

MUNICIPALITY OF MT. LEBANON  
PLANNING BOARD MINUTES  
*MEETING CONDUCTED VIRTUALLY DUE TO CORONAVIRUS*

**DATE:** Tuesday, July 21, 2020

**TIME:** 7 p.m.

**PLACE:** Mt. Lebanon Municipality – Commission Chambers

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Clint Rounsfull, Andrew George, Dennis Pittman, Dave Hornicak

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:** Municipal Planner Ian McMeans, Municipal Engineer Dan Deiseroth

**AUDIENCE PRESENT:** Commissioner Steve Silverman, Mathew Moses, Alex Ferraro, Historic Preservation Board liaison, Craig Grella (Mt. Lebanon Ward 4 Commissioner), Blake Plavchak (City Councilman Anthony Coghill’s Office), Angela Gaito, Brookline neighborhood representatives

*The Pennsylvania Office of Open Records has advised that to ensure continued compliance with the Sunshine Act, the procedures for on-line meetings should be stated at the beginning of the meeting. There is one applicant appearing before the board tonight. The planning board chair will read the agenda item, then the applicant will have the opportunity to make remarks. After that any public comments related to the application will either be played or read into the record. The board will then discuss the application and ask questions of the applicant before calling a vote. Any public comments received not relating to the application before the board will be read at the end of the meeting. The applicant has agreed to this procedure including conducting the meeting virtually.*

**1. Minutes**

- a. May 19, 2020, meeting. Mr. Pittman moved and Mr. George seconded to approve the minutes of the May 19, 2020 Planning Board Meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

**2. New Business**

- a. Request for preliminary approval of a land development plan. The Community Builders, Inc. has an equitable interest in the property located at 2904 Castlegate Avenue. The developer is proposing to construct 51 residential units on the parcel. There will be four townhouse units and three apartment buildings along with a building to serve as a management office. The developer will also construct associated parking, utilities, and stormwater management infrastructure to serve the development. The property is zoned R-4 Residential with a Continuing Care overlay.

Vanessa Murphy, The Community Builders, Inc., said the site is located at the corner of Dorchester and Castlegate Avenue, which has three structures that are currently being demolished. She gave a brief overview of the development team. The proposed site will be on 5.6 acres and with seven residential buildings, a standalone management office which will house a community room, and a greenhouse. The breakdown of the residential buildings is four townhome building strings containing 24 apartments; two garden apartment buildings with 24 apartments, and one stacked triplex building with three apartments. The site is within walking

distance of the Brookline business district, and abuts the Brookline community in the city of Pittsburgh. They will be keeping the same main entrance that was previously used by the DePaul institute and Bradley Center, and is adjacent to the Salvation Army facility that is serviced by a private drive. She introduced The Community Builders and what their vision is for the project. She said the project will contain 51 apartments – 11 one-bedroom, 29 two-bedroom, and 11 three-bedroom. The three-bedroom apartments will be townhomes that front either Dorchester or the common green area in the interior of the site. The townhomes are two-stories, and respect the scale of the homes across Dorchester and the Brookline neighborhood. They are proposing 101 parking spaces which includes seven ADA spaces. The internal drive will be privately owned, and there will be a common green area that will be accessible to all of the residents. The property will generate real estate tax revenue. The housing on Dorchester respects the context of Brookline, including close to 100% brick based on Mt. Lebanon's design guidelines. All of the units will have front covered stoops with either rear patios or decks. The garden-style apartments contain 12 units, 1- and 2-bedroom apartments, one-story living and private patios or balconies. They are proposing substantial use of natural lighting and opportunities for sustainable lifestyle through an "agrihood." The on-site management office will have a private community room, a greenhouse for planting seedlings that can then be planted in the community garden, and a gardening shed.

