

PALMER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC MEETING - TUESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2023 - 7:00 PM
PALMER TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL MEETING ROOM, LOWER LEVEL, 3 WELLER
PLACE, PALMER PA 18045

The August meeting of the Palmer Township Planning Commissions was held on Tuesday, August 8, 2023 at 7:00 PM with the following in attendance Chairman, Chuck Diefenderfer, Vice Chairman, Jeff Kicska, Robert Walker, Tom Grube, and Robin Aydelotte. Also in attendance were Solicitor Will Oetinger, Justin Coyle of Carrol Engineering, Kent Baird, Director of Planning and Craig Beavers, Assistant Planning Director.

1. Roll Call

2. Approval of Minutes - July 11, 2023

The minutes of the July 11th Planning Commission were approved.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Robert Walker, Seconded by Robin Aydelotte. Passed. 4-0. Commission Members voting Ayes: Aydelotte, Diefenderfer, Kicska, Walker

Commission Members voting Abstain: Grube Commission Members Absent: Ruch, Wilkins

NEW BUSINESS

3. 2215 Newlins Mill Road - Werner Parking - Sketch Plan

DISCUSSION

Present for Werner is Chad Harrington, Senior Director of construction and facilities maintenance, Tom Schlegel, Attorney, Paul Szewczak, Engineer

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The subject properties contain a total of 49.18 acres in two (2) separate adjacent parcels and are located at the northwestern corner of the Tatamy Road (S.R. 2017) and Newlins Mill Road intersection. The existing property is presently developed with the Lehigh Valley Training and Maintenance Facility and is bordered by existing Industrial use adjoining its western and northern boundaries and existing Agricultural use adjoining its eastern and southern boundaries. The property is in the Township PI/PC Zoning District and the proposed Industrial use is a permitted use in this zoning district.

The Applicant proposes to consolidate the two (2) existing parcels into one (1) lot in order to expand the existing maintenance and training facility parking lot to add (47) additional tractor spaces and (138) trailer spaces. The intended hours of operation for the facility are as follows:

- Maintenance Facility - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week is possible, depending on need.
- Training Facility - 7 am - 5 pm (M-F); 7 am-12pm (Sat.)

Stormwater management facilities are proposed at the southeast corner of the property. The existing development is presently served by public sewer and water. The parking area is proposed to be buffered by a landscaped berm on the south side along Newlins Mill Road.

Diefenderfer said they would be reviewing the sketch plan. The sketch plan doesn't require approval. This is just a presentation to get and give feedback.

Harrington gave background on the original project. He said that they originally planned on paving the whole area, but the previous township supervisors said they didn't see a reason to do that at that time. At the current time Werner's growth requires them to have more parking. He said they are triple stacking tractors and trailers in the yard and aisles are too narrow. He said it makes it an unsafe environment. The additional parking will not increase traffic. It is basically to decrease congestion on the lot. Originally, they had approximately 78 tractor spots and 198 trailer spots. They counted today and there were approximately 151 trailers and 244 tractors in the yard. The inventory is there for the driving school they have in Bethlehem. The parking they would like to add is just to reduce congestion. There will be no additional car parking or expansion to the building.

Kicska asked what would stop them from triple stacking in the future.

Harrington said they are triple stacking trailers in the larger spots meant to hold trailers. With additional space they would be able to move the equipment around.

Diefenderfer asked if the potential development of the space accounted for in the earlier plans. He mentioned there may be some issues with water storage.

Szewczak , Engineer at Benchmark Engineering answered no. This piece of land was unique in the valley of 50 plus acres it never discharged water. All the water generated on site stays on site. There is a large detention pond and 2 large underground basins that are actually down to bedrock. They are down about 2530 feet where they could avoid the sinkhole problems. All water is managed onsite with zero discharge. The parking lot they are discussing now is on a 10-acre tract separate from the original 50 acre tract. It is designed to sit on top of one of the underground detention ponds from the original project and its stormwater will be in a detention pond at Newlins Mill and Tatamy. It will be a surface pond, but it will have zero discharge.

He said he wanted to talk about traffic. He said the problem with them is they don't fit into a particular category. It may be called a terminal, but it is more a maintenance and training facility. They previously did a traffic study and improved Newlins Mill Rd based on different classifications of the project within the ordinance. He said they were mandated to do another traffic study about a year after the facility opened. He said they are 20% under the anticipated volume at the original approval.

