

JENKINTOWN BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday November 19th, 2024 - 6:30 p.m.

Virtual ZOOM Meeting

APPROVED Minutes

Commission members present: Jon McCandlish, Lucinda Bartley, Peter Van Do, Shari Marlowe Neidich, Eric Horowitz, Phil Zimmerman

Others present: George Locke (borough Manager, and chief zoning officer), Claire Warner (MCPC), Jeffrey Parkins, Max Mercado MD, Alexandria Khalil, Maureen Lucak (EAC), Steve Spindler, Maxine Marlowe, other attendees on Zoom, and broadcast live on Facebook

Above attendees may be referred to by initial in the summary below:

Call to Order / Public Comment

At the November 2024 meeting of the Jenkintown Planning Commission, the meeting began with a call to order, JM(EH) followed by a request for public comments. No public comments were made.

Reports/Actions

- P.C. Meeting Minutes Approval – P.C. Secretary, Eric Horowitz

The commission moved on to the approval of the minutes from the August and October 2024 meetings. A motion was made to approve them JM(EH). The motion was seconded and passed unanimously, with no objections.

JM prepared a letter approved by members of the planning commission making a recommendation to the Jenkintown Borough Council in support of 459/471 York Road (Appendix "B")

New Business / Business for Discussion

- Issuance of DEP Planning Module Component 4A – 604 West Avenue

The first item of new business was the issuance of a DEP planning module for a property at 604 West Avenue. (property at the intersection of West and Cedar). George explained that the applicant was required to go through the DEP planning module process because the project would generate more than 500 gallons of wastewater daily. The planning commission had previously approved the project through conditional use and land use applications, and this was merely a procedural matter. The chair would sign off on the DEP form confirming the project's compliance. Dr. Mercado, the property owner, and his realtor, Jeffrey Parkins, were present at the meeting. Mr. Parkins updated the commission on the project's timeline, explaining that it had been in progress for four years, awaiting this final approval before moving forward with architectural design and construction. No action was required from the planning

commission at this stage, as the project had already been approved. The commission members expressed their support and wished the project well.

- Zoning Review Update (Various House Keeping / Language Corrections)

George said this topic was a response to a question from Eric where he wrote in an email some discrepancies in zoning wording. George said he also has noticed other things in the zoning. In a recent example, George said there was an issue related to signage, specifically regarding "channel lettering." The current zoning code includes an image of standard channel lettering in the definition section, which leads some people to think it is permissible. However, the code section also states no signs can be backlit with a translucent face. Some think there is confusing language about channel lettering and halo lit or reverse lit signs. This contradiction has led to several requests for variances from sign companies. George highlighted the need for clarity in the zoning code to avoid these issues to more streamline the approval process for signs. As a partial response Claire offered the MCPC Model Sign Code [link](#).

www.montgomerycountypa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7070/Model-Sign-OrdinanceFINAL04292014?bidId=

Eric shared several zoning-related concerns he observed. He pointed out that, despite having 18 townhouses and many twin homes inside the Town Center District, residential use is technically not permitted unless it is multi-family. He said the Town Center has 22% of all the townhomes in Jenkintown. Eric also noted the existence of a traditional residential overlay district that doesn't apply to those residential properties either.

He said the zoning code's requirement that townhouses have a 26-foot frontage in residential districts is also unrealistic. He said there might also be a conflict with the townhouse residential "build to line" and minimum front yard depth. He said he thinks the back of the front yard should match up with the build-to line. By this interpretation it is not clear if it is 15 feet or 26 feet.

The discussion shifted toward concerns regarding the zoning map, particularly regarding inconsistencies between zoning districts and actual land use. The example described was for residential properties in areas like the 300 block of Cedar Street or parts of Leedom Street which are zoned as part of the town center district, even though they don't fit the town center's commercial focus. He pointed out a multi-story parking lot on the 100 block of Greenwood Ave which is accessory to an office building that is zoned residential. Eric emphasized that these discrepancies could potentially be resolved by revisiting the zoning map to align it with the town's actual land use and long-term goals.

Jon suggested rather than diving into detailed, granular issues in moving forward to start with small steps, with the goal of cleaning up the zoning code. He asked for input on a process for annotating the areas of the zoning code that need revision, prioritizing issues that could either restrict development or unintentionally allow undesirable outcomes. He emphasized the importance of not closing doors unnecessarily on potential developments, suggesting that zoning codes should be flexible enough to accommodate growth while preserving the character of Jenkintown.

George explained that certain districts, particularly in the town center, had been designed in the past to limit specific types of development, such as townhouses. He pointed out that zoning regulations were crafted with the intent to preserve the borough's character and ensure compatible land uses, and any deviations from the zoning code would require a variance. He noted that this approach was meant to maintain control over the types of buildings that could be constructed, especially in areas where the community's vision was clear.

