

Exeter Township Planning Commission Meeting **Summary (5/5/2009)**

Planners in attendance: Unger, Shane, Bittig, Swartz, Wilson and Rush (newly appointed)

Agenda items:

1. Rite Aid Variance requests
2. Exeter School District Annexation
3. Exeter Township Elementary School (Sketch Plan and Preliminary Plan)
4. Historical Area Controls
5. Discuss Locations to Plant Trees on Public Land

Rite Aid Variance Request:

9 total variances were requested. Most dealt with setback issues. Landscaping (green area coverage) was also an issue. The Zoning Hearing Board met on 5/4/2009 to hear the same variance requests and was leaving the hearing open until the Planning Commission could make a recommendation. The zoning hearing board had questions/comments concerning the variances and decided to extend the hearing with a second session on 6/10/2009. The Rite Aid store is proposed as a 14,000 sq. ft. building and requires 51 spots by Exeter Township Zoning laws. The plan submitted by the Rite Aid representatives called for 56 parking spots but there were several cases where the parking spots would encroach on required setbacks. Also, there are other issues with the plan including instances of non-compliance with the required setbacks at the rear of the property and where the company wished to put up a 20 ft. high sign. The required setback from the rear property line is 30 ft. and the setback for the sign would be 20 ft. (the fall distance of the sign to protect the health and safety of the public). The plan was also short on the amount of space that needed to be dedicated to "green area." The zoning requires 10% of the property for green space but the plan falls way short at only 1.4%. There was some discussion about what portions of the property could be counted as green space and the PC solicitor suggested that the Rite Aid reps were too conservative in their initial estimate of green space coverage. He stated that they could also

consider the areas at the edge of the property, which would bring them, closer to meeting the 10% requirement. Mr. Unger made a motion to reject the request for variances based on the fact that there were so many of them and that the property owners knew the zoning regulations prior to the purchase and subsequent request for construction. He felt that granting the variances would basically be "throwing away" the protections set forth in the zoning ordinance. Mr. Shane seconded the motion for rejection, which allowed further discussion concerning the requests. The planners made suggestions about things that could be done to eliminate the need for some of the variances or to limit the severity of differences between the requirements and what was planned. The planners voted to deny the request for variances with the understanding that their recommendations and those of the ZHB would be acted upon and brought back for review at the next scheduled Planning Commission Meeting, at which time, the PC would make a recommendation to the ZHB.

ETSD Annexation:

Part of the new elementary school property is another plot of land owned by developer, Mr. Greth. This plot of land (~16.6 acres) will be annexed with the larger property (Amber Hill). The lot is considered a "non-building" lot. No structures allowed. The area contains steep slopes and has conservation easements. The planners requested a better drawing showing the plots on one diagram with documentation of required notations that should be filed at the courthouse. The ETSD plan representative stated that they would provide an updated drawing at the next PC meeting.

ETSD Elementary School Plans:

Overhead views of the property and surrounding areas were shown and discussed. The discussion included; designation of the property, Route 562 and Schoffer's Road, the wetlands, St. Catharine's, the pond that is situated on the property and other feature. A sketch drawing of the school, showing perspective views was provided and explained. The building will be a "green building" with a vegetative wall of ivy in the front. The south side of the building will be constructed with sun shades to minimize impact on the interior but there will be reflective surfaces

put in place to direct natural light throughout the building to minimize the need for artificial lighting. An interesting aspect of design is an outside terrace that they are calling the "Amphitheater." This area is designated as a place where they can hold outdoor classes and it is situated away from other classrooms to minimize the impact of external activities on the conduct of classes. The structure will sit on a sloping plot with one end of the building being a two-story structure and the other end of the building being a single story. The initial plan is for the school to accommodate 500 students but there is a second phase of the plan to construct an addition to accommodate up to 700 total students. The ETSD reps explained some of the other aspects of the project that are designed to minimize environmental impact and to provide for appropriate services. The plan calls for less impervious surfacing than would normally be used. One way in which this is to be accomplished is by the use of a fire lane using reinforced turf instead of asphalt (reinforcements that allow water passage to minimize runoff). The plan also calls for using only native plants in landscaping and to provide geothermal heating/cooling. The playing fields will be watered by rainwater collected as runoff from the building and the wetlands will be protected as required. The pond may eventually be fenced for safety considerations. The planners had several questions/suggestions. Having reviewed the Berks County Planning Commission comments, the planners felt that the ETSD should consider putting in another access road for the site to be used during an emergency or in case the single planned access is blocked by an accident on Route 562. Further, it was suggested that the secondary access be blocked and locked to prevent unwanted traffic to the site via Schoffer's Road during normal operation. The planners also stated that the SALDO section dealing with a Water Resources Study could not be waived for this project but explained that the plan should have very little impact on the water table in the surrounding area because the school would be hooked into public water and sewer lines and the collection and reuse of water strategy would provide for putting water back into the ground. Before completing the discussion on the new school, Jordan Bausher, representing WalkBikeBerks provided handouts to the planners and spoke about an initiative to provide for safe non-motorized transport to and from the new school. Mr. Bausher asked that the planners, ETSD and eventually

the Supervisors, decided to provide bike/walking paths on the property and along the roads bounding the property. He further stated that he'd be providing more data (at the next meeting) including ordinances from other communities showing how our ordinances can be changed to promote safer walkable/bikable paths for community. At this time, he mentioned that the paths suggested by WBB were inexpensive and easy to construct, eliminating some of the concern about expensive cost of providing sidewalks. The planners and Mr. Bausher also made some other suggestions. A concern about sufficient parking on the site was discussed. The parking areas were kept to a minimum due to the fact that the ETSD would like to put another couple of buildings on the site and would be limited by the amount of impervious surface allowed. Jacksonwald parking issues during school functions were noted and Dr. Martin (ETSD Superintendent) mentioned that they had provided buses to shuttle people from the Lausch property instead of having people park on the road at Jacksonwald recently and that seemed to go well. Suggestions were made that the plan should include some other areas utilizing the reinforced turf (i.e. like the fire lane). Another suggestion was to have the ETSD discuss sharing St. Catharine's parking lot if needed. At the end of the presentation, Mr. Nye, representing the University Gun Club, stated that the club was not in favor of having a path along their property on Schoffer's Road. Specifically, he stated that the club was private property and would not allow a path on their property. The planners voiced their approval for a safe, walkable path along Schoffer's Road and stated that it would not be on the club's property. Rather, it would be in the road right of way if constructed and that the club surely could not object to that. The planners expressed their understanding that the club did not want a path on their property especially for liability reasons.

Historical Area Controls:

The planners reviewed a draft of the suggested ordinance for Historical Controls. Several suggestions were made to the township zoning officer to reword some of the document to remove "subjective" language and replace it with definite requirements instead of guidelines.

Trees:

The zoning officer brought up the request by Supervisor Michelle Kircher to use money from the Exeter Commons project to plant trees in Farmingridge Park to replace those that had been removed. The planners stated that the use was allowed under the ordinance and that they approved of the use of the funds in this manner.

