



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

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FAX 610-278-3941 • Website www.planning.montcopa.org

February 13, 2009

Mr. David Kraynik, Manager
Cheltenham Township
8230 Old York Road
Elkins Park, Pennsylvania 19027

Re: MCPC #02-0050-003
Plan Name: Laverock, Tentative Sketch Plan
(9 lots comprising 42.89 acres; 216 DUs)
Situat: Willow Grove Avenue (W)
South of Fort Washington Expressway
Cheltenham Township

Applicant's Name and Address

Hansen-Lloyd, LP
1401 Morris Road
Blue Bell, PA 19422

Contact: Anthony John Hibbeln,
Hibbeln Engineering
Phone: 215-619-9070

Dear Mr. Kraynik:

We have reviewed the above-referenced Tentative Sketch Plan in accordance with Section 502 of Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code," as you requested on January 15, 2009. We forward this letter as a report of our review and recommendations.

Background

The applicant is proposing to create an age-restricted multiple-dwelling development on a 10.97-acre (gross) portion of a larger estate totaling almost 43 acres, and is intending to seek a Special Exception to develop the property under Cheltenham Township's Age-Restricted Overlay District. The majority of the proposed development area, 9.8 acres, is located in Cheltenham Township, with the remainder in Springfield Township. No land development is proposed within the Springfield Township portions, though the applicant is applying 1.17 acres of land in Springfield to the development area, presumably in order to meet the dimensional requirements.

The proposed plan would create a new main entrance to the site off of Willow Grove Avenue, approximately 450' north of Newbold Lane, and would widen the existing driveway to the main house to provide secondary site access. The proposal is for eight four-story buildings (two pairs of which are interconnected) with footprints of 74'x140', with 27 units per building, for a total of 216 age-restricted dwelling units. The proposed buildings would have parking in the ground level and four stories of living above. 388 parking spaces are proposed, in surface lots and underground garages, at a rate of 1.5 spaces per unit, plus 64 additional spaces for visitors and employees, as required in the Code. A community building of approximately 2400 square feet would be located in the center of the development. Sidewalks are shown throughout the development site, and a sidewalk

is proposed along a portion of the frontage from the Main Entrance to an existing sidewalk stub at the corner of Willow Grove Avenue and Newbold Lane.

The overall 43-acre property contains four large country homes, one of which is located on the tract proposed for development. The subject development tract contains the circa 1890 estate known originally as "Falcon Hill," and later called "Laverock Hill." The proposed plan would raze the Laverock Hill house, remove the majority of the existing trees and plantings on the property, and re-grade much of the existing slope of the land. The proposed plan may also require the demolition of another existing home to the rear of the development area, which is located on the Springfield Township portion of the overall 43-acre tract. The Laverock Hill estate has been listed as an important cultural resource in both the Cheltenham Township Open Space Plan and Comprehensive Plan.

The current zoning of the Cheltenham Township portion is R-3, Medium-Density Residential, permitting by-right development of single-family detached homes on minimum 20,000 square foot lots, and permitting townhomes in Planned Cluster Development as a Conditional Use. Our estimate indicates that approximately 18 single-family home lots could fit onto the proposed development parcel in Cheltenham Township. The Age-Restricted Overlay District may also be applied to this parcel at the discretion of the Township, provided that it meets all of the requirements for the Overlay and for Special Exception use.

Cheltenham Township has a Preservation Overlay District, which would apply to development on this site; however it appears that the proposed development could be exempt from the requirements of this Overlay District, provided that the proposed community is permanently restricted to persons aged 62 or older.

The proposed development parcel has 1,454 feet of frontage along Willow Grove Avenue, which is a State Road identified in Cheltenham Township's Comprehensive Plan as a "Major Collector." Use of the Age-Restricted Overlay requires a minimum of 750 feet of frontage on a State Road for parcels measuring between 8 and 12 acres, and the proposed plan meets that requirement.

