

Call to Order:

The regular meeting of the Monroe Township Planning Board was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Chairman O'Brien. The Board saluted the flag. Roll call was as follows:

Present – Mr. Agnesino, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Crane, Mr. Kozak, Mr. Masterson, Mr. Scardino, Mr. Teefy, Ms. Hui, Mr. O'Brien. Absent – Mr. Caligiuri, (excused), Mr. Jordan, (excused). Also present – Mr. Rocco, Solicitor, Mr. Kernan, Planner.

Proper notice of this meeting was given as required by the Open Public Meetings Act on January 15, 2015.

Chairman O'Brien read the following statement: "Be advised, no new item of business will be started after 10:30 p.m. and the meeting shall terminate no later than 11:00 p.m."

Discussion for Board Action:

1. Acme Redevelopment Plan

Mr. Kernan stated that the Acme Redevelopment Plan has had a number of versions over the years. The original plan covered both sides of the Black Horse Pike; the old Acme side and the Quality Furniture side. It also incorporated about 250 residential units, all to be located on the Acme side, as a mix of townhomes, condos or apartments, and units above the retail. The other side was strictly all commercial. The second version of the plan identified the Quality Furniture side as the Williamstown Square Redevelopment Plan and proposed moving the traffic signal down to Charm Road. The last version of the Acme plan removed the residential component except further down the Black Horse Pike where there are still some townhomes in the plan that would buffer the existing single family home. Prior to the last change, RD Management had come to the town with proposals to develop the Acme site with residential units; six or seven story apartment buildings to be located in the open field in front of the old Jamesway building. They have not come to the town with a viable redevelopment plan so the residential component was removed from the Acme plan. That plan was sent to the Pinelands; they will not certify the plan unless the residential component is put back. At the last Redevelopment Committee meeting back in September, it was suggested that the town remove the Acme Redevelopment Plan completely, not the redevelopment zone, but just the plan. The Williamstown Square Redevelopment Plan will remain in effect. Then the ordinance that eliminates the Acme plan will be sent to the Pinelands.

Mr. Kernan explained that before the redevelopment areas were established the only residential zoning within the redevelopment areas was on the Williamstown Square side of the pike; the Acme side was zoned all commercial. However there are environmental constraints on the Williamstown Square side that would make developing the area for residential unlikely. So even though the Williamstown Square side has the underlying residential zoning, and no residential is proposed in the Williamstown Square Redevelopment Plan, the Pinelands certified that plan but they will not certify the Acme Redevelopment Plan without a residential component even though the Acme side does not have an underlying residential zone. So the Acme plan will be eliminated altogether and the town will go back to the original commercial zoning within that redevelopment area. Then if RD Management wishes to propose something in the future the town can negotiate a redevelopment plan at that time.

Mr. Teefy added that he recently spoke to Mr. Wainberg regarding the Williamstown Square side of the redevelopment area. Mr. Wainberg indicated that the Benderson Group is interested in doing a mix of commercial and residential similar to what has been done on Berlin Cross Keys Road behind Sam's Club. They do not see the big box stores coming due to customers doing much of their shopping online. Mr. Wainberg stated they would be interested in doing high end townhomes or apartments with smaller high end retail stores.

Discussion for Board Action: (continued)

1. Acme Redevelopment Plan (continued)

Mr. Wainberg also indicated to Mr. Teefy that they would be interested in a professional medical building and Mr. Teefy commented that Jefferson is looking for a location in Gloucester County so that could be a possibility. There was also discussion on the possibility of a local college having an off-site campus facility. Mr. Teefy stated that Mr. Wainberg would like to meet with the Redevelopment Committee soon. He also informed the Board that when he spoke to Mr. Wainberg he let him know that there is a lot of momentum going forward after the election and if he would like the Township to consider his changes to the plan then Mr. Teefy would like to see them take down the Quality Furniture building to show that they are moving forward as well as removing an eyesore from the Black Horse Pike. Mr. Wainberg replied that he would speak to Benderson.

Mr. Kernan commented that the Redevelopment Committee will have to decide if they want to allow the plan to be opened up to include residential units. He stated that if they do, the town may be able to negotiate with the Pinelands on where the residential component will be located within the redevelopment areas. He commented that what the Pinelands is really looking for is Pinelands Development Credits. Mr. Kernan stated that the Board should vote on eliminating the Acme Redevelopment Plan. Ms. Hui asked if it is still possible to expand the redevelopment area. Mr. Kernan replied that it is still possible and in fact there was discussions on doing that years ago and he had prepared a study of every property down to the Cedar Creek area. He still has the study so that if the town wants to consider expanding the redevelopment area in the future, there is a starting point.

