

BOROUGH OF CONSHOHOCKEN BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING

Wednesday, December 2, 2020

PUBLIC MEETING held via GoToMeeting video/teleconference

PRESENT: Colleen Leonard, Council President
Tina Sokolowski, Council Vice-President
Robert Stokley, Senior Council Member
Anita Barton, Council Member
Jane Flanagan, Council Member
James Griffin, Council Member
Karen Tutino, Council Member
Yaniv Aronson, Mayor

ALSO PRESENT: Stephanie Cecco, Borough Manager
Michael E. Peters, Borough Solicitor

CALL TO ORDER

The Public Meeting of the Conshohocken Borough Council duly advertised, was held remotely using the GoToMeeting platform. Colleen Leonard, Council President, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Leonard thanked everyone for attending the virtual Council meeting. She reviewed the meeting logistics and participation instructions. She announced that Council held Executive Session prior to the regularly scheduled meeting on legal matters.

PRESENTATIONS

There were no presentations.

LAND USE MATTERS, PUBLIC HEARINGS AND ORDINANCES

a.) Second Amended Final Land Development Application for SORA West: Keystone Property Group, Applicant

Mr. Peters explained that this is the second time the applicant has sought to amend final land development approval for the SORA West unified development. He introduced the application, which seeks to combine the previously proposed hotel and brew pub into an eight (8)-story hotel, retail, restaurant building with 127 rooms and no parking below.

Robert Gundlach, attorney for the applicant, provided a brief overview of the application. He explained that the proposed changes are to reduce the size of the hotel and restaurant area, given the realities of current market conditions, including specifically the effect of COVID-19.

Scott Boyle, the applicant's architect, reviewed the site plan and explained the changes to the site, including the connector between the historic firehouse and the hotel, with the historic firehouse serving as the entrance to the hotel. He shared the proposed design features of the hotel.

Ms. Leonard asked if the plan still proposes 150 public parking spaces in the parking garage. Mr. Gundlach replied that the Borough maintains the 150 public parking spaces. Ms. Barton asked about the location of the ADA accessible lift for access to the public plaza. Ms. Cecco explained that the Borough and Keystone are working together to evaluate the site and determine the location of the ADA accessible lift.

b.) 7 Tower Bridge Zoning Hearing Board Application

Eric Johnson, Zoning Officer, stated that the applicant proposes to install identification signage on the Seven Tower Bridge building and attached parking garage. He explained that variances are required for the number and size of the proposed signage.

Ross Weiss, the applicant's attorney, stated that the applicant is seeking variances for signage relief for the Seven Tower Bridge office building and parking garage. He explained how the location of the Seven Tower Bridge property creates a hardship and that signage must be installed on the building and garage to deliver information that is visible to direct the public. Mr. Weiss reviewed the signage plan and shared the proposed design features of the signs. Kevin Lucey, CFO of Hamilton Lane, provided a brief overview of the company and shared its excitement about moving its headquarters to Conshohocken. Ms. Sokolowski asked how the sign would be illuminated. Jeff Carson of Sign City Service responded that the proposed signs are LED illuminated and face lit.

c.) 400 West Elm Street Zoning Hearing Board Application

Mr. Johnson stated that the applicant is proposing a multifamily residential development with 352 units. He explained that the proposal requires variances for building bulk and to permit a portion of the proposed development within the Floodplain Conservation District.

Bob Dwyer, representative for the applicant, provided an overview of the history of the site, which included prior approvals for a residential development in 2013, a commercial office building development in 2014 and a variance to permit building bulk greater than 300 feet. He explained that the applicant is currently proposing a multifamily residential development, which requires variances for building bulk and construction in the Floodplain. He explained how the topographical and locational characteristics of the site restrict the applicant from developing the property in strict conformance with the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance.