Mr. Bernie Lamm, site engineer, Common Ground, described where the greenspace and garden plots would be in relation to the buildings. The entrance drive will be directly across from Castlegate Avenue, but the internal drive area will be privately owned and maintained. They will be adding new crosswalks across Dorchester Avenue to connect to Castlegate Avenue and provide access to the Brookline corridor. They are working with the City of Pittsburgh regarding widening Dorchester and creating streetscape. Some of the amenities they will provide will be decentralized bicycle parking throughout the plan, and a central mailbox kiosk, secure areas for larger deliveries such as Amazon and UPS, and several areas for dumpsters. They have worked with the fire department to provide for fire hydrants, and adequate turning radii for fire equipment. There will be several units that are ADA accessible, with accessible routes.

Mr. Pittman asked if the sidewalks at the end of the property that connect to Midland could be repaired. They are in poor shape and could be tripping hazards.

Mr. Lamm said that is the City of Pittsburgh's property, but thinks they could work with them to get that repaired. There are also some utilities under those sidewalks so they'd need to contact them as well.

Mr. Deiseroth asked Mr. Lamm to elaborate on the proposal along Dorchester.

Mr. Lamm said they are proposing widening Dorchester, then on their property putting in a sidewalk and adding a buffer between the sidewalk and the curb. They are proposing adding some parallel parking, and people could walk across the small buffer area. The sidewalks and trees would be part of the development and maintenance. They will also be lengthening the sidewalk to join with the sidewalk on the Salvation Army property.

Mr. Deiseroth asked how wide Dorchester is now and what is the width they are proposing.

Mr. Lamm said they will be widening by approximately eight feet.

Mr. Deiseroth said if the street is approximately 16 feet wide now, then it would be approximately 24 feet upon completion.

Mr. Lamm said the street is approximately 21 ½ feet wide; they will be making it 32 feet wide. That width will allow for parallel parking on one side. The small area near Midland will not be widened.

Mr. Deiseroth suggested they might provide some transition going from 21 feet to 32 feet. He said he asked for a cross section of that area in his review letter.

Mr. George asked if the parallel parking would be striped.

Mr. McMeans said that is a City of Pittsburgh street, so that would be their decision.

Mr. Hornicak asked if there is a status update with DOMI.

Ms. Murphy said they have not had received any feedback at this point, but they will ask for a meeting with them.

Mr. Hornicak asked if there would be any grading issues with widening the street.

Mr. Lamm said they will not be altering the grade along Dorchester, but instead they will adjust the grade on their property to make it flat with Dorchester.

Mr. Roundsfull asked what the parking ratio would be, and how they arrived at the number of spaces for the units.

Mr. Lamm said they followed municipal code guidelines, and have a few more than those guidelines.

Mr. McMeans said the Mt. Lebanon Zoning Ordinance requires one parking space for a one-bedroom unit, and two parking spaces for two- or more bedroom units.

Mr. Lamm said the ADA spaces are calculated by the zoning ordinance, but they try to provide more than the required number.

Mr. Rounsfull asked if there are parking spaces for visitors, of they will need to park on the street.

Ms. Murphy said they typically don't see more than one car for the affordable units, and they are providing more than would be necessary.

Mr. Rounsfull said the community is very impressive, and he likes the green aspects. He asked about a time schedule, and if the project would be phased, and what that would look like.

Ms. Murphy said all of the units would be constructed at the same time, although she is not sure what the contractor's time frame is, at this time. If they receive all of their funding they are anticipating starting construction in summer 2021.

Mr. George asked for elaboration on the fencing and what materials they anticipate using.

Mr. Lamm said the purpose of the fencing is atop the retaining wall, the fencing along the Salvation Army property would most likely be black PVC, but they haven't made any decisions on what will be along the front of the property. He thinks the fence at the beginning of the property on Dorchester would be different from the back, possibly an aluminum picket fence.

Mr. Hornicak said he is concerned about the geotechnical information especially regarding stormwater management. He also wants to make sure the walls are strong enough to handle the loading traffic on the site.

Mr. Lamm said they did have a lot of that geotechnical information when they built the senior apartment site. He said the buildings that were previously on the site had higher loadings than the proposed site. However, they will do their due diligence and make sure the site is secure.

Mr. Deiseroth said the same questions were presented when the senior apartments were being reviewed, and they will make sure the loading and water pressure against the walls is considered.