The conversation turned to the possibility of revising zoning regulations to allow for more flexibility in the types of buildings permitted, particularly townhouses. One council member shared their perspective that townhouses could be a beautiful addition to the borough, especially in areas like Greenwood Avenue, which had a mix of residential and commercial properties. They argued that some of the borough's restrictions might unnecessarily limit the potential for desirable development.

Claire from the Montgomery County Planning Commission offered to check with Marley to see if any individuals involved in the original ordinance are still available to provide insight. This would help clarify the intent behind earlier zoning decisions. George mentioned the names of some participants from the 2010 zoning revision who could be contacted.

Further discussions include a comparison of Jenkintown with nearby Wyndmoor, where Alex described new townhomes integrated into a town center setting with garages at the rear.

Maxine offered thoughts on the parking lot near the Verizon building where there could be deeded shared parking as permitted by the code with possibly some townhouses across the street.

In conclusion Jon expressed this as a topic for the Planning Commission to take on, although it is a big topic. He suggests taking it in small pieces. He thinks we can start just by looking at some of the discrepancies discussed or areas where the code could be improved to support the goals of a long range plan. Locations he said to consider would be the old Glanzmann lots, the 300 block of Cedar Street and the 400 block of Leedom Street.

- **Approved Plant List**

George suggested that further discussion be deferred to the next meeting. This topic was not immediately pursued, and it was agreed that it would be revisited at a future date.

Ongoing Business

- Jenkintown 2035 Comprehensive Plan Implementation Audit – MC Planner

The next significant agenda item focused on the **2035 Comprehensive Plan Implementation Audit**. The plan is still under development, with ongoing work on a presentation that was shared by Marley and Claire in the previous meeting. The group is actively reviewing the plan and will likely provide an update at the next Commission meeting. There was a request for any relevant pictures, especially those related to projects near the town square, Borough Hall, and Greenwood Avenue, to be submitted for inclusion in the presentation. Claire volunteered to share her contact information to facilitate the submission of photos.

- 459/471 York Road LLC – Conditional Use (Apartment Building) (Letter issued)

George reported that the conditional use permit is currently before the council, and no further updates were provided during the meeting.

- Bike and Pedestrian Safety (Sub-Committee update)

The sub-committee did not meet due to limiting schedules of members. Jon raised concerns about a vacancy on the Bike & Pedestrian Safety Subcommittee and the possibility of expanding the Planning Commission. It was clarified that the Planning Commission had not opposed expanding its size but had not had a robust discussion about it. The Commission was open to the idea, especially if more qualified candidates were available. George offered to communicate this stance to the relevant parties.

The **Holiday Light Ride**, a bicycle event scheduled for Saturday, December 21st, at 4:30 was mentioned. This ride, which starts and ends at the Town Square, had been well-attended in previous years, and the organizers are hoping for more participants this year.

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

George provided an update regarding the **Greenwood Avenue properties**. The Borough had entered into a lease agreement for parking lots, and Lindy had requested an extension of the lease beyond the Arts Fest. The lease will now be extended short-term while the parties work on further arrangements.

- Short Term Rentals (Under Solicitor's Review)

The issue of **short-term rentals** is still under the Solicitor's review. George mentioned that Councilor Bruno had discussed this in committee, and it had been sent to the solicitor for further examination. However, no votes have been scheduled yet, and it remains a work-in-progress.

- Chapter 181 Zoning – Article XIV Off-Street Parking and Loading (Code Review and Discussion)

The Planning Commission was asked to review changes to **Chapter 181, Article 14**, concerning **off-street parking and loading** requirements. The Commission had received variance requests for parking and acknowledged that this matter intersects with broader parking management. However, no formal action or decisions were made during the meeting.

- 181-141 Off-Premises Signs Ordinance (Tabled – ongoing discussion)

Additionally, the **Off-Premises Signs Ordinance (Chapter 181, Article 14)** has been tabled for some time, with no further updates or decisions made.

Other Business

New Developments and Grants

A discussion followed about the **Starbucks** location at 610 York Road. George shared that the project is moving forward with some engineering work underway for a new sewer line. It was also mentioned that another Starbucks will be located inside the Giant, a development that many of the members seemed to appreciate.

A new **coffee shop** is also planned for another property at 501 Washington Lane, indicating a positive trend in ground-floor retail development. This is seen as a good strategy for activating storefronts and drawing businesses to the community.

George also reported a **new addition** being designed for the Loving Care Cleaners, which is looking to expand by 800 square feet. He expressed support for helping the business sustain itself, especially given the challenges the dry-cleaning industry faced during COVID-19.

