

**MINUTES  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
ZOOM MEETING  
JANUARY 12, 2021**

**Attendees/Participants:** Dave Shula, Sherri Glantz Patchen, Patrick Doran, Bob Dambman, Aaron Kostyk, Elizabeth Shaw Fink, Scott Quitel, Charlie Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning and Zoning, Krista Heinrich (Township Engineer), Vince Manuele (BOS Liaison), and Dave Sander (Township Solicitor's office)

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** 6:04 PM by Chair Dambman
2. **ELECTION OF CHAIR:** Motion by Mr. Shula, second by Mr. Dambman to elect Patrick Doran as Chair. Vote was unanimous
3. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR:** Motion by Mr. Doran, second by Mr. Kostyk to elect Dave Shula as Vice-Chair. Vote was unanimous.

**4. ANNOUNCEMENTS & CORRESPONDENCE**

**Announcements:**

- In accordance with PA Act 15, meeting via Zoom was advertised in the Times Herald on January 7, 2021.
- Mr. Guttenplan announced this will be the last time that the Planning Commission meeting is going to be advertised in the Times Herald. The yearly meetings were advertised in a joint ad for all the commissions.
- Mr. Guttenplan inquired if there would be any interest from a member of the Planning Commission to volunteer as a representative for the Ridge Pike meetings to replace Peter Cornog.

**5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- On a motion by Mr. Shula seconded by Ms. Patchen, the Planning Commission moved to approve the December 8, 2020 meeting minutes. Vote 7-0

**6. ZONING HEARING BOARD APPEALS:**

- Review ZHB#2020-36 Federal Realty Investment Trust/1842 Bethlehem Pike (Flourtown Shopping Center  
(Located in Springfield and Whitemarsh Townships)  
*Variance & Special Exception Requests for parking relief for an additional retail building*

Attendees: Rob Lewis, Esquire, applicant's attorney from Kaplin Stewart; Alex Tweedie, Civil Engineer from Landcore; and Andy Bottaro from Federal Realty

The applicant is proposing to expand the Flourtown Shopping Center, including construction of a pad site consisting of approximately 4,550 square feet to be occupied by a restaurant and bank with drive-through, along with associated revisions to the adjacent parking fields and circulation patterns. The Shopping Center is bisected by the municipal boundary of Springfield and Whitemarsh Townships with the majority of the Shopping Center being located in Springfield Township. The majority of the bank and only a small portion of the restaurant would be in Whitemarsh. The Whitemarsh portion of the Shopping Center is split zoned between the VC-3 Village Commercial District and the B-Residential Zoning District, though the proposed development is entirely within the VC-3 area. The applicant is requesting some variances and a special exception, all related to parking.

The applicant's attorney provided a history of the shopping center and its various redevelopments since its development in the late '50's or early '60's and explained the demand for the proposed additional building, being in a prominent location at the front of the center. He also explained the various nonconformities of the center in both Townships, particularly related to parking; the bulk of the parking is in Springfield where all of the current buildings are located. He also explained that the center is on three separate parcels. With the area available in Whitemarsh, it is not possible to provide the required 39 spaces for the proposed building; 5 are proposed within Whitemarsh. Currently the entire center contains 177,000 square feet of building space and has 4.03 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross leasable area (714 spaces); the proposal would reduce that number to 3.85 spaces per 1,000 (699 spaces). In October 2020, Springfield's Zoning Hearing Board granted variances allowing for the reduced number of spaces as proposed. Mr. Lewis explained that the reason for some of the variances is that the requirements of the VC-3 district are not geared for this type of shopping center development but more for individual buildings close up to Bethlehem Pike with parking in the back of buildings, not in front of them.

The relief requested is the following:

1. **Variance from Section 116-184.D.(6) & (8)** to provide less than the required parking and permit it to be located on an adjacent lot.
2. **Variance from Section 116-184.E.** to not provide landscape strips within the parking lot.
3. **Special Exception from Section 116-185.** to allow shared parking between adjacent parcels.
4. **Variance from Sections 116-291.A.(7)(b)[1], [2] & [3]** to permit parking between the street line and front principal building plane in excess of 25% of the total parking and to not require a wall and associated landscaping between the parking and street.

Mr. Lewis explained that Frank Travoni, professional engineer, performed a parking analysis of the site pre-Covid; the study demonstrated there is more than enough parking for the existing and proposed buildings. Mr. Lewis also explained that if the Zoning Hearing Board grants the approval requested on January 19, 2021, there are many steps still ahead that the Planning Commission will be involved in: if approved, they will be submitting a Conditional Use application for the drive-through as required in VC-3; and then submitting Land Development applications for approval in both Springfield Township and Whitemarsh Township.

