



JENKINTOWN BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, March 16th, 2021

6:30pm – 8:00pm

MEETING MINUTES

Attendance

Members Present via Video Conference: Gabriel Lerman – Chairperson, Lucinda Bartley, Alison Danilak, Jon McCandlish, Phil Zimmerman – Secretary

Members Absent: Joe Hentz, Glen Morris

Others Present: George Locke – Borough Manager, Patrick Hitchens – Borough Solicitor, Deborra Sines-Pancoe – Borough Council President, Kieran Farrell, Alexandria Khalil – Borough Council members, Jeff Lustig – Midgard Properties Applicant, Alyson Fritzges, Greg Richardson, Steven Kline – Representing Midgard Properties

Reports/Actions

Meeting Minutes

Meeting minutes from the February 2021 Planning Commission (PC) meeting were approved.

Presentations

Midgard Properties, 821 Homestead Road Conditional Use Presentation

Patrick Hitchens explained the definition of a conditional use pertaining to zoning code and gave the PC an overview of goals pertaining to the applicant's presentation. He explained what the PC's role in reviewing the conditional use application for the project was and clarified that the PC was responsible to then submit an advisory memo of support/non-support to Borough Council (BC) regarding the project. Mr. Hitchens further explained that the PC review is not actually part of the formal public review or hearing, and that that would be the purview of subsequent BC meetings.

Mr. McCandlish asked for clarification of the criteria under which the conditional use application was to be evaluated. Mr. Hitchens clarified that the applicant seeks an apartment building use for their property which is located within the Borough's NCR (Neighborhood Commercial Residential) zoning district. He summarized several conditions that must be met for the proposed use to be considered:

- 20% of first floor is walk in retail or commercial, not dedicated to the apartment use.
- Adherence to building design standards as indicated in applicable zoning code sections.
- General conditions applicable to all conditional uses listed in the zoning code.

Midgaard Properties representative Alyson Fritzges introduced project and summarized the conditional use application. She also conveyed that although the property contained other existing structures that would be rehabbed/converted as part of the project, the proposed 32-unit apartment building was the only component that would be subject to the application.

Project Architect/Planner Steven Kline presented the site plan and gave an overview of the proposal. He reviewed site and existing building demolition plans – one existing building to be removed to construct the proposed apartment building. He reviewed site circulation and parking, stating that site access and egress would remain unchanged and that a total of 69 parking spaces would be provided (3 spots over zoning requirement). Mr. Kline communicated that the new building would be comprised of first floor commercial and ground floor units, with two additional residential levels above. He conveyed that an existing church and adjacent annex building would be renovated into apartment units as part of the project. Mr. Kline stated that all zoning requirements were being met for the project, including pervious area, setbacks, etc. and that no zoning relief will be required.

Project traffic engineer Greg Richardson summarized his review of the project's impact on traffic through the completion of a traffic study, which he stated had been provided for review to the Borough and Borough's traffic engineer. He conveyed that traffic counts had been done at peak traffic hours in mornings and evenings, with volumes adjusted (increased) to account for decreases in commuter traffic due to the pandemic, and shared these percentage increases over observed traffic counts. Mr. Richardson reviewed his observations as part of an intersection study which focused on three primary intersections adjacent to the site. He conveyed that based on traffic projections derived from project's proposed uses, traffic volumes maintain service levels (A rating) at all studied intersections adjacent to the site. He clarified that the study looked at existing conditions at all intersections, and reiterated that the proposal would not incur more dangerous traffic or turning conditions. He did also express the desire of the applicant to work with the Borough to increase pedestrian and traffic safety with low impact measures: signage, etc. Mr. Richardson reiterated that no significant changes/improvements would be made to paving at the intersections. Mr. Richardson continued to further clarify details contained in the traffic study.

Ms. Danilak pointed out that the study and related discussion focused on the just the application for the apartment building and that the PC was being asked to review traffic without considering the project as a whole (including the renovated church buildings). She inquired how traffic would be impacted by the other uses on the site, in addition to the apartments. Ms' Danilak also asked about changes in use of the existing buildings and tenants, and how that might impact traffic, site circulation or parking. Mr. Richardson conveyed that the study did not consider any other uses/tenants other than those currently in place. He speculated that site parking limitations would restrict traffic increases due to future uses.

Mr. Lerman asked what other design options for egress and access had been considered. Mr. Richardson and Mr. Kline explained that physical parameters of the property limit access from York Road. They also conveyed the client's intent to preserve the integrity of the historic buildings and site by limiting impacting due to change in site access.

Mr. Zimmerman and Ms. Danilak noted that the project consisted of a single, 3-story building mass and observed that the building appeared to have its back turn to York, the public sidewalk, etc. They inquired what other site massing schemes were considered. Mr. Kline described the site and project constraints that had contributed to the building's form, and conveyed the applicant's intent to limit the building height although it could have been allowable to be higher.

Mr. McCandlish asked if the Borough engineer had provided a letter of support for the project, and if PHMC had reviewed the proposal because of the removal of the existing building. Mr. Hitchens informed the PC that a review by the Borough engineer and county historical body would not be required at this point, and could be expected during land development review. Mr. McCandlish conveyed the difficulty for the PC in evaluating the project without hearing feedback from these professionals. Mr. Hitchens suggested that these reviews could be conditions for PC recommendation. Mr. Locke confirmed that the study had been provided to the traffic engineer for his comment prior to the BC meeting.