Ms. Tutino voiced a concern about constructing a building in the Floodplain. Lou Colagreco, attorney for the applicant, responded that the floodplain relief is needed to facilitate the relocation of a portion of the current trail system. He explained that the proposed floodplain disturbance is less than that associated with the previously approved office building development. Ms. Tutino asked several questions related to design features of the residential units and proposed parking on site. Mr. Dwyer responded that the proposal is for 1.3 bedrooms per unit. He explained that the proposed project meets the parking requirement. He added that public parking spaces would also be provided on site for access to the trail.

d.) 900 Fayette Street Zoning Hearing Board Application

Mr. Johnson introduced the application, explaining that the applicant is proposing to construct an addition to the rear of the existing building and to install a trash enclosure to the rear of the building. He stated that the proposal requires a special exception for the expansion of a non-conforming building, a variance to permit the increase the impervious lot coverage, and a variance from requiring off-street parking.

Edward Hughes, the applicant's attorney, described the present use of the property, which includes a delicatessen, salon and three (3) residential apartments. He explained that the applicant is proposing an addition to house an expansion of the delicatessen kitchen facilities, office, restroom facility and walk-in freezer.

Ashley Govberg, the applicant, explained that she is looking to add more retail space with the expansion of the kitchen. Ms. Tutino stated that the proposed plan would remove the ADA ramp located in the back of the building. She asked how the applicant plans comply with ADA requirements. Ms. Govberg responded that a new ADA accessible ramp would be constructed in the front of the building.

Ms. Govberg confirmed that there has been no objection to the application from the other tenants of the building. She stated that there is currently no off-street parking on site.

Ms. Sokolowski voiced a concern related to the proximity of the trash enclosure to residential properties. Mr. Hughes responded that the addition would not create any encroachments into the rear of the property.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

a.) Conduct interviews for Board and Commission vacancies

Ms. Leonard introduced Marlowe Doman who was present to interview for appointment to the Zoning Hearing Board (ZHB). Mr. Doman explained that as a homeowner in the Borough, he has an interest in the regulations that guide development and shape the community. He mentioned that importance of responsible development and the interests of residents and business owners as it relates to zoning. He discussed how his professional experience as a lawyer and knowledge of housing litigation and policy would contribute to the ZHB.

Ms. Leonard introduced Dana MacNeal who was present to interview for appointment to the Planning Commission. As a long term resident of the Borough, Ms. MacNeal discussed her interest in advising Borough Council on matters of community growth and development and the preservation of the Borough's small town characteristics. She briefly discussed her volunteer experience with the local school district.

Ms. Leonard introduced Lindsay Neal who was present to interview for appointment to the Dog Park Advisory Committee. Ms. Lindsey shared that she is a new dog owner looking to get involved in the community. She briefly mentioned her prior involvement with volunteer programs and voiced her excitement about the Committee's community engagement and fundraising initiatives.

Ms. Leonard introduced Chelsea Woickowski who was present to interview for appointment to the Dog Park Advisory Committee. Ms. Woickowski reviewed the role of the Dog Park Advisory Committee, which included specifically the overall operation and maintenance of the Dog Park as well as strategic planning for the Park's future use and development. She discussed the importance of dog parks in growing communities and shared some park amenities to meet the needs of the members and their dogs.

Ms. Leonard introduced Ashley McQuaide who was present to interview for appointment to the Environmental Advisory Council (EAC). Ms. McQuaide voiced her interest in supporting the EAC's goal of promoting a more environmentally conscious and sustainable community. She provided an overview of her professional background and discussed how her knowledge of environmental risk and impact could contribute to the EAC. Ms. McQuaide shared that she has participated in the Green Conshy cleanup events and is eager to get involved in the other initiatives.

Ms. Leonard introduced Brandon McCracken who was present to interview for appointment to the EAC. Mr. McCracken explained that the role of the EAC is to identify environmental problems and recommend plans and programs to Borough Council. He shared that he has participated in the EAC's environmental education and outreach initiatives. He discussed how his educational background and professional experience as a Park Ranger and part-time environmental educator would contribute to the EAC.

b.) Conduct interviews or Board and Commission reappointments

Ms. Leonard introduced Marty Eckert who was present to interview for reappointment to the Civil Service Commission. Mr. Eckert provided a brief overview of his history and experience on the Commission. He explained that the Commission conducts examinations and certifies qualified applicants for positions and promotions within the Police Department.

Ms. Leonard introduced Sarah Aronson who was present to interview for reappointment to the Friends of Conshohocken Park. Ms. Aronson shared her experience serving on the Friends of Conshohocken Parks.