Mr. Kozak stated that if the town is going to be negotiating with the Pinelands then why don't they try to take Main Street out of the Pinelands and the town can give them something else. Mr. Kernan replied that he did not know what it might take to accomplish that suggestion. He didn't believe the Pinelands was the reason that Main Street hasn't grown. Mr. Kozak asked how the town could get through the Pineland and bring back a commercial use in a building where there used to be a commercial use but it was since changed to all residential; so essentially the commercial use was abandoned. Mr. Kernan expressed his belief that the Pinelands would work with the town in that area of the Township. Mr. Kozak commented that Dr. Briller purchased the building next to his and would like to have a commercial use on the bottom and residential uses on the top; Mr. Kozak wanted to know how long it would take him to get through the Pinelands and what could be done to help him since Mr. Teefy wants to streamline the process for new businesses. Mrs. Farrell commented that the Pinelands would be more in favor of the proposal as long as the residential is included. Mr. Kernan stated that it's possible to change the zoning in that area so dual uses would be permitted; however the area is already zoned Regional Growth Town Commercial and he thought both commercial and residential uses are permitted. If it is not then they could talk to the Pinelands about allowing a dual use in that zone. The applicant would most likely still have to go to the Pinelands to receive a Certificate of Filing because the Pinelands will still want to look at certain issues such as environmental constraints, impervious coverage, groundwater issues, etc.

Mr. Kozak commented that the town should be more inclined to help someone like Dr. Briller because he has already proven himself. He stated there could possibly be two commercial uses on the lower level; a restaurant or microbrewery and a dental lab in the back and then two or three apartments on the top floor. Mr. Kernan stated that he would look at the zoning and if necessary they may be able to tweak the ordinance somewhat. Mr. Teefy commented that someone is also interested in the old Penn Jersey building for a microbrewery. Mr. Kozak didn't think that was an issue because the commercial use was never converted to a residential use.

Discussion for Board Action: (continued)

1. Acme Redevelopment Plan (continued)

Mr. Kernan stated that if commercial and residential is not permitted in the RG-TC zone, the town has a better chance of the Pinelands allowing them to change that than they do of removing Main Street from the Pinelands altogether. Mr. Teefy commented that he did not understand why there is an issue because when he spoke with Mr. Weikel earlier today it was his understanding the zoning does allow residential and commercial uses together. Mrs. Farrell commented on an applicant who wanted to convert a garage on a residential property to a commercial use and the Pinelands required him to purchase a quarter of a Pinelands credit since he was decreasing the residential portion of the property. Mr. Kozak stated that was a perfect example of the issues a business has to go through in order to get Pinelands approval. Mr. Kernan replied that the area of Main Street where that issue occurred was not in the RG-TC zone but in the RG-PR zone. He commented that after the ordinance is sent to the Pinelands for the Acme redevelopment site he is sure there will be an opportunity to meet and have discussions with the Pinelands on many issues including Main Street.

Motion by Mr. Cooper, seconded by Ms. Hui to approve removing the Acme Redevelopment Plan and memorializing the Resolution PB-09-15. Roll call vote: Ayes – Mr. Agnesino, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Crane, Mr. Kozak, Mr. Masterson, Mr. Scardino, Mr. Teefy, Ms. Hui, Mr. O'Brien. Nays – Zero. Abstentions – Zero.

2. Ordinance 175-135 Signs

Mr. Kernan stated that the sign ordinance was done back in 2013; however the Planning Board did not recommend the plan due to the changes the Pinelands wanted the town to make to the ordinance. It was also believed that it was vetoed because of language in the ordinance that requires existing signs that do not comply with the Pinelands regulations must be removed. Mr. Kernan stated that language has been in ordinance for many years; it is not a new Pinelands requirement. In addition some Board members felt the restriction of allowing electronic changeable copy signs to just certain areas of the town was not fair to businesses outside of those areas. The Pinelands will not allow electronic signs along the Black Horse Pike in the Rural Development Zone and the Forest District Zone because they said the lights interfere with the night sky. Mr. Crane asked if his son would be able to put an electronic sign up to replace the one that exists on the Black Horse Pike. Mr. Kernan stated that he would not because the current sign is located in the Rural Development Zone. The allowable area stops just about at Cedar Creek area on the east side of the pike. Mr. Kernan stated that if the town does not change the ordinance to comply with the Pinelands regulations, they will not certify the ordinance and electronic signs will not be permitted at all.

