

# Upper Gwynedd Township Planning Commission

**Wednesday June 14, 2023**

1. Call to Order

June 14, 2023, Planning Commission Meeting was called to order by Kathryn Carlson, Secretary, at 7:30 pm. In attendance were:

Kathryn Carlson	Secretary
Gill Silverman	Member
John Tierney	Member
Chris Carroll	Member
Andrew Faulker	Member
Gail Ramsey	Member
Sandra Zadell	Township Manager
Megan Weaver	Assistant Township Manager
Denise Hull	Commissioner
E. Van Rieker	Zoning Officer
Isaac Kessler	Township Engineer
Colleen Tronoski	Recording Secretary

2. Approval of March 8, 2023, Minutes

Ms. Carlson asked for any corrections/additions to the Minutes of March 8, 2023, which had been circulated via email. Mr. Silverman made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Carroll seconded this motion, and the minutes were unanimously passed.

3. The Report of Commissioners' Meeting was cancelled.

4. Old Business

A. Ratification of Component 4A – ACT 537 Plan for Towamencin Special Sewer Study

Ms. Carlson noted that the Planning commission had previously approved the same motion but that there is a need to do so a second time because a different owner is listed as the applicant. Mr. Tierney made a motion to ratify the submission of Component 4A – ACT 537 Plan for Towamencin Special Sewer Study. Mr. Carroll seconded this motion and it was unanimously approved.

5. New Business

A. TOD – 2 Draft Zoning Ordinance Amendment  
1500 Pennbrook Parkway/Walters Group

Joe Clement, Attorney for the applicant and developer, was present. He introduced Kim Krauter, who is the director of acquisitions in Pennsylvania for the Walters Group. He also introduced Joe DelDuca, president of the Walters Group, and the traffic engineer. Mr. Clement stated that they are seeking a recommendation from the Planning Commission for the proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment that would allow for a multifamily use in portions of the Limited Industrial District near the Pennbrook train station.

Mr. Clement stated that this project has been in the planning process for three years. One of the issues that came out of the meeting with the Plan Review Committee was the density limitation permitted in any multifamily development. Presently, the township does have a certain density limitation permitted in the TOD (transit-oriented district) for Station Square which is 11 units per acre. This project will mirror that. It also must be a walkable distance to the train station. As a result, there's a requirement in the ordinance that they are proposing to be within ½ mile of the train station. This impacts 2.5 – 4 % of total property area in the entire township. It is basically anything along Church Road in the Pennbrook Parkway area to Wissahickon Avenue. There are a couple properties along Wissahickon that are Limited Industrial. The other side of Wissahickon is Industrial and would not be impacted by this ordinance.

Mr. Clement noted that there is a review letter from the County Planning Commission supporting the ordinance. He stated that there are very specific limitations on where this TOD would apply. He noted that, from the applicant's perspective, this is really a development option not a true overlay district. It's a development option within the limited industrial district and in only certain portions. One of the limitations is the ½ mile distance from the Pennbrook Station. The second would be that the property would have to be 4-8 acres in total, limiting the amount of density. It cannot be more than 11 units per acre. Impervious coverage is not exceeding what's allowed in the LI District as it is today. Mr. Clement referred to the Montgomery County Planning Commission letter and stated that there had to be consistency between the zoning map and the overlay district. Mr. Clement stated that whatever the township's recommendation is, the map amendment or having a development option within the Limited Industrial District, the applicant will happily comply.

Mr. Clement explained that in the Developable Area Ordinance section already existing there is a provision for half of what would be in a flood plain area. They are not allowed to take credit for half of that. If you net that out, it reduces the density.

Kim Krauter presented an illustration of the plan. Ms. Krauter explained that The Walters Group has been in business for over 40 years. They deal with construction, property management and development. The Walters Group is also one of the Premier Developers in New Jersey. Ms. Krauter stated that all of her development experience is in Pennsylvania, predominantly in Montgomery County. She noted that she has developed property in Hatfield, Towamencin, and Lansdale. Currently there's over 2000 units in existence and about 250 units in development throughout the organization. The Walters Group does have the capacity to easily manage a project like this.

