

CONSHOHOCKEN BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION
REPORT TO CONSHOHOCKEN BOROUGH COUNCIL

APPLICANT: Ratoskey & Trainor, Inc.
PROPERTY: 203 East 12th Avenue
MEETING DATE: April 8, 2021
ZONING: BR-1 Borough Residential District One
ACTION DATE: April 8, 2021

COMMISSION ACTION: Recommendation of approval of land development and the requested waives. The Planning Commission recommended the following conditions:

1. A deed restriction restricting use of the garage for parking only (*i.e.* not for storage use)
2. The applicant shall negotiate a fee in lieu of park/recreational space pursuant to SALDO § 804

WAIVERS REQUESTED:

1. SALDO § 22-306.A(1)—to excuse requirement of showing existing features within 100 feet of the subject property, subject to providing additional information deemed necessary by the Borough Engineer
2. SALDO § 22-308.A—to permit a single submission for preliminary/final land development approval
3. SALDO § 22-404.1.A—to permit a residential alley without the minimum required right-of-way and paved widths (existing alley)
4. SALDO § 22-409.2—to permit grading within the right-of-way and within 3 feet of the property lines
5. SALDO § 22-421.4—regarding shade tree spacing and location, requested to avoid interference with the seepage bed
6. SALDO § 22-421.6—to excuse the requirement of pedestrian lighting, given the existing street lights
7. SALDO § 804—to permit a fee in lieu of park/recreational space

MATERIALS REVIEWED: The Planning Commission reviewed the following materials:

1. plan set prepared by OTM, LLC, consisting of 5 sheets, dated December 28, 2020
2. post-construction stormwater management report, prepared by Kraft Engineering, dated January 14, 2021
3. architectural renderings prepared by RHC Design, LLC, consisting of 4 sheets, dated July 24, 2018, last revised September 4, 2018
4. 3 pictures of existing conditions
5. review letter of Borough Engineer, dated March 31, 2021
6. review letter of Borough Fire Marshal, dated March 19, 2021
7. review letter of Montgomery County Planning Commission, dated April 2, 2021

8. review letter of Borough Traffic Engineer, dated March 31, 2021
9. review letter of Borough Zoning Officer, dated March 30, 2021

MEETING SUMMARY:

This is an application for land development to permit construction of 3 single-family homes, each 1,405 square feet with a 50 square foot front porch and 170 square foot rear deck. Each dwelling would take vehicular access via a driveway connection to Hallowell Street. An underground seepage bed is proposed to address stormwater management. Public improvements include curb, sidewalk, and widening of Hallowell street to 43 feet. The dwellings would be served by public water and sewer.

The meeting occurred remotely using the GoToMeeting platform. The following members of the Planning Commission were present: Stacy Ellam, Chair, Elizabeth MacNeal, Vice Chair, Judy Smith-Kressley, Dana MacNeal, and Daniel Swartley McArdle. Also present for the Borough were Borough Solicitor, Michael Peters, Esquire, Borough Engineer, Karen MacNair, P.E., Borough Zoning Officer, Eric Johnson, P.E., and Executive Assistant to the Borough Manager, Brittany Rogers.

Present for the applicant were Jerry Rath, Esquire and Rob Ratoskey.

Mr. Ratoskey explained that the majority of the items set forth in the review letters were a “will comply” except to the extent that the applicant was seeking certain waivers, as set forth in the Borough Engineer’s review letter and above. Mr. Ratoskey reviewed the requested waivers with the Planning Commission.

With respect to the seepage bed design, Mr. Ratoskey explained that the beds had been designed as if the full building envelope was being developed, even if the house would be smaller.

Mr. Ratoskey agreed to work with the Borough’s traffic engineer regarding pavement/other markings required to address the proposed road widening. Mr. Ratoskey further agreed to obtain all approvals required from Whitmarsh for the road widening.

Mr. Ratoskey explained that the lots will all be developed at the same time and held under common ownership, so the Borough Engineer’s General Comment 4 (grading/water-lines between lots) is addressed.

Mr. Ratoskey explained that there would be 2 parking spots, one each in the driveway and the garage.

Mr. Ratoskey stated that the Applicant would comply with all other comments in all other review letters.

Member Smith-Kressley stated that she was strongly in favor of the single-family homes and liked the design shown in the renderings. Mr. Ratoskey explained that the Applicant also liked the design, and that the constructed homes would be very similar in terms of design, depending on current material prices, etc. Ms. Smith-Kressley had Mr. Ratoskey confirm that he would be complying with the tree caliper requirements.

Member Dana MacNeal was in support of the project.

Member McArdle was in support of the project and asked how quickly the project would move forward. Mr. Ratoskey stated that he intended to file for building permits while land development is still proceeding.