Ms. Leonard introduced Mark Danek who was present to interview for reappointment to the Zoning Hearing Board. Mr. Danek stated that the role of the Zoning Hearing Board is to interpret and enforce the Zoning Ordinance. He discussed the importance of regularly assessing the zoning code and making any necessary revisions in order to reflect new trends. Mr. Danek discussed necessary decision-making skills for Zoning Hearing Board members.

Ms. Leonard introduced Stacy Ellam who was present to interview for reappointment to the Human Relations Commission. Ms. Ellam discussed ways for the public to learn more about the Commission.

MANAGER MATTERS

a.) Consider approving the 2021 meeting schedules for Borough Council and Boards and Commissions

Ms. Cecco reviewed the proposed meeting schedules for Borough Council and Boards and Commissions for 2021. There were no changes to schedules for the Dog Park Advisory Committee, Environmental Advisory Council, Mary Wood Park Commission and Planning Commission. Council agreed to continue holding Borough Council meetings on the first and third Wednesday of each month. Council also agreed to cancel the July Work Session and hold special budget meetings in September and November. Ms. Cecco asked Council to consider approving and authorizing advertisement of the proposed 2021 meeting schedules at the December 16, 2020 Voting Meeting.

b.) Consider approving the SORA West financial security escrow release no. 3 revised in the amount of \$629,998.20

Ms. Cecco stated that Council had previously approved financial security no. 3 in October, which included a partial release for completed work associated with the parking garage. She explained that following the approval, concrete issues with the garage were identified and that escrow release was not processed. Ms. Cecco confirmed that the work required to rectify those issues has been completed. She explained that the Borough Engineer is recommending release of a portion of the escrow funds associated with the parking garage minus the cost of the change order to address the concrete strength issue in the parking garage.

Ms. Sokolowski made a motion to approve the SORA West financial security escrow release no. 3 revised in the amount of \$629,998.20, seconded by Ms. Tutino. Mr. Stokley recused himself. The motion carried 6-0.

DEPARTMENT MATTERS

There were no department matters.

LEGAL MATTERS

There were no legal matters.

COUNCIL MEMBER AND MAYOR MATTERS

a.) Plaque Honoring Nugent and Burns (Council Member Flanagan)

Ms. Flanagan asked Council to consider formally recognizing Jerry Nugent, former Executive Director of the Redevelopment Authority of Montgomery County, and Joe Burns, former Borough Council President and Member, for their contributions to the development of the Borough of Conshohocken. Council supported Council Member Flanagan's recommendation to honor Mr. Nugent and Mr. Burns. Ms. Cecco asked Council to think of ways to recognize their contributions and to submit any ideas to administration for further discussion and consideration.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Brittany Rogers, Executive Assistant to the Borough Manager, stated that no public comment was received via email submission.

There was no additional public comment.

Mayor Aronson reminded everyone to support small businesses during the holiday season.

Ms. Barton also encouraged everyone to support small businesses during the holiday season.

Ms. Tutino inquired about the details of the Holiday House Decorating Contest. Ms. Cecco provided details of the event.

Mr. Griffin reminded everyone to continue following all COVID-19 safety protocols.

Ms. Sokolowski asked Council to consider approving a request from St. Mark's Church to hold outdoor church services on Christmas Eve. She stated that the event would require the partial closure on 5th Avenue. Ms. Cecco added that the event request has been vetted by Administration and the Police Department. Council voiced support of the special event request. Ms. Sokolowski also asked Council to consider partnering with Back to Earth Compost Crew to collect and recycle broken and non-working strands of holiday lights. She recommended placing collection bins at the B-Field parking lot. Council voiced support of a holiday light collection site.

Superintendent Metz shared that there has been an increase in theft from vehicles. He reminded everyone to lock their cars and keep their valuables safe. He thanked Officer Storti, Detective McGuire and Police Administration for making the Thanksgiving food drive and distribution a success. He announced that the Police Department is participating in its annual toy drive and shared ways to donate.

Ms. Cecco shared that tickets to the Drive-in Christmas Movie are sold out.

Ms. Leonard recognized Lauren Irizarry, Director of Recreation Services, and the staff at the Community Center for their hard work on the holiday event for seniors.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Cecco,
Borough Secretary