

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
ZONING WORKSHOP MEETING
MARCH 12, 2015

The Board of Supervisors of Upper Merion Township met for a Zoning Workshop meeting on Thursday, March 12, 2015 in the Township Building. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m., followed by a pledge of allegiance.

ROLL CALL:

Supervisors present were: Greg Waks, Erika Spott (arrived late), Greg Philips, Bill Jenaway and Carole Kenney. Also present were: Dave Kraynik, Township Manager; Sally Slook, Assistant Township Manager; Joseph McGrory, Township Solicitor, John Walko, Solicitor's Office; Rob Loeper, Township Planner; Scott Greenly, Associate Planner.

DISCUSSIONS:

PROPOSED ORDINANCE AMENDING SALDO BY ADDING NEW ARTICLE ENTITLED "DESIGN STANDARDS FOR THE NC (NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL), LC (LIMITED COMMERCIAL) AND GC (GENERAL COMMERCIAL) ZONING DISTRICTS

Mr. Rob Loeper, Township Planner, began discussion of the SALDO for the Commercial Districts. Referring to Section 1.C (Compliance), Mr. Loeper stated this would require a design manual similar to what was required in the Mixed Use District. He said there was a previous discussion about keeping some of these standards simple and having a threshold for some based on the size of the project; however, he was not sure a conclusion was reached. Mr. Loeper felt there wasn't anything in the design manual that was difficult for anyone doing a commercial building. He noted everything is waivable.

With regard to Section 2 (Site Design Standards), Mr. Loeper said these are the same as in the Mixed Use District. In looking at Vehicle Access, Mr. Loeper indicated ways of eliminating curb cuts and provisions for cross easements were studied. It was noted connectivity with neighboring sites has not always been easy.

A discussion followed about the case law associated with marginal access.

Mr. Loeper took issue with the wording of Section 2.D (Pedestrian Circulation). While it was taken out of the requirement for the Mixed Use District, he thought it was more appropriate where there would be parking in the rear to ensure easy access into a building.

Mr. McGrory suggested “cleaning up” the wording as well as the wording in the Mixed Use ordinance. Mr. Loeper indicated staff would take a look at that.

A discussion ensued regarding pedestrian circulation if parking is in the rear, parking in both front and rear and retailers preference for a controlled access into their building.

Mr. Loeper discussed Section 3.A. Building Orientation and Access. He noted the recently-approved land development for 705 W. DeKalb Pike does not have entrances on US 202. The entrances are in the back, but a different treatment is being provided for the façade on US 202.

A discussion followed about current establishments on US 202 with side entrances.

Mr. Jenaway mentioned a development in North Carolina where none of the buildings are consistent. He said some are at an angle, some are set back, some are close to the sidewalk, some have pedestrian doors that enter from the side, and some have doors in the rear. Because of the foliage and other amenities around the fronts of the buildings or on the street sides of the buildings it makes it totally irrelevant as to how to get in and out of these buildings because of the way the streetscape is designed. It provides an attractive entrance into the community.

Mrs. Kenney noted the way the Buildings and Streetscape Design Standards are written it is not addressing the entrance in the back of the building. Mr. Loeper responded this comes down to how critical is a street entrance.

Mr. Philips commented he favors the idea of having a streetscape.

Mr. McGrory stated some thought should be given to streetscaping and it is just as important as architectural review. He said he has some examples for the supervisors to review.

Mr. Philips said this is should be coordinated with the Business Improvement District (BID) and what they are planning on US 202.

Mr. Loeper pointed out the difficulty is the mixture of different retail buildings intermingled with homes along this stretch of US 202. Mr. Philips noted

a streetscape ordinance would help. Mr. McGrory said such things as wider sidewalks, street lanterns, benches, trash receptacles all contribute to consistency.

Referring to Section 3.B. (2) about the primary building entrance, Mr. Philips pointed out the anomalies with regard to the wording. A discussion followed regarding possible alternative language.

Mr. McGrory asked if Peter Simone defined the primary front façade in the Mixed Use ordinance. Mr. Loeper responded he would have to check.

Mr. McGrory noted if the idea is to promote parking other than the front yard, the entrance has to be somewhere else.

Mr. Loeper discussed Section 4 dealing with the building design standards. He said Section 4.B(1) indicates all sides of the building shall be designed to be consistent and Section 4.B(2) gives the Board of Supervisors permission to allow simulated brick or stone as a predominant material. Mr. McGrory asked what that decision was based on. Mr. Waks responded simulated brick is what is being used for the township's electronic sign. This was reviewed very carefully by the Media Communications Board. Mr. McGrory asked if there was any reason to retain Section 4.B(2) requiring Board approval for the use of simulated brick or stone. It was the general consensus to strike the need for special approval.

