

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP SCREENING COMMITTEE MEETING
Thursday, April 19, 2018

Present: Christopher Bobbitt, Mayor
James Kownacki, Councilman
Doris M. Weisberg
Edward Wiznitzer, Chairperson

Absent: None

Excused Absence: None

Also Present: Brian Slaugh, Planning Consultant
James Kochenour, Traffic Consultant
James F. Parvesse, Municipal Engineer
Edward Schmierer, Planning Board Attorney
Susan Snook, Recording Secretary

Statement of Adequate Notice:

Adequate notice of this meeting of the Lawrence Township Zoning Board has been provided by filing the annual meeting schedule with the Municipal Clerk as required by law; by filing the agenda and notice with the Municipal Clerk, posting prominently in the Municipal Building and mailing to the Trenton Times and the Trentonian newspapers.

Before the application was presented, Chairperson Wiznitzer stated to the public that is not a formal Planning Board meeting and no formal action will be taken tonight.

Public Participation (for items not on agenda):

Gregory Puliti, 827 Bunker Hill Avenue stated that he is requesting that Mayor, Council and the Planning Board consider an amendment to Section 420.D.60.E of the Lawrence Township Land Use Ordinance that sets the standards for the conditional use of extended stay facilities in the Highway Commercial Zone. The amendment he is proposing is an addition to the existing bulk requirements. It should be required that any parking lot or structure provide a 1,000 feet natural buffer zone when abutting any residential or open space district. He believes this is a reasonable standard to meet in order to protect the use and quality of life in those districts. He understands that any future changes to the Land Use Ordinance cannot be applied to the current application; however, it will ensure that any future applications would have to meet this standard, copy of statement dated April 19, 2018 is attached.

Minutes for Approval: None

Resolutions: None

Applications:

Major Site Plan – Preliminary and Final Approval Application No. P-8/17; **Sheft Associates, Inc.**; 2420 Brunswick Pike; Tax Map Page 21, Block 2101, Lot 39

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Councilman Kownacki asked our Planning Consultant, from his report on Page 6, conditional use that talks about this application and not taking jurisdiction tonight, based on the information does this belong here tonight. Mr. Slaugh stated he cannot tell because the architectural elevations that were reviewed had no scale associated with them. It is his understanding that architectural elevations were distributed by the applicant in error and there is a new set of architectural elevations that had a scale and did not do any calculations to see or receive them to determine if they meet that requirement or not. They have indicated that their application now meets all the conditions of the conditional use, obviously if they don't, then this jurisdiction goes back to the Zoning Board.

Councilman Kownacki stated if it does not meet it now, do we even hear this application tonight because it is not presenting the proper paper work for me to review or the effort that was put in by the professionals to deal with the applicant. There was plenty of time that this paper work could have been updated. Mr. Slaugh stated this is at the Board's discretion and there might be some comments from legal counsel as well on this.

Mr. Slaugh explained to the audience that this application is called a conditional use, which means it is an allowed use in the zoning district in which it is placed upon meeting certain conditions that are established by ordinance and if it does not meet those conditions it becomes a Zoning Board of Adjustment matter. This application started with the Zoning Board of Adjustment and then the applicant indicated they would meet all the conditions of the conditional use and the issue at hand is the maximum room sizes and the minimum room size, for an extended stay hotel a room has to be 325 sf and you could not determine that with the original set of architectural plans; however, a second set of architectural plans were received but they were actually the same as the first set, which he was informed by the applicant. They might have plans that conform today and they have not been reviewed. It is a jurisdictional issue because the Zoning Board does not hold screening committee hearings like the Planning Board does because it is a different kind of application.

Councilman Kownacki stated he did not get an answer, do we hear this application. He understands the residents are here and have a lot of concerns, but to go through this application tonight and assume that everything is going to be met. He does not feel that it is fair to anyone in the audience to hear something if we do not have the plans in front of us that say that. Mr. Slaugh commented that is a legitimate way to view it but the question is you have to decide how you are going to approach it.

