

PALMER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC MEETING - OCTOBER 11, 2011 7:00 P.M.

The regular monthly meeting of the Palmer Township Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, October 11, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. with the following in attendance: Vice Chairperson Virginia Rickert, Ron Grandinetti, Jo-Ann Stoneback, Bob Blanchfield and Chris Briglia. Absent were Chairman Tom Grube and Rich Wilkins. Also present were Planning Director Cyndie Carman, Attorney Victoria Opthof and Engineer Ralph Russek. Vice Chairman Rickert convened the meeting and led those present in the Pledge to the Flag.

Minutes of the meeting of September were approved on motion by Stoneback, seconded by Blanchfield, and agreed by all.

Dr. Valla Medical Office – 2445 Lawnherst Avenue – Minor Land Development Plan and Conditional Use Application. Request by Suriya Enterprises, LLC (Dr. Suneel Valla, Principal).

Dr. Valla was present with his engineer, Terry DeGroot from Terraform Engineering requesting approval to convert an existing home into a physician's office. Departmental comments were reviewed and they questioned the Police Department's comment. DeGroot stated they agree to put up the requested no parking signs on their side but feel the business across the street should be responsible for their side. Carman agreed and will contact them about this. DeGroot stated the Knox Box will be indicated on plan and installed. The site lighting will be reviewed as part of the building permit process. DeGroot stated the waiver/deferral requests were submitted. They are requesting a waiver for the proposed driveway to be located within 300 feet of the centerline of Rt. 248. The existing driveway is located approx. 65 feet which will be removed and replaced with a new driveway on the eastern side of the property. This distance would be 145 feet from Rt. 248. The next waiver request is for the installation of sidewalks along Rt. 248. A variance was granted from the Zoning Hearing Board for this. The next waiver request is to eliminate the requirement to install concrete curbing along Lawnherst Avenue. This roadway is not currently curbed. They would also like to add Rt. 248 to this request. Their last waiver request is to eliminate the requirement to plant street trees along Rt. 248 as well as Lawnherst Avenue. There are existing large trees already on this property and the neighborhood does not have street trees. Russek noted that right-of-way improvements are usually deferrals not waivers. Carman agreed that the street tree and driveway requests could be waivers, but the curbs and sidewalks should be deferrals.

DeGroot felt there is no reason for large vehicles to access the rear of the property. Garbage trucks will use the front and typically fire vehicles will park on the street in front of the building. All necessary outside agency permits and approvals will be indicated on the plan. They discussed the storm water pipe which will keep any water from running directly onto Rt. 248. It is being diverted to an existing inlet which is in the township right-of-way. However this pipe

does tie into a pipe on Rt. 248 which is a PennDOT roadway. It was suggested that DeGroot get in touch with PennDOT about this. DeGroot stated that the Conservation District does not require a permit for land development under an acre. As far as getting sewer/water approval, this existing house was used as a residence and they feel the rates will be much lower for a doctor's office; they will be using less consumption than a residence does. The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission approval letter was submitted. The other engineering comments were going to be complied with.

They were asked how many parking spaces were going to be in the rear and DeGroot responded that they are planning on six in the rear of the building with three in the front which will be for employees. He also stated that they received zoning approval for the reduction of the aisle width to 18'. This enabled them to make the parking spaces wider. He also noted that the Zoning Hearing Board denied them from having another physician in this building. The driveway width has been approved to 18' which is adequate for two cars passing on the driveway. This is a reduction from the required 24'. The public entrance will be from the rear with the front entrance to be for employees. There being no further questions or comments from the Board, staff or audience Rickert called for a motion. Stoneback motioned to recommend approval to the Board of Supervisors for the minor land development and conditional use application as well as the waivers/deferrals subject to the satisfaction of the departmental comments and the township engineer's letter dated October 5, 2011. The Conditional Use request is to convert a residence to a medical office in the Rt. 248 Overlay. The motion was seconded by Grandinetti and agreed by all.

Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment – Digital Signs - Carman stated that she incorporated all comments from the last meeting including the staff comments into what she distributed to all. Attorney Opthof stated that she still believes flashing, blinking and twinkling signs should be allowed somewhere in the township. The courts have questioned similar provisions in the past. The Commission felt Carman should decide where these should be allowed. Signs that are permitted in residential districts was amended by allowing one digital or electronically changing message sign as a freestanding sign in the C-R district for school uses only. This would allow an electronic changing sign with words only to be allowed in this district. This is common for schools in our area. There is only one sign allowed on a lot so if the school district wanted one for the highway, they would have to decide where to place it since they front 2 major roadways. If they wanted one for each side they would have to go before the Zoning Hearing Board for relief on this. The sections that permitted electronically changing message signs in commercial, industrial, business and planning office/business districts were amended to add that the sign shall have a maximum height of five (5) feet. The section regarding off premise signs, including billboards was amended to allow billboards in the GC district and along Rt. 22. Also amended is that the maximum sign area on each of two sides may be increased to 672 square feet for billboards along Rt. 22 or 33. This is a standard billboard size. Any non-conforming billboards

could not be increased to this larger size nor could any existing billboards, not on Rt. 22 or 33 be changed to digital or electronically changing message signs.

There is a sub-section that is added to clarify the way the distance is measured between signs. We would measure the distance in the linear fashion along the edge of the roadway, like Penn DOT does. Signs shall be separated a minimum of 1,000 feet from any other digital or electronic off-premises sign. Also, signs within residential districts in proximity behind them would require a buffer as high as sign. It would be up to the property owner to maintain this landscaping. Carman displayed a map of the township showing the areas where digital or electronic changing signs would be allowed. At the last meeting the Commission discussed the timing that a message would stay on the sign. This was amended to 7.5 seconds, which is still higher than PennDOT which allows their timing at 6 seconds. This would allow more images to show per minute.

The one section requires signs to not be illuminated from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. Carman noted there is a recommendation to change this to 6 a.m. She was given some comments by other township officials and they feel there is traffic on the roadway at 6 a.m. and advertisers would like to have their advertisement displayed during peak travel times. Commission members feel that it is at night when you see the signs best, especially on the highways. They feel if a sponsor is going to be paying for these signs, they should be on 24 hours a day but not near residential districts. These signs would be inspected quarterly by the township lighting consultant and the owners would have to pay an annual fee of \$600 which would cover these inspections.

Attorney Victor Cavacini from Adams Outdoor Signs commented on some of the amendments that were discussed tonight. He asked about the height limitation of five feet and if it was to the bottom of the sign and Carman stated it was the overall height of the sign. He did question the annual fee that was needed to be paid and objected to this. Also in regards to the buffer between the sign and a residence; where would this landscaping have to be planted; how far from the structure? Carman stated she would clarify this. He stated usually the billboard company leases property from someone and he feels the landlord will be required to maintain this. He also stated that he was pleased that the seconds for the display were changed and that he liked the suggestion to have the signs on 24 hours.

Carman explained that the annual fee was based on the cost to the township for our lighting consultant to inspect the signs. Commission members asked why these signs would need a quarterly inspection if they are new and installed properly? Is there any other inspections that are done at that time like a structural inspection? Carman stated that we do not have any personnel that would be trained to inspect lighting levels. Attorney Cavacini stated the billboards need to be an engineered approved structure.

Commission members suggested that inspections once or twice a year would be enough, quarterly seems too frequent. Blanchfield motioned to recommend approval to the Board of Supervisors for the proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendments for digital signs with further amendments to recommend an annual inspection which cost would be determined by the lighting consultant fee; and that the signs along the state highways be illuminated 24 hours a day. This motion was seconded by Grandinetti. Russek commented that an annual inspection is okay but feels there needs to be the first initial installation inspection then annually after that, when the sign is energized. The Commission agreed with this.

Proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendments – North End Land Use – Carman distributed amendments she is proposing for the Comprehensive Plan pertaining to the north end of the township. Work has been moving forward to get the interchange at Rt. 33 constructed. The township and the school district have already approved the TIF and it is to go before the County in a few weeks. These amendments are designed to keep up with what is developing with the TIF process. The proposed amendment is to remove the “Rural/Future” designation from this area and recommend this area specifically for planned industrial, office and commercial uses. The Commission asked about the Borough of Tatamy and where they stand with this development of the interchange. Carman felt that they are realizing that this will be of assistance for them with their traffic. The Chrin Commerce Center will complement this area and a portion of this development is in Tatamy. The Commission felt that light industrial and office buildings would be great in this area. Carman displayed the township map and a new revised map of what is being proposed. She also suggested that some area at the northern tip of the township be kept as rural. There is a lot of potential for the township in years down the road. There being no further comments or questions Rickert called for a vote. On motion by Grandinetti, seconded by Stoneback, and agreed by all, the Commission recommended approval by the Board of Supervisors for the proposed text amendments as well as land use map changes as discussed.

On motion by Stoneback, seconded by Grandinetti, and agreed by, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Diane Grube, Corr. Secretary