With regard to vertical articulation of the building, Mr. Loeper commented it is more critical for a larger building. A smaller building is not going to be as big an issue. Similarly horizontal articulation for a one or two-story building is not going to be as critical as a taller building. The standards are exactly the same standards from the Mixed Use District. Mr. McGrory emphasized those are the two most important conditions in the whole ordinance.

Mr. Loeper stated Section 4.E. is another critical item dealing with the articulation of roof lines every 50 feet. On buildings with flat roofs, all visibly exposed walls shall have an articulated cornice that projects a minimum of four inches horizontally from the top of the vertical building wall. This section also permits fixed or retractable awnings at street level and on upper levels and screening of roof top mechanical equipment.

With regard to Section 4(F) regarding proportions of walls to openings for street level facades, Mr. Loeper stated the intent here is not to have a blank wall on the street level.

Mr. Loeper discussed Section 4(G) windows and indicated windows could have tinting as long as they met the standard. Smoked, reflective, tinted or black glass in windows at street level is discouraged.

A discussion followed about such related items as the UV blocking action of some of the tinted glass which also saves energy in summer and provides the benefit of sun in winter. Mr. Loeper indicated he would go back and check on this. Some in the group did not want to have tinted or black glass. Others were not sure what the term "black glass" means. Mr. Jenaway said some education on this is needed. Mr. McGrory felt reflective glass on US 202 is going to be a distraction to motorists.

With regard to parking structures, Mr. Loeper said this was geared more toward the Mixed Use District and is not sure it will be a major issue since all this says is if the parking structure is not wrapped at all levels with active uses and visible to public view there is going to be a filtering buffer. Mr. Waks asked if any of Henderson Road would fall in this district, specifically the Henderson and Monroe area. He asked about the possibility of SEPTA one day wanting to build a stop there with a parking garage along the Norristown High Speed Line Extension. He also noted it would still be waivable.

Mr. Loeper mentioned Jaquelin Camp, Chairperson, Planning Commission, brought up the issue of the Route 100 line last night in terms of thinking ahead of design stops and stations and how they are going to interface with everything. She will broach this subject with SEPTA at upcoming meetings, but she wants people to start thinking ahead about this.

With regard to sidewalks, trails, crosswalks, Mr. Loeper stated this was discussed during consideration of the Mixed Use District for using such things as textured pavement for crosswalks and installation of pedestrian crosswalks in parking lots as determined by the Township. Streetscape site amenities along DeKalb Pike would include such things as one bench every 500 feet of linear frontage unless otherwise approved by the Township. Proposed benches are identical to what the BID has proposed for First Avenue.

A discussion followed about the whole issue of streetscape. During the discussion Mr. Loeper indicated the light bulb amenities were not addressed in the proposed ordinance. Mr. Philips stated this should be incorporated in the ordinance as well as landscape vegetation. Mr. Loeper responded technically this would be covered in the landscape portion of the SALDO which would be one street tree every 40 feet.

Mr. Philips asked about the bus stops. Mr. Loeper responded the proposed ordinance mentions bus passenger accommodations in accordance with SEPTA standards. It was pointed out during the discussion that the township does not own bus shelters. Clear Channel maintains the bus shelters and the Transportation Management Association manages them for the township.

Mr. Philips asked who would own the benches and trash receptacles. Mr. Loeper responded these would be owned by the property owner and language is needed requiring them to own and maintain these amenities.

With regard to the bus shelter accommodations, Mr. Philips suggested discussing this further with the BID.

A discussion followed about the use of benches for streetscape. Mr. Waks pointed out the need to distinguish these so people will not mistake them for bus stops.

With regard to landscaping, Mrs. Kenney stated language is needed in the ordinance so that a significant percentage of evergreens is included in the plantings and a smaller percentage of deciduous plantings. Mr. Loeper commented this might be something to bring to the attention of the Shade Tree and Beautification Commission.

Mr. Loeper stated in the section dealing with landscaping there is a generic standard provision for tree pits as well as how they have to be handled with soils.

Mr. Loeper reviewed the Section 5 regarding signs, consolidation of directory signs for one or multiple tenants located within 20 feet of the driveway entrance, and architectural lighting.

Mr. McGrory cautioned on the timing of passing an ordinance as new uses are established on US 202. He said the Board may just want to pass something and come back and refine so that something is in place in order to have some say in what is being built. Mr. McGrory would like to send the ordinance to Mr. Viñas in advance so he knows what he will be asked to agree to with regard to the streetscape.

A discussion was held about the timeline of scheduling the ordinance and US 202 rezoning for the April business meeting.

ADJOURNMENT:

Without further comment from the Board and public, it was moved by Mr. Waks, seconded by Mr. Jenaway, all voting "Aye" to adjourn the zoning workshop meeting. None opposed. Adjournment occurred at 6:13 p.m.

DAVID G. KRAYNIK
SECRETARY-TREASURER/
TOWNSHIP MANAGER

Minutes Approved:
Minutes Entered: