

**LOWER GWYNEDD TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of September 16, 2026**

Present: Craig Melograno, Chairman
Danielle Porreca
Michael Mrozinski
Robert Sawyer
Maureen Nunn

Jamie Worman, Asst. Township Manager
Patty Furber, Building Codes Admin
Ed Brown, Gilmore & Associates
Chad Dixson, Bowman

Absent: Rich Valiga, Vice-Chair, Craig Adams

Call to Order:

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

Approval of Minutes: June 17, 2026

A motion was made by Mr. Sawyer and seconded by Ms. Porreca to approve the minutes of the Lower Gwynedd Township PC meeting of June 17, 2026. The motion carried unanimously.

Prior to proceeding with the agenda, the PC accommodated a resident, Linda Cymbala, who was present to raise concerns regarding six dead trees on township property adjacent to Wells Fargo. Ms. Cymbala noted that she had previously contacted the township and spoken with staff on multiple occasions but had not received a follow-up. The Chair acknowledged her concern, advised that this matter was not within the PC's purview, and directed her to leave her contact information with township staff for follow-up.

Waiver of Land Development:

#26-13WLD

1345 Sumneytown Pike - Parking Lot Expansion
Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School

Present for the applicant was Ms. Christen Pionzio from Hamburg, Ruben, Mullen, Maxwell and Lupin, Mr. Tim Woodrow from Woodrow & Associates and Ms. Denise Marbach, President of Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School.

The application sought a waiver of land development to expand the existing front parking lot by adding 42 gross spaces and removing 6, for a net gain of 36 spaces.

Ms. Marbach explained that the expansion was necessitated by an unusually large junior class with a higher-than-anticipated number of student drivers. The school confirmed this was not expected to be a recurring issue, as enrollment acceptance rates would be curtailed going forward. The parking lot would be permanent and would include lighting.

The PC reviewed letters from Gilmore & Associates, Bowman and Fire Marshal, Al Comly. Gilmore's letter noted sufficient capacity in existing stormwater management facilities to accommodate additional impervious coverage. The applicant sought relief from several design standard recommendations, specifically the planting strip between parking areas and additional landscaping along the frontage, citing the importance of minimizing encroachment into the school's practice fields. Mr. Woodrow noted that coaches were already reluctant to lose any field space, and that the parking area was designed to occupy as little of the field as possible. Ms. Pionzio stated that street signs would be added to certain driveways shown on the plans, as requested in Fire Marshal Mr. Al Comly's review letter dated September 14, 2026.

Mr. Melograno engaged in discussion about the philosophy of waiver applications, expressing a preference that waiver-of-land-development applications be straightforward and free of further design deviations. Mr. Woodrow stated that the project was essentially submitted originally as a grading permit given its limited scope.

Mr. Mrozinski suggested that the area adjacent to the parking lot (depicted on plan set as "temporary topsoil stockpile area") currently planned to be returned to grass following topsoil stockpiling could instead incorporate low native plantings or pollinator-friendly vegetation. Ms. Marbach questioned why that would be a consideration since it's private property and indicated no interest in additional landscaping for aesthetic purposes.

With respect to construction access, the applicant confirmed that construction vehicles would use the school's main entrance with a traffic signal, eliminating concerns about sight distance at the Sumneytown Pike access. The PC noted the parking spaces were dimensioned at 9 feet wide and accepted that the applicant would comply with traffic control measures identified in Bowman's letter, including stop bars, stop signs, and lane markings.

A motion to recommend approval of the Waiver of Land Development subject to the following conditions, was made by Mr. Sawyer and seconded by Ms. Porreca based on the following conditions:

- (1) the applicant shall use the main entrance for all construction access;
- (2) the applicant shall comply with traffic control measures identified in Bowman's review letter dated September 10, 2026.

The motion passed with a 5-0 vote.

Subdivision:
813 Plymouth Rd – 2-lot Subdivision
CDHB Ventures, LLC.

#26-12SUBD

Present for the applicant was Ms. Christen Pionzio from Hamburg, Ruben, Mullen, Maxwell and Lupin, Mr. Tim Woodrow from Woodrow & Associates and equitable owner, Mr. Corbett Hall and Ms. Nicole Murphy from BHHS Fox & Roach Realtors.

