

January 9, 2013
Curtis Hall

A regular meeting of the **BUILDING AND ZONING COMMITTEE** was held tonight, Chairman Morton J. Simon, Jr. presiding. Members present were Commissioners Norris, Portner, Simon and Sharkey. Also present was Ex-Officio Member Haywood.

Staff present were David Jones, Interim Planner/Zoning Officer and Bryan T. Havir, Acting Township Manager. Also present was Joseph Bagley, Esq., Solicitor. A Public Attendance List is attached.

Mr. Simon called the meeting to order at 9:50 p.m.

1. Review of Zoning Hearing Board Agenda for January 13, 2013 as follows:

APPEAL NO. 3450 – (CONTINUED)Appeal of School District of Cheltenham Township, 2000 Ashbourne Road, Elkins Park, PA owner of premises known as 333 Rices Mill Rd., Wyncote, PA (a/k/a Wyncote Elementary School), from the Decision of the Zoning Officer in order to demolish / remove the existing school and build a new Elementary School:

The following Zoning Relief is required for the proposed school building within the R-3 Residential District:

1. From CCS 295-23. (Building area) for relief to construct a 51,252 SF school building with 22.96% building coverage that exceeds the allowable 15%. The existing nonconforming building coverage is 19.22%.
2. From CCS 295-220A. (Front yard projections) for relief to construct a portion of the play area in the front yard setback along Church Road and to allow the proposed driveway widths along Rices Mill and Barker Roads to exceed 18 feet.
3. From CCS 295-221.B(5).(a) (Location of surface parking) to allow surface parking between the school building and Rices Mill and Barker Roads.

Present representing the School District was School Board President Tina Viletto; Ray Bavi; Facilities Director; Catherine Crystal Clark, Wyncote Elementary School Principal; David Horner, Traffic Engineer; and Glenn Harris, Gilbert Architects. Mr. Bavi reviewed the process of the project; issues with the current school, i.e. age, structural problems, etc.; and stated that there have been 23 public meetings.

The architect reviewed the existing plan, building layout and site location. For the proposed plan, he reviewed the moving access point for buses from Rices Mill Road to Barker Road; the angle of the building; size of the acreage; steep slopes; 65-space parking; access of the bus loop and parent drop-off on Barker Road; on site parking on the side of the building; circulation of the buses; dimensions of the driveways; street access; playground location; stormwater management and compliance with the Act 537 Plan and rate control of stormwater management with a pipe system; the building area greater than 15%; landscaping between the street and the building; and the requests for zoning relief.

Mr. Horner reviewed how the traffic study was performed, including traffic counts, access, bus loop options, off-site impact, which he claimed was not significant since the school is an existing school, and even with enrollment increases, traffic will not significantly increase, the bus traffic on Rices Mill and Barker Roads, the bus loop will separate it from vehicular traffic; on-site parent pick-up area; stacking of vehicles. Mr. Horner claimed that this plan is an improvement over what presently exists and for moving forward. In response to a question by Mr. Haywood, Mr. Horner that that he is reviewing the comments by Frank Tavani, the Township's Traffic Engineering consultant. Mr. Tavani commented that most of his traffic concerns should be addressed during the land development review process.

Ms. Clark stated that a 21st Century school was needed; school officials want everyone to enter and exit on site; the current entrance and exit is dangerous and a safety issue.

Mr. Haywood questioned the ability of the plan not to encourage a parent to give into the parent drop-off area that encourages them to go down Greenwood Avenue as opposed to using Rices Mill Road going towards Abington Township and the chances that a child could use the bus loop as a short cut. Mr. Horner stated that landscaping will discourage this, and responsible adult supervision.

It was Mr. Simon's opinion that the community needs to be educated and encouraged to use the safe drop off on Barker Road and that the location of sidewalks around the school would help eliminate cut-thru.

Mr. Norris asked about student enrollment. Ms. Clark stated that currently there are 413 students, and the new building was designed to accommodate 500 students.

Ms. Hampton asked about the height of the building and cost. Ms. Clark stated that it will be two (2) stories. Mr. Bavi stated that a three (3) storey would cost \$2 Million more. As the principal, Ms. Clark preferred a two (2) storey building due to young children circulating inside the building, moving up and down stairs, and issues during an evacuation, if needed.

Ms. Viletto commented as follows: she urged the Committee for its support of the project; the school is needed; the safety of children is a concern; delay negatively impacts the timeline and cost of the project; many of the issues raised this evening are land development issues and will be vetted.

Mr. Haywood stated that he represents Rices Mill Road neighbors who object to the bus loop in front of their homes. He asked about having curb cuts on Barker Road. Mr. Horner stated that Barker Road is inadequate to accommodate a turn for nine (9) buses. Mr. Horner stated that with curb cuts and having the buses pullover instead of a loop, only four (4) to five (5) buses could be accommodated between Rices Mill Road and Barker Road.