The Planning Commission members raised questions about the demand for the building and the bank and why this location is so desirable (prominent location for retailers, visible from Bethlehem Pike); specifically, questioned the configuration of the bank's drive-through and number of stacking spaces (will be reviewed as part of conditional use and land development); sought clarifications concerning the current and proposed parking numbers and need, as well as what relief is being asked for as far as numbers in Whitemarsh (Mr. Travoni's analysis detailed vacant spaces at peak times, 39 spaces required for new development based on Whitemarsh requirements but 5 are proposed); asked about the center's economic viability (Movie Tavern took the biggest hit but expected to recover post-Covid); questioned why another brick and mortar bank (banks continue to want a physical presence); questioned the use of the striped macadam (truck turning/parking) area proposed to remain in front of the proposed development, and focused on the potential treatment of a new green space that will be provided to separate the bank's drive-through lane from its pass-by lane to ensure that it wasn't just another island of grass with a couple of trees but done in a more environmentally conscious manner, and interest to see what green improvements could be implemented in general throughout the center (applicant agreed to look at these issues during land development). The Commission also sought explanation of the specific relief being sought (applicant explained why each variance, special exception is needed).

Public Comment: None

Motion: Mr. Kostyk made a motion to recommend that the Zoning Hearing Board grant the requested relief by the applicant with the following recommended conditions;

1. Consider options for changing the current striped macadam (truck turning/parking area) into a productive green area.
2. Work with the Planning Commission to make maximum environmentally beneficial use of the proposed green space adjacent to the bank.
3. Take a holistic view of the entire property to find opportunities to add green space throughout the shopping center.

Motion seconded by Ms. Patchen. Vote 6-1

- Review ZHB#2020-41 Robbins Gulph Holdings, LLC/27 Germantown Pike, Plymouth Meeting, PA  
*Variance Requests for a two-story addition and to restore the front portion of the two-story existing building in VC-2 for office use*

Attendees: Ed Hughes, Esquire, applicant's attorney; Scott Mayer, former owner; and Tom Robbins, property owner

The applicant proposes to restore the existing two-story building (650 square feet each floor) and add a two-story addition to the rear (742 square feet each floor) with associated site improvements and parking for 14 vehicles. The entire expanded building would be used for business and professional offices. The expanded building will be used by the owner for his financial consulting business; there will not be additional tenants. Initially, he plans to only use the first floor but to eventually expand his staff and use both floors. Variances are being requested related to parking, buffering, impervious coverage and green space requirements. In 2016, the prior owner proposed the same plan and requested (and was granted) the same relief (one additional variance granted in 2016 is no longer necessary based upon a more recent interpretation of §116-24.D.(3) of the ordinance). This building is in the VC-2 Village Commercial District and is also within the Plymouth Meeting Historic District.

The applicant's attorney explained the plan for the property and relief requested. The history of the previous proposal was discussed, including its approval by the Zoning Hearing Board, review by the Historical Architectural Review Board, and the processing of the land development plans (the latter process was reviewed by the Planning Commission but the applicant was diverted to other projects and this was never taken to the Board of Supervisors; it was not stopped because of any Township push-back). Mr. Hughes also explained that because of the thickness of the walls of the existing house, the difference in square footage if measured to the outside walls as required vs. measuring to the inside wall surface of the existing building is 3,348 vs. 2,792 square feet, requiring 17 vs. 14 parking spaces, and hence the reason for one of the variances.

The relief requested is the following:

1. **Variance from Section 116-184.D.(5)** from the requirement that one parking space must be provided for each 200 square feet of gross floor area of office use.
2. **Variance from Section 116-291.C.** to eliminate the requirement to comply with the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance as to Class B buffers; the property is nonconforming as to buffers and there is no room on the property for buffers.
3. **Variance from Section 116-294.(#7.)** to allow 66.5% impervious coverage; maximum permitted is 50%.
4. **Variance from Section 116-294. (#9.)** to allow 33.5% open space; minimum of 50% is required.
5. **Variance from Section 116-296.B.** to permit the parking lot setback from adjacent residentially used property of 2.25 feet; 20 feet is required.

The Planning Commission engaged in substantial discussion about the size of the parking lot and the actual parking need, including whether two spaces could be placed in reserve as previously required by the Zoning Hearing Board (the applicant believes that would give adequate number of

