

Call to Order:

The regular meeting of the Monroe Township Planning Board was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Chairman Schwaiger. The Board saluted the flag. Roll call was as follows:

Present – Mr. Crane, Mayor DiLucia, Mr. Kozak, Mr. Helsel, Mr. O’Brien, Mr. Schwaiger. Also present – Mr. Boraske, Solicitor, Mr. DeFrank, Engineer, Ms. Pellegrini, Planner, Mrs. Farrell, Secretary, Mrs. Orbaczewski, Clerk Transcriber. Mrs. Farrell stated that as of today, Mr. Masterson has resigned from the Board.

Proper notice of this meeting was given in accordance with the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act on January 4, 2019.

Chairman Schwaiger 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.”.

Memorialization of Resolutions:

1. PB-34-19 – Recommending to Council Commercial Corridors for Rehabilitation – Approved

Motion by Mr. O’Brien, seconded by Mr. Helsel to adopt resolution PB-34-19. Roll call vote: Ayes – Mr. Crane, Mayor DiLucia, Mr. Kozak, Mr. O’Brien, Mr. Helsel, Mr. Schwaiger. Nays – Zero. Abstentions – Zero.

Public Hearing:

1. #429-SP – M3 Hotel Developers, LLC – Preliminary & Final Site Plan

Present – Mayur Chheda, applicant, Mitel Chheda, applicant, Brian Peterman, applicant’s engineer, Keith Davis, applicant’s attorney.

The applicant is proposing to expand the existing Best Western Hotel by adding a three-story addition consisting of 39 additional rooms as well as expanding the hotel lobby along with the installation of a patio area. The existing signage will be changed to reflect the new name as a Holiday Inn Express. The property is located at 1151 N. Black Horse Pike, also known as Block 1201, Lot 23 in the Commercial Zoning District.

Public Hearing: (continued)

Mr. Davis introduced himself as the applicant's attorney. Mr. Peterman displayed the colored architectural plan for the Board which was marked as Exhibit A-1. Mr. Davis gave a brief overview of the proposal. There is a history of approvals with regard to the expansion, although it was never built. As a result of those approvals, variances and waivers were granted and are valid, through extension approval, until May of 2020. Mayur Chheda and Brian Peterman were sworn in by Mr. Boraske.

Mayur Chheda testified that he is the principle of M3 Hotel Developers. He has been involved since it's inception in 2002 and the construction in 2005. It has been a Best Western all these years; however, with the expansion, it will be changing to a Holiday Inn Express. This will bring more corporate clientele to the hotel as Holiday Inn Express is a more recognizable brand. No hotel rooms are being added to the existing building. There is a third-floor façade being proposed on top of the existing building for aesthetics only. The site has not experienced any significant change since the construction of the hotel. Mr. Chheda stated they did acquire some additional property on the south side of the site which is where the new stormwater management basin will be constructed. The size of the signage will not change just the branding. The existing lighting under the canopy will remain the same.

Mr. Peterman displayed an aerial photograph of the site and the surrounding area which was marked as Exhibit A-2. He pointed out the north side of the site which currently shows the existing parking and the stormwater management basin. The addition is proposed on the north side and it will encroach into the existing parking area. Some of the parking will be relocated to the south side of the site and the existing stormwater management basin will be reduced in size. A new stormwater management basin will be constructed on the south side of the site and tie into the existing basin. He also pointed out the areas on the site plan which was marked as Exhibit A-3. The proposal does meet the requirements for parking with one space per unit; there will be 85 rooms and 85 parking spaces. With regard to the previously granted waivers, the applicant is requesting to carry those waivers over to this proposal. The addition is also proposed to be shifted closer to the Black Horse Pike which will allow for a greater separation between the addition and the rear property line as well as from the townhouse development behind the hotel.

The buffer on the townhouse development property is very dense and actually reaches higher than the existing two-story hotel. The new addition meets the requirement for height and lot coverage. With regard to access, the plan proposes one-way in and one-way out. This will improve the circulation on the site. The applicant has applied to the NJDOT for the new access on the south side. They have spoken to a representative from NJDOT and they have indicated the new driveway access will not be a problem. The representative also stated that the applicant did not need to submit a new traffic impact study.

Public Hearing: (continued)

1. #429-SP – M3 Hotel Developers, LLC (continued)

Mr. Peterman stated they do have an existing buffer and landscaping along the rear property line and they will be adding to that buffer where they can, however, they are somewhat restricted because they have to install piping from the existing basin to the new basin in that area. Mr. Davis commented that Exhibit A-4 is the survey of the site and Exhibit A-5 is the proposed signage. Mr. Peterman testified that the signs will be the same size and height; there will just be a reconfiguration for the brand name. The directional signage will remain the same.

