

WHITPAIN TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
May 2010

A work session of the Whitpain Township Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, May 11, 2009 at 7:00 PM at the Whitpain Township Building, 960 Wentz Road, Blue Bell, PA for the purpose of reviewing the agenda of the public meeting to be held that evening. Planning Commission members Kenneth Corti, Richard Shorin, Daniel Kluger, Mark Clemm, Harry Phifer, and Yongli Min were present. Township Engineer Roman M. Pronczak, Assistant Zoning Officer William McManus, Township Planning Consultant E. Van Rieker, and Recording Secretary Michele Alifano were also present. Assistant Township Engineer James E. Blanch was absent.

1. Chairman Corti noted some changes to the agenda, including the observance of the passing of Mr. John Todd, a former member of both the Whitpain Township Planning Commission, as well as the Shade Tree Commission, following a prolonged battle with illness. He stated that there would be a moment of silence prior to the start of the public meeting. Also, Mr. Vincent Philomeno, former Vice-Chairman of the Planning Commission resigned his position, effective immediately, and Mr. Pronczak stated that the Board of Supervisors would be looking to appoint someone to fill the vacancy within the upcoming weeks. Chairman Corti identified the need to re-organize the officers of the Planning Commission, and he suggested that Mr. Clemm should be nominated to assume the duties of Vice-Chairman. He stated that the nomination will need to be made official by a vote at the public meeting.

2. Zoning Text Amendment for the VC – Village Commercial District.

Mr. Pronczak provided some history on the property, known as the Village Square Shopping Center. Approximately ten years ago, Gambone purchased several properties on Route 202, which were vacant and not well maintained, and a new zoning district was created, VC – Village Commercial, to accommodate the non-residential use at the location. The new zoning district had strict regulations governing architectural features, size of the commercial occupants, berks, etc., in an effort to give the shopping center a “village” appearance. Mr. Pronczak explained that there have been on-going issues with signage regulations and visibility; therefore, the businesses at the location have a difficult time remaining viable. Mr. Rieker stated that the applicant will be presenting their proposed changes which would permit the shopping center to have additional directional signage, specialty signs around the individual stores, edge lighting features, as well as a size and height increase to the main free-standing sign along the street frontage. Mr. Pronczak noted that a small portion of the main sign is proposed to be a plasma sign. Although the presentation is of an informal nature, the applicant is ultimately seeking a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to authorize a public hearing on the proposed text amendments.

3. Review of Montgomery County Planning Commission proposed amendments to the County Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Rieker explained that the County updates the Comprehensive Plan every ten years, and that although it is basically an advisory document, there were some oversights regarding land use categories that were in need of refining. Mr. Rieker advised that the County is now awaiting the responses from the various municipalities, and he asked if the Planning Commission could review his memo, and make any additional recommendations they deem to be appropriate before it would be submitted to the County.

4. Draft Amendments to LED Sign Regulations.

Mr. Rieker briefly discussed a draft Ordinance that has been distributed which addresses the use of changeable copy signs within the Township, as well as the regulation of these signs. He requested that the Planning Commission make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to have a public hearing to adopt the Ordinance, if they found the draft version to be acceptable.

5. Zoning Hearing Board cases.

- a. #1861-10. This application is a request to allow a 20' x 30' garage addition to the side of the house reducing the minimum required side yard from 25' to 15' and reducing the minimum required aggregate side yard from 60' to 40' at the subject property.
- b. #1862-10. This application is a request to allow an 8' x 16' addition to the rear of the house reducing the minimum required rear yard from 75' to 67' at the subject property.
- c. #1863-10. This application is a request for relief to construct an L-shaped deck to the side and rear of the existing house on the subject property.
- d. #1864-10. This application is a request to allow an 18' x 42' one-story addition to the side of the house reducing the minimum required side yard from 45' to 32' at the subject property.

The work session adjourned at 7:30 PM, at which time the Planning Commission members left for the public meeting.

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Respectfully submitted,

Michele Alifano, Recording Secretary

WHITPAIN TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
May 2010

The fourth meeting of the Whitpain Township Planning Commission for the year 2010 was held on Tuesday, May 11, 2010 at the Whitpain Township Building, 960 Wentz Road, Blue Bell, PA. Chairman Kenneth Corti presided with Commission members Richard Shorin, Daniel Kluger, Mark Clemm, Harry Phifer, and Yongli Min present. Township Engineer Roman M. Pronczak, Township Planning Consultant E. Van Rieker, Assistant Zoning Officer William McManus, and Recording Secretary Michele Alifano were also present. Assistant Township Engineer James E. Blanch was absent.