Mr. Schmierer stated it would be appropriate to recognize the applicant's attorney and have him explain what change if any should have been on the plan. The only change is the room size and the room count does not change, etc. 99.9% of the plans you have will remain the same. If the applicant represents that on the record that the room size meets the conditional use standard, then this sub-committee has jurisdiction tonight and you should proceed.

Chairperson Wiznitzer stated when this application comes to the formal Planning Board meeting, if the plan does not show conformance with the conditional use requirements, then how would this Board take formal jurisdiction at that hearing. If the Board does not take jurisdiction at that hearing, because it feels a conditional use variance is required everyone here and the applicant gets kicked back to the Zoning Board to restart all over again. Mr. Goldberg stated that it understood and obviously if they do not satisfy one of the conditional use criteria this would go before a different Board. Councilman Kownacki stated they had plenty of time to upgrade this plan and with all the work the professionals have done as well as the applicant, they had plenty of time to fix it and they did not. Mr. Slaugh stated the architectural and floor plans were supposed to be submitted that indicated that they meet those requirements is not something he has seen yet.

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Eric Goldberg, represented the applicant and what is being proposed is a 123 room Spring Suites Hotel as well as an application for a 1,200 sf coffee shop but the bulk of tonight will be devoted to the hotel. The applicant has met with staff professionals on several occasions and has come up with the plan tonight.

Witness #1: Peter Sheft, Manager/Owner of the Colonial Bowling Alley stated his father donated a large part of what is now Colonial Lake to the Colonial Lakelands group and to make the lake possible. He stated they have always been a good corporate citizen, encouraged the use of the lake front, cleaned up the trash along the lake, encouraged fishing, encouraged the path around the lake, encouraged the residents to view the scenery and participated over the years in different functions that benefited the community at large from the Police to the Firemen, as well as Big Brothers Big Sisters and with the Special Olympics. They hold an annual event for the Foster and Adopting Services of Mercer County and has always been a part of the community at large. The lanes that were taken out were used for park benches at the Liberty Bell Park in Philadelphia, donated the equipment to other bowling centers and try to minimize the waste during that process. They has also used different recycling capabilities and since opened they have saved close to 10,000 trees. This development being proposed has been on-going for a long time and wants to be a part of the community. They had other opportunities for this property and thought this would be a good fit into the overall plan. This is a quality project with a quality name behind it and happy with the product.

Witness #2: Elizabeth Skiva, of Choice Hotel and explained that Wood Spring Suites is now a part of the Choice Family as of February 1st. It is an extended economy stay hotel and fits a specific market. They have 241 locations with 29,000 rooms across the country. In the first quarter they signed 15 new deals and half of those with the new franchise which means attracting new business owners who see the value of what Spring Wood Suites can do for a community. They are only a new built and average occupancy growth is 78% in the four properties in the surrounding range market within two hours that was built in the last two years. The ramp up over the 16 weeks is an average of 80% and those properties are very clean and doing very well.

Ms. Skiva stated they are like a Comfort Inn, but in the extended stay market, which is weekly. Their guests consists of construction worker, engineering, traveling nurses, summer interns from Micro Soft and not bottom of the barrel. In the extended stay we will be at the high end of the extended stay market.

Mr. Slaugh stated it is often times that the developer ends up owning the land and doing infrastructure improvements, possibly building the building and the name on hotel is usually an operating system that manages the hotel and sometimes a third part vendor that provides cleaning services or food services of that nature. Is that consistent with your business model. Ms. Skiva stated it is different from the typical franchise and they have two: (owner/operators), which own the hotel and typically own their own their property management company and they are managing several of their own hotels. The other franchises which hire a third party management company; however, they are very selective who the third party companies are and have six to choose from. They have to go through training; they hold leadership conferences with them twice a year in addition to the other two conferences because they want to make sure they are keeping the hotel clean and safe for the guests. They do not have third party to clean, it is the hotel staff and no food services at the hotel. There are kitchenettes in the rooms, they have coffee service in the lobby and that is the extent of the food service. Mr. Slaugh asked if there are cooking facilities in the rooms. Ms. Skiva stated there is a cook top and a microwave and a full size refrigerator.

