

New Hope Borough Planning Commission

Monday, April 5, 2020, 7:00 PM

MINUTES

The New Hope Borough Planning Commission April meeting was held virtually. Members in attendance included Jason Apuzzio (JA), Paul Atkinson (PA), Peter Meyer (PM), and Keith Voss (KV). Staff members included Tracy Tackett (TT), Zoning Officer and Matthew Walters (MW), Bucks County Planning Commission.

A. Call to Order at 7:05 PM

B. Public Comment

1. It was noted that the agenda originally included a sketch plan application for a four-unit building at 218 Towpath. The Borough received several comments from residents expressing concern regarding the scale and massing of the proposal and the Applicant decided to withdraw the proposal from the agenda and go back and look at alternatives that might be more acceptable to the neighbors, that also may not require variances.

C. Approval of Meeting Minutes

1. Postponed

D. New Business

1. Matt Walters explained that for the meeting he has a presentation focused on an analysis of past variances and an overview of the CC and RB zoning districts for discussion purposes. Variances discussed include:
 - Nurture Spa- required a use variance and applicant obtained dimensional variances
 - 46 N. Main- variance for multi-family use, and included multiple dimensional variances. It was noted that this proposal did not come before the planning commission (PC) even though it was a use change.
 - It was then discussed that variance applications never come to the PC because of the way the process works. It was discussed whether the process could be altered in some way to allow the PC an opportunity to provide feedback on variance applications. It was explained that the ZHB hearings have to be scheduled within a certain period of time from when they file the application and so there is often a timing challenge to get an application to the PC as well as Borough Council for review and comment. It was discussed that many projects that received variances several years ago, are now being constructed and the result of this construction has prompted Borough Council to take a stronger stand against many variances, and to update the zoning code. It was noted that Borough Council prioritizes commercial in the CC District, and particularly retail. The Borough has a lot of eateries.
 - Borough Council automatically gets standing at all ZHB hearings.
 - The hardship criteria for the ZHB is in the zoning ordinance and it is the same criteria that is in the Municipalities Planning Code.
 - Brewery- allowed as a special exception.
 - 20 S. Main Street- received SE, expand nonconforming uses on nonconforming lots, and

multiple dimensional variances.

- Mansion Inn- noted that a couple of the variances were denied, but most variance requests were approved.
- Concern was expressed about the changes of uses without consultation of the PC. Would like to see the PC more involved with review of such ZHB applications.
- Recurring variances for uses greater than 5,000 square feet.
- 182 S. Main St.- variances were mainly dimensional. Look at scaling of buildings relative to adjacent properties.
- 27 W. Mechanic Street- use variance to allow a single-family dwelling and also included some dimensional variances. It was noted that the approval of this variance now leaves one remaining commercial property surrounded by residential properties. The Borough may want to revisit the zoning in this area given the residential character of this area now.
- Need to come up with a way of notifying PC of ZHB variance applications, particularly relating to use changes. Staff should pursue with Borough Council authorization to allow ZHB applications to be sent to the PC.
- 18-20 W. Mechanic- use and dimensional variances to allow townhouses, apartments and commercial.
- 306-308 S. Main- use variance and dimensional variances.
- MW is going to look into the 5,000 sf issue and look into ways to encourage PC involvement with use variances.
- MW will provide copies of the nonconforming analysis previously completed by the County. The analysis was for the CC District and the RB District.
- It was suggested that MW look into suggestions for possible updates to the districts to eliminate some of the nonconforming situations. Maybe it could give a bit more flexibility to existing property owners.
- It was noted that the zoning standards tend to be more suburban in nature.
- MW was asked to provide information regarding the County's thoughts on integrating some form-based codes into the existing ordinance.
- It was noted that when someone needs one or two variances they will often request more variances because they are going through the process already and figure they should go for more than they may necessarily need because they are already going through the process.

E. Public Comment:

F. Discussion

The PC discussed an interest in adding workshop meetings to help get through the code updates in a more timely manner. PC members should send TT their availability.

MW will provide updates for the joint parking language to be considered at the next meeting.

G. Adjournment at 9:10 PM.