

**LOWER GWYNEDD TOWNSHIP  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
Minutes of November 20, 2024**

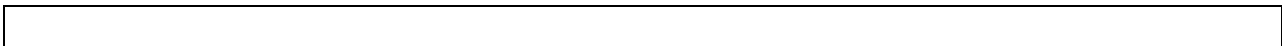
**Present:** Craig Melograno, Chair  
Rich Valiga, Vice-Chair  
Maureen Nunn  
Danielle Porreca  
Michael Mrozinski  
Craig Adams

Patty Furber, B&Z Administrator  
Brian Jones, Bowman  
Ed Brown, Gilmore & Associates

**Absent:** Rusty Beardsley

**Call to Order:**

The meeting of the Lower Gwynedd Township Planning Commission was called to order at 7:00 PM.



**Approval of Minutes: October 16, 2024**

A motion was made by Ms. Porreca and Mr. Valiga to approve the minutes of the Lower Gwynedd Township Planning Commission meeting of October 16, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.



**Lower Gwynedd Township & BET Investments:  
MF-3 Text & Map Draft Amendment Ordinance**

Present for the draft amendment was Mr. Michael Markman, President and Mr. Peter Clelland, Vice President of Development from BET Investments. Mr. Melograno started by giving some background regarding the Planning Commission since there were many residents present at tonight's meeting. He stated that the Planning Commission is just a recommending body to the Board of Supervisors who may or may not take the board's recommendations into consideration. He stated that everyone will get a chance to voice their concerns, but didn't want to lose focus on why they are here for tonight. Mr. Melograno requested that Mr. Markman give some background on his project. Mr. Markman showed renderings of the future campus that will consist of apartments, retail and office use. He stated the development would be comparable to their site at 555 Flats located in Horsham. Mr. Markman showed slides that reflected how much would be collected in taxes by the township and school district. The slides depicted that this development would generate \$1.359M in taxes. Wissahickon School District would net \$872,000 from taxes and the township would net \$264,000 per year. Mr. Markman stated

that they have had discussions with the business manager from the school district. Mr. Markman stated that the workforce units would consist of 35 units, the tenants would have to meet 100% of the median income to qualify for the rent reduction. He stated the income to qualify would be \$80,000 for one bedroom and \$100,000 - \$105,000 for two bedrooms. Mr. Markman stated that they were asked at the last meeting to look for a connection to the 309 bypass to their property. Mr. Markman stated that they looked at the current conditions and that they could create a sidewalk under 309 that could connect to the other side. Mr. Melograno wanted him to explain why he was here tonight. Mr. Markman stated that this process would be a long one that would involve them filing a conditional use application that would consist of hearings and following that would be their land development submission. He explained that their land development submission would consist of their traffic impact study, stormwater improvements and more defined architectural renderings. He stated the timeline for all the required hearings would take around 6-12-months and if approved, an approximate construction start date of 2025-2026.

Mr. Melograno wanted to know who wrote the ordinance and wanted to know about the changes. Mr. Markman stated that the ordinance was written by the township. Mr. Clelland stated that the property is currently zoned as D-1 and that they needed to rezone the parcel to MF-3 to be consistent with ACTS. He stated that the ordinance wouldn't apply anywhere else, but the MF-3 district. Mr. Melograno stated that there are other districts that allow apartments such as MF-1. Mr. Melograno stated that MF-1 allows apartments and wasn't sure why that wasn't the basis for this text amendment instead of the MF-3. Mr. Clelland stated that he wasn't sure, that it probably was due to the density. Mr. Clelland stated that when they laid out the site, that is where their development would reasonably fit with decent setbacks. Mr. Melograno stated that part of the reason why there is a room full of people here tonight is because this is twice the density of any other apartment building that would be considered within the township.

Mr. Melograno wanted to know how much traffic would be generated from a project of this size. Mr. Clelland stated that they did not have those numbers available. He stated that this is just a redevelopment of an existing property that is in decline, and they are just replacing the use. Mr. Melograno wanted to know the size of the existing office building. Mr. Clelland stated that the existing office building is 75,000 square feet. He stated that office buildings have heavy peak hour trips and apartments aren't as many, especially with people working from home. He stated that the retail is proposed to be estimated at 46,000 sq feet and they don't expect to see much difference in traffic vs what already exists on the site. Ms. Porreca wanted to know about the traffic study and how far away did they studied it. Mr. Clelland stated they would take the direction of the township's traffic engineer regarding what intersections would be required to studied and that is more of a conditional use/land development type of detail. He stated that there would be a traffic impact fee required that would contribute towards road