The proposal will require a variance for front yard setback where 60 feet is required and 66.27 feet is proposed. A rear yard setback is being requested where 35 feet is required and 23.2 feet is proposed. The existing rear yard setback is non-conforming and the proposal is in keeping with that non-conformity. The ordinance requires a 25-foot perimeter landscape buffer and the applicant is proposing 23 feet. The applicant is also requesting to reduce the size of the parking spaces from 10 x 20 to 9 x 18. The size and configuration of this property in itself would constitute a hardship for requesting the variances. It creates somewhat of a challenge for them since they have had to skew the addition closer to the Black Horse Pike, which only allows them to have one row of parking in front, it also creates a challenge with lining up the interior hallways and such, but they have done the best they can in designing the site to meet the ordinance and make it work. They have also tried to keep the circulation on the site limited to the front of the building along the Black Horse Pike to minimize any comings and goings of vehicles around the rear so as not to cause much impact to the townhouse development behind them. The expansion of the hotel will be an asset to the community, the hotel is centrally located and in a commercial zone and for these reasons they believe the use advances the purposes of zoning and does not create any substantial detriment to the public good or the zone plan.

There is one waiver they believe they require for the width of the drive aisle. They are proposing a 24-foot drive aisle and the ordinance requires a 25-foot drive aisle. Mr. Peterman stated that many of the waivers were previously granted and they are continuing those waivers to this proposal without any detriment to the ordinance. The applicant is requesting submission waivers from providing a traffic study and an environmental study. With regard to the environmental study, they did submit the one they had done in 2008. There will be testimony from the applicant that there have not been any substantive changes to the site since that study was completed. Mr. Chheda acknowledged and agreed with the statement that there have not been any substantive changes to the site since the last environmental assessment was completed and submitted. They have received the reports from the Board's professionals and there are some completeness comments that they do not object to complying with or they are requesting relief as noted in the report.

Public Hearing: (continued)

1. #429-SP – M3 Hotel Developers, LLC (continued)

Mr. Crane inquired as to the buffer along the rear property line and the comment that there will be a pipe connecting the two basins. Mr. Peterman explained the reason for the piping and stated that they will be restricted from planting some of the buffer area due to that piping. Mr. Crane asked if they can plant shrubs on top of the pipe. Mr. Peterman replied that they are proposing some plantings but for maintenance purposes they do not want to provide the entire planted buffer. The existing planted buffer will remain in place. Mr. Crane commented that he would like to see as much planted buffer as possible. Mr. Kozak stated that the townhouse development has a thick planted buffer with 50-foot pine trees. Mr. Peterman stated they will work with Ms. Pellegrini's office with regard to the buffer.

Mr. DeFrank reviewed his completeness report for the Board. He listed the waivers required and being requested which are noted in his report. The waiver from providing the contours beyond 200 feet of the property is fine in most areas, however, Mr. DeFrank asked for some testimony regarding the discharge point from the basin on the south side of the property. Mr. Peterman testified that the property behind the strip store center has an existing wooded area which will help dissipate and absorb that water. Mr. DeFrank asked if any property owners might be affected if the basin were to fail. Mr. Peterman replied that the emergency spillway is directed toward the large basin in the rear of the townhouse development in the event the hotel basin failed. Mr. Schwaiger asked if the basin is an infiltration basin. Mr. Peterman replied it's a combination due to the new standards. It's an infiltration, detention, and retention system which works together to reduce runoff and provide stormwater quality infiltration back into the ground. Mr. DeFrank stated that many of the comments in his report relate to stormwater issues and the response from Mr. Peterman is that they will comply and provide updated information to Mr. DeFrank. Mr. Schwaiger asked Mr. DeFrank if he had any concerns that the applicant will not be able to comply. Mr. DeFrank replied that he does not have any concerns that the applicant can make the changes and provide new information. He will continue to work with Mr. Peterman's office on the outstanding issues.

Mr. DeFrank stated that the applicant is requesting a waiver from providing a designated loading area. He stated that they did provide an outline of the operation and the deliveries are minimal and done by small box trucks a few times a week; however, a waiver is still required. Mr. DeFrank stated that two environmental site assessments were provided, one dated 2002 and one from 2008 which is for the newly acquired piece of property on the south side where the new basin will be located. Mr. DeFrank stated he has not completed his review of that assessment yet since they just received it but there didn't seem to be any issues; however, after they complete their review if there are any major issues, he will advise the Board.

Public Hearing: (continued)

1. #429-SP – M3 Hotel Developers, LLC (continued)

Mr. Peterman stated they will continue to work with Mr. DeFrank on any issues or questions they may have concerning the environmental assessment. Mr. DeFrank stated he did look at the report briefly and had a question about the existing well. He also noted that the adjoining property, from which the newly acquired property was subdivided from, has a LSRP report associated to it and he did not know if that was a standard practice due to the daycare facility or if there was a previous issue on the site. He stated he would continue to follow up on that issue. Mr. Chheda stated that prior to them purchasing that piece of property, there was a contingency that the environmental assessment had to be clean. With regard to the traffic report, since the NJDOT is not requiring a new report, Mr. DeFrank did not see the need for them to provide one. Mr. DeFrank reviewed the submission waivers for the Board. A waiver from providing existing contours 200 feet beyond the property, a waiver to allow parking within 20 feet of the building, a waiver from providing a topographic base map, a waiver from providing all existing structures within 200 feet, a waiver from providing a traffic report, and a waiver from providing the existing lighting within 100 feet of the property. Mr. Schwaiger commented that the ESA is an important component and he would like to see any approval conditioned on a clean report. Motion by Mr. Crane, seconded by Mr. O'Brien to grant the submission waivers and deem the application complete. Roll call vote: Ayes – Mr. Crane, Mayor DiLucia, Mr. Kozak, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Helsel, Mr. Schwaiger. Nays – Zero. Abstentions – Zero.