Public Comments:

Olga McHugh thought the bus drop-off at the curb was safe. Her children went to the school and were safe with it. Sustainability issues should take precedence in the Township such as the need improve walking, not bus use.

Philip Washington opposed the Rices Mill Road parking lot; there are not state or Township requirements for parking lots and it was not necessary; he wanted the building's rotation changed, parking lot removed and more green space; the School District has itself to blame for any delay because they did not do a traffic study; the less turns buses make, the safer it is; the traffic study does not address where the buses go.

Will Hawkins supported the bus loop; most schools have a loop, and it is a safe transition off the road.

Bob Collings stated that his children went to the school, and there were no safety issues; he opposed zoning relief in an R3 district; he felt traffic bells and whistles were being added and would not make traffic patterns safer; aesthetics are a key part of zoning, and this plan will alter the aesthetics of the community and the neighborhood, and there will be a mass of parking lots and buses; there is nothing in the plan that proves it is beneficial to the community; the School District did not communicate with the neighbors.

Valerie Solitryn supported the plan. She was concerned about the children and drop-off patterns; the plan supports better parental behavior; the large trees around Rices Mill Road will remain.

Bob Miller asked Mr. Horner how many schools he designed with such a bus loop. Mr. Horner responded that he designed a school in Easton, PA. Mr. Mill has issues with the bus loop. The children can get hit on Rices Mill and Barker Roads and on the loop; there are too many turns for the buses to make; he support a curb cut and bus drop-off at the curb; he opposed the parking lot and lack of aesthetics.

Stephanie Wietecha felt there was a cross-purpose of cars coming and going on Barker Road; children will cross where they can and as quickly as they can; she had concern about sustainability and more flooding onto Greenwood Avenue, the addition of imperious surfaces that would promote flooding; Greenwood Avenue is being set up for more flooding.

Tom McHugh felt that the current way of dropping off students was not a problem and stacking the buses up in single file along the curb is safe; the plan creates an incentive for children to run between the buses and in every direction; parents do not pay attention; the plan is too off-the-shelf; Cheltenham is not Souderton; he wanted the bus loop eliminated; that too big a school was being squeezed on a small plot; he questioned the adequacy of underground stormwater storage for the frequent regular severe rain events; flooding will increase.

Jim Taylor stated that he is a teacher at the school; he supported the plan; this is the middle of a difficult beginning; it will be a state-of-the-art school for the 21st Century; the current school is a safety problem; an educational plan for students and parents is needed on how to use the new building.

Jim Custer supported the plan; he acknowledged that it is not perfect but addresses the issues; the current school has no stormwater management; safety of children is important; police enforcement should be on Rices Mill Road.

David Cohen felt that this is a public building being paid by tax dollars; there is an attitude to rush this plan through; there is an aesthetics issue with the parking lot; there is a stormwater run-off issue; the traffic engineer did not give alternatives but rather validated the plan; the traffic study did not address on-site parking needs; he opposed the bus loop.

Tracy Rossman opposed the plan, the cut-out on Barker Road; the drop-off of students and the pick-up habits of parents are an issue; she opposed the left turn egress out of the driveway of the buses; the loop will not solve the problem of parents dropping off the children; there was no outreach to the community by the School District.

Phil Bugg supported the plan and felt that it was safer for children.

Dan Blitstien felt the bus loop was an issue; questioned if there was a study of the loop at Glenside Elementary School and if was being utilize; he felt that the current number of buses and the projected increase is buses do not justify a loop; the left bus turn out of the loop was an issue with him; he valued the safety of the children but felt the plan could be challenged.

One resident did not feel the plan sustained sustainability; there was poor sewage and drainage; it is too costly; there is "zero" planning; it is being rushed through; and asked that the Commissioners oppose it.

Susan Collings felt it was too dangerous for children to walk on Barker Road.

Robert Hyslop was concerned about stormwater due to the size of the building; the building is too large, and stormwater will be affected; stormwater needed to be addressed now and not wait until land development.

Amy Blum was concerned about the bus loop; supported curb cuts; concerned about students being dropped-off; people do not listen, and they open the card door and let the kids run out; she did not think parents will use the bus loop; at the Glenside Elementary School, the loop is slow moving, and the parents do not have patience, the loop causes congestion; she was concerned about the lack of green space; the School District caused its own delay because it did not do its traffic study before the plan was originally submitted; the traffic study was done on a bad day; the curb cut is sufficient for the number of buses; the building is too large for a residential area; public concern was ignored by the School District, which dismissed the opinions of neighbors; the site should be considered before the structure.

