



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

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January 29, 2001

Mr. Robert A. Ford, Assistant Manager
Whitemarsh Township
616 Germantown Pike
Lafayette Hill, PA 19444-1821

RE: MCPC # 00-475-1
Municipality # SLD 5-00
Plan Name: Creekside Commons
(1 lot comprising 54.30 acres)
Situates: North of Stenton Avenue/
East of Joshua Road
Whitemarsh Township

Applicant's Name and Address

The DePaul Group
1750 Walton Road
Blue Bell, PA 19422

Contact: James J. Garrity
Phone: (610) 825-8400

Dear Mr. Ford:

We have reviewed the above-referenced land development in accordance with Section 502 of Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code," as you requested on December 5, 2000. We forward this letter as a report of our review and recommendations.

Background

This review is for a sketch plan for the redevelopment of Corson's Quarry One, currently owned by Highway Materials. The quarry, which has been filled in, is proposed to be redeveloped with three apartment buildings, totaling 600 dwelling units, and four office buildings, totaling 450,000 square feet. Along with these uses is a 3,450-stall parking lot, of which 512 spaces are located under the buildings while the rest are surface spaces. Additionally, 447 spaces are being held in reserve.

The site is zoned HVY-X Modified Heavy Industrial District. Office buildings and uses are permitted in this district. Apartment buildings and residential uses, except as an accessory use, are not.

Review

We have the following concerns regarding this submission.

1. Overall Development Proposal. We believe that this plan presents a proposal that is too intense in both its impervious coverage and density for this site and the surrounding area. The HVY-X zoning was developed for heavy industrial uses and its dimensional standards were devised for such uses. When applied to suburban style office buildings and mid-rise apartment buildings (the proposed buildings are 80 feet in height) the coverage of the site becomes excessive, resulting in buildings surrounded by acres of paving. We believe that this results in a project that, while initially attractive because of its newness, will not age well. The lack of amenities, typically found in the best designed suburban office campuses, such as green space and walking trails, will result in a loss of desirability over time. Similarly, the apartments are positioned within areas of intense paving. Even the one proposed amenity, the swimming pool and clubhouse, are surrounded by parking spaces and roads. While we feel that a suburban style office campus is appropriate for this area, as

recommended in the draft comprehensive plan, and believe that including a residential component is desirable, any development of this type proposed for this area should follow regulations written specifically for it.

2. Apartment Use.

A. Pursuant to Section 116-155.A of the Zoning Ordinance, residential uses, except as a residence for a caretaker, watchman or custodian is specifically prohibited in the HVY-X District. Given this, it seems reasonable to assume that the applicant will seek a use variance from the township's Zoning Hearing Board. However, under Act 247, to obtain such a variance the applicant would have to show a hardship. While we defer to the township solicitor, we are unable to see what the applicant's hardship in this situation is.

B. The applicant is proposing 600 dwelling units on approximately one-half of the 54-sacra site. Under the township's existing density requirement for apartments (10 dus per acre), if the entire site was developed with apartments only about 540 units could be built. Again, we feel that the proposed density is too intense.

3. Development Design. Besides the overall density and impervious coverage concerns, we have the following comments regard the project's design.

A. Office Buildings:

- 1) The two groupings of office buildings essentially have only one access point to the main drive. Each are located directly across from the other. This will create excessive congestion in this area and a potential safety hazard in the event of a fire or other emergency. Additional access points are needed. The situation is exacerbated for the grouping west of the main drive, for one of the apartment buildings could also use this access.
- 2) Several parking rows have more than 15 spaces in a row. This is not permitted under Section 105-38 (I) of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance.
- 3) No one parking area shall have more than 30 cars. Several areas appear to conflict with this regulation. (Section 105-38 (I) of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance.)
- 4) Angled spaces are used alongside right-angled spaces. This is not desirable.
- 5) If developed, the reserve parking spaces will result in the loss of desirable green space and many of the proposed trees. We recommend that they be removed from the plan.

B. Apartment Buildings:

- 1) Several parking rows have more than 15 spaces. This is not permitted under Section 105-38 (I) of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance.
- 2) Areas of not more than 30 spaces are not permitted (Section 105-38 (I) of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance).

The various violations of the township's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance is an indication that the development proposed for this site is too intense.

4. Stormwater Runoff. We are concerned about the effect on adjacent streams because of the extensive paving associated with this project. The volume needs to be controlled to prevent erosion and the applicant should install best management practices to improve the quality of the stormwater.

5. Traffic Study. A traffic study was done on July 31, 2000. This study was for 500,000 square feet of office space with no residential use. Therefore, we believe that a new study should be done before this plan proceeds. Regarding the current study, we are concerned that it has a lot of traffic coming from Philadelphia. We feel that most of the traffic will actually come from the Blue Route (I-476). Therefore, we recommend that this be considered when the new study is done and, especially, the effect that this new traffic could have on intersections in Cold Point and Plymouth Meeting.
6. Reduction of Paving. To reduce the amount of paving on this site, we recommend that the following be considered:
 - A. Reduce the size of the individual parking stalls from 10 x 20 to 9 x 18 feet. This would require a waiver from Section 105-38 (A) of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. We recommend that such a waiver be considered by the township.
 - B. Given that the parking requirements for office and residential uses would not have the same peak requirements, consideration should be given to allow a percentage of the required spaces to be shared by both uses. Since the current ordinance is silent on the issue of shared parking, the township will have to make a determination if it is permitted.

Recommendation

At this time we recommend that the applicant and the township work together to draft a new zoning district that would allow office buildings and apartments in a campus setting, with appropriate dimensional requirements. To develop this site as proposed under the HVY-X District dimensional requirements will create a new, dense, village surrounded by a semi-rural area, disconnected from other dense areas of the township.

Also, consideration needs to be given to the future redevelopment of the entire quarry area. The project should be seen as the first phase of a potentially multi-phased project that will occur over many years. In particular, thought should be given for creating an internal road network that would connect all of the quarries and provide alternatives to such constricted intersections as Joshua Road and Stenton Avenue and Joshua and Flourtown Roads.

Please note that the review comments and recommendations contained in this report are advisory to the municipality and final disposition for the approval of any proposal will be made by the municipality.

Should the governing body approve a final plat of this proposal, the applicant must present the plan to our office for seal and signature prior to recording with the Recorder of Deeds office. A paper copy bearing the municipal seal and signature of approval must be supplied for our files.

Sincerely,



Nels Sandberg, Principal Planner
610-278-3743 – nsandber@mail.montcopa.org

- c: The DePaul Group, Applicant
James J. Garrity, Applicant's Representative
Lawrence J. Gregan, Twp. Manager
William F. O'Donnell, Chrm., Twp. Planning Commission
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