Chairman Corti called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM. The members of the Planning Commission introduced themselves to the members of the public that were present.

1. Announcements.
 - A. Chairman Corti called for an observance of the recent passing of Mr. John Todd, who had served on both the Shade Tree Commission and the Planning Commission. Chairman Corti wished to recognize the many years of dedicated service provided by Mr. Todd, and there was a moment of silence on his behalf.
 - B. For the record, Chairman Corti announced that the Board of Supervisors was accepting with regret, the resignation of Mr. Vincent Philomeno from his position as Vice-Chairman of the Whitpain Township Planning Commission.
 - C. A motion was made by Mr. Kluger, seconded by Mr. Shorin to nominate Mr. Mark Clemm to the position of Vice-Chairman of the Planning Commission, replacing Mr. Philomeno. The motion passed 6-0.
2. Approval of minutes.

A motion was made by Mr. Shorin, seconded by Mr. Kluger, to approve the minutes of the March 9, 2010 meeting of the Planning Commission. The motion passed 6-0.

3. Informal presentation regarding signage and requested zoning text amendments for the VC-Village Commercial District.

Present for the applicant: Mr. Joseph Gambone
David Dratch, Esquire
Chris Eisenberg, Esquire

Mr. Gambone provided some background information as explanation for the proposed zoning text amendments. In 1997, the Village Square property on Dekalb Pike was rezoned, creating a new zoning district, VC- Village Commercial. At the time, there was some concern from the neighbors over a retail operation being constructed at that location. Some compromises were made, and a berm was installed, as well as a row of buffer trees on the side that was adjacent to the Blue Bell Country Club. The difficulty that arose was a lack of visibility due to the design of the shopping center, which had the store frontage set back from the road, and the small signage which discouraged an anchor tenant from coming in, which would have helped the smaller size tenants to remain operable.

With visibility being an issue, some of the tenants had placed signage to attract customers, for which they were cited by the Code Enforcement Department. In an effort to keep the shopping center viable, Mr. Gambone stated that he was trying to come up with a signage compromise that would keep with the character of the Village Commercial Zoning District, while aiding vehicular traffic in identifying where it needs to go. Also, Mr. Gambone advised that all of the tenants are unable to be listed on the main directional sign because it would be too difficult to read and understand.

At this time, Mr. Eisenberg presented details regarding the types of signage that are proposed in the draft Ordinance. The plan involves replacing the main free-standing sign that is located along the street frontage, and there is a request to increase the sign in size from 100 sq. ft. to 200 sq. ft. Also, a portion of this sign face will contain changeable copy (electronics). There is also a request for directional signs as well as additional façade signage, awnings or placard style signs.

Planning Commission comments:

Mr. Clemm expressed his concern over what could potentially be approved for this site would then apply to other developments within the Township.

Mr. Kluger asked about the pylon/directory sign, and if the intention was to remove it. Mr. Gambone stated a new one would be put in its place.

Mr. Shorin inquired about illumination of the signs. Mr. Gambone stated that the concept of edge lighting, or silhouette lighting, was proposed for the façade signs on the individual stores, and there would be no illumination on the main free-standing sign.

Mr. Clemm asked if the intention was to have all the signs made with the same font and color. Mr. Gambone stated that the font could vary, but the size and color would be uniform. Also, the illumination would be shut off when the stores would close.

There being no further questions, Mr. Pronczak stated that Mr. Gambone had a draft Ordinance prepared, which could be distributed for review by the Planning Commission. He advised that there would be no formal vote this evening, since there was only an informal presentation. Mr. Clemm remarked that he is supportive of the concept, but the Planning Commission would need to review the details of the Ordinance before being able to make a recommendation. The Planning Commission thanked the applicants for their presentation.

4. Montgomery County Planning Commission proposed amendments to the County Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Rieker explained that the Montgomery County Planning Commission updates their Comprehensive Plan every ten years, and drafts of the document are sent to all the municipalities for their input. Some discrepancies were found as they pertain to Whitpain Township, and those differences have been identified and will be suggested for amendment.