Ms. Krauter had a slide show of 1500 Pennbrook Parkway. She noted the proximity to the train station and the bus stop. She noted the continuous sidewalk to the train station and the bus stop and one small island in the parking lot that would require a small additional piece of sidewalk which would make it completely continuous.

Ms. Krauter presented the layout for the property. She stated that the goals for building this were to maximize green space while meeting the requirements of the TOD Zoning and including outdoor space

for residents. The building is designed with LEED gold or LEED platinum standards. Instead of being one large apartment building that's 60,000 sq ft, these are smaller buildings that have the appearance of townhomes. All the apartments have their own individual entrances. There are no elevators and no long corridors. There are 8-12 units per building. There is a clubhouse for the residents use.

Ms. Krauter noted that a traffic study has been completed. The proposed project will generate less traffic, of all kinds, during the morning and afternoon peak hours than any other use that's already permitted by the zoning ordinance. The proposed multifamily development will generate fewer truck trips. The peak hour trips are expected to be 9 entering trips and 21 exiting trips during the morning peak hours and 17 entering trips and 11 exiting trips during the evening peak hours.

Ms. Krauter explained that whoever is a prospective resident living in this community could be provided with tables for rent and income. There are 60 apartments: 27 of which will be 1 bedroom; 20 will be 2 bedrooms; and 13 will have 3 bedrooms. She explained that the amounts of rent to be charged are based on percentages of the median income for Montgomery County which in 2023 is \$111,000 annually. In the lowest rental category, that would mean that people who make at or below 20% of the area median income would qualify. There are only 4 apartments that fall into this category. For a 1 bedroom, the maximum income a renter could make is \$17,860 annually; for a 2 bedroom it is \$20,100; and for a 3 bedroom, \$22,320. The bulk of the apartments will be in the 50% and 60% category, which is moderate income. The incomes average between \$44,650 and \$66,960. This will be the bulk of the residents living here which is why this is called work force housing. The housing is designed to accommodate the work force in Montgomery County. There are 9 market rate units. Income levels were not included because residents can make any amount of money.

Projected monthly rent for 1 bedroom units for people at the 20% level will be roughly \$343 a month up to \$407 for a 2 bedroom. In the 50% category, the rents go from \$971 to \$1331. In the 60% category, the rents go from \$1,181 to \$1,621. The market rate units are \$1,600 to \$1,915.

Ms. Krauter noted that 46.6% of renters in Upper Gwynedd, approximately 770 households, are spending more than 30% of their income on rent and a home is typically considered affordable if the owner or renter's total housing costs don't exceed 30% of their household total income. Forty-eight percent of renters in Montgomery County, approximately 45,000 households, are spending 30% or more of their income on rent.

Ms. Krauter shared some sample pictures of apartments and of the club house they would like to build. The club house would offer fitness centers, computer library, lounge area and areas where residents can have parties.

Depending on the space available, they sometimes can offer outdoor seating areas and playgrounds.

Some of the unit features include a higher quality of materials to be used when available, such as granite counter tops, ceramic tile and washers and dryers in every unit.

Ms. Carlson asked what LEED gold meant. Ms. Krauter stated that this is a rating system for how green a building is and how energy efficient it is. LEED platinum is a considerably efficient, zero net ready, green building.

Ms. Carlson asked how the buildings are managed. Ms. Krauter noted that the Walters Group does their own property management. They have a full-time property manager and maintenance staff who would manage the building.

Mr. Silverman asked if the property manager would be living at the building. Ms. Krauter noted that this hasn't been decided yet.

Ms. Ramsey asked how many floors the buildings will have. Ms. Krauter noted that they can be 3 floors.

Mr. Faulker asked what the qualifications would be to live at the development. Also, what will be the application process and what would prevent people from living there and how is income quantified as far as source? Ms. Krauter explained: before a resident moves in, they would fill out an application and they would have a full income certification, which includes reviewing income, bank statements and investments. The resident would need to give permission for this to be reviewed. Their income is verified through third parties. Credit checks are also done along with criminal background checks. If someone earns more than these thresholds, they are disqualified.

