

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MAKEFIELD
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 1, 2020

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Lower Makefield was held remotely on September 1, 2020. Mr. Bruch called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

Those present:

Planning Commission: Ross Bruch, Vice Chair
 Tony Bush, Secretary
 Adrian Costello, Member
 Dawn Stern, Member

Others: James Majewski, Director Planning & Zoning
 Barbara Kirk, Township Solicitor
 Andrew Pockl, Township Engineer
 Frederic K. Weiss, Supervisor Liaison

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Bush moved, Mr. Costello seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve the Minutes of August 10, 2020 as written.

SALDO ORDINANCE AMENDMENT DISCUSSION OF DESIGN GUIDELINES IN OFFICE/
COMMERCIAL/MIXED-USE DISTRICTS

Mr. Bruch stated in early February they started discussing Design Guidelines for Mixed-Use developments and how they could be best implemented in the Township and used to the Township's benefit. He stated in the February 10, 2020 Meeting Minutes there is a good run-down in the Public Record on that discussion. He stated at that meeting they broke the subject down into four separate parts. Mr. Bryson handled Architectural Guidelines. Ms. Stern had Public Realm. Mr. Bush signed up for Parking and Circulation. He stated he believes he and Mr. Costello are going to handle Landscape and Hardscape Guidelines. Mr. Bruch stated tonight's discussion is going to be about parking and circulation, and Mr. Bush will be making a presentation.

Mr. Bush stated with regard to parking design and circulation it seems that functionality is most important, as are aesthetics, and environmental concerns. He stated in terms of functionality, he feels it is important to have adequate

entrances and exits, flow within the parking lot, parking lot spaces being sufficient in size, and pedestrian safety. Mr. Bush stated he feels they should look at what we already have in the Township in several Commercial lots.

Mr. Bush showed a slide of the ShopRite parking lot. He stated he feels most people agree that this is not the best of designs. He stated there are no pedestrian walkways within the parking lot itself. He stated traffic flow is not good when it is crowded, and the rear of the parking lot away from the supermarket has poor traffic flow. Mr. Bush stated the size of the parking spots and the cartway widths do not seem adequate when driving on them. He stated at the last Planning Commission meeting there was discussion that they need to get the ratio of the parking spots and cartway widths right. Mr. Bush stated in that lot the spots appear to be too small for many of today's larger vehicles.

Mr. Bush showed a slide of the McCaffrey's lot which he feels has better flow than the ShopRite. He stated the size of the parking spots are bigger, and he feels they are 10' by 20'. He stated the rear of the lot also has good flow. Mr. Bush stated it might not be a good comparison because it is a smaller parking lot for a supermarket.

Mr. Bush showed a picture of the McCaffrey's in Newtown which is a much bigger lot which serves a larger shopping center. He stated it has good traffic flow both in front of the stores and at the rear of the lot. He stated it also has a lot of entrances and exits to the parking lot. He stated the size of the spots seems to be adequate. He stated the only thing missing from this lot are good pedestrian walkways which is surprising as the shopping center was recently re-done, and they did not address pedestrian walkways within the lot.

Mr. Bush showed a slide of the Giant parking lot in Lower Makefield. He stated he feels it has good flow throughout the lot. He stated at one point they felt that that spots closer to the building were larger, but it was then determined that they are uniform throughout the parking lot. Mr. Bush stated Mr. Majewski had originally indicated that he felt that the spots closer to the building were larger; and while he does not know if the existing Ordinance addresses this, this is something that they may want to consider in these design guidelines and the size of the parking spots closer to the building should be larger. He stated possibly half way thorough the lot they would then get smaller. Mr. Bush stated he understands that this might cause problems with impervious surface, so there should be flexibility.

Mr. Bush stated none of the lots in Lower Makefield are new lots, and none of them adequately address pedestrian safety. Mr. Bush stated some, to varying degrees, have good flow and good parking lot size. He stated these are all things to keep in mind as they go through this process.

Mr. Bush stated he received information from Mr. Pockl in July which he thought that all Planning Commission members received, and he did not realize until late today that was incorrect. Mr. Bush stated this was the Montgomery County Green and Sustainable Parking Lots publication. Mr. Bush stated he does not feel they need to “reinvent the wheel,” and this publication puts forth a lot of information about problems with parking lots and how to make them better. He stated he is not sure if any communities in Bucks County or even Montgomery County have adopted this, but he feels it looks “terrific.” He stated it goes through problems with older designs of parking lots including that they are urban heat islands, and that they are bad for water quality and stormwater management. He stated they do not have character or the best lighting. He stated they also do not focus enough on driver and pedestrian safety. He stated it also clearly lays out a proposed Ordinance on Page 41 of the document. Mr. Bush stated he felt they could model something from this, although he recognizes that the rest of the Planning Commission has seen this document yet. Mr. Bush stated it goes through the purpose and intent, the applicability, and specifics in terms of plantings, the appropriate number of parking islands, and what islands should look like. Mr. Bush stated although he cannot comment on the specific details since he does not have an engineering background, he feels it looks good.

