

WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP

PLANNING COMMISSION  
MINUTES

Minutes of the first September meeting

September 5, 2023

**Members Present**

Ray McKeeman, Chairman

Dan Cote

Jeff Glisson

Mark Gordon

MaryFrances McGarrity

**Township Personnel Present**

John Weller, Planning Director

Pam Gural-Bear, Township Manager

Rajesh Kumbhardare, Board of Supervisors

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Ray McKeeman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

The Commission observed a moment of silence to honor our veterans and first responders.

**II. REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES**

MOTION: To approve the minutes for the meeting of August 1, 2023. (Glisson/Gordon)

ACTION: Passed, 5-0

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment on items not on the agenda.

**IV. PLANS**

**1. 690 E. Lincoln Associates**

Address: 690 E. Lincoln Hwy.

Post Approval: Land development

Request: Application for a post-approval waiver from certain lighting standards in the Subdivision/Land Development Ordinance

John Weller provided background for the request explaining that on December 8, 2021, the Board of Supervisors gave final plan approval for the Wawa convenience store at 690 E. Lincoln Hwy. now under construction. The approval required compliance with our lighting standards, but Wawa is now requesting waivers from some of these standards:

- from §281-48.C(2)(b) to allow wall-mounted fixtures that do not have a full cut-off design;
- from §281-48.C(3)(c) to allow exterior lighting at full intensity past 11:00 p.m. (since the business will be open 24 hours a day); and
- from §281-48.C(3)(g) to allow exterior under-canopy lighting brighter than allowed.

Mr. Weller explained that the second item (second bullet point above) is allowed when permitted by the Board of Supervisors, so is technically not a waiver.

Attorney Michael Gill of Buckley, Brion, McGuire & Morris; engineer Travis North of Polar Engineering; and Mike Spiegel from Wawa were in attendance. Mr. Gill explained that the under-canopy lighting

fixtures are the same fixtures approved for the Wawa at the Whitford Rd. intersection, but the canopy at that store has a different design. This store has an A-frame canopy that requires a different means of mounting, resulting in a higher light level on the ground below. Mr. Gill confirmed that there would be no trespass of light offsite. This canopy was preferred for this location as being more compatible architecturally. There are no adjacent residences, and those homes behind the Wawa will be blocked by the store itself. Mr. North confirmed there was no cost differential, and there is dimmer capacity.

Mr. Gordon expressed concern that the lighting could be a distraction to drivers, noting that there will be more pedestrians in the area, but was generally in favor of the request, provided that the wall pack lighting is not in excess. Members felt the architectural change to the A-frame canopy was good, and the lighting request was reasonable.

**MOTION:** To recommend that the Board of Supervisors amend their approval of the land development plan for 690 E. Lincoln Hwy. as follows:

1. By granting a waiver from §281-48.C(2)(b) of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (“S/LDO”) to allow the wall-mounted fixtures that do not have a full cut-off design, as shown on the Applicant’s plan.
2. To allow exterior lighting at full intensity past 11:00 p.m., pursuant to §281- 48.C(3)(c) of the S/ LDO.
3. By granting a waiver from §281-48.C(3)(g) of the S/ LDO to allow exterior under-canopy lighting brighter than otherwise allowed by this section, as shown on the Applicant’s plan

(Gordon/Glisson)

**ACTION:** Passed, 5-0

2. **Bush Auto Group**  
**Address:** 390 W. Lincoln Hwy.  
**Second Review:** Conditional Use  
**Request:** Application to establish a satellite car dealership for vehicle sales, storage and display, office use, and employee parking

Mr. Weller gave an overview of the project to consolidate two lots into a 10.5-acre lot and build a satellite location for Exton Nissan; one lot was the site of Exton Collision and the other was residential. Extensive environmental constraints give the tract a net developable area of only 2.34 acres. The site will be used for vehicle sales, storage and display of vehicles, offices, and employee parking. There will be no servicing or repair of vehicles at this location. Most of the existing buildings will be demolished with the exception of the Exton Collision building and a historic springhouse. The Historical Commission reviewed this application on April 10, 2023, and recommended approval with conditions.

Conditional use approval is required pursuant to the following sections of the Zoning Ordinance:

- §325-70.A(1)(b) to exempt man-made prohibitive slopes from the restrictions on steep slope development;
- §325-70.A(2)(b) to exempt man-made precautionary slopes from the restrictions on steep slope development; and
- §325-105.A to allow the existing non-conforming uses to be changed to another nonconforming use.

All conditional use criteria have been met. The proposed plan has less building coverage and fewer peak hour trips, so no open space or traffic impact fees are required.

The most significant outstanding issue is how best to provide a pedestrian crossing at the intersection. Mr. Weller said that he and Township resident Anita Nardone (a civil engineer and former Chair of the

Planning Commission) visited the site to try to identify possible solutions. They concluded that a crossing from this site across Whitford Rd. would not be useful due to conditions at the southwest corner of the intersection. They had some ideas about how best to cross Lincoln Hwy. that Mr. Weller discussed with the Applicant, who developed a design in response that will be presented to the Commission tonight.