Playground Renovations

An important update was provided regarding the **school playground renovation** project. A member from the school board reached out for help in securing land survey services, possibly through the county or via pro bono options. The Planning Commission was asked to consider if there might be any resources available for this purpose. Claire (MCPC) agreed to look into whether any county resources or services could assist the school in this matter. It was noted that the Commission had already offered support and that communication channels would remain open.

Grant Updates

George reported on several significant grants secured by the Borough:

- **\$200,000** for ADA ramps,
- **\$800,000** DCED grant for municipal building improvements,
- **\$60,000** grant for a school zone project,
- **\$60,000** for a traffic safety Green Light Go project,

- **\$90,000** for a police vehicle, which includes a plow and emergency management equipment,
- **\$200,000** for the police,
- **\$48,000** for the school zone extension from MONTCO
- **\$200,000** from CDBG for curb ramps
- **\$30,000** for a recycling program.
- A grant for recycling totes
- Additionally, the school district has secured a **\$1 million** grant from the Commonwealth for facilities and infrastructure improvements, including updates to the HVAC system and the gymnasium at the elementary school. This is part of a broader effort to modernize school infrastructure.

In total, George estimated that the Borough has received over **\$3-4 million** in grants for various infrastructure and community improvements, a notable achievement for the borough.

Additional Developments

George was asked if he was aware of any movement on the Starbucks at 610 York Road. He said there was an attorney working on a lease with Starbucks. He also said there is a sewer line which runs down Spring Avenue and that Abington did not want the Starbucks to tie into it. The engineering solution to this was to put a force main in and pump the wastewater uphill to Madeira to drop it in a manhole at Madeira and York Roads. Then it will go into a metering station and from there it will gravity flow back downhill. He said Carol Engineering has been designing beams to support the site excavation for the force main and lift station. Public works was also out last week popping manholes to take flow measurements and doing a design for it.

Adjournment

The members expressed their appreciation for the work done so far by borough personnel and volunteers, and the meeting adjourned with a note of goodwill. The next Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for **December 17th**, and the JBPC wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Appendix “A”

The following are links presented by participants in the Zoom chat area during the meeting:

Here is the link to the MCPC model sign ordinance:

[montgomerycountypa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7070/Model-Sign-Ordinance FINAL 04 29 2014?bidId=](http://montgomerycountypa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7070/Model-Sign-Ordinance_FINAL_04_29_2014?bidId=)

Future land use plan: https://jenkintownboro.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/3_Land-Use-Plan.pdf

ARC GIS data: <https://data-montcopa.opendata.arcgis.com/>

Appendix "B"



MEMORANDUM

TO: Jenkintown Borough Council
George Locke, Borough Manager

FROM: Jenkintown Borough Planning Commission

DATE: 18 November 2024

RE: 459/471 York Road – Conditional Use

To whom it may concern,

The Jenkintown Borough Planning Commission (PC) met at our regularly scheduled public monthly meeting on 15 October 2024. During this meeting, the PC reviewed a proposed Conditional Use application under consideration for a new mixed-use development comprised of 48 one- and two-bedroom dwelling units and ground floor retail fronting onto York Road. A prior version of the project had previously been before the Planning Commission with no street-fronting commercial presence. At that time, the PC declined to support the application. The redesigned project was presented to the Planning Commission as by-right, requiring no further zoning relief to address matters such as height, parking, property-line setbacks, etc.

Mixed-use development in the Borough's Neighborhood Commercial Residential district is essential to Jenkintown's Long-Range plan. As stated in [Section 181-48 of the Borough's Zoning Code](#), development within the Neighborhood Commercial Residential district should encourage mixed-use development that encompasses commercial, office and residential uses in conformance with the Borough's economic development goals and the following objectives:

- *Encourage economic development opportunities along specific portions of York Road which will act as buffers between the more intense auto-oriented uses of the Gateway Commercial District and the smaller pedestrian-friendly areas of the Town Center District.*
- *Provide opportunities for new residential development that enhances the York Road streetscape and is supportive of the Borough's commercial development.*
- *Maintain and enhance the existing community character of Jenkintown Borough.*
- *Encourage pedestrian connections within and between properties in the District and throughout the Borough.*
- *Improve the York Road streetscape by requiring that parking be contained in a parking structure or consolidated among uses to the rear/side of the properties.*
- *Provide design standards that ensure new buildings, additions and renovations are consistent with and enhance the surrounding streetscape.*

- *Assure suitable design to protect the character and property values of adjacent and nearby neighborhoods.*
- *Encourage commercial development that enhances the Borough's downtown core from an architectural and design standpoint.*

The proposed development at 459/471 York Road meets some of these objectives by providing a mixed-use primarily residential building with ground-level commercial space that fronts York Road. As such, the Conditional Use request under review is solely for the purpose of allowing apartments, a use which is specifically provisioned for in the zoning code and 2035 Long Range Plan.