Mrs. Rollins felt that the current school is in poor condition; she felt that parents needed to be educated; there should be adequate signage; she supported the bus loop; she felt that currently the children are unsafe.

The Township's Traffic Consultant Frank Tavani addressed the meeting regarding the bus loop. It was his professional opinion that there were positives, i.e. it is surrounded by sidewalks; simultaneous pick-up and drop-off of students; the buses can turn right or left when exiting; the loop allows the buses to go where they want to go; it separates bus and parent traffic; it gets the students closer to the building; the current building is sub-standard for stormwater retention, and a new building will correct this.

Mr. Bagley asked about left turn on Barker Road vs. right turns. Mr. Tavani responded that the School District needs to educate parents and motorists regarding use of common sense; restricting traffic to right turns only can cause issues.

Ms. Viletta explained the future phases and standards as set forth by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Ms. Hampton asked about stormwater run-off issues being addressed. Ms. Viletta stated that this could be discussed at a Liaison Committee meeting. The cost of the project is based on timing, and delays make the project more costly.

Mr. Portner stated that everyone is concerned about safety of children. To the best of his knowledge, no children have been injured at the current school.

Mr. Simon felt that stormwater management is a matter of law, and a part of land development. He thought there might be less opposition to a small loop and might create less impervious surfaces.

Mr. Sharkey asked that the School District consider the following: reducing the size or eliminating the loop; eliminating the driveway on Rices Mill Road; if the bus loop is kept that there be landscaping and/or fencing, which will be considered in land development; the Shade Tree Advisory Committee is aggressive about landscaping; inclusion of sidewalks on the property.

Discussion concluded, and the Committee considered a recommendation.

MOTION: The first motion: Mr. Haywood motioned approval of the plan contingent upon elimination of the bus loop. The motion did not pass (AYES: Hampton; Haywood; NAYES: Norris, Portner, Sharkey, Simon).

The second motion (passed): Upon motion of Mr. Portner, the Committee unanimously directed the Interim Township Zoning Officer/Planner to advise the Zoning Hearing Board that the Committee recommends approval of the plan.

2. Upon motion of Mr. Portner, the Committee unanimously received the Report of the Building Inspector for December, 2012.

3. The Committee reviewed recent decisions of the Zoning Hearing Board as follows:

APPEAL NO. 3446 – Appeal of George Speakes, owner of 1810 Chelsea Road Elkins Park, from the determination of the Zoning Officer finding that construction of a deck, measuring 12 feet by 20 feet, to the rear of an existing residence situated on a nonconforming lot as to area and width regulations which creates a less than required side and rear yard setbacks would violate the Cheltenham Zoning Ordinance of 1929, as amended, and, specifically, Article VIII, Section 295-46, regulating yard setbacks.

The Zoning Hearing Board granted the request for relief with conditions

Upon motion of Mr. Portner, the Committee unanimously agreed not to take any action.

APPEAL NO. 3447 – Appeal of Victoria Palm, owner of 212 Ryers Avenue, Cheltenham, from the determination of the Zoning Officer finding that construction of a deck, measuring 19 feet by 19 feet, and a wheel chair ramp, measuring 5 feet by 16 feet, to the rear of the premises and creating a less than required side yard setback would violate the Cheltenham Zoning Ordinance of 1929, as amended, and, specifically, Article XVII, Section 295-121, regulating yard setbacks.

The Zoning Hearing Board granted the request for relief with conditions

Upon motion of Mr. Sharkey, the Committee unanimously agreed not to take any action

APPEAL NO. 3448 – Appeal of Steven Wit, owner of 8320 Forest Avenue, Elkins Park, from the determination of the Zoning Officer finding that construction of an octagon shaped gazebo, measuring 12 feet in diameter, in the northeast corner of the Property and created less than required side and rear yard setbacks would violate the Cheltenham Zoning Ordinance of 1929, as amended, and, specifically, Article VII, Section 295-39, regulating yard setbacks

The Zoning Hearing Board granted the request for relief with conditions

Upon motion of Mr. Simon, the Committee unanimously agreed not to take any action.

4. At the advice of Solicitor Bagley, the Committee unanimously agreed to table discussion of an Ordinance and the Scheduling of a Public Hearing to amend the Zoning Code relating to expenses exceeding the filing fee to be paid by the applicant.

5. Mr. Bagley announced that the Board of Commissioners will commence an Executive Session after the meeting to discuss personnel and litigation matters.

There being no further business, upon motion of Mr. Portner, and unanimously approved by the Committee, the meeting was adjourned.



Bryan T. Havir
Township Manager

as per Anna Marie Felix

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING, 7:30 p.m.
PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETING, 7:45 p.m.
BUILDING AND ZONING COMMITTEE MEETING, 8:00 p.m.
Wednesday, January 9, 2013, Curtis Hall

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