

# Township of Lower Alsace, Berks County, PA

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## PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES Building a Better Community

**September 1, 2021**

The Lower Alsace Township Planning Commission met in regular session on Wednesday, September 1, 2021, at 7:00 P.M. in the Township Municipal Building, 1200 Carsonia Avenue, Reading, PA.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M. by Chairman Homer Williams and was followed with the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

### **I. ATTENDANCE**

Board members present included Tom Watcke, Joel Reber, Homer Williams, Kim Alarcon. Also in attendance was Corrie Crupi, Secretary to the Planning Commission, Terry Naugle from Great Valley Consultants and Curt Hill from Antietam Valley Municipal Authority.

In attendance were the applicant Mr. Jack Gulati owner of Stokesay Villages LLC, and Luis Pereira, President of Stokesay Castle LLC. Their engineer, Greg Bogia from Bogia Engineering and Greg Phillips Attorney of Stokesay Villages LLC.

There were 23 members of the public present at this meeting.

### **II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

A motion was made by Homer Williams, seconded by Joel Reber and all voted yes to approve the minutes from August 4, 2021.

### **III. DISCUSSION:**

Mr. Greg Bogia opened the meeting by presenting a sketch plan of what they intend to build on a large empty parcel belonging to Stokesay Castle Villages at 141 Stokesay Castle Lane. The site is located on several contiguous properties owned by Stokesay Village LLC containing and adjacent to the property 141 Stokesay Castle Lane. The site is located within the R-1 Rural Residential Zoning District and the Spook Lane overlay district. The existing site contains the Stokesay Castle / Knight's Pub restaurant / banquet facility and a single-family dwelling, and there is a single family dwelling and detached garage on one of the parcels (137 Stokesay Castle Lane).

The applicant is proposing a large-scale residential development on the site around the existing restaurant/ banquet facility. No proposed work is indicated for the existing restaurant / banquet facility as part of this plan.

The proposed residential development contains thirteen (13) apartment buildings containing twenty-four (24) units in each building plus one (1) apartment building containing sixteen (16) units. There is a proposed total of 328 which includes apartments and residential units.

The development is proposed to be an age-restricted development (50+). The Townhouses are a conditional use in accordance with Section 507 (F)(2), but the proposed apartment use will need a variance under the Spook Lane Overlay District (Section 507 of the Township's Zoning Ordinance).

A Conditional Use Hearing will be required and should be one of the first steps in the review process for this proposed development so that the conditions that the Board of Supervisors may require can be addressed in the plans prior to the initial submissions.

All new access roads will be designed, and an existing part of Stokesay Castle Lane will be closed for use.

**IV. DIMENSIONAL VARIANCES NEEDED:**

1. A significant portion of the site is within the Steep Slope Overlay District. There is a considerable amount of development proposed in the steep slope areas, and it appears that there will be multiple variances required from several portions of Section 508 of the Township's Zoning Ordinance to allow for the proposed development. The applicant needs to review Section 508 and provide a list of all proposed Variances from this section.
2. The proposed plan appears to require several dimensional variances from the Spook Lane Overlay District - Section 507(G) of the zoning ordinance. Some possible variances will be needed as follows:

- a. The lot coverages by building and for total impervious coverage are not indicated in the plan, but the percentages appear to be over the limits allowed.
  - b. The proposed buildings are four stories of apartments over a level for parking- it appears that a number of these buildings would exceed the maximum height limitation.
  - c. Several of the proposed apartment buildings which do not appear to comply with the 100' setback requirement from adjacent residential properties.
3. Other variances may be required as the plans are more fully developed. If variances are required, we strongly recommend that these be applied for before the land development plans are submitted so that the plans can be prepared according to the result of the hearings. The submission is in a sketch plan format, and there may be other variances required from the Zoning Ordinance that may be for setbacks and lot coverages as listed in Section 403 or Section 507 once the plans are further developed.
  4. The applicant needs to review Sections 403 and 507 and provide a list of all proposed variances. These should be presented to the Zoning Hearing Board for Approval of these items.

**V. SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE OF 2011:**

- 1 The plans will need to insert the requirement of Section 403 once a formal plan has been submitted.
- 2 A stormwater management plan and evaluation will be required. The plan indicates several stormwater basins. However, we have concerns that the basins cannot be constructed where shown due the severe slopes.
- 3 A traffic study will be required. The scope of the study will need to be submitted for review prior to acceptance of the scope. The proposed intersection of the new access drive and Spook Lane will need to be evaluated for sight distance and constructability.
- 4 An Environmental Impact Assessment will be required in accordance with Section 405.

- 5 Approvals from the appropriate Utilities will be required in accordance with Section 408. We note concerns about the availability of the required electrical power for this development. We note concerns about the required domestic and fire water supplies for this development. The applicant should contact the sewer authority to determine if the "EDU"'s are available for this size development and if the sewage lines that this development will utilize can handle the additional flows.
- 6 Grading plans, profiles and the E&SPC Control Plan will be required. A NPDES permit form DEP will be required. We have major concerns with respect to the existing slopes where the apartment buildings are being proposed.
- 7 The applicant will need to address the easements that were provided from the previously approved subdivision.
- 8 The design standards in accordance with Article 5 will need to be addressed in the formal submission.
- 9 Other comments may be noted during reviews of the plans during the Preliminary Plan submission.

