

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MAKEFIELD
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES – JANUARY 25, 2016

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Lower Makefield was held in the Municipal Building on January 25, 2016. Mr. Tracey called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

Those present:

Planning Commission: John Tracey, Chair
 Chad Wallace, Secretary
 Dean Dickson, Member

Others: Steve Ware, Keystone Municipal Services
 Maryellen Saylor, Township Engineer
 Mike Shinton, Township Traffic Engineer
 Judi Reiss, Supervisor Liaison

Absent: Dawn DiDonato-Burke, Planning Commission Vice Chair
 Charles Halboth, Planning Commission Member

TABLING APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Due to lack of a quorum able to vote on the Minutes of 11/9/15 and 1/11/16, the Minutes were tabled.

INFORMAL PRESENTATION OF PENNSBURY SCHOOL DISTRICT MIDDLE SCHOOL CAMPUS PLAN

Ms. Annina Hogan and Mr. Owen Hyne, engineers from Remington, Vernick, & Beach were present. Mr. Hyne stated this project involves renovations to Pennwood Middle School and improvements to the Middle School Campus. Mr. Hyne stated Pennwood was constructed in 1952 with an addition added in 1972. He stated the School is over 200,000 square feet, with fifty-three classrooms which will be increased to fifty-six classrooms. He stated it currently has a pool which has been de-commissioned. He stated there is also a cafeteria, boys and girls separate gymnasiums, and a 600 seat auditorium. He stated currently there are 850 students enrolled in Pennwood Middle School. He stated Pennwood has never been renovated, and there are a number of needs.

Mr. Hyne stated in 2014 the School District undertook a District-wide Facilities Study; and a number of needs were identified at Pennwood Middle School including relocating the Administrative Offices as there is currently a lack of security when you come in the building, removing an auditorium that has been taken out of service, making ADA upgrades, upgrading major mechanical systems, and upgrading the roof, windows, and some other exterior improvements.

Mr. Hyne stated Pennwood shares a campus with two other Schools in the District – Charles Boehm Middle School and William Penn Middle School. He stated when looking at the Middle School Campus in general there are a number of issues that the District, the parents, and students experience on a regular basis which they view as problems that they would like to correct. Mr. Hyne stated passenger vehicle traffic, bus traffic, and pedestrian traffic mix on that campus and the parking is not as organized as it should be. Mr. Hyne stated there are also concerns with students crossing over to the athletic fields as well as walkers going from the Schools to their homes. He stated whenever they make that crossing, they are crossing over an internal driveway that does not have any restriction on traffic. Mr. Hyne stated there are also issues with the condition of the asphalt, concrete, and site improvements due to age; and even though they have done some treatments on the paving and updated striping and lighting as necessary, it is showing its age. He stated they also plan to address ADA ramps and storm drainage throughout the site.

A Plan of the existing Middle School Campus was shown. Mr. Hyne noted the Pennwood Middle School and showed the mixed parking areas where there are buses and passenger vehicles coming in. He noted the location of the bus storage area, on-street parking along Makefield Road, and a larger bus parking area coming around to Charles Boehm Middle School. Mr. Hyne also noted the on-street parking on Big Oak Road. He showed the location of William Penn Middle School which is a newer school and does not have some of the problems they have at the other schools; but even there they have problems with buses trying to exit out onto Derbyshire Road.

Ms. Hogan noted on the slide areas where there are people walking which create a safety concern, and they are trying to make this as safe and visible as possible.

Mr. Hyne showed the Plan showing an overview of the improvements proposed at the Campus. He stated most of the work is around Pennwood Middle School; however, they are also doing some extensive improvements around Charles Boehm, and some important improvements at William Penn.

