

# JENKINTOWN BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## APPROVED Minutes

Planning Commission members in attendance: Shari Neidich, Phil Zimmerman, Peter Van Do, Jon McCandlish, Eric Horowitz, Lucinda Bartley

Also present: George Locke (Borough Manager), Claire Warner (MCPC), Marley Bice (MCPC), Mark Bickerton (borough engineer), Maureen Lucak (EAC) and Council members: Maxine Marlowe, Joanne Bruno, Alexandria Khalil.

Presenters and community members: Vince Celenza, Joan, Ken Mackenzie, Mathew McHugh (attorney for developer), other Zoom participants and observers of a Facebook livestream.

### **Call to Order**

The October 2024 meeting of the Jenkintown Planning Commission was called to order at 6:34 with a motion and a second. JM (PZ). Along with Planning Commission members Marley Bice and Claire Warner from the Montgomery County Planning Commission were present as well as the Borough Engineer Mark Brickerton.

### **Public Comment**

The agenda included a public comment session. No comments were received on Zoom or Facebook. After confirming no public comments, the group moved to approve the September meeting minutes, which had been distributed earlier. A motion was made and seconded JM (PVD) to approve the minutes, and no dissent was noted. The minutes will be posted on the Borough website. This evening's meeting is primarily about the presentation regarding 459-471 York Road, identified as Hellweg's Funeral home.

### **New Business / Business for Discussion**

The meeting then moved on to the conditional use application for 459-471 York Road, presented Vince Celenza and his team with attorney Matthew McHugh. They provided an overview of the project's history, highlighting revisions made since their last presentation, including a reduction in proposed units from the high 50's to 48 and then to 40 and to include commercial and retail. They eliminated certain variances and aimed for compliance with zoning requirements. The team is seeking feedback from the Planning Commission before proceeding to Borough Council.

The applicants presented renderings of the apartment building at 459-471 York Road, detailing the layout and design. The building will feature a retail area on the ground floor

and three residential floors above, comprising 40 units—a mix of studios, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units. The entrance will be at the corner of Johnson and York, with 8 foot wide compliant sidewalk along Cherry Street.

The residential portion will not span the entire width of the property, allowing for a 6,000 square foot amenity area above the parking structure. They proposed 48 covered parking spaces to meet the needs of both residential and commercial tenants.

The attorney emphasized that the project aligns with zoning requirements, having exceeded the necessary retail space on the ground floor. They opened the floor for questions from the Planning Commission and the audience.

JM sought clarification on the difference between a settlement stipulation and a variance, expressing concerns about previously proposed variances for the project. The attorney explained that many variances were either eliminated or reduced during the project revision process, resulting in an agreement with the borough on the necessary zoning relief, now mostly settled. They confirmed that the project is designed by right, with only the conditional use aspect pending. The commission chair encouraged members and attendees to ask questions.

The attorney confirmed that they would provide the presentation slides for inclusion in the records. Questions followed regarding the overall layout, including public amenities and the relationship between building and open spaces.

Discussion highlighted a pedestrian crosswalk on York Road and the building's corner entrance. The attorney explained that while the main entrance for residents must be at the corner, commercial access could vary based on tenant needs.

Concerns about signage for retail visibility were addressed, noting that it would depend on the tenant configuration. The parking arrangement for tenants was clarified, with 48 covered spaces available for both residential and commercial use. The sidewalk along Cherry Street has been increased to eight feet to comply with zoning requirements, addressing previous stakeholder concerns. The discussion continued with inquiries about on-street parking on Cherry Street, which will remain unchanged. The parking entrance for the building will be off Johnson Street.

Questions about the small pocket park at the corner of Cherry and Johnson were raised, with the applicant affirming plans to include park benches and landscaping to enhance public space. Further inquiries regarding the planting of trees along the sidewalks were discussed, with the applicant expressing willingness to explore options for adding greenery while considering space constraints.

Concerns about traffic flow and signage for retail parking were also addressed. The applicant noted that while traffic studies would determine the need for traffic signals, they were not currently anticipating a need at the intersection of Johnson or York

Roads. Directional signage for parking would be considered based on the final mix of tenants and their usage patterns. A traffic study is planned to assess the impact of the development, which includes 48 residential units.

Overall, the focus remained on enhancing pedestrian accessibility and ensuring clear traffic flow in and around the project area.

Discussion shifted to potential road widening, with no plans for changes at this time. The project features four stories around the building, with the fourth floor set back to reduce height perception.