Comments

We bring the following issues to your attention:

1. **Clarification of Proposed Age-Restricted Use.** The Applicant does not indicate on the plans whether the proposed Age-Restricted development will be limited to persons 55+ or persons 62 or older. This point of clarification is important because of a reference in Article XXIV, the Preservation Overlay District, that states "multiple-dwelling housing for the elderly projects are exempt from the requirements of this article." The definition of "multiple-dwelling housing for the elderly" in the Cheltenham Zoning Code refers to communities restricted to persons 62 years of age or older; a 55+ community however would not be exempt. We recommend that the Township require a deed restriction to persons 62 or older as a condition if a Special Exception is granted for this site. If the applicant cannot agree to the deed restriction to persons 62 or older, then the site will have to be redesigned to meet the requirements of the Preservation Overlay District.
2. **Preservation Overlay District.** As noted above, if the proposed development is a "55+" community, then it will be required to meet Article XXIV of the Cheltenham Zoning Code, the Preservation Overlay District. Key requirements affecting the site layout: density would be determined by a By-Right Yield plan; existing structures and natural features would have to be

preserved; new structures would need to be located a minimum of 100 feet from the preserved structures on the site; maximum height would be 3 stories or 40 feet; no more than eight units would be permitted per building; and other requirements apply per Article XXIV. The Applicant and Township will need to resolve whether the Preservation Overlay shall apply to this site.

- 3. Historic Preservation and Plan Consistency.** We note that two of the four goals of the Age-Restricted Overlay are to enable “the adaptive reuse of existing buildings and facilities,” and to encourage “the preservation of natural features,” and that these goals should be taken into account when considering the granting of a Special Exception. We also note that one of the criteria for granting a Special Exception is that the project be “in accordance with the Cheltenham Township Comprehensive Plan.”

The Laverock Hill property is a significant cultural resource and is identified as such in the “2002 Township Comprehensive Plan” and the “2005 Township Open Space Plan.” The house and gardens are also listed on the Athenaeum of Philadelphia’s inventory, and are mentioned in several books regarding history, architecture, and landscape architecture. Demolition of these structures would be inconsistent with the Township’s official goals and plans.

The main house was built by John C. Sims circa 1890. The home was later purchased by Isaac Tatnall Starr and renamed “Laverock Hill.” It is said that the Laverock neighborhood is named after the estate, increasing its importance as a local landmark. Starr hired the team of architect Charles A. Platt and landscape architect Ellen Biddle Shipman in 1915 to remodel the home and design integrated formal gardens and plantings throughout the property. Platt and Shipman, each renowned in their own rights, are noted for their collaborative garden and home designs during this period. The main house, formal circular drive from Willow Grove Avenue, brick retaining walls running most of the length of the property frontage, greenhouses, tree plantings, and gardens survive today in their original condition.

Even if the Preservation Overlay does not apply to the site, we recommend that the Applicant consider redesigning the site layout to preserve the Laverock Hill house, its circular entry drive, and the circa 1915 formal gardens adjacent to the house. We do commend the applicant for preserving the brick wall along Willow Grove Avenue, and the brick entry feature at the existing entrance. Even if the house cannot be saved, we see great opportunity to design a community around the preserved formal gardens, which we believe would add substantial value to the project, and go a long way to meeting the need for better resident amenities on the site.

While the property is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is unique to the Township’s history and may be eligible for this distinction. The Applicant is to be commended for preserving historic structures in other projects in the County, and we would hope that the same consideration can be given to this significant property.

We also note that the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) recommends that historically significant properties and structures be documented regardless of whether or not demolition is planned. At a minimum, we encourage the Township to work with the Applicant to document this unique resource using PHMC standards. The standards include preparing a historical narrative, creating site sketches, and taking photographs.

- 4. Public Sanitary Sewer Access.** The Applicant’s cover page indicates that the existing structures utilize on-site septic, and that the sketch plan proposes “no change.” The Age-Restricted Overlay, however, requires that all proposed buildings “be served by public water and public sanitary sewerage” (§ 295-245.E.). It is our understanding that Cheltenham Township does not

currently have the capacity to provide public sewer to this site. The Applicant shall confirm with the Township how the site will gain access to public sewer facilities.