Mr. George asked about the planting schedule for the proposed trees and shrubs, and if the key was general and if there would be a more specific key later in the review process.

Mr. Lamm said there would be more detail, but the palette is pretty accurate. Most of the trees that they are proposing are consistent with the City of Pittsburgh's specifications, but they are willing to discuss the trees they've chosen.

Mr. George said he is curious as to what plantings would be used around the edge of the site.

Mr. Lamm said where ever screening is needed they are proposing some sort of evergreen such as a White Pine, or Hemlock. They also are trying to be aware of providing color throughout the year. All of the utilities are underground so they didn't need to worry about providing utility trees.

Mr. Hornicak asked if there is a schedule of the traffic study, and if they are trying to meld together Pittsburgh's and Mt. Lebanon's ordinances.

Mr. Deiseroth said Gateway would coordinate with DOMI on a traffic impact study (TIS) in terms of scope so they would cover both entities.

Ms. Murphy said with the current situation and lower traffic patterns they didn't feel it was an appropriate time to conduct a TIS.

Mr. Hornicak asked if there was a traffic study for the previous project.

Ms. Murphy said there was, but it focused more on McNeilly and Midland, and not on Dorchester.

Mr. Pittman asked if this parcel would be sold to the Allegheny County Housing Authority (ACHA), and if so, will it become tax exempt.

Ms. Murphy said to land would be leased by ACHA, but the land development would still be taxable.

Mr. Deiseroth read into the record a letter from Gateway Engineers dated July 16, 2020.

Mr. George asked if there could be more detail regarding architectural relations.

Ms. Murphy said they would provide more details.

Mr. Deiseroth said they will be expected to provide more information, but he wants to make sure they provide a narrative that shows they meet the design guidelines to go along with the elevations.

Mr. McMeans said no public comments were received either by phone or email.

Angela Gaito, Dorchester Avenue, said she is concerned with the stormwater issue because she had heard that when the Salvation Army facility was built many homes on Dorchester experienced severe flooding. She also asked what role will the ACHA have in this community being built, if they own the land.

Ms. Murphy said the will be an affiliated entity as a co-developer, same as with the senior property below. They are providing self-financing to the project, and there will be five publicly-assisted units within the 51 units.

Ms Gaito asked if those numbers were solid, or if there was a possibility they would change.

Ms. Murphy said they have a 40-year affordability restriction with PHFA. The income tiers will stay the same, meaning the number of units set aside of different percentage affordability should remain constant. Currently the number stands at 50% AMI, 30% are at unrestricted market value, and 20% at working-class level.

Blake Plavchak, City Councilman Anthony Coghill's Office, stressed the importance of the stormwater issue. He asked when the traffic study was going to be conducted.

Ms. Murphy said they are waiting to see what will happen with the pandemic, so they may get a more accurate accounting of traffic.

Mr. Plavchak asked if all of the units will be rented, will the rents start and stop at the same time? Or will some of the units provide for longer-term rents.

Ms. Murphy said they will be one-year leases, but they don't generally have a high turnover rate in their apartments, especially in the affordable units, given the high demand for affordable units.

Ms Gaito asked which company would be involved with the day-to-day building of the facility.

Ms. Murphy said her company, The Community Builders, would be on-site, with an on-site manager.

Mr. Deiseroth asked about the approximate investment for this project.

Ms. Murphy said \$16.5 million. With that big of an investment there is incentive to make sure the development property is well-maintained.

Mr. McMeans said there will be an on-site property manager, that will help with property maintenance.

Mr. Pittman moved and Mr. Hornicak seconded to table the preliminary approval request for the Castlegate Green Land Development Plan to give the developer time to address the comments in the engineer's review letter dated July 16, 2020, and any additional comments from the Planning Board. The motion carried unanimously.

**3. Old Business**

There was no old business.

**4. Citizen Comments**

There were no citizen comments.

**5. Next Meeting** — The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Mt. Lebanon Planning Board is **Tuesday, August 18, 2020**, at 7:00 p.m.

**6. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.