

East Whiteland Township

Planning Commission

Wednesday, January 26, 2022

*This meeting will be held in-person (not virtually) at the East Whiteland Township Building.
Masks are required for all in-person attendees regardless of vaccination status.*

Minutes

(agenda items [linked](#) to online documents)

Members Present:

Deb Abel, Chair; Todd Asousa, Vice-Chair (via Phone); Jeff Broadbelt, John Laumer; Tim Kelly; and Dante Bradley.

Also Present:

Zachary Barner, Director of Planning & Development; Bernadette Kearney (via Zoom), Township Solicitor; Steve Anella, Deputy Township Solicitor; Darrell Becker, Township Engineer; and Chris Williams, Township Traffic Engineer.

Call to Order:

Ms. Abel called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Reorganization:

- **Chair:** Mr. Bradley made a motion, seconded by Mr. Broadbelt, to recommend Ms. Abel to serve as Chair.

The motion carried unanimously **(6-0)**

- **Vice-Chair:** Ms. Abel made a motion, seconded by Mr. Broadbelt, to recommend Mr. Asousa to serve as Vice-Chair.

The motion carried unanimously **(6-0)**

Minutes:

Mr. Bradley made a motion, seconded by Mr. Kelly, to approve the **November 29, 2021** meeting minutes (no meeting in December).

The motion carried unanimously **(6-0)**

Development Applications:

1. **Modular “Data Pods” at Swedesford Road Data Center** (Green Fig Land Company) – Request for a Waiver from the Land Development Process to install twelve (12) “data pods” on the eastern portion of the tract, which was previously approved for a solar panel array. The site will be improved with a grass paver style access road and will utilize existing stormwater management facilities. The project is associated with a previously approved Zoning Hearing Board Appeal (No. 2021-11) which regulates the proposed use and other aspects of the site development. The property, located at 15 S. Bacton Hill Road, is within the INS (Institutional) Zoning District.

Jack Robinson, Engineer for the Applicant, provided an overview of the proposed project. He began by circulating example photographs of other modular data units for review by the Planning Commission.

The dimensions of the modular units shown on the plan are approximate. The exact dimensions may be subject to minor changes once the specific unit is selected.

The pods are proposed on an area of the larger tract which was previously approved for up to 8,000 solar panels. The Applicant previously performed remediation of the site, including a membrane (or “quarry cap”) and installed a stormwater management basin. The solar panels would have equated to over two (2) acres of impervious coverage. The access road that is shown will likely be a grass paver style roadway to reduce the overall impervious coverage. The runoff currently sheet flows from the east side of the site to the west and into the stormwater basin.

Mr. Laumer asked how the units are contracted with the end users. Charlie Lyddane, on behalf of Green Fig, explained that the pods are leased out to individual companies, who use them for various computing tasks – ranging from financial calculations, rollout of 5G, internet of things, and cloud storage. There will be one company that leases out the site and installs the units for lease by the individual users.

Mr. Bradley asked if solar panels are still envisioned elsewhere on this portion of the tract. Mr. Lyddane explained that panels were intended to provide power to the previously proposed continuing care retirement community, whereas the panels would only produce approx. 1-2% of the required electricity to power the overall data center use. Mr. Lyddane added, for context, that the 11 acres solar field (or 8,000 panels) would supply enough electricity for only one of the proposed data pods. Mr. Lyddane explained that, ultimately, the Applicant is seeking to power the entire facility with renewable energy.

Mr. Robinson explained that the Applicant is requesting a waiver from the land development process since the majority of the site improvements (like stormwater management) have already been installed as part of previous efforts.

Mr. Bradley asked for information regarding the security of the site. Mr. Lyddane explained that the entire site will be fenced and served by camera surveillance among other measures. The existing gate (which was required by the EPA during the site remediation) will be upgraded for security purposes.

Ms. Abel asked if Mr. Becker had any comments on the plan. Mr. Becker responded that the comments outlined in his review letter should be addressed by the Applicant.

Mr. Laumer asked if these facilities would be visible from the road and whether it should be screened from view. Mr. Robinson explained that the facilities would likely not be very visible from the road due to the relative grades of the site compared the surrounding roadway. Landscaping and screening opportunities are limited due to EPA requirements on the remediated portion of the site.

Mr. Kelly asked if the units could be double stacked vertically. Mr. Robinson explained that the units would not be stacked due to cooling requirements and heat dissipation. The units are currently separated by 50 feet between units.

Mr. Laumer asked that the Applicant explore the possibility of painting the units with infrared reflective coating.

Action: Mr. Bradley made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mr. Laumer, to recommend approval of the requested waiver of the land development process to the Board of Supervisors.

- 2. [Knickerbocker Tract Redevelopment](#)** (DP Whiteland, LLC) – Preliminary Subdivision & Land Development application to construct 280 single-family attached (townhouse) and semi-attached (twin) dwellings, a clubhouse and amenity space, trails, stormwater management, and associated improvements. The property, which is comprised of several parcels of land located between Mill Lane, Lapp Road, Old Morehall Road, Liberty Drive, and Swedesford Road (UPIs 42-4-19 ; 42.4-25.1 ; 42-4-25.2 ; 42-4-42 ; 42-4-30), is within the RMH (Residential Medium-High Density) Zoning District. These parcels, known collectively as the "Knickerbocker Tract," total approximately 176 acres. The Applicant is seeking initial feedback from the Commission on the Preliminary Plan submission. No formal action is requested at this time.