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Witness #3: Andrew Moss, Architect stated they resubmitted plans on March 9, 2018 which shows the 325 square foot rooms and is the same plan with a scale. Mr. Goldberg stated the Board did not get a chance to review what was just submitted. Mr. Moss continued that what is being proposed is a three story Spring Woods hotel with three types of rooms that consists of a queen suite that is 325 square feet; typically for Spring Woods that would be a smaller room but it was upsized for jurisdictional requirements; there is a queen double suite and a queen deluxe suite. There is also a fitness center, guest laundry and guest lobby on the first floor.

Mr. Moss explained the material board that shows a more residential feel; it will match the stone base to the Bowling Lane so they will tie together with earth tones to the building. A study was done of sight lines taking pictures of different times of the year (fall, spring, summer) which shows the hotel. Mr. Moss described the views during December and March looking across the lake and how it will blend in using the earth tones and even with less foliage because the building has been lowered. When looking at this building, the items of the room size and building height have been met. Also limiting the impact of the overall massing of the building.

Chairperson Wiznitzer asked about the smallest floor plan being 22 x 14. Mr. Moss stated it is 325 square feet and what he can do is provide a plan with exact dimensions and calculations was done which has been verified that they are 325 square feet which means the building had to be elongated to account for the extra square foot per room from the queen suites. Mayor Bobbitt stated a typical suite size would go a long way to an overall dimension and a typical suite size would be helpful to the Board. Mr. Moss stated as part of the next meeting, a plan will be submitted to show those extra dimensions to add additional clarification.

Witness #4: Ed Capalarro, PE referred to the Dimension Plan, Sheet 3 of 23 (Exhibit A2) testified that it is on 8.79 acres and the property currently has a 38,455 sf bowling and entertainment facility with 187 parking spaces. The environmental constraints on the site include wetlands with a 50' buffer which is at the southeast corner. Adjacent to Colonial Lake is a flood hazard limit that was approved and accepted by New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and that requires a 50' buffer zone to it. The Township also has a 100' stream corridor buffer that is measured off of the flood hazard limit as well as the Delaware & Raritan Canal Commission has the same 100' buffer also measured from the flood hazard limit. There is a 60' rear yard building setback measured off the 100' corridor line and a 25' rear parking setback. The applicant is proposing a three-story hotel with 123 rooms, with a 1,200 sf coffee/donut shop. The maximum floor area ratio is 0.24 and the impervious coverage is 57%. The site is adjusted for two phases and the first phase is the extended stay hotel with parking, driveway, bowling alley and entertainment facility and the second phase would be the coffee shop with its associated parking.

Mr. Capalarro spoke about the variances which include the free standing sign at Route 1, which is existing for the bowling alley and the second free standing sign for the hotel which will be 15' and located just northeast of the entrance drive of the complex so people can see the hotel. The proposed free standing sign is 83.03 sf for the hotel which will include the hotel name and room rates. There is also two existing façade signs for the bowling alley and proposing to add one additional façade sign and adding a sign to the hotel itself for directional purposes. The area for the signs is 120 sf and the signs itself will be an electronically changeable sign.

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Mr. Capalarro spoke about the exceptions. Currently along the southwest side behind the bowling alley the existing parking is right along the existing property line and in order to provide a trail easement, the driving isle has been reduced to 22' with angular parking and parallel parking, which would allow for a 10' trail easement located at the southwest side to be utilized for a walking path from Route 1 along Colonial Lake and at the southeast corner the easement will be increased to 30' wide. The parking was reduced along the rear for a buffer. There are no loading zones; sidewalks to be connected to the bowling alley and donut shop and a 4' sidewalk will be provided with a 6' crosswalk.