Mr. Bush stated he looked for other examples, but he did not find any that looked as good as this one. He stated he feels Mr. Pockl found a good model for Lower Makefield.

Mr. Pockl stated while he did not do a comprehensive search for other Ordinances, he was familiar with this one because it is one of his standards when involved with Land Development. Mr. Pockl stated the only thing he would caution with the Green Sustainable Parking Guide is that it is a guide and not a mandatory manual as a requirement. He stated there are certain sites where based on the type of soil that this would not work. He stated it would also not work with certain slopes of parking lots. Mr. Pockl stated the idea is to take the run-off from the parking lot and get it into the parking islands in between the spaces so the spaces are not abutting against

each other at the front, and there is a gap with a vegetative swale in the middle so that the stormwater run-off is hitting the parking lot and then getting to a green space and ultimately into an inlet and being channeled to the regional stormwater management system for the entire development. He stated it is a way of addressing water quality prior to getting to the flood control basin.

Mr. Bruch asked with regard to the vegetated island, could they still put a sidewalk in. He noted the parking lot at McCaffrey's has sidewalks in between some parking spaces that promote pedestrian traffic. He stated at the Giant parking lot, he does not believe there are any which prohibits easy pedestrian traffic; however, at the Giant it is possible to pull through and go through more easily, and a sidewalk would break up the ability to do that so there is a trade-off. Mr. Bruch asked Mr. Pockl if there could be a sidewalk or does that prohibit the benefits of the run-off management, and he also asked how that would effect flow. He asked if there is an advantage because there is better pedestrian flow or is there a disadvantage because traffic flow is at a disadvantage. Mr. Pockl stated a good design engineer would be able to work around that. He stated that is why this is a guideline. He stated if they want a walking space down the middle, they could have stone with an underground seepage bed or a trench underneath the walking surface where water gets into the stone layer, goes underground, and infiltrates into the ground that way. He stated the walking path would be on top. Mr. Pockl stated that would achieve a similar result. He stated there could also be porous paving within the parking spaces, although you would not typically want that within the driveway aisle as there is more vehicle load on the driveway aisle. He stated in the parking spaces, the vehicles sit there and they do not create as much load on anything that is underneath. He stated they could put porous paving within the parking spaces and have an underground stone vault that would infiltrate water into the ground that way.

Mr. Pockl stated another important factor is planting trees within the islands since trees take up a lot of water, cool down the pavement, and also create shade. He stated that is another benefit that is expressed in the guidelines.

Ms. Kirk stated at the Lower Makefield Corporate Center North Campus they took up a significant part of the parking lot and are installing an internal green space with pedestrian walkways, and she asked Mr. Pockl if that is similar to what he is referring to. Mr. Pockl stated that is more of a lawn plaza area. Mr. Pockl stated what he is discussing would be a 5' to 8' wide aisle at the end of each bank of parking stalls.

Mr. Bush stated if you put the islands at the ends of the parking aisles, you could still have the walkways between the cars, and Mr. Pockl agreed. Mr. Pockl added that if they are putting this in an Ordinance, it could be stated that these measures are encouraged as he does not know that they could specifically require them without understanding if it is feasible for a specific site.

Ms. Stern asked if they are just talking about the large parking lot that would service a grocery store, and Mr. Pockl stated he feels that they would be talking about every parking lot. Mr. Bruch stated it is his understanding that they are talking about the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance that is currently enacted in the Township and suggesting an Amendment to that to incorporate these Design Guidelines to be implemented on any new development or any rehab of an existing development. He stated they had discussed earlier in the year as to what would qualify as a rehab; and he believes the conclusion was that it would be anything that involves displacing dirt, so it would be more than painting, a new façade, or cosmetic. He stated while the Design Guidelines would be in the SALDO, developers/re-developers could always seek a Waiver of them; however, it would set a minimum standard that we feel is a comprehensive Guideline for the Township and for development in the Township. Ms. Kirk agreed with Mr. Bruch's comments.