Mr. Hyne showed a slide of the existing Pennwood School. He stated in the picture the on-street parking on Makefield Road can be seen. He stated there are issues on Makefield with traffic backing up from Big Oak Road, and the cars which park on Makefield Road then have to back out onto the road which is a safety and congestion issue along Makefield Road. Mr. Hyne stated on the south side of the School there is a bus storage lot which is signed entrance-only, and the District has tried to curtail passenger vehicles in and out of that area. He stated they also have signage on the left side of the School to try to prevent some of the traffic from going through; but a lot of the parents are coming from Makefield Road and want to pick up their children so they are cutting through and then cutting back out even though there is signage to the contrary. Mr. Hyne noted an area along Roelofs Road where there is a parking area and drop-off area, and this is an area where a lot of parents will do their drop offs coming in off Roelofs Road, and a lot of vehicles stack in the bus parking stalls. He stated the buses themselves also use that area at the same time.

Ms. Hogan stated it is a “nightmare” at pick-up time with cars, buses, and students walking through.

Mr. Hyne discussed the proposed improvements. He stated currently there are a series of entrances on Roelofs Road, and they will combine some of them and line them up with Ramsey at a location he showed on the Plan. He showed where parents will circulate into the parking area, and he also showed the parent drop-off area which will be on the passenger side of the vehicles. He stated the cars will then be able to park and queue; or if the queuing gets too long, they can circulate through the parking area and make their way back through. He showed an area which is “exit-only,” as they are really trying control the traffic and make sure it is organized so that people are not driving wherever they want to. He stated in order to increase the capacity of the intersection of Makefield and Roelofs, they are providing right and left turn lanes. Mr. Hyne noted the visitor’s parking lot which will be introduced. He stated this will replace the parking that is currently on Makefield Road where there are fifty-six stalls; and those stalls will be relocated elsewhere particularly into the larger, consolidated parking area which he showed on the Plan. He stated they will still need visitor parking up front where the main entrance to the School is.

Mr. Tracey noted a different rendering which is showing new sidewalks. He stated he feels the rendering clearly shows that there will be a vast improvement in traffic flow. Mr. Hyne stated what they are showing in that rendering is the sidewalk along Roelofs Road, the parking, and the access for pedestrians for the School. He noted where the boys and girls gyms and auditorium are located which is where the events are, and they wanted to get the parking as close as possible.

Mr. Hyne stated eliminating the parking along Makefield Road will free up some of the congestion, although there will still be the same volume since they will still have the same number of students at the School.

Ms. Reiss noted the existing sidewalk on Makefield Road, and she asked if there will still be sidewalks. Mr. Hyne stated on the Plan they are showing they are not proposing sidewalks going along the west side of Makefield Road. He stated there is already sidewalk on the east side of Makefield Road which continues to the north and south of their site. He stated on the west side of Makefield Road there is no sidewalk to the north and south of their site so there is nothing to connect to. Ms. Reiss stated there is a large population of people, not just students, who walk. She stated what they are doing is making people who are walking have to cross the street then go up and cross again. She stated she feels they need the sidewalks; and the Board of Supervisors has been inundated with e-mails and phone calls about this and they would request that they consider putting in the sidewalk. Mr. Hyne stated they will consider this. Mr. Tracey noted the sidewalk would still end. Mr. Hyne stated they wanted to discourage parents from dropping off their children in the middle of the road, and not having sidewalks there would prevent them from doing so. He stated they also wanted to guard against having students walk up in the bus entrance area. Mr. Hyne stated if the Supervisors would prefer the sidewalk there, they can provide it; and Ms. Reiss stated the Supervisors will be requesting that.

Mr. Hyne noted an existing entrance off of Makefield Road which is signed “entrance only.” He stated they propose to make this a dedicated bus entrance and exit. He stated this would satisfy one of their goals of segregating the passenger vehicle traffic from the bus traffic. He stated this would be for buses only, and they will come in off of Makefield Road, and do the drop off at a new bus-drop off entrance. He stated this is for buses only, and the passenger vehicles will be on the north side. Mr. Hyne stated once the buses do their drop off, they can either continue down the internal driveway to go to Charles Boehm, or they can go back out to Makefield Road. He stated people have indicated that they are bringing a lot of bus traffic to the entrance that is not there now, but this same bus traffic is currently at Roelofs combined with passenger vehicles; and this will separate it; and by creating the turning lanes and eliminating the on-street parking, he feels there will be an improvement on Makefield Road.