spaces; there would be himself plus 4 staff initially plus 2 to 6 clients per day requiring another 2 to 3 spaces), there was substantial discussion about the stormwater management proposed for the site and the fact that the property slopes toward the back and stormwater will impact adjacent property, and especially the amount of impervious coverage that is being requested and whether other options could be considered to reduce impervious, (stormwater management designed to avoid impacting other properties is required and will be reviewed with land development, and the applicant is willing to investigate other options to reduce impervious like pervious asphalt or paver blocks although Ms. Heinrich indicated that due to maintenance requirements, pervious asphalt would be considered as impervious; Mr. Hughes also pointed out that if the applicant chose to consider a use that requires conditional use approval, an impervious coverage of 65% would be permitted without variance relief). There was some sentiment that impervious should be capped at the 50% requirement; we've learned a lot over the last 5 years, and having just completed the comprehensive plan update, realize that the 'landscape' isn't the same as it was then. The possibility of shared parking was also raised as a possible way to reduce impervious, though without sidewalks, the applicant did not feel that is a safe option. The limited space for buffering was also discussed; applicant is willing to plant what he can; Mr. Hughes pointed out that if the adjacent dwelling/office use ever changes to all office, no parking setback/buffer would be required. Finally, Mr. Hughes explained how the various requirements of the VC district make it difficult to redevelop older, small properties like this one and hence why the variances are needed. Finally, Commission members acknowledged that considering the interest in restoring historic properties, some relief may be warranted.

Public Comment: Roy Wilson, 4006 Butler Pike, registered opposition to the project (lives on adjacent property); Eli Glick, Whitefield Drive; Bill Telegadis, 25 E. Germantown Pike (adjacent property owner); comment was made about significant stormwater concerns, particularly that any stormwater that is not properly controlled will end up on Mr. Wilson's property given the slope of the subject property, especially if curbing is not installed along the back of the parking lot; also confusion as to what the 'dry well' under the parking lot is. Concern also was raised about lack of previous property maintenance. Who would maintain pervious pavement options if provided, shouldn't be the Township (would be the owner through a legal maintenance agreement, enforceable by the Township); could parking on one side be considered to increase buffer (not provide enough parking); could arborvitae be planted (applicant is willing if there's enough space; Mr. Hughes pointed out that in the 2016 ZHB decision, the buffer was left up to the Shade Tree Commission and Board of Supervisors);

At the conclusion of the discussion and comments by the Commission members and the public, the Planning Commission made three motions:

1. Ms. Patchen made a motion to recommend that the Zoning Hearing Board approve Variance #'s 1, 2 and 5; seconded by Mr. Dambman. Vote 7-0
2. Mr. Kostyk made a motion to hold two spaces in reserve, install the buffer as provided in previous Zoning Hearing Board action (as recommended by the Shade Tree Commission and Board of Supervisors); seconded by Ms. Patchen. Vote 3-4; motion failed.
3. Mr. Dambman made a motion recommending that the Zoning Hearing Board not grant Variance #'s 3 and 4; seconded by Mr. Quitel. Vote 4-3

**7. CONDITIONAL USE APPLICATIONS:** None

**8. SUBDIVISION &/OR LAND DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS:** None

**9. OLD BUSINESS:**

- Mr. Dambman volunteered to attend the Ridge Pike meetings while the meetings are being held virtually. Once the meetings go live, they will need to revisit who might be available since they are daytime meetings.

**10. NEW BUSINESS:** None

**11. PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS COMMENTS:** None

**12. PUBLIC COMMENT FOR NON AGENDA ITEMS:**

- Eli Glick, Whitefield Drive, advised the Planning Commission that the Board of Supervisors temporarily stopped construction of the Veterans Monument. The Heros Monument was to sit at the corner of Joshua Road and Germantown Pike. The only time they came before the Planning Commission was in 2019. At that time, they had a chance to look at the plans with not much discussion. There was a question raised by the audience, Linda Doll, were any of the trees going to be removed and the response was an absolute no. This is coming up now because now all the trees are proposed to be removed to maintain proper line of sight; there were also construction issues, the trees were going to get damaged and then there was a safety issue. This is not what was promised which caused a large uproar with the public. If it is in the Planning Commission's power, would like to see them raise a motion that before this is approved, to come back before them for a more vigorous review. This is a private not for profit entity that wants to put this on public taxpayer land so the public should have a say in this and hope that the Board of Supervisors will allow that to go forward.

Planning Commission members responded that it is a complicated issue and glad to hear there has been a pause so there can be more discussion about it; thinks it would be good as it continues to come back in front of them whether it is for comment or for a motion; with something so prominent as that it would be appropriate to have something like that get re-discussed in front of the Planning Commission so they can at least weigh in. Mr. Manuele stated that it is correct that there was a representation made that trees would not be removed; there will be no construction or further development until this is all reviewed in public forums; the intent is to have meetings outside so people can gather; this will be done as often as is necessary for everyone who wants to make a comment and to be part of the development of the solution.

**13. ADJOURNMENT**

- Chair Doran asked for a motion to adjourn; motion to adjourn by Ms. Patchen, the meeting was adjourned at 8:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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Charles L. Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning & Zoning

The Planning Commission is appointed as an advisory group to the Board of Supervisors and the Zoning Hearing Board with respect to comprehensive land use planning, existing land use, and various land use and zoning applications in Whitmarsh Township. No formal decisions are rendered by the Planning Commission. Formal decisions are rendered by the Board of Supervisors or Zoning Hearing Board, as prescribed by law, based on the type of application.