

New Hope Borough Planning Commission
Tuesday, September 23, 2021
Meeting Minutes

The New Hope Borough Planning Commission met on September 23, 2021 in the public meeting room. In attendance and voting were Chairman Keith Voss and members Jason Apuzzio, Louis Bellafronte and Lawrence Greenberg. Also in attendance were Mary Stover, Interim Zoning Officer, and Dave Kimberly and Matthew Winters of the Bucks County Planning Commission (BCPC).

Call to Order: Mr. Voss called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Public Comment: There was no public comment. No public was present in the audience.

Approval of the August 2, 2021 Minutes: Minutes from the August 2, 2021 meeting were tabled since only two members that were present at the August meeting were present at the meeting.

RB District 1 and 2 Revisions – Area and Dimension Requirements, Permitted Uses

Mr. Winters distributed two maps that had been prepared by BCPC. One map provided the proposed delineation of the RB-1 and RB-2 Zoning Districts. The second map illustrated the distribution of lot sizes in the RB-1 and RB-2 Zoning Districts using a computer model.

Mr. Kimberly explained that the proposed RB-1 District would consist of smaller lots closer to the center of town and the RB-2 District would include larger lots further from the center of town.

The uses proposed for the RB-2 District are the same as the current RB Zoning District. Most of the dimensional requirements proposed for the RB-2 District are consistent with the current RB District except the minimum lot width, front yards and side yards for single-family and two-family dwellings. Additional changes were included in the section for “other permitted uses” in the district.

In RB-1 District, Use 275-14.E – Townhouse/attached dwelling has been added as a use by right. In the RB-1 District, the minimum lot size is proposed to be reduced in addition to other dimensional changes.

Mr. Apuzzio questioned whether the proposed Conservation District Overlay would include the RB-1 and RB-2 Districts. Mr. Winters confirmed that the intent was to include all of the RB-1 and some of RB-2 in the Conservation Overlay District.

There was discussion regarding the proposed setbacks and lot size requirements. It was noted that the intent was for less lots to be considered “non-conforming”. The potential requirement for averaging the front yard setbacks of adjacent lots as written in the Conservation Overlay District may not be appropriate for the RB Districts. It was questioned if the intent was to have RB-1, RB-2 and the Conservation District Overlay. Mr. Kimberly indicated that a final decision regarding the Overlay District has not been made.

Mr. Voss questioned the inclusion of Use 275-22J – Travel trailer/recreational vehicles storage in the RB-1 District. Due to the smaller lots, it might not be an appropriate use in this district.

There was a discussion regarding the proposed front yard setback which is a “Build to Line” of 5 to 15 ft. or possibly an average of adjacent or nearby properties. The method of calculating average setbacks as defined in the Conservation District Overlay was reviewed.

The proposed lot width requirement for a two-family dwelling was discussed. It was explained that many two-family dwellings are on two separate lots. The definition in the existing ordinance was read to explain how the lot width would be measured.

The proposed requirement for averaging the heights of adjacent or nearby buildings in the Conservation Overlay District was discussed. Since a 15% deviation from the average is permitted, there was a concern that a building could be greater than 35 ft. which is the current maximum height.

There was a discussion regarding architectural requirements in areas outside of the Historic District. Mr. Kimberly noted that architectural guidelines could be built into the Conservation District Overlay. If this were done, it would have to be established how these would be regulated and who makes the determination if the proposed architectural design meets the requirements outside of the Historic District.

Mr. Bellafronte stated that it would require a tremendous effort to apply architectural guidelines outside of the Conservation District and it would add another layer of review of a proposed application.

Mr. Kimberly discussed that it would be possible to require variations in the roof styles in a larger development to encourage more variety. Mr. Voss stated that there are not many large lots where there would be multiple buildings in a development.

Mr. Voss said one concern is if a new building is being constructed in an area where most of the existing structures are smaller that a new building could be large by maximizing on the allowable building coverage and height.

Mr. Bellafronte asked if there has been an analysis of the existing buildings and lot sizes. Mr. Voss stated that there was a report on existing non-conformities that had been previously provided to the Planning Commission, Mr. Voss stated that they would provide this past information to Mr. Bellafronte and Mr. Greenberg.

Mr. Voss questioned why the side yard for a Townhouse listed the side yard as “each” when at least one side is connected to the adjacent building. There was a discussion of requiring a “grocer’s alley” between units to allow access from the front of the building to the rear of the building. The walkway could be shared via an easement, or each access could be on an individual lot so that access to the rear was under the control of the individual unit owner. Mr. Kimberly stated he could bring pictures of the “grocer’s alley” to the next meeting.

Mr. Voss asked if the proposed changes in lot sizes would encourage subdividing existing properties.

Discussion of Conservation District Overlay

There was a discussion regarding the requirements in the Conservation District Overlay for front yard setback, height and floor area be within 15% of the average of the adjacent properties. It was discussed that “floor area” should be changed to “footprint”.

The language for the section on “building height” should be clarified. The either/or statement should be separated from the statement in “c” in the same section.

The potential purpose of the Conservation District Overlay was discussed for the new Planning Commission members.

The extents of the Conservation District Overlay were discussed. It was suggested that the Overlay does not need to cover the entire RB-2 District.

The “demolition” requirements in the Conservation District Overlay were discussed. It was questioned if a portion of an existing structure could be demolished. It was stated that it would depend on the definition of “demolition”. It was noted that the current Zoning Ordinance does not define “demolition”; therefore, the standard definition would apply. It was stated that the criteria listed that would allow demolition should clearly state that all three items listed are required to be able to demolish an existing building. The requirement that the applicant would need to provide “evidence that no sales or rentals have been possible during a 12-month period of significant marketing” was discussed. It was felt that an applicant could set the rent at a high rate to impact the ability to rent the building. It was questioned who would determine if the applicant provided adequate evidence that there was no feasible use for the property. The type of evidence required should be further defined.

Mr. Bellafronte stated that sometimes that an older building becomes too expensive to maintain. Mr. Kimberly stated that more uses could be permitted for reuse of an older structure such as a distillery, a bed & breakfast or small retail or provide relief of parking requirements to keep older structures. Mr. Voss asked if the alternative uses could be a Conditional Use to allow for review by Council. Mr. Kimberly stated he will offer some suggestions to encourage saving older structures.

There was further discussion about the need for an Overlay District which would require another layer of approvals.

BCPC will prepare additional recommendations prior to the next meeting.

The agenda items for **CC District Revisions** and **Protection of Historic Resources** were not discussed due to the time.

Meeting Adjourned: 9:03 pm