Mr. Masterson commented that he wasn't in favor of the ordinance because Council restricted the permitted location to the Black Horse Pike and Route 322. He stated there are other commercial areas in the town and businesses that should be allowed to have an electronic sign. He stated that the town may have to abide with the Pinelands regulations in the Pinelands area but the town shouldn't be so restrictive in areas outside the Pinelands. The ordinance limits the size of the signs and the changeable copy area so there are regulations in place to keep them from being too large or too bright. He added that a business that is allowed to have a sign can put regular lighting around that sign which is usually brighter than an electronic sign. Mrs. Farrell commented that the ordinance also allows electronic signs along Berlin Cross Keys Road. Mr. Masterson replied that there are other areas of the town like Sicklerville Road with businesses that would not be allowed to have electronic signs. There was some discussion on allowing all businesses to have electronic signs but that would include in-home businesses and the town does not want electronic signs in residential areas. After further discussion, Mr. Masterson commented that the signs should be allowed in all commercial areas of the town.

Discussion for Board Action: (continued)

2. Ordinance 175-135 Signs (continued)

Mrs. Farrell commented that Main Street is a commercial area but did the town really want to allow all the businesses along Main Street to have electronic signs and it end up looking like Las Vegas. Mr. Masterson reiterated that there are size restrictions as well as brightness restrictions. Mr. Kernan stated that the task at hand was whether or not the Board was going to recommend the revised ordinance per the Pinelands regulations to Council. He felt it was best to get the ordinance through the Pinelands and certified and that if the Board and the town wanted to revisit it later they could do that. Mr. Masterson felt that it would not be revisited once it gets done now. Mrs. Farrell replied that if there is an increase in use variances for electronic signs in a certain area of the town, such as Sicklerville Road, then the Zoning Board will recommend that Council revisit the sign ordinance.

Motion by Mr. Crane, seconded by Mr. Cooper to recommend Ordinance O:17-2014 to Council. Roll call vote: Ayes – Mr. Agnesino, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Crane, Mr. Kozak, Mr. Masterson, Mr. Scardino, Mr. Teefy, Ms. Hui, Mr. O'Brien. Nays – Zero. Abstentions – Zero.

Mr. Teefy commented that the reason the sign ordinance was amended to begin with was because Council wanted to place some regulations on electronic signs as the Zoning Board was granting so many variances to allow them, Council did not want them popping up all over the place without being regulated. He stated the ordinance can be revisited later to include areas outside the Pinelands that are commercial like on Tuckahoe Road heading down toward the Walmart.

Reports:

Mr. Teefy stated he forgot to mention that during his conversation with Mr. Wainberg he let him know the pilot program that was part of the Williamstown Square Plan for a big box store will be off the table if the plan is changed to a mixed use. Mr. Wainberg agreed any residential portion would not have any tax advantage but he did mention a tax abatement for the commercial portion. He also informed the Board about a meeting that included the Police Chief and two Captains where they discussed several problem areas in town such as Colonial Estates, shoplifting at Walmart, and the big area of concern, Main Street and Blue Bell. Based on the data they've collected they plan to change the focus of their patrols. Chief McKeown would also like to have a Town Hall meeting with the landlords on Main Street and Blue Bell to discuss implementing language in their lease agreements that would allow them to evict a tenant who is found to have a criminal record while living in one of their rental units. That meeting is tentatively scheduled for the beginning of March.

Mr. Teefy mentioned that the owner of the Best Western contacted him for a meeting. Mrs. Farrell commented that he had contacted the Planning Board office in reference to making some changes to the expansion approval he received some time ago. She advised him to meet with the Mayor. Mr. Teefy commented on the Friday morning meeting he had with Township Engineer, Mrs. Farrell, Mr. Kernan, and Mr. Fiore. He stated he is planning on having another meeting on Friday, January 30th at 7:30 a.m.

Mr. Kernan mentioned that Bill Bowman would be calling the Mayor's office to set up a meeting with regard to the vacant property between Amberleigh and the original section of the Arbours as well as discussing the issues with the basin that does not drain properly.

Reports: (continued)

Mr. Teefy informed the Board that he met with the homeowner association board from the Amberleigh development with regard to the parking problem. Mr. Heffner confirmed that they will be coming to the Planning Board to get approval to allow Exposition Way to become a one way street with parking on one side; they will also be installing the no parking signs. Mrs. Farrell stated that the approval did not allow any on-street parking; however the developer never installed the no parking signs so the residents would be aware they were not allowed to park on the street. Mr. Teefy added that the change to a one way street will force the residents to put their trash cans on the opposite side of the street and it's possible their mailboxes will have to be moved. He stated that they have to take the proposal back to the association where they will need sixty six percent of the residents to agree before they can come to the Board. They are going to implement the no parking signs first before bringing the plan to the rest of the association in hopes that the majority will agree.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

These minutes are an extract from the meeting that was held on the above date and are not a verbatim account or to be construed as an official transcript of the proceedings. The tape of the meeting is stored in the office of the Board.

Ninette Orbaczewski
Clerk Transcriber