Mr. Tierney asked what the continued reporting requirements are. Ms. Krauter stated that in Pennsylvania, the agency that manages the tax credit program would be building through the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. The PHFA has annual requirements: audits need to be submitted to confirm that no one has moved in whose income is too high. They also perform technical service inspections where they come out to the buildings and ensure that the buildings are managed and maintained in the best way possible. Under the program requirements, they are required to have a prescribed replacement schedule. They are required to make payments to replacement reserves monthly. There's a schedule they follow for what needs to be worked on, painted, replaced, etc.

Ms. Carlson asked what are the lowest and maximum rents that will be paid. Ms. Krauter stated that the lowest rent is \$343 and the maximum rent is \$1,915.

Ms. Zadell added that this presentation will be posted to the Township website. The 2 other presentations that the applicant made are available also.

Ms. Krauter noted that this table has different rent and income limits from the previous presentation because they changed for 2023. They do change annually.

Ms. Carlson mentioned that there were several residents who wanted to speak and she asked if those speaking could try to keep their comments down to 3 minutes.

### **Public Comments**

1. Mark Connelly, 11 Kearney Drive, thinks it's important to recommend this project. He believes there's a housing affordability crisis in the township. If you look at what people pay in rent and who makes less than 50k-75k, according to the census bureau, all available housing units are unaffordable. This means that people are paying more than 30% of their income for housing. Of the people in the 50-75K range, 94.6% are paying unaffordable rents. Over 75k it's only 14% but this is still 139 households. There are over 700 households that would benefit from having lower rents.
2. Dennis Wendt, 886 Fulton Avenue, stated that he has been following this topic and the meetings for the last couple of months. He also stated that this would probably be the best location to build this type of housing, it's in a desirable location, close to mass transit and it's affordable. This property has been on the market for over 15 years with no buyer.
3. Susan Baker-Wendt, 886 Fulton Avenue, stated she has attended several meetings on this topic. She hopes that the future for Upper Gwynedd is as a community that values each person who lives and works here and which recognizes what they contribute to the community no matter what their income level. She emphasized the affordable housing crisis. If we as a society worked to give a hand up instead of a hand out it would benefit our community as a whole.

4. Eric Comen, 705 Jackson Street, understands that people with lower income want young children and want a better life for their families. He believes this will lower the property values and increase traffic. He wants to know why the taxpayers do not have a vote on this project.
5. Pam Kendig, 1921 S. Valley Forge Road, noted that taxes are getting higher. This project will put more children in schools. No one is thinking about the elderly. The elderly are on limited income. She thinks you need to think about the current residents first. This project will also add traffic.
6. Donna Mirynowski, 644 Eagle Lane, stated she moved from Bensalem to give her son a better life. Before she moved, Bensalem started with one subsidized housing project, then they added more. Then crime was more prevalent. She thinks instead of this proposed project, do something for the elderly, the disabled veterans, or the current residents.
7. Steve Veneziale, 710 Whites Road, asked once this project is completed what's going to stop the next similar project? How are the roads, sewers, and water going to be taken care of? Mr. Kessler stated that the utility companies have to review and approve any kind of development before it approved. Mr. Clement stated that it is a very limited area of the township which would permit this particular development option. It could only be in the Limited Industrial District and must be within ½ mile of the Pennbrook Station.
8. Michael Nessly, 115 Beth Drive, stated that he was not notified of this meeting and that this meeting is the least transparent governmental local action he's ever seen. He believes this is precedent setting, both for the tax structure and for the zoning. Mr. Nessly commented on the green corridor on which this project would be built. He stated that it connects a lot of urban green spaces that would be gone. This development would go right up to the train tracks, butterfly meadows, wetlands, and the corridor which connects to the Wissahickon.
9. Betsy Marple, 115 Beth Drive, is concerned about the red-tailed hawks that live in this area along with other wildlife.
10. Amanda Ryan, 917 Tricorn Drive, strongly encouraged the Planning Commission to consider the impact that adding this many houses will have on the already strained community resources particularly the schools.
11. Carl Smith, 815 McIntosh Way, believes this type of housing always ends up with someone else paying part of the rent.
12. Linda Smith, 815 McIntosh Way, stated that, as a resident, she doesn't feel like she's getting the whole story. She feels that helping people is not giving them a handout. They need to work for it.
13. Yvonne Paci Ciquero, 1421 Gwynedale Way, believes this type of housing will bring crime into Upper Gwynedd. She would like a survey mailed to each Upper Gwynedd resident to vote on this project.
14. David Ciquero, 1421 Gwynedale Way, noted that the Comprehensive Plan states that Upper Gwynedd is 97% built out. Why would we build on the last 3%? He also asked what happens if the residents lose their income. Do they get kicked out? He also believes the traffic is already too heavy. Ms. Krauter responded about subsidized housing and noted that rents subsidized by HUD, are considered Section 8. The project being proposed is not subsidized. It's a program through the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. The rents are not subsidized.
15. Mike Hays, 330 W. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, #401B (Bridgeport), is a teacher at the North Penn School District. He noted that he would love to live in a development like this. He said that it's hard to find a safe, affordable place to live. He believes we need to support those who work in this community. We need to offer a large mix of housing at all income levels. He supports the building of this community.

