

Swarthmore Planning Commission

August 19, 2020

Members attending: Chris DeBruyn, Rex Brien, Denise Disney, Steve Minton, Nancy Templeton, Don Jones, Laura Poltronieri, David Virgil, James Levine.

Also attending: Borough Council liaison Betsy Larsen, Borough Manager Jane Billings, Borough Council President Mary Walk, Borough Councilor Ross Schmucki, Borough Councilor Michael Carey, Borough Engineer, Eric Johnson

The meeting was convened via Zoom at 7:35 pm

New Business:

Application for Subdivision of a lot at 686 N. Chester Road

The applicant provided preliminary plans indicating the division of the subject lot into two separate lots. The application included 3 requests for waivers:

- 1) Request to avoid installing sidewalks along Oakdale Avenue
- 2) Request to avoid the lighting requirements of SALDO 1293.08
- 3) Request to partially waive the requirement for a conservation plan.

Additionally, the plans were appeared to be non-compliant with SALDO 1288.04 (b).

Additionally, review comments from the Borough Engineer were provided, noting various deficiencies in the plans.

Additionally, review comments from the Borough Solicitor were provided, noting non-compliance with SALDO 1288.04 (b) and potential non-compliance with an implied lot width requirement.

Additionally, preliminary review comments from the Delaware County Planning Department were provided, noting similar concerns with the Borough Engineer, as well as noting that the existing structure is listed as #335 on the Swarthmore Historic Resource Survey, recommending that it not be demolished as an example of late 19th century Queen Anne Style.

Public Comment:

There was substantial public interest. Common issues included:

- 1) Desire to maintain the existing character of the street
- 2) Desire to match the setback of surrounding homes. Zoning requires 25' from the front of the home to the lot line, which is approximately 15' from the curb, for a total of 40'. A commenter

provided information that the existing homes in that area of North Chester range from 45' to 74' from the curb.

- 3) Desire to save the existing home, noted as having been listed on an inventory of Swarthmore homes as over 120 years old.
- 4) Desire for traffic calming measures to be part of the project.
- 5) Concern about the removal of trees on site.
- 6) Concern about granting the waivers requested.
- 7) Concern about location of garages.
- 8) Concern about the project being a "gateway location".
- 9) Request that the Borough enter into a development agreement with the applicant in order to more completely specify conditions of final approval.

The Planning Commission Board discussion:

- 1) Concern about Borough Engineer comments regarding plan deficiencies.
 - a. The applicant stated that the submitted plans would be address these comments.
- 2) Concern about the removal of trees on site.
 - a. The applicant stated that they would meet the ordinance required tree replacement. When follow up indicated that the large number of trees required might not fit, he stated that some would be closely placed for screening purposes, and that they may choose arborvitae which have a smaller footprint. There was discussion as to whether arborvitae was an appropriate choice for tree replacement.
- 3) Concern about "Street Trees" and how they are calculated.
 - a. The applicant stated that they would meet the ordinance street tree requirements.
- 4) Concern about storm water run-off from Baltimore Pike, and from lot 1 onto lot 2, and to other downslope neighbors.
 - a. The applicant described the scheme, indicated that the design was not complete as shown on the plans, and that the final plan would be compliant.
- 5) Concern about the difference in setbacks.
 - a. The commission discussed and attempted to verify that the setback of surrounding homes was in fact substantially beyond the RB zoning requirements of 25' from the lot line or 40' from the curb. After viewing the area on Google Earth it was generally agreed that it was likely it that was typical. The commission discussed the setbacks and suggested that the applicant would commit to adjusting the setback of the front of the home to 35' from the lot line, or 50' from the curb line on lot 2. The applicant agreed to review this option.
- 6) Concern about granting the waivers requested.
 - a. The commission discussion indicated that the sidewalk waiver request would likely not be granted and the applicant stated that he would remove that request from the plans.
 - b. The commission discussed the lighting requirement and agreed that there was not a lighting requirement for a residential single-family lot. The applicant agreed to remove the request from the plans.

- c. The commission discussed the requirement for a conservation plan and noted that the majority of the elements were already included in the application, and that it was unlikely to be waived. The applicant agreed to remove the request from the plans.
- 7) Concern about SALDO 1288.04(b), with regard to the 2-segment lot line.
 - a. The applicant described his intent as seeing the original lot as similar to a lot on a curved street. The proposed new lot line, which would originate on the Oakdale Ave street line and run roughly west, would be radial to a curved street line (if the corner were instead a curved street line as is common in some zoning jurisdictions). The lot line then turns approximately 1/3rd of the way through to the northwest, having the effect of balancing out the size of the rear yards for both lots. The applicant indicated it appeared to be the best solution to providing screening at the Baltimore Ave. side of lot 1, while allowing adequate width for building footprints with side loading garages. One set of plans was provided showed buildings built to the front and south/southwest setback lines, with sideloading garages.
- 8) Concern about saving a potentially historic building.
 - a. The applicant stated that the building would not be economically salvageable, given the current status with failed roof and interior mold and structural damage. There was discussion about another building on North Chester that was in similar condition and had been renovated by another party. The commission attempted to determine if the existing home, located on what would be lot 1, would be compliant with the setbacks on the plans submitted and determined that it appeared to be compliant.
- 9) Concern about traffic calming options.
 - a. It was confirmed that this would not be a part of this approval at this time.
- 10) Concern about maintaining the character of the street.
 - a. The commission noted that the materials and style of the homes to be built are not regulated by borough ordinances other than to require that buildings are to be constructed in compliance with all applicable code and other regulations. The commission requested that the applicant provide some documentation of previous projects to give the neighbors and borough council some idea of the design or quality intent of the builder. The applicant agreed to provide some photographs of previous projects.
- 11) Concern about location of garages on the homes shown on some plans:
 - a. The applicant stated that the homes were “placeholders” and did not represent final plans. He stated that the garages would be configured in a code compliant manner, and that they intended to provide side-loading garages.

Additional conversation and review of all public questions posted in the Zoom chat box continued.

A motion was made, and seconded:

“The Swarthmore Planning Commission recommends approval of this adjustment of lot lines, rejecting all 3 waiver requests, and additionally requiring an additional 10’ of front setback on the home located on North Chester Road, and photo documentation of other similar projects completed by the applicant.”

The vote was in favor of the motion.

Motion to recess until the meeting could be continued on Wednesday August 26 at 7:30 pm was made at 10:20 pm. The motion was seconded and approved with unanimous consent.