Concerns about the parking access on Johnson Street were addressed, confirming it would remain as one entry/exit point, approximately 18 feet wide. The applicant indicated that there are no current plans for parking restrictions, but property management would monitor usage.

Inquiries about unit sizes revealed that dens will not function as second bedrooms due to window requirements. The expected rental rates aim for a luxury market.

Suggestions for greenery along York Road were discussed, with the applicant open to exploring options for enhancing the pedestrian experience.

Lastly, the interaction between the new building and the existing structure to the north was clarified, with dedicated parking and a loading area provided for the neighboring building. There was also a suggestion to stripe additional parking along Johnson Street, which the applicant was willing to consider. Overall, the updates reflect a more refined design that addresses previous concerns.

Other discussion revolved around a proposed corner park that could enhance the site's appeal and addressing stormwater management through underground systems. There was a suggestion for pervious paving and a large shade tree to improve aesthetics.

The conditional use being considered pertains to an apartment building with requirements for 20% retail space, aiming for compliance with zoning ordinances. Questions about access to commercial areas and the building's entrance were raised, affirming it meets the ordinance's design requirements. Planning Commission members expressed support for the project, highlighting its alignment with the community's development goals and emphasizing the importance of creating visually appealing green spaces.

The discussion emphasized the need for retail businesses that serve the community, promoting pedestrian circulation through thoughtful design and landscaping. A motion was made to support the conditional use for residential development in line with the 2035 comprehensive plan JM(EH). After a series of affirmations from planning commissioners, a unanimous vote was reached in favor of the motion to recommend approval to the Borough Council. JM would write a letter to the Council. JM specified

some recommendations reviewed tonight for inclusion in the letter. Some recommendations in discussion were: Keeping in line with the 2035 Comprehensive Plan; Have fewer, higher quality facade materials deployed equally on all elevations; The PC likes the efforts to add retail on York Road and would suggest a way to get people past the building not just to the building; Suggest a name more reflective to Jenkintown than “the Flats” which is the name of another development; Equal treatment to all 4 facades; If there is a possibility of adding street trees on Cherry St and York Road to do so; Continue unitized paving on York road that encompasses walkability; Make the long stretches of garage appealing; Top off the building which is setback by capping it where it meets the sky; Find a way to beautify the pocket park and amenity space so people living across the street can appreciate it and make it verdant.

The group expressed appreciation for the collaboration with the developer and looks forward to ongoing discussions regarding land development. Handouts were not available, and the following are some screen images presented at the meeting.



### 5 year Review of Accomplishments from the 2019 Comprehensive Plan

The next order of business focused on an audit of the 2035 Comprehensive Plan, led by Marley and Claire. They proposed creating a public-facing brochure in the same format as the 2035 executive summary to highlight successful projects and strategies. The brochure would summarize key themes and showcase neighborhood preservation such

as community greening and building projects; economic development successes, and sustainability efforts.

Key highlights included:

1. **Neighborhood Preservation:** There has been a lot of community greening and building projects. Projects like the Washington Avenue and York Road Gateway, the Cedar Street Moriarty Park, and the Pollinator Gardens such as the Vernon and Vista traffic circle pollinator garden, the town square planter, the horse trough by the train station, the four planters by borough hall were examples of successful community greening initiatives.

The Comp Plan encouraged using the large right of ways with decreasing paved areas and making sure landscaped areas are meeting their most environmental benefit potential. Marley and Claire asked the PC how they feel about these things and other suggestions.

2. **Economic Development:** The team noted the rise of vibrant businesses in the area, including unique shops and outdoor dining options that emerged during COVID-19. New businesses like the Keep Easy, Capricorn Bookstore with its bookstore crawl, the Human Robot, King's Corner with karaoke and open mic nights, The Jenkintown Market, White Horse Café, Carminati Creamery, the upcoming Giant Grocery store grand opening, Smoothie King, Take Five Oil Change, etc. MB and CW highlighted community events, summer concerts, and sesquicentennial celebrations. There has been an effort at adaptive reuse of older buildings, emphasizing the importance of engaging businesses that actively use both front and back spaces. The conversation touched on various community-led initiatives and the positive impacts of local businesses. Dr. and Mrs. Tollin did the mural in the parking lot at 435 Johnson Street. Members discussed the need for visual documentation of these projects to effectively communicate successes. Overall, the discussion emphasized the positive progress made since the comprehensive plan was adopted, and there was a consensus on the importance of fostering a vibrant business community and maintaining sustainable practices.