Ms. Pionzio explained that the applicant had previously obtained variance relief from the Zoning Hearing Board for a flag lot configuration. The plan involved subdividing Lot B from the rear of the existing property, with the existing circular driveway's right-side entrance serving the new flag lot and the left-side entrance continuing to serve the retained Lot A. The applicant had reduced impervious coverage and removed features from the original property to eliminate the need for additional variances related to setbacks or impervious coverage.

Review letters were received from Gilmore & Associates and Bowman:

The PC discussed three requested waivers pertaining to road improvements along Plymouth Road: (1) cartway widening, as the existing cartway width of 34 feet falls short of the required 40.5-foot width; (2) sidewalk/trail improvements, as no such improvements exist on either side of the road; and (3) curbing, as no curbing exists along Plymouth Road. The PC agreed that these waivers were appropriate given the surrounding context.

Key discussion points included:

Fire Access: The existing gate and pillars at the entrance to the flag lot driveway may need to be widened to achieve the required 16-foot fire access width. The applicant is committed to measuring and making any necessary modifications to achieve compliance.

Highway Occupancy Permit: Because Plymouth Road is a county road, the applicant acknowledged the need to coordinate with Montgomery County for a highway occupancy permit regarding the driveway serving the new lot. Ms. Pionzio made the PC aware of a minor encroachment onto the adjacent property to the north was noted on the plan and is committed to addressing it through the county process. Ms. Pionzio declined to require formal documentation of neighbor notification. Mr. Dixon had no issue with her request.

Public Utilities: Ms. Worman raised the issue of connection to public water and sewer for both lots, referencing a prior ordinance amendment requiring connection rather than mere availability. Ms. Pionzio and Mr. Woodrow both confirmed that both lots would be connected to public water and public sewer and committed to verifying and demonstrating the existing house connection, with final confirmation to occur during the building permit process.

Pedestrian Trail: Mr. Sawyer raised the question of a future pedestrian trail along Plymouth Road. Mr. Melograno acknowledged the difficulty of securing trail easements through individual minor subdivisions and noted that the PC had previously had more success with larger developments. No trail condition was imposed on this application.

A motion was made by Mr. Mrozinski and seconded by Ms. Nunn to recommend approval of the 2-lot subdivision to the Board of Supervisors based on the following conditions:

- (1) the applicant shall comply with fire marshal access requirements, including achieving the required 16-foot driveway width at the gate;
- (2) the applicant shall comply with Bowman's review letter, except item 4 since no curbing exists along Plymouth Rd. With respect to item 7 regarding the encroachment, the applicant acknowledges the condition and will address it through the county highway occupancy permit process;
- (3) the PC supports the three requested waivers for cartway widening, sidewalk, and curbing;
- (4) the applicant shall comply with Gilmore's review letter, including verifying and confirming that the existing house is connected to public water and public sewer.

The motion passed with a 5-0 vote.

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Conditional Use:

#26-06CU

BET – 321 Norristown Rd.
BT 309, LLC

Applicants' counsel Ms. Christen Pionzio of Hamburg, Rubin, Mullen, Maxwell & Lupin appeared on behalf of BET Investments, accompanied by the applicant's representative, traffic engineer, civil engineer, and architect.

Ms. Pionzio stated that the applicant submitted an amended conditional use application on July 22, 2026, following the Board of Supervisors' adoption of rezoning and text amendment ordinances for the property. The PC was reminded that conditional use is a zoning proceeding, not a land development review, and that approval would be followed by a full land development application. Ms. Pionzio stated that a significant update to the plan was presented: following the adoption of the text amendment, the existing office tenant, Berkadia, informed BET that they intended to vacate the property to relocate to a newly constructed building elsewhere. BET negotiated a new arrangement in which it would construct a brand-new building on-site for Berkadia, allowing the tenant to remain. This necessitated a swap in the positions of the apartment building and the Berkadia office building on the site plan. The repositioning produced several benefits: the new Berkadia building is smaller (70,000 sq. ft. versus the existing 79,000 sq. ft.), is three stories rather than four, and the buffer between the Berkadia building and Gwynedd Estates increased from approximately 25 feet to over 40 feet. Architectural materials across all buildings were also unified in design.

Setback Issue:

The plan as revised places the apartment building approximately 80 feet from Route 309, whereas the ordinance requires a 200-foot front yard setback from the street. Ms. Pionzio acknowledged this deviation upfront, noting it was a known consequence of the building repositioning. She stated that a text amendment to address this is anticipated and indicated it did not want to immediately file that text amendment in case additional issues emerged through the review process.