Diefenderfer said that you are almost 100% over the number of tractors on the site.

Szewczak said they are already there and are accounted for in the supplemental study that shows they are still under 20%.

Harrington said it will be the same traffic coming in as today.

Diefenderfer expressed the concern of what will stop them from overloading the additional parking they would like to add.

Harrington commented that safety is one of their biggest concerns.

Aydelotte voiced the same concern as to what will prevent future stacking.

Schlegel asked Harrington to explain the size of the fleet, operations, and the facility.

Harrington explained they basically need a 2:1 ratio of tractors and trailers to keep the fleet moving. They issue trucks from the facility and drivers may drop a load that another driver will pick up.

Grube asked if drivers are scheduled.

Harrington said they need to be directed into the facility. You can't have people randomly showing up .

Kicska asked about sub-contractors.

Harrington said only owner/operators which they only have a very small percentage of. They all need to go through the same training as drivers. The owner/operators are Werner employees. They are just driving their own truck.

Grube asked how they got to the point that they are at now with overcrowding with no expansion of the operation. He asked if it was under-designed to start with.

Harrington said they tried to build bigger, but the previous supervisors felt they didn't need to do it at the time.

Baird said in a letter from former solicitor Bruno in 2018 the Board increased passenger vehicle space from 150 to 173. It also said there would be 76 tractors and 198 trailers.

244 is what is currently on the lot. He asked how the demand increases.

Diefenderfer said they are violating the Conditional Use.

Baird said after reviewing the sketch plan if there were berms were considered between parking lot and proposed infiltration basin.

Kicska added that it looks like they will be cutting out the berm on the corner.

Harrington said that at the time berms were placed at the perimeter of the

property line. The acres that were not developed didn't get berms. The intention is to put a berm when developed as well as 8-10 ft berm along Newlins Mill.

Kicska said there should be one along Tatamy Rd. also.

Beavers asked if there was a plan to address some of the landscape and lighting comments regarding landscaping when it comes to the land development phase including sidewalks and frontage improvements.

Szewczak responded that the intention is to improve Newlins Mill to Tatamy mimicking the improvement from what was required from the piece of frontage already improved.

Kicska said curbing and sidewalk for Tatamy Rd. also.

Beavers said the original deferrals would have to be addressed and it would need to submit as another conditional use for the parking lot expansion.

The Engineer questioned this.

Beavers said under the original approval and further expansion would require approval from the Board of Supervisors.

Szewczak said that it is not on the same property and we're not changing use.

Beavers said it is expansion of the use.

Szewczak said it is a different property. He also said this would be a conversation they would need to have with the solicitor. He also asked for the grading and design for Newlins Mill and Tatamy if sidewalk and curbing needs to be put in.

Diefenderfer said they would address that.

Szewczak referenced a comment in one of the review letters about widening the driveway. He said they had no interest in doing that. The facility works well. They don't want to turn left out of the facility.

Diefenderfer said they weren't sure what letter that was in.

Szewczak said possibly comments from Public Works.

Beavers referenced that there is a bike path that is part of the First Park 33 that would need to continue.

Diefenderfer said there may be some improvements like that, that will need to be done.

Szewczak said that there is a piece of the frontage that they do not control where the preserved Farmhouse is.

Beavers asked if there were any provisions for landscaping for the parking lot.

Szewczak said they don't consider it a parking lot. It is an equipment storage yard.

Schlegel said this needs to be thought about in a different way. It makes sense to have landscaping in a shopping area parking lot. This is a truck yard, with trucks moving through it. Landscaping makes the job harder for the drivers.

Diefenderfer said the zoning ordinance is what needs to be complied with.

Baird said we had concerns about overnight parking.

Diefenderfer said lighting in the parking lot was a concern.

Harrington said there will be lighting in the parking lot.

Diefenderfer said part of the concern was lighting affecting nearby residential areas.

Diefenderfer asked if the trucks in that area would be utilized day to day.

Harrington explained that would be more of the equipment under maintenance or to be assigned in that area.

Diefenderfer commented that there wouldn't be a need for a high level of light in that area.

Harrington said one of the comments was fencing around. He said that all their facilities are fenced. The fencing would be changed to encompass the entire yard.

