

LOWER MACUNGIE TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING – April 13, 2021

The April 13, 2021 meeting of the Lower Macungie Township Planning Commission was called to order by Chairman Tom Beil at 7:05 p.m. via Zoom Meeting. Commission members in attendance: Tom Beil, Jon Hammer, Tim Pickel, Amy Miller, Bob Rust, Al Perez, and Wesley Barrett. Also present were Nathan Jones, Director of Planning and Community Development, Brian Cicak, Township Engineer, CKS Engineers, and David Brooman, Township Solicitor.

Meeting Minutes

Minutes from the previous meeting will be approved at the April 20th meeting.

1955 Willow Lane Barn Conversion- Conditional Use Plan

Mr. Jones provided an overview of the project. The commission has previously seen the plan and this is further information. Mr. Jones states that there is onsite planting, a shed, and parking on the plans now. Applicants are looking to have live events and music at the location. There will be a walking trail along the creek as well, in line with the greenway plan. Long term plans are to connect that to current walking trails. There is also a planting buffer proposed, however, the current resident would ensure the buffer will not block their view of the creek. Onsite lighting and signage are now on the plan. Technical items to be addressed from the last meeting have been corrected, but states that the proposed shed must be pre-fab. Applicant is aware of concerns that are still lingering. This location will be a mixed-use structure with apartments on second floor and a microbrewery and distillery on the first floor. The applicants are utilizing the Barn Preservation Ordinance. This is the first of its kind.

Mr. Cicak states that this is straight forward since it is not a land development. The engineer staff would like to see that the comments in the current letter are addressed.

From the applicant's team in attendance are Ron W. Beitler, Ron R. Beitler, and attorney C. Neely.

Atty. Neely states that this has been a comprehensive review by the Township staff. The applicant team has 3 items to comment on. 1) The buffer between the lots. They are looking for a deferral and not a waiver which would allow the project to go forward without the buffer. If a new owner takes over at that point a buffer may be put in. 2) Street trees are difficult along Willow Lane, they would like to see them possibly be planted at Kratzer Farm. 3) Condition that potentially prohibits commercial use within 150ft of a residential zone.

Mr. R.W. Beitler states that at this time the current neighbor does not want her views obstructed, and that the applicants are more than happy to readdress the buffer component when new owners take over the parcel. He addresses the complication of the planting of street trees along the side of the road that the parcel is on, and they are more than happy to plant them along Willow Lane along the Kratzer Farm side.

Commission Members state their concerns on egress and emergency access, safety for children near the water, and parking concerns for patrons as well as employees. Mr. Beitler states that they are willing to keep the northern driveway for emergency access, but the intent is to close it off. Signage will be posted to state that the creek is off-limits during and after flooding events. Parking concerns will be addressed and Smooth On is willing to give use of their parking for events. Employees will have safe access from parking area to the building.

Mr. Beil opens the floor to public comment.

Mike Siegal states that he is in favor of this use.

Julie McDonnell questions the need for a path for employees to walk through the parking lot in the winter.

Mr. Barrett questions the time frame for the buffer deferral. He feels that there should be a timeline for this at the time of sale. Mr. Beitler states that they are more than willing to work with the new owners and township.

Board Discussion.

Mr. Beil is in favor for the commission to vote to act.

Mr. Hammer makes a motion to recommend approval with conditions that 1) The applicant shall comply with comment letters. 2) Hours shall be limited to operations until 10pm. 3) Applicant shall submit final planting plan. 4) Applicant to enter into agreements and covenants with the township for trail easement. 5) Applicant shall submit formal parking plan to the Township for all special events outside of regular operations. 6) Applicant shall submit plan for future reserve parking. 7) Only a pre-fab shed on stone base shall be installed. 8) Path across employee parking and site must be shovelable. 9) Deferral of planting buffer to be reviewed upon change in ownership of adjacent property.

Mr. Beitler states that the shed may built by the real estate company. They feel they can meet all conditions of the shed by building it themselves and not use pre-fabricated. Mr. Beil asks for removal of the word pre-fabricated from condition #7. Mr. Beitler questions the 150ft setback requirement to a residential zone. Mr. Jones spoke to Zoning Officer Carl Best and states that Mr. Best reviewed the ordinance to be sure that the BOC can waive this or if it must go to the Zoning Hearing Board. Waiver issue will be on hold until further clarification can be made.

Mr. Beil calls to motion a conditional approval for the 1955 Willow Lane Barn Conversion along with 9 proposed conditions.

Mr. Rust seconds the motion. Vote Carries 7-0.