Chairman Corti asked for any comments or questions from the planning Commission. Mr. Shorin identified a parcel of land that has been included as part of a Growth & Preservation Plan, which he stated is a land-locked area, providing no access. He stated that it seemed unusual to include this parcel as part of that category, and he requested that Mr. Rieker address this point in his review letter that will be submitted to the County.

A motion was made by Mr. Shorin, seconded by Mr. Phifer to acknowledge and agree with the comments made in Mr. Rieker's review letter which will be submitted to the County, with the inclusion of Mr. Shorin's additional comments. The motion passed 6-0.

5. Draft Amendments for LED Signs.

Mr. Rieker provided a brief overview of the proposed changes, which will create a new subsection of the existing Sign Ordinance, specifically addressing and regulating the use of LED signage. The Ordinance will address specifics such as size and height requirements, color of the copy, frequency of copy change, and in which zoning districts LED signage will be permitted.

Mr. Pronczak stated that LED signs are presently permitted in certain zoning districts, with the limitation that the copy cannot change more than once per day. The proposed Ordinance would allow for the copy to change once per minute. Mr. Min expressed his concern that if the change is too

frequent, it could potentially distract passing motorists. Mr. Pronczak stated that the copy change would be instantaneous. Additionally, Mr. Rieker stated that LED signs will only be permitted as secondary signage, and flashing or scrolling, which could be distracting to motorists, will not be permitted.

A motion was made by Mr. Clemm, seconded by Mr. Kluger to recommend that the Board of Supervisors authorize the advertisement of the Ordinance governing LED signage. The motion passed 6-0.

6. Zoning Hearing Board Applications.

- a. #1861-10. Application filed by Jeffrey Bydalek, as owner of the property located at 1582 Sylvan Drive, Blue Bell, PA, 19422 for variances from the terms of Article VII, Section 160-34 and Article XXVIII, Section 160-203 to allow a 20' x 30' garage addition to the side of the house, reducing the minimum required side yard from 25' to 15' and reducing the minimum required aggregate side yard from 60' to 40' at the subject property. The zoning classification of the subject property is "R-2" Residence District.

A motion was made by Mr. Clemm, seconded by Mr. Phifer to remain neutral on the subject application. The motion passed 6-0.

- b. #1862-10. Application filed by Donald M. & Nancy N. Ball, as owners of the property located at 467 Kurt Drive, Blue Bell, PA, 19422 for variances from the terms of Article V, Section 160-19 and Article XXVIII, Section 160-204 to allow an 8' x 16' addition to the rear of the house reducing the minimum required rear yard from 75' to 67' at the subject property. The zoning classification of the subject property is "R-1" Residence District.

A motion was made by Mr. Clemm, seconded by Mr. Phifer to remain neutral on the subject application. The motion passed 6-0.

- c. #1863-10. Application filed by John K. & Margaret G. Ostrander, II, as owners of the property located at 961 Stony Brook Drive, Blue Bell, PA, 19422 for variances for the following relief to construct an L-Shaped Deck to the side and rear of the existing house on the subject property:

1. Variances from the terms of Article V, Section 160-17 and Article XXVIII, Section 160-203 to reduce the minimum required side yard from 45' to 34'.

2. Variances from the terms of Article V, 160-19 and Article XXVIII Section 160- 204 to reduce the minimum required rear yard from 75’ to 32.9’.

The zoning classification of the subject property is “R-1” Residence District.

A motion was made by Mr. Clemm, seconded by Mr. Phifer to remain neutral on the subject application. The motion passed 6-0.

- d. #1864-10. Application filed by Rajendra & Swapna Padhye, as owners of the property located at 690 Wyndrise Drive, Blue Bell, PA, 19422 for variances from the terms of Article V, Section 160-17 and Article XXVIII, Section 160-203 to allow an 18’ x 42’ one-story addition to the side of the house reducing the minimum required side yard from 45’ to 32’ at the subject property. The zoning classification of the subject property is “R-1” Residence District.

A motion was made by Mr. Clemm, seconded by Mr. Phifer to remain neutral on the subject application. The motion passed 6-0.

There being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion was made by Mr. Clemm, and seconded by Mr. Kluger to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Shorin, Secretary