Attorney Ryan Jennings of Unruh, Turner, Burke & Frees; engineer Justin Brewer of Howell Engineering; and traffic engineer Matthew Hammond of Traffic Planning & Design were in attendance on behalf of the Applicant.

Mr. Jennings said the Applicant has spent the four months since the last meeting with the Commission fine-tuning the plan. He added that the Applicant is not opposed to a pedestrian crossing at Lincoln Hwy. provided it is safe and approved by PennDOT.

Mr. Brewer reviewed changes since the last meeting. The number of access points onto Lincoln Hwy. and Whitford Rd. has been reduced from 4 to 2, and they have been relocated to improve sight distance. Sidewalk has been added along Whitford Rd. to Creamery Way and along Lincoln Hwy. The sidewalk along Lincoln Hwy. stops short of the property line due to the grade, but the Applicant agreed to take another look to see if it can be extended to the property line. Mr. Glisson questioned the need for this sidewalk, maintaining that it would be a "sidewalk to nowhere." Township Manager Pam Gural-Bear and Township Supervisor Raj Kumbhardare responded by noting the importance of filling in gaps to eventually connect sidewalks. Mr. Weller added that sidewalks are shown along this part of Lincoln Hwy. in the Township's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which is an element of our Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Brewer confirmed that the Applicant will be connecting to public sewerage, but water will still be provided from on-site wells.

Mr. Hammond reviewed options for pedestrian crossing of Lincoln Hwy., noting problems with each:

- A crossing to the southwest corner of the Lincoln Hwy./Whitford Rd. intersection was not feasible due to slopes at the corner.
- Increasing the radius of the existing right-turn lane from Whitford Rd. to Lincoln Hwy. would allow for a larger refuge island, but this would require relocating utility poles at considerable expense. It would also likely result in increased vehicle speeds, making it less safe for pedestrians.
- If the crossing is at a 90-degree angle - which is preferred as it makes for the shortest crossing - pedestrian would still need to cross five lanes of traffic, and the stop bars on Lincoln Hwy. would need to be pushed so far to the east it would effectively eradicate the existing right-turn lane from Lincoln Hwy. to Whitford Rd.
- A smaller radius curve for right turns from Whitford to Lincoln would slow traffic, but large trucks would not be able to negotiate it.

Mr. Hammond passed out a schematic plan for a 2-part crossing: first from the corner to a proposed refuge island and from there to the existing sidewalk at Primrose Day Care. The refuge island will be larger than PennDOT's required minimum, and the existing stop bar would need to be moved only 8 or 10 feet. Mr. Hammond thinks this is the best solution but will require PennDOT approval. There was discussion regarding the safety of pedestrians versus the free flow of traffic. Mr. Gordon suggested PennDOT may not be familiar with the area and will need to see how the topography is problematic, with drivers tending to accelerate up the hill. Mr. Hammond confirmed that trucks turning right onto Lincoln will not be hindered by the proposed island.

Mr. McKeeman read questions prepared by Commission member Andy Wright who could not be in attendance this evening. In response to a question about the staging of large auto carrier vehicles, Mr. Hammond confirmed that auto carriers will not be accessing the site. All vehicles will be offloaded at the main Exton Nissan site, and any overflow will be driven individually to the satellite location.

Mr. Gordon and Mr. McKeeman both expressed that the proposed use was good for the site and an improvement over the existing condition.

**MOTION:** To recommend that the Board of Supervisors approve the conditional use application of 105 Whitford Rd., LLC (Bush Auto) along with support for the various waivers from the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance and Stormwater Ordinance endorsed by the Township consultants; provision of the pedestrian crossing of E. Lincoln Hwy. as presented this evening; support for the Historical Commission recommendation; and resolution of all remaining consultant concerns to the satisfaction of the Township.

(Gordon/McGarrity)

**ACTION:** Passed, 5-0

Mr. Weller advised that the conditional use hearing before the Board of Supervisors will be scheduled for September 27, 2023. He also noted that the drawing of the proposed pedestrian crossing distributed by Mr. Hammond at the meeting this evening will be added to the Township's website for those attending online and unable to see the drawing.

3. **Valley Creek Homes**  
**Address:** 301-305 Church Farm La.  
**First Review:** Conditional Use  
**Request:** Construction of 330 dwelling units as an age-restricted, active adult community with recreation amenities

Mr. Weller provided an overview of the project noting that while tonight is the first review for the conditional use, the Applicant previously appeared before the Planning Commission with various Sketch Plans and a Zoning Ordinance amendment to allow an active adult community through the IN Institutional overlay district. The Board approved that amendment on May 25, 2022.