3109 Macungie Road Residential Subdivision- Sketch Plan

Mr. Jones states that this project is being referred to as The Cove at Millbrook. Historically this subdivision plan has been floated a few times before. This site is on Sauerkraut Ln, but has frontage on Macungie Rd. There is a creek and wooded area to one side and residential neighbors to the other side. A Horseshoe shaped lot with two cul-de-sacs are being proposed along with 16 lots. Staff note of cul-de-sacs being removed to go with a u-shaped property. Stormwater management is at the rear of the development. Site should have path or sidewalk frontage. Note that some lots have steep topography. Technical items will be addressed in the future.

Mr. Cicak states that there are some concerns for cul-de-sac that will have additional impervious coverage. Right cul-de-sac is within 5ft of neighboring property. Another concern is the street improvements needed along Sauerkraut Ln. He does say that this is a fairly straight forward plan.

From the applicant team is Attorney Kate Durso and engineer Salvatore Caicazzo.

Atty. Durso states that there is no issue of removal of cul-de-sacs if that is the wishes of the commission and township. A waiver would be needed to be granted in order to remove them. By eliminating these it would also alleviate the concerns about not disturbing the steep slopes on some of the lots.

Mr. Jones reminds that there cannot be stormwater or utility easements bisecting lots anymore. The reasoning is to be able to allow residents to place fences in their backyards. By having an easement bisect lots, that makes fence placement challenging. Secondly in regards to lot sizing and total impervious lot coverage there is an extra percentage in the ordinance that is required to make sure that max coverage is not met at the time of land development. This is to make sure residents have the opportunity to put in sheds, patios, etc.

Atty. Durso questions what the township is looking for along Sauerkraut Ln. Currently no curbing, would it be a bike path as opposed to sidewalks since there are no connecting sidewalks. Mr. Jones states that his opinion is that a path is a better choice for this location. Mr. Beil states that there should be at least a paved path. Existing bridge culvert would have to be taken out in order to get a typical path in. This area typically does have flooding with severe weather. Mr. Cicak points out that there is currently the 100-year flood plain in this area.

Mr. Beil asks for opinions on the elimination of the cul-de-sacs. Commission agrees of elimination. Mr. Cicak states that radius shows as 85ft is too narrow, he would like discussion on what would be acceptable. Elimination of curbing along Sauerkraut Ln is discussed. Mr. Caicazzo

states that bike line path would be placed along the road which would be expanded. Curbing elimination is supported. Discussion of path placement is had to safely be put in without having to extend the culvert. It was discussed to have rec fees in place of the open space. The commission would like the applicant to look at extending the path to Macungie Rd. The applicant will look at all possibilities, they do state that there may be some issues with Macungie Rd.

The applicant also states that they were looking for the possibility of a fee in lieu of dedication, due to the fact that they are under the impression that the township does not want to own the area that houses the unnamed tributary. It will be up to the Board of Commissioners to make that decision.

Public comments were made by Mr. Siegel stating his opinions on the removal of the cul-de-sacs. He feels they would become problems with parking and the encouragement of basketball hoops being placed there. Mr. Robert questions the reverse frontage. Six lots will have reverse frontage. Mr. Siegel advises his wishes to have the fee in lieu for improvements. Mr. Robert states that the seventh lot would require reverse frontage per SALDO.

The applicant appreciates all of the advice and guidance given from the commission.

No further action is required by the commission.

3510 Macungie Road Residential Subdivision- Sketch Plan

Mr. Jones states that this project is has never been brought to the planning commission before. This is located at Indian Creek Rd. and Macungie Rd on land that is current pasture area with an existing farmhouse. This is a brand-new design scheme for the township. The design shows a shared driveway sketch for four residences with a total of twenty-two residences in the development. The developer has utilized this design in Montgomery County. The current existing basin will be expanded. There is potential for trail easement access due to staff comment. SALDO revisions bring up concerns with impervious coverage. There is also an existing gas pipeline that bisects lots in the development. There are possible issues with definable backyard space for pools and patios in a zoning sense. A HOA will more than likely be necessary to be sure the driveways are managed and maintained.

Mr. Cicak states there will be a substantial amount of zoning issues with lot width, lot ratios, etc. and zoning variances will be required. Discussion will be needed on expanded basin maintenance.

From the applicant team is Attorney Erich Schock, Engineer Robert Cunningham, and Developer Reiss Rosenthal.

Atty. Schock states that the plan will be modified to address all comments made. The number of lots will more than likely be reduced in order to reduce concerns. Mr. Cunningham states that this type of scheme works well in Montgomery County where they built. He agrees that they will be willing to address all comments and ordinance requirements.