Mr. Bush stated they do have the Traditional Neighborhood Development Overlay which covers Edgewood Village as well as the Giant and McCaffrey's shopping centers. Mr. Bruch stated if those requirements are more stringent than the SALDO, then the developers would need to adhere to that rather than the SALDO. Mr. Bush stated he believes that they are more stringent.

Mr. Majewski stated there are some items in the current Ordinance that regulate off-street parking and parking lots. He stated that in 2006 when Lower Makefield embarked on implementing low-impact development standards, one of the things they recognized was large parking lots rather than just being a "sea of pavement" should try to incorporate wherever possible some green areas especially where they have the opportunity for infiltration. He stated one of the items they have is that they should try to incorporate infiltration/bio-retention areas wherever possible in order to allow water to sheet flow from the parking lot into that. He stated traditional parking lots typically have the water run over the asphalt, go to a storm drainage inlet, and get piped through a stormwater management system. He stated a slightly better way to treat water from a water quality perspective is to have some of that water go into a vegetated area which

tends to absorb some of the water, and then it goes into an inlet and goes off to be treated for the rate of run-off so it does not flood people downstream. He stated that is in the Ordinance which aligns with the standards that Mr. Bush was discussing from the Montgomery County Guidelines. Mr. Majewski stated we also have in the Ordinance some items indicating that pedestrian crosswalks and refuge islands are required to be planted wherever possible such as every 200' in the parking area so that there are places where people can potentially walk. Mr. Majewski stated the Montgomery County guidelines are more comprehensive, and it explains in a layman's way what they are trying to do; and he agrees that a lot of them are what we want to do. He stated we want to try to not have a sea of parking where we do not need to. He stated at the North Campus of the Corporate Center they did have the parking broken up, but they wanted to make a large green area which pushed the pavement around to the sides of the building; but in the middle there was a large green space area which is also in the Montgomery County Guidelines. Mr. Majewski stated this is also in the Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) Overlay which requires some green space in areas to break up asphalt.

Mr. Pockl stated language in the Ordinance could be "no more than ten or twelve parking spaces in a row without having a dedicated green space." He stated they could have ten parking spaces and then a planted island where they could have mulch, perennials, and a tree, and then there would be another ten spaces. He stated they could indicate that planter islands should be incorporated into parking lot design for every ten parking spaces.

Mr. Majewski stated the Ordinance currently has that but the requirement is for twenty parking spaces, and you can only go twenty spaces in a row before you need to break it up with a green area. He stated this would minimize the "heat island" impact you get with a vast area of asphalt.

Mr. Bruch noted the Giant parking lot and stated he does not believe those "break-up elements" are in there. Mr. Majewski stated that is correct, and those elements are not in there. He stated that project pre-dated the Ordinance that had that in it. He stated the Giant parking lot does have the green island running down the center in one area, but for the most part they just have a few green areas up front and in the back.

Mr. Majewski stated some of the problems they have with the islands is that they make them a little too small and they need to make sure that they select the right variety of tree so that the roots will not heave the

parking lot or outgrow the space. He stated it also has to be resistant to salt. He stated many elements need to be incorporated into the Landscape Plan to make sure they get something nice.

Mr. Bush stated he had indicated earlier that he felt that traffic flow at the back of the parking lot was important. He asked from an engineering standpoint, what is needed to make that happen. Mr. Majewski stated it depends on the configuration of the site. He stated some of the sites such as the McCaffrey's Shopping Center are tight between the buildings and Heacock Road so there is not a lot of room. He stated this is also true at the ShopRite parking lot as there is not a lot of room between the buildings and Big Oak Road. He stated the way it is laid out all the cars drive on the aisle that is right in front of all of the stores at the ShopRite. He stated McCaffrey's is laid out a little better in that you can come in off of Heacock Road and go down the back aisle parallel to Heacock Road before you turn down to the parking area so you can come in from two directions.

Mr. Bush stated having multiple entrances without being funneled in front of one spot is something they should be looking for. Mr. Costello stated he feels a big priority is giving the Township better parking lots from a functional standpoint because we have a lot of "sub-par lots" in the Commercial areas. He stated he feels we should focus on what we need to have an effective parking lot – the aisle widths, ingress and egress to the parking lot, and to have pedestrian flow work with the cars. He stated they should then discuss what they can do to effectively mix in green space and trees. He stated he does not want a parking lot that just looks good but does not function properly. He stated they need to consider the traffic flow.

Mr. Majewski stated Mr. Bush was correct when he started his discussion that functionality is key and includes access, flow, parking lot size, and pedestrian safety. He stated the environmental aspects are also important; however, functionality is number one and that includes safety.