Vice-Chair MacNeal had questions regarding the pedestrian lighting in the area and whether the lighting would be sufficient. Mr. Ratoskey explained that the tree canopy in that area had recently been trimmed, and that the existing lighting (Cobra Head) was, in his opinion, as the owner of the house across the street from the project, sufficient. Mr. Ratoskey also explained that there would be lights on the front of the houses.

Chair MacNeal confirmed with Mr. Ratoskey that there would be no improvement of East 12th Avenue in the area of Mr. Ratoskey's own home.

There was no public comment.

The Planning Commission recommended approval of the application and waivers, subject to the conditions set forth above. Member Smith-Kressley made the motion, seconded by Member McArdle. The vote was unanimous.

CONSHOHOCKEN BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION
REPORT TO CONSHOHOCKEN BOROUGH COUNCIL

APPLICANT: Craft Custom Homes, LLC
PROPERTY: 261 and 263 East Elm Street
MEETING DATE: April 8, 2021
ZONING: LI Limited Industrial
ACTION DATE: April 8, 2021

COMMISSION ACTION: Recommendation of approval of the conditional uses requested:

1. pursuant to zoning ordinance § 27-1901-B to permit a modern multifamily housing development in the LI Limited Industrial zoning district
2. pursuant to zoning ordinance § 27-1903-B.11 to permit a building height greater than 35 feet, with the recommendation that the height be increased by 5 feet as needed to accommodate “scissor-lifts” in the parking area (discussed below)

MATERIALS REVIEWED: The Planning Commission reviewed the following materials:

1. conditional use plan prepared by Vastardis Consulting Engineers, LLC, dated February 17, 2021
2. existing conditions plan prepared by Vastardis Consulting Engineers, LLC, dated November 25, 2020, last revised December 9, 2020
3. landscape and lighting plan prepared by Vastardis Consulting Engineers, LLC, dated November 25, 2020, last revised December 9, 2020
4. traffic generation analysis, prepared by Heinrich & Klein Associates, Inc., dated July 16, 2020
5. parking assessment, prepared by Heinrich & Klein Associates, Inc., dated August 31, 2020
6. exhibit package containing renderings, floor plans, and pictures, 19 pages
7. review letter of Montgomery County Planning Commission, dated March 29, 2021
8. review letter of Borough Zoning Officer, dated March 31, 2021

MEETING SUMMARY:

This is an application for conditional use approval to permit a multifamily residential development in the LI Limited Industrial zoning district containing 21 units. Applicant proposes under-building parking containing 42 spaces and a courtyard behind the building. Conditional use approval is required to permit the multifamily residential use in the LI Limited Industrial zoning district and to permit a building height taller than 35 feet. Conditional use approval is requested pursuant to sections 27-1901-B and 27-1903-B.11 of the Borough’s zoning ordinance. The dwelling units will be sold as condominium units.

The meeting occurred remotely using the GoToMeeting platform. The following members of the Planning Commission were present: Stacy Ellam, Chair, Elizabeth MacNeal, Vice Chair, Judy Smith-Kressley, Dana MacNeal, and Daniel Swartley McArdle. Also present for the Borough were Borough Solicitor, Michael Peters, Esquire, Borough Engineer, Karen MacNair, P.E., Borough Zoning Officer, Eric Johnson, P.E., and Executive Assistant to the Borough Manager, Brittany Rogers.

Present for the applicant were Debra Shulski, Esquire, Ryan Alexaki, and Nick Vastardis (applicant's engineer).

Mr. Peters provided background information to the Planning Commission on the conditional use process.

Ms. Shulski provided background on the project and what was being proposed. Ms. Shulski explained that the project was similar to the project proposed by the Applicant on Hector Street in the Borough.

Mr. Vastardis explained the scope of the project and what was being proposed in comparison to existing conditions. Mr. Vastardis explained that the building currently contains a golf shop, locksmith, gym, and offices. Currently, the property is almost entirely covered by impervious surfaces. There is an existing, unattractive, chain link fence. Mr. Vastardis explained that parking for the project would be under the building. In the southwest corner of the site a large landscaped area is proposed for use by owners of the condominium units (e.g. a potential dog park). Mr. Vastardis explained that the impervious surface coverage is being reduced.

Mr. Alexaki explained that the Applicant had arrived at the current plan after a presentation to Borough Council. The number of units was reduced from 22 to 21 so the plan met the parking requirements. What was previously the 22nd unit will be a communal area.

In terms of the MCPC review letter, Mr. Alexaki explained that the Applicant would defer to the Borough regarding the additional design elements suggested by MCPC. Those design elements would require additional building height.

Mr. Alexaki explained that the majority of neighbors support the plan. Those not in support of the plan apparently misunderstood that the dwelling units would not be rental apartments, but rather condominium units.

Mr. Alexaki explained that the Applicant had performed traffic and parking studies on the Property. The traffic study demonstrated that the trips per day would be reduced by 182 cars per day. The parking study demonstrated that the parking demand for units of this nature would be 1.5 spaces per unit. This will likely mean that there will be available parking for guests.