Mr. Beil voices concern over the configuration of the homes (a front of a home looking at the side of another) as well as shared driveway maintenance and snow plowing etc. Applicant team states that they will address these concerns. Discussion held on the existing farmhouse, which is over 100 years old and written documentation that will be needed. Mr. Rust questions why this sort of development has occurred and it is stated that it is due to the lot configuration. The applicant states that trees will be planted to offer privacy to lots. Ms. Miller questions if there are shared driveways in Montgomery County. There is no HOA it is an agreement between homeowners, but for this neighborhood the HOA will cover the shared driveways and the basin maintenance.

Discussion is held on the expanded basin and addresses that the HOA will in fact be handling that and not the township. Zoning requirements will be addressed to both Mr. Jones and Mr. Best. Lot Width, easements, buffers, and right of way comments will be looked into. The BOC will have to address the comments regarding Rec Fees.

Mr. Cicak comments on widening of Macungie Rd, the applicant is encouraged to work with the township engineer for what may be required on the widening as well as the separation of road and path along Macungie Rd.

Public Comment commenting on configuration of homes, driveway problems, and specific lot backyard depth. Applicant will look at all public comments.

Being a sketch plan no further movement is needed from the commission.

3370 Route 100 Allen Organ Mixed-Use Redevelopment- Sketch Plan

From the applicant team is Atty. Kate Durso, M. Bahnick (Van Cleef), S. Santola, and S. Varneckas (Woodmont Properties).

Applicant team is back before the commission. Atty Durso explains the new sketch plan as opposed to what was shown prior. Mr. Bahnick states that these will be carriage house apartments as well as a commercial space with apartments above the structure. The new plan shows 8 buildings with 99 carriage homes, it does meet the ordinance ration for commercial and residential spacing. The loop road configuration will stay and has been successful with other Woodmont projects. There will be a 10,000SqFt commercial space on the first level with roughly 14 apartment units on the second and third floor. There will be 84 parking spaces on the rear and sides, and no parking between the building and Route 100. There will be a drive-thru access point at one end of the commercial structure which has become very desirable. Two points of access will be shared with the existing Grandview Development and a third point of access to Route 100.

Atty. Durso speaks on the success of the carriage house type dwellings in both the existing Woodmont property in Macungie, as well as other areas. The sketch tonight goes along with comments and suggestions that have been made by the commission.

Mr. Jones appreciates the partnership with the applicant team and their desire to work with the township. This will be a new land development and not a phase of previous development. The township is not opposed to going bigger with mixed-use structures and have more integration between the carriage homes and the commercial structures. He would like to see more of a walkable area for residents to get to shopping, and restaurants in the area. He urges the applicants to get creative and further build on the mixed-use structures. The shown pocket park is a great addition as well as potential to create a gateway to Macungie Borough.

Mr. Cicak discusses the density calculations and the need for clarification for this project as this will be a separate land development. The stormwater management system will have to be discussed as the plan goes further into fruition. It will be requested that a traffic analysis will be held by PennDOT.

Discussion by the commission rises concerns with speaking to PennDOT. There have been conversations by the applicant with the traffic engineer, but not with PennDOT. Meetings will be occurring in the future. It is felt that the commercial portion is just an afterthought of the project and there are wishes to have more integration in the area. It is felt that this is two separate projects and the commission is truly looking for a more cohesive design with more mixed-use projects closer to the road and addition of more commercial into the project.

Mr. Santola feels that this plan is much more integrated and that the applicant team wants to get where the township wants this plan to be, but they do see some cautions. They will look at the possibility of a second building, and the commercial will need to be up on Route 100, and the residential will have to sit behind it.

Commission members have discussion on the feeling of cohesiveness and their wishes on what they would like to see with the mixed-use development as well as traffic concerns and the interest to see the upcoming traffic study. They do not want to see the commercial development thrown into the project just to appease the townships needs. It is suggested that the applicant work with Mr. Jones for some improvements to the plan for a better design. The quality of design is appreciated, but it just needs some more integration.

Public comment regarding congested traffic, stormwater swales, and suggestions for basin improvements and a wish for a fountain within the basin. The applicant states that there is a fountain in one of the basins.

Being a sketch plan no further movement is needed from the commission.

Department Report

Mr. Jones reminds the commission that due to the load of applications, next Tuesday will be another general meeting. He will inform the commission when the change to hybrid in-person/Zoom meetings will occur. Expectations of May meetings will be discussed at the next meeting.

Commission discusses thoughts on meetings returning to in-person or a hybrid of virtual and in-person. The Board of Commissioners will be returning to a hybrid option at the end of April. There will be public notice as to when any changes will occur. With funding given to the township there have been multiple digital upgrades within the building.

There being no further business, motion made by Mr. Hammer, second by Mr. Pickel, all in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kimberly Boyer, Permit Clerk
Lower Macungie Township