Coordination with Adjacent Properties:

Ms. Pionzio described several cross-property arrangements reflected on the updated plan:

Gwynedd Estates: BET has negotiated an agreement with Gwynedd Estates under which BET will construct a trail on Gwynedd Estates' property and provide significant landscaping improvements in exchange for an emergency access connection across their property. There is no pedestrian interconnection between the two developments. The only connection will be the sidewalk along the frontage.

Old York Road County Club – Golf Course:

The golf course requested an access easement across the BET property to reach a cell tower currently accessed informally from PennDOT right-of-way. BET agreed to provide this easement as a contingency access for the golf course.

Parking:

Mr. Melograno raised the issue of the plan providing approximately 74 more parking spaces than required by ordinance and questioned why that was needed with garage parking available. Mr. Markman noted that retailer and office tenants tend to request additional parking, and that cross-use between the office building and apartments was anticipated. Mr. Melograno noted that excess impervious coverage represents unnecessary cost and stormwater burden and suggested that parking quantities be revisited during land development to determine whether spaces could be eliminated. The applicant indicated that they would evaluate this. Mr. Melograno also raised the question of whether parking lot islands complied with the subdivision and land development ordinance requirement for landscaped islands at intervals, noting that addressing this proactively during conditional use would avoid a waiver conversation later.

Architecture:

Architect Michael McCloskey presented a series of view corridor renderings and building elevations included in the conditional use submission. Views were presented from Norristown Road, from within the site, and from Gwynedd Estates. The renderings showed that for most of the year, existing vegetation along Norristown Road would screen much of the development from view, though winter visibility would be greater. The PC noted a preference that trees along the Norristown Road frontage be preserved and replaced if lost, regardless of tree replacement calculations, and that frontage plantings be enhanced. All four buildings—the apartment building, the Berkadia office building, the grocer, and the retail building—were presented with full elevations and material palettes. Materials include manufactured stone veneer, fiber cement siding, metal panels, and composite concrete panels. No vinyl siding is proposed.

Traffic:

The PC reviewed traffic-related items with the applicant's traffic engineer and the township's traffic engineer. Key points included:

A third updated traffic impact study had been submitted and was under review by both Bowman and PennDOT. Upgrades to traffic signal equipment and loop detection systems at four intersections—Boveri Drive, Tennis Avenue, and both Route 309 interchange signals—were discussed. The PC sought to include a condition requiring the applicant to review and evaluate these intersections. Ms. Pionzio noted that the township ordinance regarding traffic signals is strict and would involve a significant cost to her clients. Ms. Pionzio stated that while the signal at Bolveri is along their frontage and their responsibility, the remaining signals are not, and the applicant would expect credit against their traffic impact fees. However, the applicant agreed to review all four signals, with further discussion deferred to a later date in consultation with Bowman. To avoid prejudicing the impact fee discussion, which was characterized as a Board of Supervisors matter, the PC agreed to condition only the review and evaluation, without specifying required upgrades. The applicant and Mr. Dixon agreed to a condition requiring review and evaluation of the feasibility of extending the eastbound left-turn lane on Norristown Road at Tennis Avenue. Mr. Melograno stated that pedestrian improvements along Norristown Road were required and was confirmed as a firm commitment by the applicant, as was full design, permitting, and construction of a pedestrian underpass beneath the Route 309 interchange.

Signage:

Mr. Melgorano noted the inclusion of a pylon sign in the conditional use submission. Ms. Pionzio confirmed it complies with the ordinance's dimensional requirements. The sign is proposed near the main entrance, and its architectural design is intended to match the buildings.

A motion was made by Mr. Mrozinski and seconded by Mr. Sawyer to recommend approval of the Conditional Use Application to the Board of Supervisors based on the following conditions:

- (1) the applicant shall review the traffic signal equipment and loop detection systems at Boveri Drive, Tennis Avenue, and both Route 309 signal intersections along with PennDOT and Bowman to determine if any additional upgrades are required; applicant will comply if upgrades are required.
- (2) pedestrian improvements along Norristown Road shall be provided;
- (3) the applicant shall add lighting for trails within the property, details to be determined during land development;
- (4) the applicant shall enhance frontage plantings along Norristown Road, the details of which shall be determined during land development;
- (5) the applicant shall review and evaluate the feasibility of improvements to extend the eastbound left-turn lane from Norristown Road onto Tennis Avenue.

The motion passed with a 5-0 vote.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30

P.M. Respectfully submitted,

Patty Furber

Patty Furber, Secretary