Mr. Johnson explained that it would be helpful if the Planning Commission would provide feedback on whether the use meets the requirements for conditional use, specifically whether the housing is “modern housing”.

Member Smith-Kressley provided feedback on the design, and stated that otherwise she agreed that the new homes would be beneficial to the tax base.

Member Dana MacNeal stated that she was supportive of the project and the design. Member MacNeal asked Mr. Alexaki to explain how the units are broken up internally; Mr. Alexaki explained the layout.

Vice-Chair MacNeal questioned the Applicant on the width of the sidewalk, after accounting for the additional landscaping. Mr. Alexaki explained that the sidewalks met all requirements and that the issue would be examined more during land development. Mr. Vastardi explained that there would be 9-10 feet of sidewalk. Mr. Alexaki explained that the additional landscaping was added with the advice of Borough Council, and that the landscaping could be removed if Borough Council desired.

Vice-Chair MacNeal asked a question regarding the pilot house at the top of the structure, and Mr. Alexaki explained that that area is allowed to be over the height limit.

Vice-Chair MacNeal was pleased that the units would be condominiums, and further noted that she hoped that Borough Council would also continue to encourage single-family homes for young families.

Member McArdle liked the design and had no specific questions.

Chair Ellam questioned the Applicant on the unit size. Mr. Alexaki explained that the units would be 1500-1700 square feet. Chair Ellam had questions regarding the existing grass area on the site. Mr. Alexaki explained that the grass area would be maintained for the most part with additional landscaping.

Chair Ellam asked whether the building height would block sun for the neighboring properties. Mr. Alexaki explained that the most heavily impacted house is a row-house, and that existing structures in the area are at a greater elevation because the subject property is downslope.

Mr. Alexaki explained that the Applicant was considering the installation of scissor-lifts in the parking area to double the amount of parking. The scissor-lifts would be available to homeowners at a cost, but in order to be installed under the building, 5 feet of additional height would be required. The Planning Commission discussed the scissor-lift concept in depth, ultimately deciding that allowing for the scissor-lifts would be in the best interest of the future of the Borough.

Vice-Chair MacNeal made a motion to recommend approval of the multifamily development as presented. Member McCardle seconded, and the motion was unanimously passed.

Vice-Chair MacNeal made a motion to recommend approval of the additional height beyond 35 feet, and to further recommend permitting an additional 5 feet of height as needed to accommodate the scissor-lift concept. Member Dana MacNeal seconded, and the motion was unanimously passed.

CONSHOHOCKEN BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION
REPORT TO CONSHOHOCKEN BOROUGH COUNCIL

PROJECT: Accessory Structure Zoning Amendment
MEETING DATE: April 8, 2021
ACTION DATE: April 8, 2021

COMMISSION ACTION: Recommendation of adoption of zoning amendment.

MATERIALS REVIEWED: The Planning Commission reviewed a draft of the zoning amendment.

MEETING SUMMARY:

This is an amendment to the Borough zoning ordinance's accessory structure regulations.

The meeting occurred remotely using the GoToMeeting platform. The following members of the Planning Commission were present: Stacy Ellam, Chair, Elizabeth MacNeal, Vice Chair, Judy Smith-Kressley, Dana MacNeal, and Daniel Swartley, McArdle. Also present for the Borough were Borough Solicitor, Michael Peters, Esquire, Borough Engineer, Karen MacNair, P.E., Borough Zoning Officer, Eric Johnson, P.E., and Executive Assistant to the Borough Manager, Brittany Rogers.

Mr. Peters explained the amendment to the Planning Commission. Mr. Peters explained that the current size restriction for garages in the Borough is 350 square feet. The purpose of the amendment is to increase the permitted size of garages to 450 square feet. The amendment excludes the additional 100 square feet from the impervious surface and building coverage requirements of the zoning ordinance. The amendment also requires that property lines be staked before an accessory structure is constructed. The amendment otherwise amends other sections of the zoning ordinance to incorporate the aforementioned changes. The purpose of the amendment is to increase available off street parking in the Borough and reduce the need for zoning variances for two-car garages.

Member Smith-Kressley felt the amendment was an excellent idea, as the Borough needs more off-street parking and the amendment proposes a solution.

Member Dana MacNeal had no questions regarding the amendment.

Member McCardle agreed that the amendment was appropriate, and posed a question regarding impervious surface coverage in the BR-1 versus BR-2 district which Mr. Johnson answered.

Vice-Chair MacNeal asked Mr. Peters to confirm that the amendment did not impact the minimum setbacks for structures, and Mr. Peters explained that the setback provisions were not being changed.

Chair Ellam asked Mr. Peters whether the height was being changed, Mr. Peters explained that it was not changed. Chair Ellam and Mr. Peters discussed the difficulties in ensuring that homeowners actually use the garages for parking.

Vice-Chair MacNeal made a motion to recommend adoption of the amendment as drafted. Member Smith-Kressley seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.