3. **Sustainability:** The discussion focused on celebrating recent accomplishments in sustainability, stormwater management, and community initiatives, as well as planning for future improvements. The addition of electric vehicle charging stations and updates to the SALDO for improved landscaping standards were mentioned as part of ongoing sustainability efforts. Marley and Claire highlighted various projects, including birding workshops, storm drain labeling, and rain gardens. The borough has successfully implemented stormwater management strategies, secured grants for recycling, and organized sustainability fairs and cleanup events. The adoption of stricter stormwater ordinances was also noted. There is a sustainability fair each year for the past three years. There is the block-to-block cleanup every year. There has been an investment in storm water management through partnerships with businesses or with stormwater ordinances which are very stringent for any new development. The borough got a recycling grant with consistent recycling totes. There have been successful 902

and 904 Recycling Grants. Outside borough hall we recycle string lights, single use plastic and there is other sustainability within the borough including with the school district too who should get kudos as well. There are the rain gardens and there is another one being built at Washington and York which has been dug out but not planted yet. There is also the one at the current Take 5 Oil Change parking area.

4. **Transportation Improvements** include updates, initiatives and discussions on traffic calming measures and pedestrian access improvements. These have included new crossings and sidewalk enhancements to support walkability. There was a 2040 MONTCO grant awarded which was a major accomplishment for traffic calming and walkability on York Road. The school zone was expanded to make it safer to walk to the Jenkintown School. The south end was updated to strengthen the sidewalk crosswalk and streetscapes standards. There was a CDBG grant for ADA curb ramps and there is one currently on the east side of town for 24 ramps. There has been some creativity in some areas such as coordinating with PennDOT to get some improvements. There have been signage initiatives to the new grocery store with a new crossing at Washington Lane between Walnut and Cedar Streets at mid-block; and getting a signal to help with that. There is also a new bus shelter planned at the grocery store.

For the layout of the back cover, they could highlight the Jenkintown 150th anniversary and awards or other rankings to highlight. Jenkintown was awarded number four in one of the top 10 best places to live in the county. It ranked #20 for all of Pennsylvania. The school got a Green Apple Award and also ranked #20 in Pennsylvania. The school's website would show more specifically including its sustainability efforts.

For Future Priorities the group considered the importance of balancing the celebration of past achievements with a focus on future priorities. Discussions included potential upcoming projects and how to best highlight both accomplishments and ongoing goals in the upcoming brochure. There are also items which were not implemented. There are some things which seem insurmountable and others which are easy to realize and some which no longer make sense or no longer a priority. There is the reinstalment of the GE sign which doesn't fit in one of the four categories but was very inspirational to see. Peter suggested including some stats to support the data including to highlight the walkability score and bike and transportation scores.

Overall, the meeting fostered a collaborative spirit, emphasizing the borough's progress and the importance of continued community involvement.

### **Ongoing Business**

- Approved plant list

GL will have something to share next month. JM asked if the planning commission may review it ahead of that meeting.

- Bike and Pedestrian Safety (Sub-Committee update)

The bike and pedestrian safety subcommittee is poised to review insights from a recent traffic calming seminar.

- Greenwood Avenue (Former Cedar Street/Glanzmann) Properties – Borough Parking Lot Rentals, Future Land Use Discussion

The status of the Cedar Street garage was also addressed; materials had been sent to the borough council for review, and the planning commission is currently waiting for further direction on next steps. It seems there's ongoing discussion about the Cedar Street garage and the need for a solid business plan to move forward. There's interest from developers, but nothing concrete yet. The zoning issues regarding row homes were highlighted. Manager Locke plans to review the zoning regulations to clarify these points.

- Short Term Rentals (Under Solicitor's Review)

Joanne mentioned that she and George received a draft of the short-term rental ordinance but needed time to review it before sharing it with the planning commission

- Zoning Review Update (Various House Keeping / Language Corrections) Ongoing, no report this month.
- Chapter 181 Zoning – Article XIV Off-Street Parking and Loading (Tabled – ongoing discussion) No report this month.

### **Other Business**

Peter shared updates about getting local parking lots listed on Google and Apple Maps, which was a positive step toward improving community public parking access. Overall, there was a sense of collaboration and hope for future developments.

### **Adjournment**

A motion was made to adjourn JM(EH). Passed with no opposition at 8:36.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric Horowitz