Mr. Capalarro referred to Sheet 17 of 23, Tree Protection Plan – Exhibit A3 which shows all the trees to be relocated with an inventory plan. The parking lot encroaches 50' into the buffer and it is being proposed to remove all of the pavement area out of that segment and have planted 43 trees in that location. The applicant agrees to provide evergreen trees around the eastern perimeter of the basin; there is a 36" sycamore tree that has to be removed from the detention basin; there will be landscaping around the free standing sign; a detention basin is proposed on the southeast side of the hotel.

Ms. Weisberg wanted to know that the applicant did not identify how they were going to conform to the street tree ordinance with size and species. Mr. Capalarro stated he will basically go through the landscape plan and show in calculations how they will meet that requirement. Mr. Slauch asked about the truck loading zone for the hotel and that the paving for that is an open paver and is it designed for fire truck use as well as heavier vehicles delivering goods to the hotel. Mr. Capalarro stated that the truck loading zone is on the south easterly side of the hotel adjacent to the southeasterly property line; the drive for the loading dock area is a combination of loading area that is required for the hotel but is also the access drive for maintenance to get into the detention basin and the pavers were designed for heavy loading and will be able to handle it.

Mr. Kockenour wanted to know about the three spaces for the oversized vehicles and you may get a bus occasionally to this site considering the historical significance of the Trenton area, the Princeton area and the proximity of three colleges and universities that could be bringing in athletic teams for a period of days and still concerned with what would be the need or reason to have to provide parking to accommodate tractor trailer trucks. Mr. Calaparro stated they are not basically being maintained for tractor trailers. Mr. Kockenour stated there were truck turning templates provided and would like to see where there is a demand for utilizing all three of those spaces and would make certain that an oversized vehicle could access any one of those three spaces, if the other two are already occupied. Mr. Calaparro will provide an analysis and stated it is only buses and not tractor trailers.

Witness #5: Nick Aiello, Traffic Engineer stated he prepared a Traffic Study, dated July 24, 2017 and the proposed driveway will be a right in and a right out. A pork chop island at the driveway is to separate the right in and right out in coordination with New Jersey Department of Transportation. One of the main discussion points is regarding parking and the bowling alley requirement for parking is 4 spaces per ally, which requires 96 spaces and the extended stay lodging facility is 1 space for 1 room which requires 123 spaces and 6 spaces per 1,000 sf for the donut shop equal 226 parking spaces and 265 are being provided.

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Mr. Kockenour stated that he requested a parking demand study be provided to actually look at the peak times for the existing bowling entertainment center and as this Board heard Mr. Aiello testify on paper, their study showed that the parking they are providing meets code requirements. In all due respect to the Township code, he suspects that when that provision, when they were written many years ago, it reflected the usage of those different uses at that time. The fact that it is now a bowling entertainment center, he did a sight visit and went inside and to him it is no longer just a bowling alley; there is an arcade, party rooms, bar and conjuring a lot more and especially for parking then what might have existed when the ordinance was adopted how many years ago. One request he made was to have a parking demand study done and would like an opportunity to be able to be presented. Mr. Sheft would be able to provide a list of three times when Mr. Aiello can actually do a park and demand studies.

Mr. Kockenour stated there a several site plan issues that need to be addressed and in fairness before we move forward with the project that the applicant address some of these concerns either through plan changes or in writing.

The formal hearing is May 7th.

Public Participation:

Michelle Hlewicki: Concerns were the failed businesses and empty store fronts from the Brunswick Circle to Texas Avenue; not pass another proposal for a new business in that area. This is not a complete list but enough for the Board to consider the practability of the proposed hotel and restaurant.

