

# Civic Engagement Committee Meeting Notes

February 7, 2019 – 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Board Room, Township Building

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*Members Present included: Maryam Phillips, Nancy Scarlato, Brian Hoppo, Nina Bisbee, Terry Foley, and Charlie Davidson. Township Staff Present included: Chris Leswing, Director, Building & Planning; Colleen Hall, Planner/GIS Technician, and Jillian Dierks, Planner. Approximately 8 members of the public were present, including Commissioner George Manos, Commissioner Rick Churchill, Planning Commissioner Bill Cook.*

## **MEDIUM DENSITY SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL ZONING & STANDARDS APPLICABLE TO ALL RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS**

Mr. Leswing called the meeting to order at approximately 7 PM. Introductions of the Civic Engagement Committee (CEC) were made. Mr. Leswing stated that up to this point the committee has been asked to share information with the public. The next several months this committee will be reviewing the draft document in a workshop format.

The CEC meetings will precede the Building & Planning Committee's meeting each month. Each month a different topic will be discussed. The CEC will be asked to review the sections of the Zoning Code relating to the topic and provide feedback and recommendations to the Building & Planning Committee. Mr. Leswing outlined the discussion at the January 10, 2019 CEC meeting.

### **Staff Presentation**

Mr. Leswing provided a presentation explaining the Medium Density Residential Zoning Districts, which include MDR1-3.

### **Committee Discussion & Public Comment**

Following the presentation, Mr. Leswing opened the discussion and asked if anyone had questions. A summary of the questions and answers from the CEC and the public follow:

Bill Cook- It would be helpful to see the apartment building developments in relation to MDR districts, and to see what could potentially be with the proposed zoning. The Township is primarily built out, the zoning should consider how we deal with the inevitable modernization of the existing stock.

**Q. How many single-family are remaining in the MDR2 zone, which could be converted to multiple units?**

A. There are only a few single-family houses mainly along Montgomery Avenue in the previous R7 zoning which are remaining adjacent to existing multi-family structures, that may be available for conversion. It is good question and data we will provide for future meetings

**Q. Are the MDR districts direct translations from the R6, R6A & R7?**

A. Conceptually. The districts were mapped to keep the general form and keep similar uses together (like with like). It incentivizes the preservation of existing structures by allowing additional density.

**Q. Why is the density per acre increase so significantly in MDR2 & MDR3?**

A. The form-based code is a different way of implementing the minimum size per unit. The current code creates a number of how many units that you would be able to fit on the ground, the form-based code establishes an actual unit size in the buildings. The market will direct what size units will actually be built in a particular development, and the form-based standards provides a guide for the placement of the buildings. In the form-based code more emphasis is placed on the placement and form of the outside of the building not necessarily the interior make-up of the building.

Please note that density ratios are not a requirement in the zoning code and not a performance standard in the zoning. These were provided for discussion purposes only. The existing zoning numbers provided is not an actual on the ground density per acre, it is only what the code could permit. Most of the existing multi-family are developed at a different density ratios.

**Q. Will developers be required to provide yield plans for multi-family development?**

A. No. Mr. Leswing stated that yield plans are required on Open Space Preservation Districts, to demonstrate their developable potential under the underlying zoning. It is not a requirement.

**Q. What is the proposed zoning for the Montgomery Avenue block adjacent to Suburban Square?**

A. The proposed zoning is MDR2, in an area that was traditional zoning R7 previously. The MDR2 zone permits three-story buildings in the form of a small multifamily building, which has limit of six units, which may be less than what the R7 would permit. The new code is more focused on the form of the development.

**Q. How do we preserve the existing rowhouses in the Township?**

Maryam Phillips felt that rowhouse and townhouses are two different things, and the terms are used interchangeably. Traditional rowhouses in Lower Merion are limited to two stories, and may have affordable housing, how do you preserve these blocks from speculative redevelopment.

A. This is a challenge with the market desire for newer townhouse developments to be larger in size. It is unlikely that a new townhouse/ rowhouse development will be built at a two-story height, but the new form standards will improve the form of these townhouses with frontage standards and orientation to the public street. A new development would have to provide stormwater management and the proposed parking requirements on the site. Staff will do some test analysis on some of the blocks of two-story houses.

**Q. Commissioner Manos- In the form base code, it does not focus on the use, just the form, so some form of the existing commercial uses could exist in residential structures and how you resolve that?**

A. There are different levels of commercial levels that could exist in home occupations, which staff discusses in the memo provided. It is possible that some existing business that do not fall within the home occupation limits could continue as a non-conforming use in a residential district. The proposed code includes provisions for nonconforming uses in Article 11. Staff is looking into the transition areas between the commercial areas and residential uses adjacent to them. A majority of the areas are being transitioned back into residential zones rather than commercial. The previous ASDD1 and ASDD2 will no longer exist, and this area has been transitioned to Village Commercial and MDR

zones. A discussion continued about specific areas in the Township and how they are proposed to be zoned. There are some areas that require further evaluation and staff will continue to review specific areas.

## **Recommendations & Comments**

Mr. Leswing asked the CEC for their feedback on the policy issues outlined in the memo. A summary of the discussion is provided below. The recommendations shown below were not voted on and were not necessarily unanimous. The recommendations shown summarize the general consensus of the CEC related to the policy discussions.

### **Policy Discussion: Should the minimum lot area be adjusted based on housing type? In the MDR zones more housing types are introduced, and may require further clarification for different housing types.**

- Commissioner Manos stated that lot area should not differ based on use in a true form-based code.
- Bill Cook- This concept would be better discussed with visual aids. Single family dwelling should be shown in MDR, and also the other housing types. A couple examples to provide more direction and show the different types that could be built with the different housing types.

### **Policy Discussion: Should the minimum lot area be decreased to 1,600 square feet per unit thereby allowing additional by-right density in the MDR2 and MDR3 zoning districts?**

- Brian Hoppy- Yes expect for single family. The provisions should be for small multi-family & large multi-family dwellings.
- Change the draft language to state “1,600 sq. ft. per unit”

### **Policy Discussion: Should the building height vary depending on the housing type?**

- Yes.

### **Policy Discussion: Should an increased side or rear yard be required? If so, should the increased setback apply when the lot is adjacent to a lower density residential zoning district, or should it apply in all cases?**

- Staff explained that the side yard setback needs to be clarified when a 0 or 5 foot setback would apply. It is assumed that the zero would only apply with an attached building but does need to be expanded in the text document. In the MDR2 and MDR3 zones adjacency requirements are applied, so that might also increase the setbacks if the properties are next to a lower zone which has greater side and rear setbacks. The MDR zoned property would be required to provide the similar setbacks.

### **Policy Discussion: Should a landscaped buffer be required for large multifamily buildings that abut a lower density residential district? Or can form standards address the transition concerns?**

- Brian Hoppy- Landscape buffers should be required, where possible, establishing buffering between less intense use. Mimic the footnote language from the commercial areas for buffers for MDR3 and MDR2, when a development is adjacent to LDR and MDR1 zones.

*The Committee did not provide specific recommendations on the following topics.*

**Policy Discussion:** Should every rowhouse unit be required to face onto a street or should courtyard type rowhouse developments continue to be allowed?

**Policy Discussion:** Should the minimum lot area be reduced for developments that include affordable housing?

**Policy Discussion:** Should parking standards be reduced for development that include affordable housing?

Meeting ended at approximately 9:10 PM. Notes recorded by Jillian Puleo and Colleen Hall