

Thursday, December 15, 2022
Minutes of Combined Land Use Meeting
Chairman Eric Hafer presiding

OPEN MEETING – Chairman Hafer announced that adequate notice of this meeting was given by emailing the Courier Post and The Retrospect on January 11, 2022 and posting on the Bulletin Board in the Borough Hall.

FLAG SALUTE – Chairman Hafer lead the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance and flag salute.

ROLL CALL – recorded as present were Mr. Hafer, Mr. Kane, Mr. Weidler, Mrs. Lerley, Mr. Lippincott, Ms. Nasuti, Mr. Lerley, and Mayor Barbera; absent was Mr. Weiss and Councilman Redstreak. Planning Board Solicitor Greg DeMichele and Borough Planner Ed Fox were also present.

NEW BUSINESS

Amendment of 2005 White Horse Pike Redevelopment Plan - Chairman Hafer opened the Public Hearing portion of the meeting by reading the title of the plan and saying that in 2005 the White Horse Pike Redevelopment plan was established and has now been reviewed and edited. He introduced Borough Planner Ed Fox of Environmental Resolutions, Inc., who was sworn in by Board Solicitor DeMichele. Mr. Fox said that in 2005 Borough Council adopted a redevelopment plan, the study scope of which was from Arch Avenue to the White Horse Pike and from South Avenue to Broadway. The State Statute gives eight different criteria for blighted conditions. Mr. Fox continued that everything from the 2005 study was adopted except areas in Block 5. Questions the Borough asks are do the properties meet the criteria and have there been any changes since 2005? In 2013 the State of New Jersey passed law that Redevelopment must specify and say at the beginning intentionally what is to be acquired by eminent domain. In 2005 the study identified some properties that were bad enough to be condemned, such as the bank, the gym and B&M's Motors. In 2022 the Borough asked about other properties to be included. There was discussion of the back lot behind the gym and all properties subject to eminent domain such as the former gas station property and sites of high contamination or those falling apart or when land is more valuable than the building.

Mr. Fox explained that there are two types of designations that resulted: condemnation and non-condemnation. The reason for the non-condemnation zone is required due to depth of property not allowing enough room for parking and stormwater requirements. These properties do not need condemnation but are necessary to include to expand the properties as larger commercial pieces. He said you see this up and down the Pike. Non-condemnation means they must give the fair market value of the property. Buffering must be included. At the end of the hearing the Board can entertain a resolution to recommend White Horse Pike Business District continue to the adjacent area, which would be an overlay to expand commercial into if needed.

Mr. Fox reviewed the Statutory Criteria on page 12 of the report and the map labeled Figure 2, which he had posted on the wall to view in a large map format. There was explanation of "Redevelopment Criterion D: Properties have obsolete layout and design, such as the location and relationships of buildings, accessory structures or other site improvements, onsite circulation and parking, land use conflicts and building coverage" on page 14 and stormwater requirements and structures too close to the street and that parking on the pike is hazardous. There was conversation of a property where trash in the rear is piling up and water is pooling in the back and properties where the land is worth more than the structure that it is on, especially Block 4 where the structures are worth less value than land with an explanation of tax assessment, the tax assessor role, title transfer issues and state requirements on page 15. Redevelopment Criterion H was explained as necessary to include, so overtime, developers can purchase properties to expand the development area.

Chairman Hafer opened the meeting to the public for questions and comments.

Michele Krallé – 102 Arch Avenue – asked regarding the rezoning of the White Horse Pike, if the pink area on the map is not to be touched and if the Borough can do it, to which it was responded yes, but it is not proposed. She asked if by starting it again it puts the Arch Avenue residents at risk and should it cause taxes to go up can they be grandfathered at the current rates? She asked what buffer zones include. Regarding drainage problems,

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what happens when developers want residential properties for stormwater, will this then truly change that zone? There was question about regrading and removal of dirt and guarantees about stormwater drainage should it occur, to which it was responded that the State Land Use Law will allow these matters to be questioned through the site plan process. She reiterated that the Arch Avenue residents are at risk, and nothing in the plan addresses the Arch Avenue risk. There was discussion of property taxes and the condition of the back of the existing commercial properties and the town collective deciding about the tax base from commercial properties. She responded with Laurel Springs not being the size of Cherry Hill or Voorhees that this town isn't that size nor has that traffic, to which it was responded that the White Horse Pike is the best chance for commercial development. There was discussion of the failure of previous redevelopment. There was more discussion of taxation and discussion of the condition of the buildings. There was question of who or what developers or development is being proposed, to which it was responded that the town does not know, this is just the plan for such. There was discussion of noise pollution, and that commercial properties do have their own set of issues. There was reiteration of the need to do something with the dilapidated buildings that completely need to be torn down and rebuilt to code. There was discussion of policing, fire and EMS and of cleaning it up. She asked if we still have a police alliance commenting that it needs to be cleaned up better than what's there, to which it was responded that there are many things to consider when making a plan, and that unless something is done. When someone comes to develop there will come with site plans and standards that can be addressed by the Land Use Board and by residents when all must be reviewed.