Andrew Allshouse: Concerns are there are no less than five choices for hotel style lodging within that limits of that one road; many of those hotels have fewer than 20 cars in the parking lot which would be a good indication that the hotels are not operating at capacity; this would become party hotel / crash pad and would be more noise and drug abuse; bald eagles have been spotted frequently fishing and generally making their home in the area around Colonial Lake and that construction noise and debris would severely jeopardize their habitat and possibly want them to leave the area; there is \$80 million dollar budget surplus for 2016, there should be some of this surplus still existing that could be used to purchase the land from the owners at a reasonable price so it can be preserved for future generations for both humans and wild life.

Jim Hooker: 713 Bunker Hill Avenue presented a picture from Gary Szabo of the Eagles; \$3 million in the Township Open Space fund to be used; State Open Space funds and we also have private conservation groups, such as Delaware & Raritan Greenway who is also looking to help; give us a chance to buy it; there are pictures that show the tree line in the view shed and it is absolutely gorgeous and if this hotel is built, it would be wiped out and that park would basically be destroyed; the Bald Eagle will leave and I have a request of the Township to please seek out the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and find out from them what the protections are; we are saying we will make a reasonable offer and you can put your plan away and go somewhere else

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Cindy Oldenburg-Harrison: A question: what made the extended stay sound like the best option? Stan Sheft, brother and owner of the property and responded that this is a process that we have been at for a couple years. These are beautiful birds. We have tried to develop a plan in conjunction with the Township professionals and have met with them, my brother and Mr. Cahill, to come up with something that would be a good fit for this property. For two years we have been going through different ideas ranging from a proposal for a buy out for apartments and did not think that was a good fit for the environment or the Township. We are very sensitive to the environment and would like to see the Eagles maintained their habitat. We feel that putting up a hotel that is environmental friendly. Concerns are the abandoned buildings; coffee shop franchise; the traffic and how it will impact the neighborhoods as well as Route 1 and the jug handles. Mr. Aiello responded a trip assessment was prepared and determined how much traffic is generated by the site. The roadway is under New Jersey Department of Transportation jurisdiction and the amount of volumes it did not necessitate further analysis out of the driveway because past the driveway the traffic starts to disperse.

James Weber, 114 Glenview Drive: Concerns are the variances for three establishments on one property; maximum impervious coverage; accoutrements such as dish washers; number of trees being taken out; adequate screening from hotel and parking lot; fire access for the large equipment to the side and rear of the building; evidence to fill in pool and have property from New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

Mr. Slauch stated the ordinance is different at that time and met that requirement and now they are applying for something different.

Steve Howell, 138 Villa Nova Drive: Concerns are the Eagles, birds and other animals such as beaver and fox will go away with the construction; reached out to the hotel and no response; how long construction will take; blasting; statistics of the hotel; who is building the trails and maintaining it; does not want hotel; and does not want to see hotel get built and then it all goes south. Ms. Skiva responded that no hotel constructed has failed, construction will take about 12 months.

Tom Ritter, 747 Lake Drive: Concerns are the blasting; six new signs; how thick the buffer will be; trails along a thin border which goes through the detention basin and the footbridge one continuous loop.

Audrey Maest, North Lawrence: Concerns are awful idea; there is a Hilton being built currently; who the people will be that will stay there; end up vacant and purchase as open space.

Al Kazuba, 715 Bunker Hill Avenue: Concerns are the garbage and it going into the lake if it rains; increasing the use of the bowling alley; space dumpsters sitting on and it rains where it is going; sprinkler system and the traffic study.

Mr. Capalarro answered that there will be two dumpsters located on the northeast side of the site and are enclosed with fence. It will be picked up twice a week. It will go into the storm drain in the parking lot area and goes to the detention basin and there is a water quality treatment device in the detention basin.

Chairperson Wznitzer told the audience that this application will be formally heard on May 7, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. and time limit is 10:00 p.m.

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Old Business / New Business / Correspondence:

None

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

Digital audio file of this meeting is available upon request.

Respectfully submitted,


Susan J. Snook
Recording Secretary

Minutes approved: July 16, 2018