Ms. Abel advised that this is the first time the Planning Commission will be discussing the project since the land development plan was submitted. The goal for this evening is to review the plan in general terms and provide initial feedback to the Applicant.

Jason Dempsey, on behalf of DP Whiteland, provided an update on the land development plan, which was submitted at the end of 2021. The plan preserves approximately 65% of the 176 acre site as open space. The Applicant has incorporated many of the comments received during the rezoning process and a number of lessons learned from other recent residential developments.

Mr. Dempsey provided an overview of the proposed amenities within the community, including a clubhouse, dog park, tot lot, pickle ball courts, and other features.

The plan shows 2.4 miles of walking trails (excluding sidewalks) which would extend throughout the site and connect from Mill Lane to Old Morehall Road. With sidewalks included, the plan includes up to 5.4 miles of pedestrian facilities.

Drawing on some of the issues experienced in other communities, the plans call for wider streets (26 feet compared to 22 feet in other neighborhoods), longer driveways (minimum of 20 feet from back of sidewalk), and multiple points of access (onto Lapp Road, W. Liberty Boulevard, and a potential emergency access onto Mill Lane). The Applicant will coordinate with Township Staff on the details of the emergency access, including the exact alignment, construction materials, and opportunities to minimize impacts on surrounding properties.

Mr. Bradley asked whether the trail would connect to the Chester Valley Trail (CVT). Mr. Barner advised the Township has developed some basic concept plans for how to connect the existing neighborhoods in the Moores Road, Sidley Road, and Lapp Road area to the CVT. The trail on this property could ultimately connect to these other (future) pedestrian facilities and connect southward to the CVT by crossing over the existing bridge spanning Rt. 202.

Mr. Broadbelt asked whether the existing bridge over Valley Creek would be replaced as a result of this project. Mr. Dempsey advised that he had committed to the replacement of that culvert bridge during the rezoning process, in part to address concerns from Trout Unlimited over temperature regulation and ability of the local trout to navigate the stream.

Mr. Dempsey advised that there may be a need for a handful of waivers to allow the existing connector road (Knickerbocker Way) to be used more heavily by passenger vehicles. The Applicant intends to upgrade the existing road and replace the bridge in order to bring it into closer compliance with the Township's street standards.

Mr. Broadbelt stated that he appreciates the connectivity, access to the stream, and public parking areas that are shown on the plans.

Mr. Laumer asked that the Applicant create areas for seating, shade, and drinking water for both residents and pets within the dog park. Mr. Dempsey advised that additional details will be provided on the landscaping plan. Ms. Abel asked whether the dog park and other amenities would be open to the public. Mr. Dempsey stated that the amenities are intended for private use by the residents but that the trails and open space areas would be open to the public.

Mr. Dempsey provided an overview of the proposed mix of dwelling types and the layout of units. Ms. Abel asked whether the homes would be built on the “peaks” or the “valleys” of the site. Mr. Dempsey advised that the homes would be built primarily on the lower, flatter areas toward the center of the tract.

Mr. Broadbelt asked that the Applicant identify areas for snow push-off and storage. Mr. Dempsey agreed that snow is an important consideration and feels there are adequate areas throughout the site. Mr. Broadbelt added that it would make sense to include pre-identified areas in the homeowners association documents.

Mr. Laumer asked if there would be areas that allow residents to create garden areas near their homes. Mr. Dempsey responded that residents in a community like this generally realize that there is an emphasis on uniformity and that things like gardens and outdoor spaces are generally not permitted by the homeowners association.

Mr. Kelly expressed concern over traffic entering/existing at the Knickerbocker Way/Liberty Boulevard access. Mr. Dempsey advised that his traffic engineer is coordinating with McMahon Associates to address concerns over the existing and proposed traffic conditions.

Mr. Bradley asked how this plan differs from the previous plans which were reviewed during the zoning process. Mr. Dempsey highlighted that the number of units is the same as the most recent concept plan that was presented. The overall unit count is limited by the restrictive covenant that was recorded against the property. The unit dimensions have been revised and the amenity space has shifted closer to the Lapp Road entrance. Otherwise the plan is substantially similar to the previous plans that were reviewed.

Ms. Abel opened the floor for public comment.

Sue Drummond asked Mr. Dempsey for more information on the size and layout of the homes. Mr. Dempsey responded that there will be opportunities for “master down” and the units are mostly within the 2,400 square foot range. The price point is difficult to predict at this point, particularly given the variability in the cost of materials (such as lumber) in recent months.

Martin Lutz asked why the multi-use trail and emergency access have not been shown within the narrow strip of land at the western portion of the site. Dan McKenna, Civil Engineer for the Applicant, advised that the current plans show the Applicant’s first attempt to provide an appropriate emergency access. Mr. Dempsey expressed that he and his team are considering a variety material types to minimize the visual impact of the improvements for the surrounding property owners. Additional coordination with Township Staff, including the Fire Marshall, will be required to determine the exact layout, construction materials, etc.

Mr. Lutz advised that the environmental impact assessment states that the driving range will continue to privately-owned and operated. Mr. Dempsey advised that his understanding is that the driving range will continue to be operated as it currently does, however the restrictive covenant limits the Applicant's ability to develop this area for residential purposes if/when the driving range ceases operation.

Mr. Lutz suggested that the Township consider the closed/vacated portion of Lapp Road as an additional emergency access to connect from the residential areas of Lapp Road (on the west) across to the commercial areas of Lapp Road (on the east) in order to access the community from the northeastern entrance at Lapp Road.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment for items not specifically listed on the agenda.

~ Next Meeting ~
Wednesday – February 23, 2022