Mary Grace – 100 Fairmount – she described herself as a longtime resident giving her family history in Laurel Springs. There was discussion about whether the White Horse Pike will be widened. Mr. Fox said he was formerly a Planner for Camden County and said there is no plan to widen the Pike. There were plans to take 10 feet from the Lindenwold side, but they have been gone for 15 years. There was explanation of how site plans will involve the NJDOT. There was further discussion of the NJDOT. Mayor Barbera discussed his involvement in the process of getting a traffic light and the Borough is still working on the steps, but the major problem is that the expense is on the town not the State. Further conversation of NJDOT. There was discussion of Stratford, the bowling alley, Fairmount Avenue, the Bombay store, Cumberland Farms, trash traffic and stop signs. She commented that commercial increases traffic, to all of which it was responded that there has been work with the County to close the end of the streets intersecting the White Horse Pike to increase areas for development. There was discussion of the depths of the properties, to which it was asked how to make more space without impacting residentially adjacent areas. There was further discussion of drainage and how it can be placed under asphalt and that sometimes basins are problems. It is one method, and the State encourages that. Again, it was asked what the plan is, to which it was responded there is no specific plan. There was discussion of Cumberland Farms, that is commercial and the impact on the neighborhood and on residences which is not mentioned. Nor is the traffic on Arch. There was discussion of an alley behind a building. Mayor Barbera said the only development he has seen is the Whitman Manor, for which public hearing the whole room was full of people, and it has been no problem. It was handled well, to which it was responded that that was residential into residential, and that this is commercial. There was discussion of vacant properties on the White Horse Pike and the real opportunity to open it up to commercial. There was discussion of it being a highway commercial zone and of what might actually come into the zone. The zone is 175 feet currently and 300 feet would be common. General housing would bring more something such as Senior Housing would be okay. She discussed Clementon redevelopment, that the knocked it all down and put in a strip mall, and she doesn't want that for Laurel Springs. She discussed widening the Pike by making a greenway like near the MCI building, to which it was responded that it would raise taxes and that this redevelopment is not like Lindenwold or Clementon. She said she would rather have her taxes raised. It was mentioned that the Zoning Ordinance designates the site standards for trash, buffering, fences, etc. There was reiteration of the 175 feet depth. There was discussion of parking lots need and the need to purchase lots at fair market value and put building back and parking lot in front. It was reiterated that it would be a problem for the residence.

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Guy Forman – 20 Madison Avenue – expressed concern about property values if surrounded by parking lots. The highest use is residential areas, and to think that homes would be bought and made into parking is absurd. That, if neighbors sell their homes for parking, to which it was responded that a buffer zone is required against residential properties of 10 to 30 feet of heavily landscaped and fencing so it is not seen by residents. There was discussion of someone buying and you may be a hold out and kill the project. The potential to have a parking lot around is probably not feasible and reiterated that it is absurd, to which it was responded that they come to the Board and discuss if it happens. There was discussion that buildings need to come down and be rebuilt, and that the green space is valid, to which it was responded that the town pays, and taxes go up. There was discussion of light, odor, noise and vehicle exhaust pollution, to which it was responded that all these items are governed by site plan regulation, all these are items for a site plan hearing, there are State laws, and they can be regulated by site plan, to which it was responded that no one enforces the rules. Mayor Barbera encouraged the reporting of problems to the police or public works. Mayor Barbera discussed that the Borough itself spends less money each year, specifying that is not the school portion, but taxes go up anyway because revenues are down, and this is why business taxes are desired more than residential. It was responded that the White Horse Pike development is supposed to be of benefit, and that the Whitman Manor did not add parking it was an existing building that was rehabbed. Mr. Forman asked why his block is now included, to which it was responded that it meets the criteria and the professional planner opined that it is needed.

