

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION

Board of Commissioners Meeting

Issue Briefing

Topic: Preliminary Land Development Plan, 549 Bowman Avenue, Merion Elementary School, Merion Station

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Date: April 7, 2020

I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:

Approval of a Preliminary Land Development Plan for 549 Bowman Avenue, Merion Elementary School. The plan shows the construction of a 4,400 sq. ft. modular classroom building, associated walkways, fencing and the installation of 16 previously approved surface parking spaces previously held in reserve. The plan also shows the creation of a 62-space reserve parking lot.

II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:

The Board of Commissioners must review and render decisions on all land development applications.

III. Current Policy Or Practice (If Applicable):

N/A

IV. Other Relevant Background Information:

The Planning Commission reviewed the proposal at their March 3, 2020 meeting and expressed concern with the fencing proposed along Rockland Avenue. The Planning Commission recommended three conditions to ensure that the proposed fencing would not completely restrict access, be an appropriate style, and be located so as to not interfere with the existing sledding hill. Conditions #12 & #13 addressed fencing style and location and required:

12. The Rockland Avenue fence will be an estate style similar to that provided around the residential edges of similar institutions in the Township.
13. The applicant will work with staff on potential design modifications to the proposed Rockland Avenue gate to maintain the established open campus/community facility relationship between the school and the neighborhood and preserve the sledding hill.

Following the Planning Commission review the applicant provided staff with a revised plan, prepared by Glackin Thomas Panzak, dated March 18, 2020, which shows the previously proposed chain link fence replaced with a six-foot-high estate style fence that is relocated towards Rockland Avenue. Staff feels that this revision satisfies the concern expressed by the Planning Commission and complies with their recommended conditions #12 & #13. Therefore, staff is recommending that Condition #12 & #13 be removed and be replaced with the following:

NEW CONDITION: The Rockland Avenue fence and entry gate will be located and designed substantially in accordance with that shown on the attached Overall Landscape Plan, Sheet LP-1 (Draft 03/18/2020) prepared by Glackin Thomas Panzak.

As mentioned above, the Planning Commission expressed concern that the proposed fencing would restrict public access to a community facility. To address the issue of access the Planning Commission recommended:

14. The gate along Rockland Avenue will be closed only during recess in the rear field.

Following the Planning Commission review staff determined that it would be appropriate to maintain a consistent approach for community access to public school properties. Staff is recommending that Condition #14 be replaced with the access requirements recently imposed on the new middle school at 1860 W. Montgomery Avenue, requiring:

NEW 14. The applicant shall, in consultation with the Township, provide a means of pedestrian access to the property from Rockland Avenue that could be utilized at appropriate times when students are not present on the property. Applicant shall have the absolute right to alter, restrict, or revoke any pedestrian access previously granted if it determines, in its sole discretion, that such pedestrian access is not in the best interest of the School District, however, applicant shall use good faith efforts and collaborate with the Township to consider other alternative means of pedestrian access for the property.

This language is consistent with the condition of approval as modified by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Lower Merion Township and the Lower Merion School District to resolve litigation over the approval of the new middle school at 1860 W. Montgomery Avenue.

Lastly, as included in the Township Engineer's review the Planning Commission required the following condition of approval related to the required stormwater management:

23. The increased volume of stormwater generated by the proposed development for the twenty-five (25) year storm shall be recharged. Calculations documenting this shall be submitted.

Following the Planning Commissions review the applicant completed soil testing and received poor results and is therefore requesting the condition be revised to allow for flexibility in the event that compliance is not feasible.

Staff has reviewed the requested change with the Township Engineer and he is agreeable to the changes proposed by the applicant and determined that the revision would still meet the code requirement. The revised condition requires the following:

NEW 23. If feasible, the increased volume of stormwater generated by the proposed development for the twenty-five (25) year storm shall be recharged. Calculations documenting this shall be submitted. If not feasible, additional rate control (10 year to 2 year reduction) shall be provided at Temporary SWM Basin #300.

V. Impact On Township Finances:

N/A

VI. Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Board approve the application subject to the changes to the conditions noted above.