Mr. Pockl stated he has designed parking lots, and how he approaches it is if there is a 500' by 400' space, you look at it as a rectangle and have parking spaces around the perimeter. He stated they look at standard parking stall size of 9' wide by 18' long, and they typically use a 24' wide aisle width. He stated he would then line up the aisles with a 500' distance. He stated they are be able to fit more spaces if the aisles are going in the longest direction. He stated with regard to swales, etc. that will reduce the number of aisles that can be put in.

Mr. Bruch stated when you start to implement more green elements and other pedestrian-friendly elements there is only so much room, and that is when you have the problem of not having enough spaces for a designated Retail shop which can also be problematic. He stated they want to make sure that they are not doing harm by trying to do good. He stated they would not want to force a developer to not have enough spaces. Mr. Pockl stated the Code establishes how many parking spaces are required for each Use based on the square footage of that Use. He stated they would not want to do anything that would bring it down under the Code requirement. Mr. Bruch asked if most developers seek to meet the minimum requirement or is that specific to a developer or a store so that it would be impossible to say that universally everyone seeks just the minimum. Mr. Pockl stated it has been his experience that they look at it from a practical standpoint. He stated they recognize what the minimum is, but if they anticipate that it will be a high-traffic area, they will want more parking spaces. He stated for a shopping center, they may want more parking spaces so that they can have cart corrals in the parking lot. Mr. Pockl stated they could reduce the square footage of the building if they do not have enough parking spaces.

Mr. Bruch stated if he were a developer, he would think that larger spaces were better because the shopping center that is easier for a consumer to enter and exit without risk of hitting a pedestrian or another car would be more attractive; however, that does not seem to be the case since they have already discussed a shopping center in the Township where they feel it is prohibitive to park which would seem to make it less attractive, but that developer felt it was more attractive to have more spaces.

Mr. Majewski stated some of the ultimate users of shopping centers such as a CVS or a Kohl's sometimes want more than the minimum amount of parking required by the Ordinance; and they have a square footage in mind of what they feel is appropriate for the area, and for the parking they may go beyond the minimum because they want to have the appearance that there is plenty of room. He stated when they built the CVS, they added in more spaces than were required even though he tried to convince them to get the absolute minimum. He stated they felt that from a marketing standpoint the extra spaces would make the parking lot look more attractive.

Mr. Pockl stated there is a balance because there are times when developers want to minimize the impervious surface area. He stated there is a restriction on the impervious surface, and the more impervious surface they have the more money they have to spend on stormwater management because they need to make the systems bigger.

Mr. Bruch stated they also need to discuss lighting, and he is curious to see what the Montgomery County Guidelines say about lighting. He feels that is important, and there is a tradeoff between safety and respecting nearby neighbors who will be impacted by lighting in a parking lot. Mr. Bruch stated he would be interested in reviewing the Guidelines over the next two weeks before the next Planning Commission meeting. He stated they could then come back and discuss them. Mr. Bush stated he would agree.

Mr. Bush stated he recalls that in the TND Overlay there are lighting guidelines and he asked if those would still be considered current even though that was done over a decade ago. He asked if whatever they do now should that be included in the TND Overlay.

Mr. Majewski stated there are two different thoughts on lighting. He stated one is to minimize the number of poles and reduce any chance of glare, and that would require higher lights with poles that are taller and spread light out more evenly. He stated they use LED lights, and you do not see the fixture unless you are staring right at it. He stated a standard parking lot light has a 30' pole, and that would cover more area. He stated in the TND, they wanted to make it look more like a Village, and there they used the lantern-style light; however, the issue with those is that you get a lot of glare. He noted there was a bad reaction when DeLorenzo's opened; however, after a while you get used to it, and they do lose their brightness. He stated the vegetation planted also grows in over the years which softens the glow from the lights. Mr. Majewski stated at the Prickett Preserve property which will be a larger parking lot, and they should definitely have the standard 30' tall light to try to minimize the number of light fixtures and glare. He stated when you get to the small areas of the plazas, that should be more the pedestrian-scale lantern-style light which is more attractive.

Mr. Costello asked if there is a "dark sky" requirement in the Ordinance. Mr. Majewski stated they have glare requirements that light must be cast down. Mr. Costello stated he knows that there are specific fixtures designed to be dark sky so that if you are looking at it, you do not see anything other than the "splash" on the ground.