Mr. Hyne stated they are trying to protect the students as they are walking between the Schools and the athletic fields, and they have been able to provide a gated restriction which will normally be closed, although it could be opened for an event or maintenance.

Mr. Hyne noted on the Plan a large parking lot that serves as overflow for Pennwood Middle School as well as to service the athletic fields which is where they are returning the thirty-nine parking stalls.

Mr. Hyne showed an aerial of the new bus drop off on the south side of Pennwood Middle School. He also noted the area where the proposed addition will be built. Mr. Hyne also showed a rendering showing the new sidewalk on Roelofs Road which is a continuation of the existing sidewalks. He showed parking that is sufficient for the staff in close proximity to the School. He also showed the entrance to the auditorium, the girls' gym, and the boys' gym.

Ms. Hogan stated they wanted to preserve the look of Makefield Road because it has such a classic look.

Mr. Hyne stated they are going before the Zoning Hearing Board, and one of the items they are seeking is relief from the parking setback. He stated normally a 25' parking setback is required, and he showed the bay of parking involved.

Mr. Wallace asked if the elevation of the sidewalk and the parking is equal or is there a drop off from the sidewalk down to the parking lot. Mr. Hyne noted on the plan where it is higher in one area and lower in another. He stated from the sidewalk it drains to Roelofs Road so there is drainage going in both directions.

Mr. Hyne showed the Plan for Charles Boehm. He noted where the staff currently parks in the back and side of the School. He stated there is also a large bus storage area and parking for the bus drivers' own vehicles. He stated there is one large entrance and one large exit near the bus parking, and there is another entrance/exit on the east side of the School. He stated visitors can park in the back, but a lot of times they park on Big Oak Road in pull-in parking stalls. Mr. Hyne stated at Charles Boehm they will have a new visitor parking and parent drop-off area so that they can eliminate the pull-in parking on Big Oak Road. He showed how the parents will pull in to the east entrance, travel to the visitor parking area, and do pick up, drop off, or park in this area; and he then showed how they will continue one-way back out to Big Oak Road. He stated they are also going to do a re-configuration of the parking area on the left side.

Mr. Hyne stated while there is currently a small bus storage area at Pennwood Middle School, they are going to consolidate that with the bus storage area at Charles Boehm. He stated they will expand the bus storage area at Charles Boehm, and they will relocate a fueling area. He noted where the current fueling station is located near the Rock Run stream. He stated these underground fueling stations are in the floodplain and are in need of replacement, so they will be bringing them outside of the floodplain when they install new underground storage tanks near the bus storage area.

Mr. Tracey asked about security, and Mr. Hyne stated it will be a fenced bus storage area as it is now. Mr. Tracey asked about cameras, and Mr. Hogan stated there will be security cameras inside the building as well as exterior.

Mr. Hyne noted the parking lot area which is fairly large just for visitor/parent parking; but it is oversized so that the bus drivers can park their own cars in this area as well. He stated even if all the bus drivers park in this area, there will still be ample parking for visitors to be able to park and use the main entrance.

Mr. Hyne stated behind the School they also wanted to be able to protect the students as well. He stated many of the students enrolled at Charles Boehm are coming from neighborhoods to the north, so they are walking across the Campus. He stated they will have gates at this School as well to let traffic through when needed, but they will generally be closed so that they can prevent passenger vehicles from using the driveway at all.

Mr. Wallace asked if the existing fueling tanks will be removed, and Mr. Hyne stated they will be removed once the new tanks are in operation. He stated they will also do any remediation needed.

Mr. Hyne noted the William Penn Middle School where they are doing the least amount of work, although they will still do some important improvements. He stated currently when buses are leaving the bus pick up and drop off area, they have to circulate around a peninsula where the flag pole is located in order to reach an exit-only area. He stated this is a challenging maneuver for the buses, and they are going to improve this.

Mr. Hyne stated the Zoning Code allows for some buffer averaging, and currently there is a section between two parking bays where they can add more parking by taking advantage of the buffer averaging.