Mary Grace – 100 Fairmount Avenue – thinks the frustration is watching the White Horse Pike deteriorate while trusting town council and board, who let it fall into disrepair and become derelict and for which they have shown that they are incapable of doing it, although she doesn't blame individuals. Mayor Barbera said that on a constant basis, borough code is being cited which segued into discussion of vacant buildings, which are vacant because they are not safe and not up to Code and must stop them from occupying the buildings. Mr. Fox gave an overall professional opinion that over time two things affected the White Horse Pike: 1. Development of the Echelon Mall and 2. Development on Blackwood Clementon Road. He reiterated that the Pike is zoned commercial but other things are allowed, to which Ms. Grace said he should have led with that. Mr. Fox gave his history with Laurel Springs and trust that he wants what's best. He reiterated the development in Voorhees and Gloucester Townships and the experience of the vacancy and deterioration of those shopping areas. Mr. Hafer gave his personal involvement with a development project in Pennsylvania. There was discussion of what the town should do, and specifically planning and taxation, and that this plan seems to be the best thing to do. There was reiteration of the discussion of residential areas and reiteration of the buffering requirements.

Kevin Bachowski – 104 Arch Avenue – discussed that he was familiar with the Springfield development that Mr. Hafer referred to, which can be a quiet zone and quiet at times. He expressed concern with delinquency of the Pike and his biggest fear is crime near the Pike with break-ins, etc. What will prevent this worsening, to which it was responded that it will improve conditions with redevelopment as it allows control over site plans. There was reiteration of buffer zones and site plan standard enforcement. He said he prefers vinyl fencing on property lines so he cannot see the businesses at all. There was discussion of home ownership and home memories and that he doesn't want to move. There was discussion of improvements to residential property. There was review of the site plan process and that mostly the board sides with residents. The Board serves as an arbiter between two. Developers can go to court, but they work with both sides. It was pointed out that the residents don't know the commercial property owners, and no one is saying they are tearing down buildings at this point. Mr. Fox said regarding the White Horse Pike Redevelopment Amendment, the purpose of the plan is to give general parameters to give standards for State and County and for Developers. There is no telling who or what development will come. However, they will individually come before the board to negotiate a site plan.

Michele Krall – 102 Arch Avenue – asked what brownfields were, to which it was responded that B& M's Motors was, this is more condemnation and has been so since 2005. Redevelopment would help this problem. Taking it out does not. There is mitigation and helps remediation through an action plan with the NJDEP. The Borough can offer tax incentives the County might help. Economic incentives have to be in place, and

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redevelopment opens those opportunities. Sometimes Federal and State funding becomes available. There was discussion of the environmental clean up process.

Donna - South and Arch Avenues – said that with the process of redevelopment in 2005 nothing happened, and there are interested properties but no way of knowing, but they were purchased knowing they were commercial. She asked if every time site plans are submitted, would residents be notified, to which it was responded they would. There was discussion that there was often no information, to which it was responded that there is not much going on, as Weaver's is unused, Villari's is up for sale and there is a liquor license being held in pocket. Properties owners seem to have no idea. No appearance has come before the board, there have been no plans to do anything major. There was more conversation about the condition of the White Horse Pike buildings, discussion of rentals in the area, Whitman Manor and that a new plan was needed to bring it up to date and make it legal.

Ruth Forman – 20 Madison Avenue – complained about the mailings and the Post Office issues, and how they postal delivery person told them that they had to pick up they certified mail in Berlin, to which it was responded that that the Borough was aware of that specific situation and of the overall problems with postal issues in Laurel Springs. The postal delivery person was incorrect. The specific process of getting the addresses from the Tax Assessor and the process of mailing the notices was explained. There was additional conversation about the overall problem with postal issues in Laurel Springs. She complained specifically about the Foster and Gross property, to which Mayor Barbera said that there is a new owner who bought the property a few months ago, and who is supposed to come in with a site plan. There was more discussion of the poor condition of that building.

- Hearing nothing further, Mr. Hafer closed the Public Hearing on the White Horse Pike Redevelopment Amendment.
- The motion to approve the 2022 Amendment to the 2005 Determination of needs Study (Preliminary Investigation) & 2004 Redevelopment Plan and forward the report to Borough Council by Ms. Nasuti was seconded by Mr. Kane with Mr. Hafer, Mr. Kane, Mr. Weidler, Mrs. Ierley, Mr. Lippincott, Ms. Nasuti and Mr. Ierley in favor, none opposed and no abstentions.

OLD BUSINESS

Approval of Minutes of November 17, 2022 – the motion by Mr. Kane to approve, was seconded by Ms. Nasuti with all in favor none opposed and no abstentions.

CORRESPONDENCE/OTHER MATTERS - none

PUBLIC PORTION – Chairman Hafer opened the meeting to the public for questions or comment, hearing none he closed the meeting to the public.

ANNOUNCEMENT - The next meeting of the Laurel Springs Combined Land Use Board is scheduled for Thursday, January 19, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. in the Laurel Springs Recreation Center.

ADJOURNMENT – the motion to adjourn by Ms. Nasuti, was seconded by Mrs. Ierley at 8:49 pm, with all in favor and none opposed.

Respectfully submitted,

Dawn T. Amadio, Secretary