improvements. Mr. Markman stated that their traffic study will be analyzed by the township engineer. He stated that they are not going to burden the roads around the project, if they do, they will have to either put in road improvements or lower the density. Mr. Melograno stated that he would like them to discuss the changes of traffic with the proposed development. Mr. Greg Richardson from Traffic Planning Design was present and explained that they were retained by the applicant to provide the traffic studies. He stated that they would start with the signalized intersections and any other intersections within the vicinity of the proposed development. He stated that they would have to go through a process with PennDOT regarding a scoping meeting and providing them with information. Mr. Richardson stated that he is aware that everyone would like to know numbers, but any numbers that would have been proposed tonight wouldn't be very accurate since a study has not been conducted. He stated that they are looking for feedback since it's always at the top of the list in every community. Ms. Nunn stated that traffic is part of this decision and it's hard to make that decision without understanding the impact on all the residents here tonight. She stated that it's not just about the money, but quality of life, the discussion about traffic tonight is very important. Mr. Richardson stated that during their traffic studies that they have a level of service at intersections. He stated that the level of services is a grading system that has a grading scale from A - F. Mr. Richardson stated that they have requirements they have to abide by not just by the township engineer but by PennDOT too.

Mr. Bruno who resides at 930 Redstone Ln. stated that the bottom line is that most of the people do not want high-density apartments in their community, he wanted to know what is the degree of subjectivity that is used that goes into the traffic modeling. Mr. Richardson stated that the model is structured and when they do the traffic counts the township engineer will review those. He stated that the models they use are professional and national models that are used by the Transportation Research Board. The parameters and trip generations determine the impact. Mr. Bruno wanted to know how many parking spaces would be assigned per apartment unit. Mr. Richardson stated that it's based on engineering judgement. Mr. Bruno stated that he works in the financial industry with modeling, and you could always tweak assumptions for a more desirable outcome. Mr. Richardson stated that is why you have two levels of reviews. Mr. Richardson stated that they are not trying to pass one over on anyone, that the township engineers would review their study. Mr. Markman stated that there would be one parking space per unit. If there was one bedroom, there would be one parking space, two bedrooms would have two parking spaces.

Mr. Holmquist who resides at 1500 Evans Rd. wanted to know if the applicant had any other developments of this size that had one road for ingress/egress. Mr. Richardson stated that they would have an emergency access road in case the main road is blocked. Mr. Melograno stated that it would be important to widen the ingress/egress to make sure cars would be able to turn around.

Ms. Ames who resides at 1448 W. Lamplighter Ln was concerned about the possibility of a ripple effect of traffic due to the proposed 350 units. She stated that there could be serious implications if the traffic study is not done right, that it could end up being just another vacant lot waiting for another development to come along. She stated that the township really needs to look at the long-term effects. Mr. Richardson stated that they can't start anything without a scope and everyone's comments would be taken into consideration. Mr. Melograno stated that it would be up to the applicant to prepare a traffic study to ensure to mitigate those issues. Mr. Melograno stated that this process is not over, that conditional use would be required, and everyone will have another opportunity to discuss all this again. Mr. Ehlers who resides at 2 Beth Drive thought it was silly that they would predict one parking spot per bedroom, could they do the study giving the worst and best-case scenarios. Ms. Ames also stated that the retail should be included. Mr. Jones stated that the township will review the study, and that study will be based on the data from the trip generation manual that is accepted by PennDOT. He stated that they will use that for the trip generation for the site. Mr. Jones stated that there could be a post development study completed to see if any additional improvements would be required. Mr. Melograno stated that a post development study could help put in those protections but there is a limit to the requests that the township can make with the conditional use applications. Another resident wanted to know what the process was since none of the studies were done and that the board tonight is supposed to make a recommendation based on what. Mr. Melograno stated that all zoning works that way, there is zoning that already exists in the township without any developments being proposed. He stated all we can do is take all the concerns from tonight and put up a guardrail to make sure to do what we think is best for the township.

Mr. Grey who resides at 331 Arbor Ln. stated that the applicant stated a traffic study was completed from a meeting that occurred on August 27<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Grey stated that traffic studies are usually done within the township, but this development is on the edge, so it will also impact our neighbors in Upper Dublin and Horsham. He stated that it would be important to include them. He stated that considering the size and scope of this project, this is a cultural impact on the township, and a traffic study should have been completed prior to the meeting. Ms. Villano who resides at 1432 W Lamplighter wanted to know how a developer could come to the township with such a significant modification to the ordinance without submitting any type of traffic impact study. Mr. Melograno asked Mr. Jones to inform the audience how the traffic impact fee is calculated. Mr. Jones stated that the impact fee is calculated on the number of weekday trips multiplied by the traffic impact fee.