Mr. Hyne showed on the Plan how the buses will get out more directly to Derbyshire Road. He showed the area where additional parking will be added. He also showed a new sidewalk they are adding which takes walkers from an existing asphalt path. He stated there is a fence to keep them from deviating from the sidewalk, and this is proposed for the entire length behind William Penn and then onto Charles Boehm. Ms. Hogan stated they are giving the students the route that they know they are going to take, and making it as safe as they can.

Mr. Hyne stated at William Penn they also have the capacity to restrict traffic from circulating around the School. He stated there is parking all the way around the School including behind it; and they can provide a gate to restrict circulation during the School day, but open it at the beginning and the end of the day for buses.

Mr. Tracey stated part of the Charles Boehm property is within the one hundred year flood plain, and he asked to what degree they are increasing impervious surface; and Mr. Hyne stated they are not increasing it within the floodplain. He stated one of the comments from the Township engineer was to make sure they were not increasing what is in the floodplain, and he stated they have been able to document that they are increasing it. Mr. Tracey asked if there are going to be detention basins, and Mr. Hyne stated there are going to be a series of storm water management improvements including vegetative swales, underground infiltration basins, and water quality units. He stated they are not increasing impervious surface across the site as a whole. Mr. Tracey asked if they have given any consideration to pervious paving, and Mr. Hyne stated they have looked into that. Mr. Hyne stated they have addressed water quality through a number of other measures. He stated there was a small visitors lot at Pennwood Middle School where they considered pervious paving, but there were some filter strip options they were able to do to accomplish the same water quality.

Ms. Hogan stated throughout the entire Campus, they are actually reducing impervious surface. Ms. Saylor stated that is not what the Record Plans indicated, and she asked if they are going to be updating them since the Record Plan indicates that there will be an increase in impervious surface overall on the Campus. Mr. Hyne stated he feels the Stormwater Management Plan reflects the final tally. Ms. Saylor asked if they will be updating the Record Plan, and Mr. Hyne stated they will. Mr. Tracey stated the issue is that the Record Plan indicates one thing, but what they are hearing tonight is something else.

Mr. Wallace asked where they could consider pervious paving, and Ms. Reiss stated she felt it could be used where there is visitor parking. She stated she belonged to a Congregation in New Jersey where the overflow parking had pervious surface, and she was in favor of it. She stated there were no flooding in their parking lots, and she would like to know if it possible for them to use it here. Mr. Tracey stated since they are in the floodplain, he feels this is something that should be addressed. Ms. Hogan stated they can look into this but added that they are not adding anything to the floodplain; and in fact, they are actually making reductions to the impervious surface over the entire campus. She stated they could discuss the possibility of using pervious paving in areas which are less traveled.

Mr. Shinton stated they are currently reviewing the Plans, and they met with Mr. Hyne and his team in the spring of last year; and they did give them some feedback on the Conceptual Plans which had mostly to do with traffic flow. He stated he feels they have done a nice job of separating buses, drop-offs, and pedestrians. He stated there is some fine tuning to be done including pavement marking, signage, etc. and making sure that the phasing makes sense. He stated he will consider what he heard tonight and particularly noted the comments about the sidewalk.

Ms. Saylor stated her firm is currently reviewing the Preliminary Plans.

A number of representatives from the Pennsbury School District were the only people present in the audience this evening.

ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR AND SECRETARY OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

Mr. Dickson stated they need to elect a new Vice Chair of the Planning Commission since Mr. Clark, who was the Vice Chair that they previously elected, is no longer on the Planning Commission.

Mr. Dickson moved, Mr. Tracey seconded and it was unanimously carried to elect Dawn DiDonato-Burke as Vice Chair of the Planning Commission for 2016.

Mr. Dickson moved, Mr. Tracey seconded and it was unanimously carried to elect Chad Wallace as Secretary of the Planning Commission for 2016.

There being no further business, Mr. Dickson moved, Mr. Tracey seconded and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chad Wallace, Secretary