

**Upper Merion Township Planning Commission
Regularly Scheduled Meeting for June 8, 2022**

The Upper Merion Township Planning Commission met for its regularly scheduled meeting on June 8, 2022, in-person in the Henderson Room, located in the Township Building, and via Zoom. The meeting information was fully advertised and a meeting agenda placed on the township website. The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Matt Popek, Chair
Martin Trumpler, Secretary
Kenneth Brown
William Jenaway, Board Liaison
Patrick Foley, on behalf of Leanna Colubriale, Township Engineer (Remington & Vernick)
Ashton Jones, Township Planner

ABSENT:

Mark McKee, Vice-Chair
Jaquelin Camp

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

Minutes for the May 25 meeting had not been previously distributed. The item is tabled.

411 Swedeland - Discovery Labs

1 million+ sqft. of new lab/office and parking garages

Ed Campbell, applicant's attorney, provided an overview and introduction to the large project. Collectively, this plan calls for an additional 1 million+ square feet of development space and additional parking. Additional construction in West Conshohocken will be part of 6 phases of development. Today's meeting is to focus on a discussion of traffic and what is being studied.

Brian Keaveney, traffic engineer, indicated that while the project will be multi-phased, the effects of traffic are being looked at in its entirety across all phases. Mr. Keaveney indicated that areas of study would include: Swedeland Road, River Road, South Gulph Road, Holstein Road and Trinity Lane, and areas around the Gulph Road expressway interchange. Specific intersections to be studied were: Swedeland, Holstein and Jones Roads; Swedeland Road and Renaissance Blvd; River and Swedeland Roads; Renaissance Blvd and Horizon Drive; Church Road and Horizon Drive; Swedeland Road and Trinity Lane; South Gulph and Swedeland Roads; Trinity Lane and Holstein Road; Trinity Lane and Balligomingo Road; South Gulph Road and the Schuylkill Expressway; and Swedeland Road and onsite driveways. Mr. Keaveney indicated that the site is indicated in the township's Act 209 impact fee ordinance and that the Act 209 study identified infrastructure improvements in the area. As such much of the work could be accomplished through payment of fees and subsequent construction improvements. Mr. Keaveney indicated that the township's traffic engineer has been provided a scoping form and responded with comments.

Mr. Keaveney indicated that the site was fully occupied under GSK. Through the years, occupancy has decreased and it will be important to capture future trips as if fully occupied. Mr. Keaveney indicated that it is likely that a light will be required at the site's main entrance, and that an extension of Renaissance Blvd. is being considered. Mr. Keaveney continued to describe potential intersection improvements (additional drive lanes, signalization improvements).

Mr. Popek asked about what before condition of the site would be used to judge traffic impacts, and Mr. Keaveney indicated his consideration is that full occupancy of the existing buildings is the before condition.

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Mr. Popek then asked about the ending year of the 6-phases, with Mr. Campbell responding that 2025-2030 would be when full build out was considered.

Mr. Popek summarized the potential improvements as: 1) left turn lane - Swedeland to Jones Road, 2) signal on Swedeland at main site driveway (subject to PennDOT), 3) extension of Renaissance Blvd. to site, 4) Swedeland and Route 23 right turn channelization, and 5) South Gulph Road/Swedeland, Gypsy Lane signal operations. Ed Campbell, reiterated that the extension of Renaissance Blvd. will be dependent on conversations with PECO.

Mr. Popek raised two questions on behalf of the vice chair regarding the status and timing of the proposed Renaissance Blvd extension and traffic impacts on residential neighborhoods. Mr. Popek indicated that the PECO portion of the question had already been addressed. Mr. Campbell indicated that the improvements as described by Mr. Keaveney will address the vice chair's concerns. Mr. Keaveney indicated that they could talk to SEPTA regarding routes, etc. while Mr. Campbell added that the facility already has a shuttle. Mr. Jenaway indicated that in the past a shuttle was utilized and that it was always full. This was followed by a discussion of shuttle service and bus lines in the area.

Mr. Popek asked about traffic studies in West Conshohocken, with Mr. Keaveney indicating that will also be happening and that he understands that the two sites are symbiotic. Mr. Trumpler asked about internal roadway connections, and Mr. Campbell indicated that it is contemplated that there will be internal connections between Upper Merion and West Conshohocken. Mr. Trumpler asked about a future connection at River Road and Interstate 476, and Mr. Campbell indicated that it was not likely feasible due to project cost.

Mr. Jenaway ask about if the Cooper Creek rail could provide any value to the site with Mr. Campbell indicating that he does not believe it has yet been contemplated. Additionally, Mr. Campbell indicated that Building 11, located in West Conshohocken, is a proposed warehouse building that will be used for the site's storage needs.

Mr. Jones brought up a comment regarding how to accurately get a count of employment in the past and Mr. Campbell indicated that their team has yet to go to tax records but that it could be calculated through ITE or parking spaces. Mr. Jones reiterated that any traffic counts should include known development plans for other Upper Merion's projects and the presentation ended with aerials being presented regarding the proposed project.

No action was taken by the planning commission.

