

Upper Merion Township Planning Commission
Regular Meeting on March 27, 2024

The Upper Merion Township Planning Commission met for its regular meeting on March 27th, 2024, in-person in the Board Room, located in the Township Building, and via Zoom. The meeting information was fully advertised and a meeting agenda placed on the township website. The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Matt Popek
Mark McKee
Jaquelin Camp
Kenneth Brown
Martin Trumpler
William Jenaway, Board Liaison
Jarrett Lash, Township Planner

ABSENT:

COMMENTS FROM CHAIRPERSON

Mr. Popek shared that the Chairperson's Breakfast was hosted earlier that week. Mr. Popek remarked that attendees heard a brief presentation on the Comprehensive Plan process as it relates to their Citizen Advisory Board. Mr. Popek also shared about the formation of Friends of the Farmers Market. Supervisor Jenaway added that the Farmers Market will remain at Nor-View Farm and that a permanent pavilion is planned to be installed this year.

500 AMERICAN AVE CONDITIONAL USE APPLICATION

Mr. Lash opened by sharing that the proposed project is to convert an existing office property to a 20-unit residential apartment complex. Mr. Lash shared the conditional use requirements for multifamily buildings in the KPMU as outlined in § 165-160.2. He then turned it over to the applicant.

Mr. Mark D. Damico, Esq., the project's representing attorney, introduced Mr. Dave McManus of Westover Companies and the project architect, Mr. Jeffrey Ivins of Clemente Ivins Architects, LLC. Mr. Damico introduced the project stating that the proposed building for renovation is the current headquarters of the Westover Companies. Mr. McManus said that they would stay in the Township by moving to a currently vacant office space they own in the same complex.

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Mr. Damico went through each condition and outlined how the applicant would be compliant with each. They noted that it was the determination of the Chief Zoning Officer, Mr. Mark Zadroga, that ground floor patios would be considered in the balcony count.

The Planning Commission asked questions pertaining to the placement of the balconies and ground floor patios as it related to accessibility, safety, and privacy. It was noted that the ADA-compliant unit does not have a balcony. The Planning Commission also asked questions relating to the interior layout of the unit and if there were any anticipated challenges in performing this type of renovation.

Mr. Damico noted that there is sufficient parking already present on the site, that there is an expectation of increased sewer flows from this project, and that daily traffic trips will be reduced.

Mr. Popek asked if there was a motion to recommend the conditional use application for 550 American Ave. Mr. McKee made a motion to recommend approval of this applicant's conditional use application for the interior conversion of its office building to 20 residential apartments. This was seconded by Mr. Trumpler. All were in favor.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATION PERMIT

Mr. Lash shared that the Codes Department has created a specific permit for Electric Vehicle Charging Stations (EVCS). The goal of the permit is to replace the need for an electrical, building, or fire safety permit.

Ms. Camp shared that no Level 1 chargers are permanently installed and therefore cannot be permitted. The Planning Commission recommended removing this level of charging station in the permit. Mr. Trumpler raised the point that there was a story of a fire that started from a level 1 charger in a home and suggested that an electrician still look at the outlet to ensure it is capable of the necessary charge.

Mr. Brown brought up the point that there needs to be a differentiation on the permit from the property owner and the owner of the EVCS for commercial instances when they differ.

The Planning Commission appreciated the presentation and the follow-up from previous meetings' discussions.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN HOUSING COMPONENT EXISTING CONDITIONS

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Mr. Lash provided the Planning Commission a presentation of the Comprehensive Plan Housing Component Existing Conditions ahead of the Board of Supervisors Comprehensive Plan discussion that will be taking place the next evening.

Mr. Brown believed that accessory dwelling units could be one area that the Board of Supervisors should consider for additional housing access in the Township. Ms. Camp shared a story of a local home that provided inexpensive housing to a young police officer and suggested this as an example of how it can bring affordable options to the community's workforce. Supervisor Jenaway shared that he does not believe the Board of Supervisors has any major reservations surrounding accessory dwelling units but does maintain concerns about subdividing single family homes into small multifamily properties. Mr. Popek asked why that would be an issue. Supervisor Jenaway shared the issues of parking. Mr. McKee agreed that parking could be an issue with undersized lots in the R-2 District, especially those with shared driveways, as it was with Airbnbs. However, he suggested that the concern would not necessarily be an issue with larger residential lots.

Mr. Popek brought up the fact that our discussions on housing are really discussions on who we want in the community. Mr. Popek noted that we expected to be able to alleviate our growth pressure by building transit-oriented development near the proposed KOP Rail, but since that is off the table, it is incumbent on us to find new solutions.

Ms. Camp noted that many residents complain about traffic, yet they don't want to build the housing that allows for a self-contained workforce. She stated that our exclusionary zoning has pushed individuals at a lower income level outside of the Township boundaries and forced them to drive in, thereby causing traffic.

Mr. McKee asked if we know the developable potential of the KPMU. Mr. Lash shared that the analysis has not been completed for the full redevelopment of the KPMU following the most recent zoning revisions in August 2023.

Ms. Camp suggested looking towards small, denser building types in Moore Park, potentially on the outer roads connecting to Allendale Road.

Mr. Lash recapped the conversation stating that the Planning Commission outlined two main ideas: the permitting of ADUs in the community and looking at Moore Park as the place for continued housing growth.

ADJOURNMENT:

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With no other business to discuss, Mr. Brown moved to adjourn the meeting, with Mr. Trumpler seconding. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 9:44 PM.