Mr. Pockl stated the Ordinance already has a section where it limits the number of foot candles you can have at the property line and that would prevent any kind of spillage. He stated at the Prickett Preserve site there are not a lot of nearby neighbors, but in other areas it does help with a limitation on the foot candles. Mr. Costello stated while there are not a

lot neighbors near Pricket Preserve, there are times during the year when there are a lot of people in the area for the Light Show, etc., and they would not want to see a “big glow from across the street.”

Mr. Majewski stated there are requirements in the Ordinance, and the developers are required to do a Lighting Plan to make sure that the light is cast downward. Mr. Majewski stated when they did the Caddis Assisted Living Facility on Dobry Road, they proposed to put in the lantern-style lighting; and while it looked good, once they turned them on some neighbors complained about the glare. He stated this as also due to the fact that the developer had taken out vegetation they were not supposed to which they will be re-planting; however, part of it is the nature of the lantern-style light. He added that while some people did complain about it, others felt it looked “beautiful” because it looked more like a village with the lantern-style lighting so there is a tradeoff.

Ms. Stern asked why type of lighting is at the Community Center, and Ms. Kirk stated she believes it is tall lighting. Mr. Majewski stated he believes that they are 25’ to 30’ poles cast downward. Ms. Stern asked if they would suggest the same kind of lighting here. Mr. Majewski stated he would agree for the larger parking lot areas; however, in the areas where they want pedestrians, the lantern-style lighting would look more attractive. Mr. Pockl stated he believes that the poles at the Community Center are 20’ tall, and the light is recessed into the roof of the fixture.

Mr. Bruch stated they are also going to be discussing landscaping and hardscaping, and to the extent that landscaping can aid the lighting issues that may be created by certain types of lights, it would be worthwhile to come back and discuss lighting when they are discussing landscaping.

Mr. Bruch stated he feels it would be to the Planning Commission’s advantage to review the Montgomery County Guideline and come back and discuss what they liked and did not like. He stated the goal at the beginning of the year was to get through the Design Guidelines by the end of 2020; but at that point in time they had no idea that they would be remote and on pause for some time so he is not sure that they are still going to try to hold to that timeline. He stated given the importance of parking among all of the elements, he feels it is worth the time to come back and discuss this again at the next meeting. He stated they could then consider landscaping/hardscaping at the meeting after that. The Planning Commission members were in favor of this.

Mr. Pockl stated restaurants may want to have some type of outdoor seating, especially given recent events; and that was not in the information that he had provided. He stated they may want to consider minimum width of sidewalks, etc. Mr. Bruch stated there was discussion early on that was tied to the Overlay about the advantages and disadvantages of drive-throughs. He stated the last six months have changed ideas about picking up food from a non-drive-through type restaurant and having access and parking to be able to do so. He stated he feels that is also worthy of discussion. Mr. Bush stated they may have started the discussion about outdoor seating when Ms. Stern made her presentation. Mr. Majewski stated prior to COVID, they did discuss having areas for food pick-up such as for Door Dash, Uber Eats, etc. Mr. Bush stated he feels that anyone who is going to have a restaurant is going to be interested in outdoor seating. Mr. Bruch stated he feels they should therefore consider outdoor seating, pick-up, and drive-through elements which are probably not incorporated into the Montgomery County Design Guidelines when they next meet. Mr. Pockl stated he feels they should also consider potential access for public transportation.

Mr. Majewski stated he will forward the Guidelines along with some other information about what is currently in our Ordinance as a standard. He stated a standard is slightly different from a guideline as a standard is something that you have to adhere to or have a Waiver versus a guideline which is more of “a general feel of what is wanted” although there is nothing to say that if there is a guideline that the Planning Commission feels is critical, they could recommend to make that a standard.

Mr. Bruch asked if electric-vehicle charging would fall into this discussion as well. He stated previously there was discussion around that idea when they were discussing the Overlay. He stated it had been referenced in terms of a Bonus. He stated he did not feel it should be considered as a Bonus; however, it might be very relevant to this discussion. Mr. Majewski agreed.

There was no public comment at this time.

Mr. Bruch asked that the Guidelines be circulated to the Planning Commission members. He stated they also discussed some other Ordinances tonight which were relevant, and he asked Mr. Majewski if he could provide those as well so that they will know what the minimum standards are which are already in place. Mr. Pockl stated he can get information on some template Ordinances and send that to Mr. Majewski to review and forward if he wishes. Mr. Majewski stated he will put together what the Township already has on its books.

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Mr. Costello stated he just e-mailed everyone an example of what he was referring to with regard to the dark-sky lighting, and they could discuss what might be workable to include.

There being no further business, Mr. Costello moved, Mr. Bush seconded and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tony Bush, Secretary