At our 15 October 2024 public meeting, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend approval of the Conditional Use request for 459/471 York Road.

But while the proposed project is, *prima facie*, exactly the kind of development envisioned for this location in the Borough's 2035 Long Range Plan, the devil will be in the details in terms of its overall success in meeting all of the above objectives, particularly those related to improving the streetscape and enhancing the existing community character of Jenkintown Borough. With that said, the Planning Commission would like to encourage Borough Council to work with the applicant to provide for the following provisions.

Strongly encourage storefront entrances from York Road. The applicant was unwilling to commit to the location of entrances for ground-level commercial. The Planning Commission strongly encourages storefronts that open directly to York Road to help foster an attractive ground-level streetscape in keeping with the Borough's historic commercial fabric. We want to encourage more activation of the York Road streetscape, not less. The Planning Commission's support for the project is conditional on this factor.

Ensure an enhanced streetscape for neighbors and pedestrians on Johnson and Cherry Streets. Similarly, the project involves long stretches of ground-level garage on Cherry and Johnson Streets. The Planning Commission would like to encourage ways to make these stretches more appealing for residents and pedestrians. The applicant mentioned a screen – what is this screen? Is there an opportunity for something engaging and visually interesting rather than simply a long stretch of views into a parking garage?

Provide for a consistent streetscape with the Borough's Town Center district. Carrying this theme of neighbor and pedestrian experience forward, the Planning Commission further strongly encourages the following improvements to the streetscape:

- Carry the Borough's Town Center paving and streetscape design to the frontage at 459/471 York Road, including in-grade street trees.
- Encourage in-grade street trees on Cherry Street and Johnson Street.

Meet and exceed the Borough's modest design standard requirements. The Planning Commission encourages the applicant to utilize a high-quality palette of materials that is equally applied to all facades of the building. Furthermore, the Borough's design standards state the following regarding quality and historic character of façade materials: "New infill development shall generally employ building types that are compatible to the historic architecture of the area in their massing and external treatment."

Recent projects in the Borough have not always lived up to this standard and it is up to all of us to hold applicants accountable for ensuring that proposals are up to the Borough's design standards and public meeting discourse. The Planning Commission encourages all members of Borough Council to review [Section 181-54 Design Standards of Neighborhood Residential Commercial District](#) and to use these requirements

to demand a higher level of quality in the built environment in Jenkintown, so that new buildings are as beloved by future generations as the Borough's historic structures are by residents today.

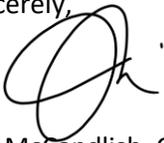
To expand on this further, historic larger buildings in Jenkintown tend to be a single high-quality façade material, typically masonry, that is applied equally on all elevations. Think of the Center Building (215 York), Jenkintown Bank and Trust (400 York), the original Strawbridge & Clothier Building (610 York), or the Borough's many stately houses of worship that front York Road. These are large buildings with refined and elevated material approaches that are variably applied to the entire building, with ornamentation and depth at windows and entrances and a roofline that meets the sky with articulation via cornice, mansard roof, crenelation, or other architecturally appropriate resolution. Another less lofty example is Greenwood Terrace, an older modest apartment building in the Borough's Residential District that employs a single material approach (brick masonry) and an articulated cornice to blend into its environment and reflect the Borough's architectural and material fabric.

The 'historic collage' approach that is a signature of recent development proposals before the PC bear no actual resemblance to historic structures in Jenkintown and reflects more of a Value Engineering-driven approach toward design than one in keeping with the tradition of construction in the Borough's historic center. Furthermore, the Planning Commission often sees palettes through renderings that change over the course of construction, sometimes drastically, as has been the case with 821 Homestead Road.

As this proposal makes its way through Land Use, we would encourage everyone in the chain of review – Planning Commission, Design Review Board, Borough Council, etc. – to hold the applicant to a standard in line with the historic built environment in Jenkintown. Higher quality design and materials will lead to more durable, beloved, longer-lasting structures. This, in turn, creates a more sustainable and economically resilient built environment for the future. To the applicant, we would offer the above guidance and reference buildings as inspiration for your ongoing work in developing the design of this new addition to Jenkintown's historic commercial corridor.

The Planning Commission provides feedback based on an application's suitability and compatibility with the Borough's long-range plan. As such, Planning Commission review is not intended to be comprehensive, and presumes the proposed design meets all applicable codes and standards pertaining to building, fire, health, safety, and accessibility.

Sincerely,



Jon McCandlish, Chair

Jenkintown Borough Planning Commission

COPY: Jenkintown Borough Planning Commission

Lucinda Bartley

Eric Horowitz, Secretary

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Peter Van Do

Phil Zimmerman