to recommend to the Board of Supervisors adoption of this zoning ordinance. Ms. Peikin motioned. Todd Brown seconded. For the record, a 4-1 vote in favor, carried.

Meeting adjournment:

Mr. McKee motioned to adjourn. Ms. Peikin seconded.

There being no additional business, the meeting adjourned at 8:09 p.m.

Sincerely yours,

TODD BROWN, SECRETARY