2901 and 2501 Renaissance Drive

Request to remove age restriction from deed

Mr. Campbell indicated that 5-7 years ago the planning commission and others worked to draft an ordinance change which allowed multifamily in close proximity to mass transit. Mr. Campbell further indicated that the site in question is within the prescribed distance to said mass transit (the Hughes Park station on the Norristown High-Speed Line). As part of the back and forth at the time, a covenant was placed on properties limiting the sites to 300 market rate units with additional units being age restricted. Currently 2901 is approved for 300 units and 2501 as an office use but could be revised to accommodate age restricted units. Mr. Campbell indicated that there is an interest in developing 2501 as market rate housing but that clearly the

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restriction would need to be removed, which cannot be done without township input. Mr. Campbell indicated that in his opinion, if the purpose of the TOD overlay is usage of the transportation facilities, it would be more likely used by those who are working rather than retired. Mr. Campbell indicated that he believes that there is more value if the age restriction is removed, considering the site's location, but that there is value in having alternative uses within the office park.

Mr. Popek summarized past actions regarding multiple proposals for residential, commercial and office uses and indicated that the last time the Planning Commission saw these applications, it was for two life science buildings. Mr. Campbell responded that 2901 will likely be residential and that they are finalizing agreements with the Township solicitor. Mr. Campbell further responded that at the time the covenant was contemplated assisted living was being considered. That use has evolved over time and now requires more space, different amenities, stepdown units, etc. Finally, Mr. Campbell concluded that the site no longer really lends itself to that use.

Mr. Campbell indicated that the restrictive covenant is indicated as voluntarily which was followed by a discussion of the restriction's specific language.

Mr. Trumpler asked about where green space will be located, as the site is surrounded by impervious/ office park type uses. Mr. Campbell indicated that while the facility will be programmed with certain amenities, it is not likely that large additional green areas will be provided. Additionally, as demonstrated by the other apartment complexes' being built in both the township and the vicinity, these complexes will not likely have many school aged children, thus requiring large children play areas. Further discussion of on-site amenities followed with Mr. Campbell indicating that when they come in for land development this would need to be considered.

Mr. Popek summarized by indicating that 1) if Planning Commission says yes to considering the removal of the restrictive covenant, the plans will be back before the board in a new iteration, whereas 2) if the Planning Commission says no, the property is restricted from market rate units (could be age restricted or otherwise). Mr. Jones reiterated that in addition to everything discussed, a residential use would require conditional use approval (Mr. Campbell indicated that this would likely be simultaneous with land development).

Mr. Popek discussed his concerns and thoughts regarding 1) the Renaissance Park Master Plan and its contemplation of residential, and 2) the township's concern regarding long cul-de-sacs accessing residential properties and the need for site access on the west, adjacent to 2901 renaissance Blvd. Mr. Popek indicated that this would likely come up again at the Board of Supervisors. Mr. Campbell indicated that he agrees site interconnection will be part of the conversation, regardless of any proposed use, as the agreements for 2901 included dedication of both land and funds for future improvements.

Mr. Brown asked about counter-flows of traffic and Mr. Campbell indicated that residential uses will provide for people going to work, whereas additional office or other commercial use will draw traffic in. Mr. Brown indicated that comparing the two uses would not result in a one for one comparison as to projected traffic demand.

Mr. Jenaway indicated that in the past, developers came to the Township and indicated that additional housing was needed (in order to accommodate employment). Mr. Jenaway indicated that two specific developers both indicated about 3,000 units as what the township could accommodate in future growth (the township now has about that number). Mr. Jenaway indicated that the studies at the time indicated that a 500

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unit per year increase was a good growth rate that would not overburden infrastructure. Mr. Jenaway indicated that, as related to this application, the applicant should consider what could be accommodated in the Discovery Labs/Renaissance area and a timeline to achieve said unit counts. This will help the Township to better understand the demand/change and would help to support future changes. Mr. Jenaway indicated that the Comprehensive Plan will be revisited in the near future and that consideration should be given to a holistic approach to the entire area and an understanding of what other needs would benefit area residents. Mr. Trumpler reiterated that different uses have different demands which will need to be considered.

Mr. Jones asked about the site's design and how the preexisting cap plays into any contemplated design changes. Mr. Campbell indicated that he has seen two site layouts in the past, 1) as a rectangular life science building, and 2) as a rectangular shaped office building. Mr. Kevin Kyle, the applicant, indicated that additional geotech would be required as related to the cap but that any building will be relatively limited in its scope of changes (minor cap encroachment). Mr. Campbell reiterated that as such, any changes in building design at 2501 will be limited in scope and the greening of the site will be largely with shrubs only.

After further discussion the board indicated that they were not opposed to allowing market rate housing. This was based on the understanding that any project would be back to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors for a continued and a more thorough review. Mr. Trumpler made a motion to remove the age restriction, this was seconded by Mr. Brown, with a 3-0 vote.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Jones provided an update indicating that the Board of Supervisors was choosing, pending public input, to move forward regarding the short-term rental ordinance. Mr. Jenaway provided additional details to address specific Planning Commission member concerns. With Mr. Popek's request for a summary, Mr. Jones provided a recap of what was discussed at the last Planning Commission meeting. With no other business to discuss, Mr. Brown moved to adjourn the meeting with Mr. Trumpler seconding and all in favor at 8:31 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:

Martin Trumpler, Secretary