16. Renee Armstead, 317 6<sup>th</sup> Street, asked how this would impact taxes. She noted that the school taxes are a strain especially on seniors. She believes this area is already overdeveloped and we no longer have the wildlife we once had.
17. William Breish, 459 Franklin Street, from Lansdale Borough, read a letter from 18 people who support the community being built. Some of the organizations who signed on to this letter were Habitat for Humanity of Montgomery and Delaware County, Manna on Main Street, Here for Us Montco, Bucks Mont Collaborative, and other community leaders.
18. Carl Vorwerk, 750 Hartley Drive, spoke of past open land that is no longer open but built up. He believes you should work for what you want.

Township Manager Zadell explained to the room that she is appointed by the Board of Commissioners who are elected. The Planning Commission Members are resident volunteers. They are an advisory commission and the recommendations they make go to the Commissioners for a vote.

19. Martin Benedetto, 750 Jackson Street, is against this project because it's going right behind his house. He opposes this development.
20. Glenn Hatfield, 1468 Cathys Lane, said that, once this project is approved, it opens the door to additional building projects. The original 2040 Comprehensive Plan talked about the TOD coming in 2 places: the North Wales Train Station and the Pennbrook Station. It seems like it's just Pennbrook Station. Does it include North Wales? In either situation, it's a large part of Upper Gwynedd that could be affected. Mr. Rieker noted that the Comprehensive Plan that was adopted in August 2021 took 3 years of planning. It suggested that the concept of a TOD would be appropriate for properties within a half mile radius of the North Wales and Pennbrook stations. This Ordinance proposes only Pennbrook Station, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. It's the only property within this proposed map amendment. The proposed ordinance is only for vacant and not developed property having 4-8 acres.
21. Joseph Hare, 938 Allentown Road, said that traffic in Upper Gwynedd is already out of control. The high school is crowded. And the school board is raising taxes 4.1% this year. He does not think another development is needed.
22. Jeff Fields, 321 Croft Road, talked about a study in Virginia that noted that home sales increased after a development like the one the applicant is proposing was built and that property values increased by 1.9%. Mr. Fields noted that in the LI District, a factory could be built and there could be tractor trailers on the streets instead of cars. He supports this proposal.

Ms. Carlson stated that it was the end of resident comments. She also stated that the comments and questions will be considered. She suggested that the Commission take this under advisement, so they have time to consider the comments. They will come back next month and hopefully be able to make a decision.

Mr. Silverman made a motion to table this application until the next meeting so there's time to consider all of the comments and questions. Mr. Carroll seconded the motion.

Mr. Rieker stated that the next meeting will be July 12 at 7:30pm.

6. Adjournment

There being no further business for discussion, Ms. Carlson asked for any further questions or comments. Hearing none, Mr. Carroll made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Mr. Tierney and unanimously passed. The meeting was adjourned at 9:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kathryn Carlson".

Kathryn Carlson, Secretary