Mr. DeFrank stated that he spoke with Mr. Peterman yesterday and earlier today and they worked through a lot of the comments in his technical review. They have agreed to address the bulk of the comments in his report. Mr. DeFrank inquired about the existing septic field and new arrangements for sewer for the adjacent building which is on the property from which they purchased a piece of land. Mr. Chheda replied that it was a condition of the sale of the property and the sewer will be taken care of as part of the expansion of the hotel by both him and the other property owner. A new small pump station and force main will be provided for that property and the current septic will be abandoned. That inspection will be done by the County and the applicant agreed to provide a copy of that to Mr. DeFrank. He also asked for a copy of the plans from the MMUA to be provided to his office regarding this matter. Mr. Chheda agreed to provide a copy to him.

Mr. DeFrank inquired about the parking spaces and there being one space for every unit. He stated that if the hotel was ever booked to capacity there would not be a spot for the employees to park. Mr. Chheda stated that it's normal practice for a hotel to have only the number of parking spaces as units. In all the years the hotel has been in operation, they have never had an issue with parking.

Public Hearing: (continued)

1. #429-SP – M3 Hotel Developers, LLC (continued)

He also stated that if people are travelling from out of town, many times they will travel together but book separate rooms or people use car share services to get to the hotel such as Uber or Lyft, so even though the hotel might be at full capacity, the parking lot is not full. Mr. DeFrank commented that ADA requirements are for four spaces but the Township ordinance would require five spaces. Mr. Schwaiger asked how many ADA compliant rooms there are in the hotel. Mr. Chheda stated that they currently have two ADA compliant rooms. They are proposing four ADA compliant parking spaces which meets the requirements. Mr. Peterman also commented that the applicant was granted relief from the Township's requirement to have five spaces and allowed them to have the four required by the ADA. Mr. DeFrank stated that the other comments in the report concern the stormwater management and the applicant has agreed to comply as a condition of approval.

Ms. Pellegrini reviewed her report for the Board. She stated that much of the information in her report has already been addressed in testimony. The applicant did clarify the patio which is noted as a Phase II project but is actually part of this approval. She also stated that her report has a comment concerning the appearance of a third floor on the existing hotel but the applicant has confirmed that no rooms are being added to the existing hotel. The variances have been requested and are consistent with variances that were approved previously for an addition similar to this one but never built. Ms. Pellegrini stated she did not have any objection to the Board granting those variances or waivers. With regard to the buffer and landscaping, she commented that it appears there is existing landscaping shown on the plans and she suggested a better accounting of what they propose so that they are not bonding for landscaping that already exists on the site. She stated she will work with Mr. Peterman's office to ensure the landscaping and buffer are sufficient. There aren't any issues with the proposed signage. The perimeter of the basin should be planted in a naturalistic manner. A minimum of 75% of the perimeter of the basin should be planted an average width of ten feet and minimum width of five feet and 50% of the plantings should be evergreen. She stated the plan does not really conform but she will work with them to improve that buffer area. The applicant has agreed to the COAH fees and other standard fees as well as obtaining all outside agency approvals. Mr. Davis commented that he spoke with Mr. Chheda and he is going to have a new Phase I Environmental Site Assessment done and submitted to the Board for approval. Mr. Schwaiger thanked the applicant for his initiative to have that done.

Motion passed to open the hearing to the public. There being none, motion passed to close the hearing to the public.

Public Hearing: (continued)

1. #429-SP – M3 Hotel Developers, LLC (continued)

Mr. Boraske summarized the hearing for the Board. Motion by Mr. Kozak, seconded by Mr. Crane to grant preliminary and final major site plan approval with the variances and waivers as stated on the record and listed in the professional's report, as well as any previously granted, and subject to the following conditions; the applicant will comply with all comments listed in the review letters as agreed to this evening, the new ESA study, working with Ms. Pellegrini's office on the landscaping and buffering, proof of all outside agency approvals deemed necessary, all fees required including escrow fees, bonding and inspection fees. Roll call vote: Ayes – Mr. Crane, Mayor DiLucia, Mr. Kozak, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Helsel, Mr. Schwaiger. Nays – Zero. Abstentions – Zero.

Public Portion:

Motion passed to open the meeting to the public. There being none, motion passed to close the meeting to the public.

Reports:

1. Mrs. Farrell stated that she sent an email to the new members concerning classes at the League of Municipalities in November to be held in Atlantic City. She stated if any of the new members can attend one of those meeting dates to please let her know so she can have them registered.

Approval of Minutes:

1. 9/12/19 regular meeting.

Motion by Mr. Helsel, seconded by Mr. O'Brien to approve the minutes from the September 12, 2019 regular meeting. Voice vote; all ayes, motion passed.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:16 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.

Respectfully submitted by: Ninette Orbaczewski, Clerk Transcriber