Kicska said the lighting on the other side is just above the berm, but the trees will fill that in. He would like the same to be done on the side they are discussing.

Diefenderfer mentioned the trucks having back up alarms. He asked it with the berming, there was a way to manage that sound.

Harrington said if the equipment is not moving during the night as mentioned previously, you shouldn't hear any noise.

Diefenderfer said a concern would be plans to change and that side becoming active.

Harrington said there is no equipment that has back up alarms.

Diefenderfer said someone has commented to him about that noise.

A Werner employee said that there is not one piece of equipment that has back

up alarms in that facility.

Diefenderfer said in the conditional use regarding the amount of personal parking spaces required vs company vehicles on the lot.

Harrington added what's on the lot if not assigned, will not have a driver with it. A personal vehicle would not be required for that. At that point it is just a piece of equipment.

Diefenderfer since the ratio will change due to the expansion from what was originally calculated, it will need to be addressed. . Her said he believes it to be the Conditional Use letter from Oct 24, 2017

Another concern was going the wrong way on Tatamy Rd.

Harrington said it has decreased. They are adding better directions into QUALCOMM in the truck . It seems to be few and far between now.

Diefenderfer expressed concerns with the increased number of trucks sitting and oil leakage.

Harrington said the lots are checked weekly, they have stormwater compliance, and they keep dumpsters covered so rainwater can't get in.

Diefenderfer asked about the age of trucks.

Harrington replied they are between 2 and 3 years topping out at around 300,000 miles.

Diefenderfer asked about the owner/operators trucks.

Harrington said he can't speak to the maintenance but what he has seen are all low sulfur diesel.

Beavers asked how far they are from the nearest residential property.

Harrington said about a half mile from their east property line.

Beavers asked if the Farmhouse is in use as a residential property.

Harrington said that he believes it is being used as a bed and breakfast.

Diefenderfer asked if there is anything new with the road that runs along the retention area between the new zone and the old zone.

Harrington said if we could cut a couple tractor stalls so they didn't cut through the berm. He said there are options.

Coyle reviewed the comments that had been talked about and addressed. He added that some landscaping may be a good idea to add shade to the site.

He said he did like the conversation about the access point. Since there is only one point in and one point out, it may be a safety concern. He feels the major points of the plan were addressed.

Diefenderfer asked about the original land configuration.

Szewczak said it was originally 3 lots turned into 2.

Coyle mentioned that now 2 are going to 1.

Szewczak said possibly.

Diefenderfer said they may need to go to 1 or would be considered accessory use.

Oetinger said if they consolidate lots it would be an easier zoning hurdle. He added if you are putting a parking lot on a separate lot, a parking lot may not be an acceptable principal use.

Coyle said the statement of intent mentions lot consolidation.

Szewczak said they will take a look at the options.

Diefenderfer said that although it is being referred to as storage, he asked if all the vehicles are drivable and inspected.

Harrington said yes.

Diefenderfer asked if there were comments from the public. There were none.

PLANNING DIRECTOR COMMENTS

Baird welcomed the new Planning Commission members Tom Grube and Bill Ruch.

Baird discussed the process of the new Zoning Ordinance review. He mentioned there was some ambiguity and redundancy. Baird, Oetinger, Beavers, Danny Nicolo, James Raudenbush and members of the Board of Supervisors were part of the review process. They are working to make it a cleaner, less confusing document. They hoped to be finished with review in the next couple months.

He said they won the grants they wrote last Fall. These were for Bushkill Creek - Greenway Parks and Trails, Mill Race and 9/11 Master Trail Plan. They are working on an Open Space and Park Plan Revision and plan to use data from a survey they are conducting at Palmer Days to capture the public attention for parks and trails.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Diefenderfer asked if there was any further comment from the Board.

Kicska said Lehigh Valley Greens was giving out air monitoring stations to certain areas in Northampton and Lehigh Counties. The areas around the warehouses do not seem to be included at this time.

He said he urges people to get one if they can.

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:01 pm

Motion: Approve, Moved by Robin Aydelotte, Seconded by Tom Grube. Passed. 5-0. Commission Members voting Ayes: Aydelotte, Diefenderfer, Grube, Kicska, Walker

Commission Members Absent: Ruch, Wilkins