Ms. Bartley pointed out that part of the conditional use requirements state that the project meets Borough design standards, and that it would be difficult for the PC to evaluate the design of the building without conformance to those standards being clearly demonstrated through the applicant's presentation. She noted that no elevations of the building had been included, and that site plan information was insufficient in determining if the project would meet design standard requirements. Several PC members expressed agreement on this point.

Councilperson Farrell noted the tight layout and design, and asked if the applicant would consider building fewer apartments. Ms. Fritzges conveyed that the applicant feels that they are currently building significantly less than what is allowable, and they would not want to change the design further to even fewer apartments.

Councilperson Khalil asked Mr. Richardson how the traffic study addressed children walking to schools or take pedestrians in general into account. Mr. Richardson responded that the study did take pedestrians in to account although numbers were not adjusted for changing patterns due to the pandemic. Ms. Khalil suggested that further, more detailed study of pedestrian children be considered.

Ms. Bartley asked if the building to be demolished on the site is included on the Borough's list of historically significant structures. George confirmed building is not included.

Council president Sines-Pancoe requested that the applicant consider alternate strategies for entering/exiting the property that would utilize York Rd.

Mr. McCandlish inquired if the PC would be limiting their responsibility to make a sound recommendation for approval to BC with only a promise from the applicant to adhere to Borough design standards. He expressed concern for somehow tacitly approving a proposal that would limit the Borough's ability to change or make future comment. The applicant expressed that design standards would be fully reviewed after PC conditional use review and that they felt it within their obligation to address these items at a later time (during land development review). Mr. Hitchens agreed with Mr. McCandlish that there was some nuanced risk in recommending approval and suggested that the applicant provide revised presentation materials addressing design standards to the PC for review in the next meeting.

Ms. Bartley expressed interest in project clarifications that would more clearly address the streetscape and focus on pedestrian experience.

Councilperson Kahlil inquired how the project reflected the Borough's comprehensive plan, and asked if the comp plan recommended expanding apartment uses in the Borough similar to those proposed in the project. The applicant responded that they felt that the project was in line with the guidelines of the Borough's comprehensive plan.

Ms. Fritzges and Mr. Hitchens discussed the applicant providing revised application/presentation materials that would address various concerns discussed with the PC ahead of a recommendation to BC and final BC ruling. Mr. Lerman agreed to provide a summary of PC requests for further clarification in a letter to the applicant.

Public Comment (the following represents a sample and does not include all public comment)

Will Steuber: Indicated that he lives on Vernon Rd. on east side of the site plan. He stated that the project being so close to the adjacent residential properties, screening for parked cars and location of trash will need to be carefully considered.

Steve Spindler: Stated that there needs to be more communication from applicant with adjacent neighbors. He relayed that traffic leaving the site would flow onto Homestead Road which is extremely narrow. A street that is currently already dangerous being used increasing as a cut-through needs to be considered prior to the project.

Casey Ciocca: Identified herself as an adjacent neighbor that see's significant traffic with just the current property tenants and surrounding retail/commercial spaces. She stated that the 15 additional cars described in traffic study doesn't seem to make sense with the proposed added tenants and residents. Comp plan also emphasizes neighborhood preservation, should also be considered. Would approval of 32 units mean granting developer 32 units for this project? Mr. Hitchens: Confirmed that approving conditional use would grant 32 unit.

Mia: Pointed out that an increase in units would be equivalent to added students in the school district. Mr. Kline: Referenced study that indicates 6 school age children per people 100, per Montco planning DBRC. This would amount to just over 5 school age children for the project. Mia reiterated that she feels the referenced study doesn't accurately reflect our community and the possible number of new children entering the school from this project.

Paul Feldman: Identified himself as an adjacent commercial property owner, concerned with current and potential traffic problems. He believes that the application as submitted would be extremely detrimental to the community and should not be recommended by PC for approval.

Joe Imperiale: Inquired if the PC had had the opportunity to fully review the traffic study. The PC responded no. Mr. Imperiale asked if it would be appropriate for a recommendation for approval be conditional to the applicant studying entrance/egress from old York road. Mr. Kline stated that it had not been studied as it would not be desirable from a grading standpoint and considering PennDOT's desire not to increase curb cuts along old York.

Anne Peff: Noted that there is no access to commercial structures from York Road as problematic. She inquired if parking had been properly accounted for: would patrons and employees have enough parking on site, or would they be parking in the adjacent neighborhoods?

Louisa Garedo: Expressed traffic as a concern. Questioned the applicant about other apartments owned within the Borough and how many are 3-bedroom. Mr. Lustig confirmed the numbers of 2 and 3 bedroom units in his properties throughout the Borough: 3 3-bedrooms and 45 2-bedrooms.

Kevin Poirot: Suggested an opportunity to relocate the pedestrian light from the nearby Cherry St. intersection and add a curb cut along off old York and into the property. He indicated that this could make the project a much more desirable property from a development standpoint.

On-Going Business

Temple University Landscape Architecture Program Collaboration

SALDO Review Update

Northern Gateway and TOD Project Coordination

Future Business

Adjournment