

MINUTES OF MEETING
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
May 5, 2009

The Springfield Township Planning Commission (PC) held its semi-monthly meeting on the date noted above.

Chairman Bob Gutowski called the meeting to order at 7PM, present were Angela Murray, George McDowell, Amanda Helwig, Joe Gerber, Mary Holland, David Sands, James Mascaro and Joseph Devine

Commissioner Doug Heller and Rob Dunlop the Staff Liaison represented the Township and Jean Holland represented the Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) this evening.

Minutes

Minutes of the April 21st, 2009 meeting were read. Changes were made to the language under the Commissioner's Update by Commissioner Doug Heller. A motion to approve the amended minutes was made by Joe Gerber, seconded by Angela Murray and approved unanimously.

Board of Commissioner Update

D. Heller

Com. Heller updated the Commission on some upcoming Zoning Hearing Board appearances. At 39 Springfield Ave. the applicant is seeking off street parking relief and a reduction of lot width from 105' to 100'. Also, Joe Halligan, Halligan's Pub, 1619 Bethlehem Pike, Flourtown will be coming before the ZHB seeking a variance for parking spaces due to the proposed addition of an 800 SqFt patio to be for the use of outdoor dining for smokers.

Old Business

Chairman Bob Gutowski gave a summary to the PC as to the status of the current review of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. It is agreed that the Ordinance shall set forth the structure for the creation of the Historic Commission and for the need to hire an expert to compile an Inventory in line with the goals and purpose of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. The PC hopes to complete the revision of the Ordinance at their next scheduled meeting so a draft can be forwarded to Michel LeFevre for his review. The second PC Meeting in June will be dedicated as a workshop session, introducing the Historic Preservation Ordinance to the BOC, Public, and local preservation groups and Historical Society for their input.

New Business

Attending the PC Meeting were Ross Weiss with Cozen O'Connor representing the Squire Ridge Development /Tecee Tract. Kristy Madden substituting for Christen Pionzio of Hamburg, Rubin etal representing the Boorse Tract. Both applicants are seeking changes to the current Zoning of the parcels from Age Restricted Zoning to Age Targeted Zoning. This relief will make both developments more economically feasible.

Ross Weiss expounded upon the change in current market conditions that have created a hardship for developers of Age Restricted 55+ communities. The current zoning for the Tecee Tract, AAA AQ1, is designed for narrower streets, no playgrounds, deed restrictions on the exterior of the properties, master bedrooms on the first floors, and other non family friendly amenities. Because of the type of properties, he feels that these homes will only be attractive to the same Buyers as would normally purchase in a 55+ community and that the number of potential families with children that may purchase one of these homes is limited. Their Development has been fully approved and is signed off on by PennDot, PA DEP and Philadelphia Sewer. They would like to break ground in the fall. The homes are targeted to empty nesters. This is the only property in Springfield Township with this type of zoning. Mr. Weiss emphasized that now more than ever the density of the development is critical due to the economy and that modifications cannot be made, and it should be noted that the units work out to be approximately one per acre.

Public Comment

Brennan Preine
265 Northwestern Ave
Philadelphia, PA. 19128

Made comment that he is neither for nor against the development at this time, and indeed thought it would have been developed by now. He asked the PC to be open minded and listen and to make note of all possible outcomes for their decisions and setting precedents.

Elizabeth Flamm
249 Northwestern Ave
Philadelphia, PA. 19128

Requested the PC clarify what had been codified. Chairman Gutowski explained that the Ordinance as it stands outlines the restrictions that make the property desirable to 55+ residents and discourages families with children due to the restrictions of the Ordinance. Commission Heller further relayed that the current zoning, AAA AQ, allows for 80% age restricted and the remaining 20% maybe be age target. Further, under the current zoning, Children under the age of 18 may only reside in the property for 3 months or less. If the zoning were overturned to Age Targeted, that restriction would be removed.

Gary Bromberg
273 Northwestern Ave
Philadelphia, PA. 19128

Expressed concern that the layout of the properties could be modified to include a third bedroom on the second floor and that this would be attractive to other buyers outside the Age Targeted buyer pool and that there should be a restriction on bedroom numbers.

Commissioner Heller requested the opinions of the individual PC Members;

Jim Mascaro: Expressed concern over the Bulk and Area of the homes, as well as their height and width be considered.

Mary Holland: Felt that the change in zoning from Age Restricted to Age Qualified does not address the underlying issue about the market conditions. People in the community want diversity. By opening up to age range it will not necessarily allow for more buyers, and does not contribute to the vitality of the community, and does not feel this design is the right design or use of the property.

Angela Murray: Is not a big proponent of Age Restricted Developments in general. Feels that public comment is needed on the topic and then modification if necessary.

George McDowell: Not necessarily ready to comment on the proposed change in the zoning. Feels that the proposed change in zoning should be honed down to something we feel comfortable about before advertising it to the public.

David Sands: Made note that he was not in favor of the Age Qualified Zoning change from the beginning, even with the benefits highlighted i.e. less traffic and no burden on the school district. However he is in even less favor of changing the Zoning to Age Targeted. He would rather investigate changing it back to AAA.

Joe Devine: Felt he was at a disadvantage being new on the PC and not privy to prior discussions on the tracts. However, he is open to the possibility of opening up the Age Qualified to Age Targeted, but still feels it will not change the developers challenge is marketing these homes.

Joe Gerber: Did not want to comment on the project. Felt that the property has gone through too many changes and that AAA would still be the best use of the property for the community.

Amanda Helwig: Expressed that no one can predict the future of the real estate market. That Age Restricted zoning offers a diversity of Zoning to the Township and as a community we should not be changing zoning at the whims of the economy. Also agreed with Mary Holland that just by removing the age restriction it will not necessarily increase marketability or sales of the homes since they are still targeting the same group. Is not in favor of changing the zoning again.

Jean Holland: As a representative of Montgomery County only wanted to advise the PC that they should look back and see if this zoning still achieves the goals of the municipality and the community. That they may want to look back and reconsider AAA Zoning.

Bob Gutowski: Made comment that he was never in favor of Age Restricted zoning and looking back still feels strongly that there were benefits to AAA zoning of the property. He feels a change of the Age Restricted to Age Targeted will still not address underlying issues he has with the zoning.

Motion was made by Angela Murray that the PC recommend the BOC allow for the advertisement of the proposed amendment of the zoning change to Age Targeted. George McDowell seconded.

3 In Favor: Joe Devine, Angela Murray, Bob Gutowski

3 Against: David Sands, George McDowell, Amanda Helwig

3 Abstained: Jim Mascaro, Mary Holland, Joe Gerber

The Boorse Tract does not necessarily have the have the same issues as the Tecee Tract. It was also noted that no plans have been submitted nor a formal proposed amendment to their current zoning. However, their intent is to model their amended zoning change similar to the Tecee Tracts proposed amendment.

There being no more discussion, a motion to adjourn was put forth by Bob Gutowski and seconded by Mary Holland. The motion was approved unanimously and the session adjourned at 9:22pm.

The next PC meeting shall be May 19th, 2009.

Amanda M. Helwig, Secretary