Mr. Melograno stated he would like to discuss the setbacks. He stated that the ordinance allows a front yard of no less than 50' feet for retail and for all other uses there should be a front yard of no less than 200' feet. Mr. Melograno stated that means that the current setback for the property is 200' feet and the only change is to allow the retail to be 50' feet.

He stated if we want restaurants and coffee shops, they must be closer to the road to allow visibility.

Mr. Stanton who resides at 321 Arbor Lane stated that he manages 9 buildings along Bethlehem Pike, and this would put a knife in its heart. He stated that there has been a lot of discussion about residential development along Bethlehem Pike, but there is no room or infrastructure that would make sense. He stated that there are a lot of business owners that are struggling right now and with this proposed development a lot of the stores will shut down. He stated that this would be an absolute disaster and will take away all the projects that are trying to revitalize that area.

Ms. Ames at 850 Wooded Pond Rd. wanted to know how this process started if the developer approached the township. Ms. Ames stated that the rents aren't affordable, and she would love to see Bethlehem Pike revitalized. She felt that there are so many things here that are wonderful already, there isn't a need to cater to the proposed 350 residents. She stated we should take baby steps by revitalizing Bethlehem Pike first, then take on larger projects. Mr. Jubilee who resides 125 Culpeper Drive wanted to know if there was going to be a study on the impact of crime for a development this size. Ms. Wagner who resides at 738 Fox Hollow Rd. stated that she has family members that reside at the developer's other property located at 555 Flats in Horsham. She stated that her family members had their cars stolen from there. Mr. Grey stated that he was on the EMS committee for over 10 years. He stated that we have no fire trucks that could fit into the proposed parking garage if there were any EV vehicles that would catch fire. He stated that the fire service is all volunteer in Lower Gwynedd, there are no paid firefighters on staff. Mr. Grey stated that we have one truck that is over 20 years old. He stated that Wissahickon Fire Company has been trying to replace it and ordered it several years ago but there was a funding gap. He stated that you can't have a building that occupies over 600 residents and not have firefighters to get there right away. Mr. Clelland stated that he acknowledges the comments regarding EV vehicles and that the building and garages would be fully sprinklered. Ms. Bruno wanted to know if there are any other buildings in the township that are currently zoned like this development and what would prevent the board from permitting other properties to switch from D-1 to MF-3.

Board member, Mr. Mrozinski, who is the Director of Community Development at Lower Providence Township stated that they are currently revising their whole ordinance which included affordable housing. He stated that workforce housing is supported at the county level due to lack of housing. He stated this would allow people like government workers or teachers to live where they work. He stated that these incentives are to encourage developers to include workforce units. Some of the audience members stated that they don't care about what happens in Montgomery County, they care about what happens in Lower Gwynedd and they do not want this development in the township.

Ms. Ames wanted to know if there were any conversations with the school district regarding the long-term effects of this proposed development. She stated that maybe if there was a proposal that was more family oriented there would be a different response tonight. She stated the development would be nothing but a strain on the township and our schools. Mr. Jubilee stated there would be an influx of students on an already strained school district. Mr. Markman stated that they did meet with the business manager in the school district. Ms. Ames stated that the resources in the school district are already strained, and these types of projects will have long-term consequences for our future. One of the audience members wanted to know how they are going to ensure that these units will be rented to people that are really considered to be workforce and if the units would be only available for people who work within the township. Mr. Melograno stated that anyone can apply for the workforce units, they don't have to work in Lower Gwynedd. Mr. Melograno stated that the workforce units are based on income. Mr. Melograno stated that the developer must match the rent to the qualifying income and must make sure they have units to rent at that income level.

Ms. Pinther who resides at 855 Wooded Pond Rd. stated that she felt she could speak for everyone in the audience tonight. As residents of Lower Gwynedd, they object to this high-density housing development that would change the complexion of Lower Gwynedd Township. Another audience member stated that she was worried about her property value lowering because of the proposed development. Mr. Markman stated that housing has increased in Upper Dublin because of their development. Some of the audience members wanted to clarify when the board will decide on the ordinance. Ms. Jamie Worman, Assistant Township Manager, stated that there would be an advertisement published 30 days prior to the public meeting. She stated that the notice would be advertised in the paper and available on our website. She stated that the ordinance would likely be on their January agenda.

A motion was made by Mr. Valiga to not approve the MF-3 Text & Map Amendment - Draft Ordinance due to the concerns that were expressed by the residents who attended tonight's meeting.

The motion passed with a 5-1 vote



**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 P.M.  
Respectfully submitted,  
Patty Furber, Secretary