

## **TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION**

### ***Planning Commission***

#### **Issue Briefing**

**Topic:** Amendment Plan - 742 Argyle Road, Wynnewood, Torah Academy

**Prepared by:** Christopher Leswing, Director, Building and Planning Department

**Date:** November 8, 2019

**I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:**

Approval of an Amendment to the approved Waiver of Land Development Plan.

**II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:**

Amendments to approved plans are subject to the approval of the Board of Commissioners.

**III. Current Policy Or Practice (If Applicable):**

N/A

**IV. Other Relevant Background Information:**

In January 2017, the Board of Commissioners approved a Waiver of Land Development Plan showing the construction of a 555 sq. ft. vestibule addition onto the existing building that houses Torah Academy to serve as a secure entrance. Other aspects of the project included an extensive interior modernization of the entire building including spatial reorganization, upgrades to mechanical equipment and replacement of all windows. Other minor improvements included landscaping, fencing and the relocation of an existing trash enclosure. The existing 6-foot-high estate fence was to be extended along the Argyle Road and the W. Wynnewood Road frontage of the site. The project did not increase the number of faculty, staff or students nor did it add any impervious surface to the site since the addition was constructed over existing paved areas.

In addition to appearing in front of the Planning Commission, Building and Planning Committee and Board of Commissioners, since the site is a Class II resource on the Historic Resource Inventory, the applicant also appeared before the Historical Commission to review the changes to the exterior of the building.

During the land development and Historical Commission review process, the applicant presented plans indicating that the proposed mechanical unit for the renovated building would be housed on the roof of the building in a section that was depressed from the rest of the building.

In June of this year, staff began receiving calls from adjoining property owners who stated that a large mechanical unit had been installed on the western side of the building. After inspecting the site, staff issued a violation letter informing Torah Academy that they were in violation of their approved land development plan.

Staff recommended the mechanical unit be removed and placed on the roof as was shown on the approved plans. Torah indicated that was not practical and subsequently submitted a request to amend the approved plan to maintain the current location. They also submitted a request to revise the approved location of the fence.

On September 23, 2019, the Historical Commission reviewed the revised plans and recommended approval of the brick screen, with the addition of patterned recessed openings using the historic elements of the school building as precedent in a pattern compatible with the building's existing fenestration openings to break down the mass of the two-sided wall, as supported by the neighbors. The Commission also recommended approval of the relocation of the fence along Argyle Road and the removal of the paved surfaces as proposed. The Commission agreed to convene a subcommittee to review the final design of the screen wall and any changes to the coping or base.

When appearing in front of the Historical Commission, the applicant indicated that they would paint any portion of the cooling tower visible to the neighbors from their properties, to be determined before the subcommittee meets.

The Subcommittee has met and reviewed and approved the redesigned wall as well as the color of the cooling tower. Based upon an inspection of the site the week of November 4<sup>th</sup>, the cooling tower has been painted.

**V. Impact on Township Finances:**

There is no impact on Township finances.

**VI. Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends the Board of Commissioners approve the Amendment Plan subject to the following conditions of approval.

1. The final fence location shall be field located with the Township Arborist to minimize impacts to existing mature trees along Argyle Road. The locations of all existing trees shall be shown on the fence location plan.
2. The portion of the fence along W. Wynnewood Road shall be relocated to extend off of the corner of the building so that it intersects with the portion of the fence on Argyle Road at a right angle.
3. The brick screen shall include patterned recessed openings using the historic elements of the school building as precedent in a pattern compatible with the building's existing fenestration openings to break down the mass of the two-sided wall.