The site consists of 100.44 acres in the O/L zoning district bound by Swedesford Road, Church Farm La., Old Valley Rd., and the boundary with East Whiteland Township. A gas pipeline crosses the northern end of the site. Nine vacant houses formerly used by Church Farm School staff will be demolished, but the historic Pickwick Mansion will be retained.

Mr. Weller provided historical background. On August 8, 2000, the Township approved a conditional use application for a Master Plan for the Valley Creek Corporate Center on a tract that included the entirety of the tract being considered tonight along with additional land south of Swedesford Rd. That Plan called for 1.75 million square feet of office space in 17 buildings, but only three were ever built. While conditional use approvals do not normally expire, the Zoning Ordinance in effect at that time stipulated that the Master Plan would remain valid for only twenty years. This was extended by Act 46, but the Plan ultimately did expire on August 2, 2022. Therefore, the only restrictions on this site presently are those imposed by the current Zoning Ordinance.

The current plan proposes an active adult community with 330 dwellings: 110 single-family detached homes, 60 single-family semi-detached homes, and 160 townhouse units. The plan also includes a community center/clubhouse, swimming pool, an internal road system, and 15.22 acres of permanent open space. The principal point of access will be from Swedesford Rd., directly opposite the intersection with Valley Creek Blvd., with a secondary emergency access from Church Farm La.

Mr. Weller said the plan complies with all area and bulk regulations but does not satisfy all conditional use criteria. Topics that should be discussed with the Applicant include:

- The need for additional access points to the road network.
- Inadequate accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Impacts upon floodplains and riparian buffer areas, woodlands, trees, and historic resources.

Attorney Alyson Zarro of Riley, Riper, Hollin and Colagreco; engineer Jack Robinson of JMR Engineering; traffic engineer Matthew Hammond of Traffic Planning & Design; and Kevin McLaughlin and Mark McGonigal of McKee Builders were in attendance to present the project.

Ms. Zarro provided a general description of the project, advising that as an age-restricted community, at least one resident in each dwelling must be over 55 years old; the historic Pickwick Mansion will not be part of the community so the age restriction will not apply there.

Mr. Robinson gave a general description of the project: twins and townhomes will be in the southern part of the site with townhomes and singles on the north side of the stream that crosses the tract. Amenities will include a dog park and a pedestrian network connecting to Swedesford Rd. The second road access will be for emergency use only; Church Farm La. will be closed, but existing residents along that road will still have access by going through this site.

Mr. Glisson objected to the proposed design of the project, noting that having only one access point for 330 homes will create a “choke point” for traffic and impair the quality of life of the nearest residents. Mr. Hammond said that the traffic study showed that there would be 80 to 100 peak-hour trips - in contrast to the over 9,000 for the previously approved office park. He argued that the infrastructure already constructed was sized for office use and will therefore operate very well for the proposed residential use. There was discussion of the Whiteland Woods design with a broad boulevard through the center and two access points. Mr. Hammond argued that Whiteland Woods was different in that its front entrance was only right-in and right-out. Mr. Kumbhardare opined that two accesses are needed. He also asked why the Applicant is proposing to construct stormwater basins on Township property. Mr. Robinson advised that this was part of an Agreement made years ago involving a land swap between the Township and Rubinstein, the developer of the office park. He further maintained that the area can only take runoff from the Applicant’s site and this in turn will reduce flows to Swedesford Rd. Mr. Weller will ask the Township Solicitor to review the matter.

Mr. Hammond argued that the plan does have two accesses, albeit one is emergency access to Church Farm La. He questioned why we would want another curb-cut/conflict point on Swedesford Rd. when it is not needed. He suggested extending the wider boulevard-type section of the road further into the development from the site entrance.

Mr. Gordon said it would be very hard to regulate and restrict the use of the emergency access to only those residents on Church Farm La., maintaining that the emergency access cannot be “part-time”. The Applicant agreed to re-think the matter and thanked the Commission for their feedback. Ms. Zarro said the Applicant will submit revised plans and return to the Commission for further review.

The Applicant is currently in the process of amending the FEMA map to revise the limits of the designated flood hazard area associated with the stream through the site.

**V. NEW BUSINESS**

None

**VI. OLD BUSINESS**

None

**VII. TOWNSHIP ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

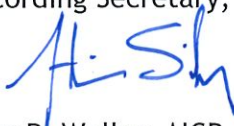
Mr. Weller announced that the Township is seeking a replacement for Caroline O'Connor who resigned to take a position at Willistown Township.

The September 19 agenda will have a second review of the Collegium Charter School Athletic Fields project as well as a conditional use plan for the Villas at West Whiteland, a 32-unit townhome community proposed at the end of Coeway La. Also, the Zoning Ordinance amendment for the Weston Tract will be returning for official action by the Commission.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:57 p.m.

Recording Secretary,

 (FOR JOHN WELLER)

John R. Weller, AICP  
Director of Planning