**VI. UNIFORM CONSTRUCTION CODE AS ADOPTED BY LOWER ALSACE TOWNSHIP:**

1. The proposed apartment buildings are required to be sprinklered under the PA Uniform Construction Code. The proposed building sketches indicate four stories above grade. This requires the buildings to be of Type I or Type II construction (Steel/concrete). Wood framing is not permitted for buildings that have more than three stories.
2. There is a concern that the water system piping that currently exists in this area cannot handle the volume or flow requirements of this large, proposed development. The water authority needs to be contacted and determine if water service can be provided and at required levels. The applicant may need to consider the installation of a water tank of significant size in order to accommodate the required domestic and fire flows. Fire hydrants will be required within the site.

3. There is a concern that the existing sanitary sewer piping serving the existing buildings cannot support the proposed flows from this development the sewer authority needs to be contacted to determine if the sewer system has the capacity to handle the proposed flows.
  
4. All new construction will be required to comply with the requirements of the PA Uniform Construction Code, with particular note of the accessibility requirements for the restaurant/ banquet facility parking and for the accessible parking for the apartments. The code requires a minimum number of fully accessible apartment units based on the total number of units, and these units are required to be spread out among the various buildings.

**VII. REVIEW AND COMMENTS FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION:**

- A. Chairman Homer Williams had questions concerning the proposed 40' deep basin around the steep slope area stating that would need a variance. How many gallons would this hold because of the slope?
  - Requested a copy of the Rules of the Community prior to any development approval request.
  - Requested the Township be a 3<sup>rd</sup> party administrator to the Villages for any changes to the Rules of the Community be brought before the Township Supervisors for approval.
  - Requested if there will be an iron clad agreement for the 50+ restriction and the allowance of any children. Questions if this applicant will in the future if the condos do not sell, would your intent be to ask the Township to consider this a hardship to change the 50+ agreement.
  - Requested an explanation as to why three bedrooms are needed in a 50+ community.
  - Would like to see a traffic study performed on an all-day basis to capture all times of the day. Considering the excess traffic this will bring to Spook Lane which is a dangerous road on a good day.
  - Will there be provisions for electric charging stations for hybrid cars.
  - Expressed a concern that it seems this project will require numerous variances outside the scope of the current ordinance. Is there consideration to building something more conducive to the adoptive Township ordinances in the R-1 District.

- B. Joel Reber expressed concerns with the old entry way to Stokesay Castle Lane and if it would be available and open for emergency situations if needed. Will the new roads with its turns be accessible for our current Fire and Emergency vehicles to be able to navigate the Villages.

- There is currently not enough water pressure available for this area? Will need to see a plan for water achievement. Will the water be generated from the Reading Area Water Authority or Mt. Penn Water Authority.

- Discussed the 50+ and the current Township school taxes. Would not want the Township of school district burdened with more children than the school can handle and to have the township burdened with road maintenance.

- Asked if there will be grocery provisions in the Villages to lessen the daily traffic.

- Joel referred a question to Curt Hill, Township representative from Antietam Valley Municipal Authority and asked about the sanitary sewers current Equivalent dwelling unit (EDU) capacity. There is current capacity, but the lines will need to be improved.

- C. Kim Alarcon – was concerned with the storm water flowing downhill with creating so much impervious coverage.

- Safety concerns with the amount of traffic on Spook Lane which is a twisty road that is not lit and there are no guiderails. Will there be a demand on the Township to install safety features including traffic controls and road maintenance.

- D. Tom Watcke was concerned with changing the scenic look of the area. He would not like for people to look up and see condos. He personally thought the condo rendition looked like a 1960 dormitory building and he expected something more fitting to the mountain setting.

- Discussed that although this is a private community, there is no limit as to who can enter this area. Will there be use of a gate being installed or the use of key cards being used to maintain privacy.

- E. Mr. Gulati expressed that each unit is proposed to have a balcony to enjoy the views and a parking space underneath the building.

- Some of the condos will have three bedrooms to be used as needed. Most people work from home and a room can be used as an office.

- There will be five phases to the project, starting with the private club house, swimming pool and a few unit buildings.

- The Traffic study will encompass the traffic daily and break down the uses.

Township Building and Zoning Officer, Terry Naugle of Great Valley Consultants commented that most of the concerns will be required and addressed when a Subdivision and Land Development application is submitted.

-Great Valley Consultants has significant concerns regarding the constructability of the proposed development. Great Valley Consultants strongly recommends that the applicant consider a constructability review with estimates of the cost of construction prior to proceeding with the land development plan submissions.

- F. Chairman Williams expressed that the board looks forward to viewing a Land Development application and the seeing a revised, more definite plan and all the attachments.

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made to adjourn was made by Joel Reber and seconded by Tom Watcke and all voted in favor to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m. The next meeting will be held as needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Corrie Zana - Secretary to the Planning Commission