5. **Rear Setback Line.** The Applicant's layout appears to meet all of the dimensional requirements of the Age-Restricted Overlay (for a 62-or-older community), however the plan relies upon lands in Springfield Township to meet the 50' rear setback to the parking area. It is our opinion that the Township Line is an imputed property line for the purposes of zoning and land development. We recommend that the applicant redesign the site layout so that setbacks can be met within the Cheltenham portion of the property.
6. **Site Area Calculations.** As noted above, if the Township determines that the Township line / zoning district boundary shall act as an imputed property line, then the Applicant will need to recalculate the impervious coverage, building coverage, and required open space so that only those lands in Cheltenham Township are included, and adjust the plan accordingly to meet those requirements.
7. **Access to Structures in Springfield Township.** It is not clear from the proposed plans how the existing homes, barn, and other structures on the Springfield Township portion of the site will be accessed. The plan indicates that the driveway near the corner of Newbold and Willow Grove will be removed; however there does not appear to be an alternative driveway location proposed. Springfield Township will need to determine whether the proposed parcels meet their Subdivision requirements.
8. **Traffic Impact Study.** We recommend that the Applicant conduct a Traffic Impact Study prior to the granting of any approvals. We also recommend that the engineer preparing the study use figures for typical multi-family development, given that the site does not have access to public transit and is not located within walking distance of shopping or other destinations. The portion of Willow Grove Avenue on which the property fronts is narrow, wooded, sloping, and close to a curve leading onto the bridge over Route 309. The road is a major arterial leading from Wyndmoor and Chestnut Hill into Eastern Montgomery County. Traffic engineering and counts will need to be provided to address State, County and Township safety concerns.
9. **Site Re-Design and Coordination with Springfield Township.** We recommend that the Applicant work with both Cheltenham and Springfield Townships to develop a plan that can preserve the Laverock Hill house and gardens and address all of the other concerns raised by us and by the Townships. In the future, when formal land development plans are submitted, the same set of plans should be submitted simultaneously to both Townships if the development is within both Townships.

Recommendation

As the Applicant's submission is a Tentative Sketch Plan, we offer no formal recommendation at this time. However, we do recommend that the Applicant work with the Township to resolve the issues we have raised here and any additional concerns raised by the Township. We look forward to reviewing revised plans in which these concerns have been addressed to the satisfaction of the Township.

Please note that the review comments and recommendations contained in this report are advisory to the municipality and the 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,



Hannah Mazzaccaro, Community Planner
610.278.3744 – hmazzacc@montcopa.org

- c: Hansen-Lloyd, LP, Applicant
- Anthony John Hibbeln, Applicant's Representative
- All Township Commissioners
- All Township Planning Commission Members
- David Lynch, P.E. Township Engineer
- Bryan T. Havir, P.P., AICP, Assistant Township Manager

Attachment: Reduced Copy of Applicant's Plan



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XC: Board - I have forwarded a copy of this to Springfield Township.

RECEIVED

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March 16, 2009

CHELTENHAM TOWNSHIP

Mr. David Kraynik, Manager
Cheltenham Township
8230 Old York Road
Elkins Park, Pennsylvania 19027

D. Lynch
J. Bagley

Dave K

Re: Laverock Development Review

Dear Mr. Kraynik:

I am writing to offer the County's assistance with development discussions between Hansen Properties, Cheltenham, and Springfield Townships for the Laverock / Lloyd tract. As you know, we reviewed Hansen Properties' Tentative Sketch Plan for the Laverock site last month. It was our recommendation that Hansen work with both Townships to create a master plan for the entire 42 acres that will meet the needs and requirements of all parties. I understand that both Cheltenham's Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners concurred with that recommendation, and that Springfield Township is also interested in participating in a multi-municipal effort.

Montgomery County Planning Commission has a staff of experienced planners, designers, and landscape architects who can provide land planning and code writing assistance, as a service to both Townships. We can provide site plans for the tract on behalf of the Township(s) to foster the discussion process with the Applicant. I did mention this possibility to both Bud Hansen and his engineer, Anthony Hibbeln, after the Township Planning Commission meeting, and they seemed to like the idea of having us involved as a third party consultant. Commissioners Gillies and Heller from Springfield were there too, and Mr. Gillies also sounded enthusiastic about getting us involved in the site planning process. We can provide design and other planning services at no charge, because both Springfield and Cheltenham Townships have Planning Assistance contracts with us. We would also be happy to review and comment on site plans provided by the client, outside of the official land development review process.

The Laverock development has the potential to be a special place for its residents and a positive addition to both Springfield and Cheltenham Townships. There are, of course, some design and community impact issues that need to be worked out, some of which we addressed in our review letter. We are confident that many of these issues can be ameliorated through a re-design process that takes into account all of these concerns.