



**CITY OF ABSECON
Municipal Complex
500 Mill Road
Absecon, New Jersey 08201**

PLANNING & ZONING
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**NOVEMBER 8, 2023
PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES**

The meeting was called to order by Bob Preston at 6:30 p.m.

Flag Salute

Notification of Meeting

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Howell, Kirk, Reilly, Thompson, Strugala, Preston

ABSENT: Aleli, Horton, Gersh, Tiberio

ALSO PRESENT: Joe McGroarty, Board Attorney; Chris Eaton in for Andy Previti, Board Engineer and Chris Dochney, Board Planner

OLD BUSINESS:

VOTE: Minutes of October 11, 2023 meeting

Motion to approve – Lou Strugala – second – Jessica Thompson

All were in favor.

VOTE: D & R for Appl. #4-2023 for SNS Land Holdings LLC – 401 White Horse Pike – Block 207 – Lot 11 (the old hardware store) for preliminary and final site plan approval; conditional use approval and c variance relief for total sign area and maximum sign height.

Motion to approve – Betty Howell – second – Deb Reilly

Roll Call: Howell, yes; Reilly, yes; Thompson, yes; Strugala, yes; Preston, yes

NEW BUSINESS:

Appl. #6-2023 for 301 Absecon LLC – Block 224 – Lot 13-15 at 301 White Horse Pike for Preliminary and Final Major Site Plan Approval with "c" variance relief for proposed renovation and conversion of the existing Crest Motel into a 26-unit residence for veterans 55 and older.

Appearing were: Mike Lario, attorney for applicant; Bill McManus, planner and surveyor; Tom Roesch, engineer and Harry Harper, architect; Elliot Tawil, owner; Gladys Krasicki, operator

Mike – the applicant wishes to convert the old motel into a 26-unit residence for veterans, 55 years of age or older. This property has been in existence for years and it has become deteriorated. The applicant purchased it in March of 2023 and the overlay use allows for this type of living. It has become a national epidemic to house veterans. They have a hard time finding stable, affordable housing. They want to do that with this project. There would be 26 total living units and 4 will be specifically affordable, which will count towards the city's affordable housing requirement. New roofing; siding; stucco; lighting and landscaping will be done and the inside of the rooms will all be gutted and remodeled. A bulk variance is needed for the room size, where 600 sq. ft. is required and we will have 225 sq. ft. per room. HUD and VA are very involved in this project and they have regulations that need to be followed and these rooms have been designed to meet those standards. We feel the rooms still provide an important stable environment and there is a great demand for them.

Bill McManus – Marked exhibit A1, the site plan cover sheet into evidence. He then went over the location and its conditions. It is a permitted use under the overlay zone. It is an ideal spot for a 55 and over targeting veterans. This is not a nursing home; the residents live on their own and are ambulatory and get around on their own. This project is especially helpful with the city receiving 4 more units toward their affordable housing requirement.

Exhibit A2, a survey of the existing conditions (sheet 2 of the application) was marked and Bill walked the board through it and explained the property.

Exhibit A3, proposed/revised site plan that includes some of Andy's and Chris' comments. The parking lot needs some work since it is in bad shape; largely due to a very large tree on the westerly side of the property. The old manager's office will be made into two units. There is one handicapped space there, but it does not meet the standards now. They propose to make two spaces and carve out some asphalt, so they are compliant with the code. The striping in the parking lot will be redone to meet standards. They propose a one-way clockwise route for circulation purposes and eliminating some parking spaces that have conflict with that route, which was suggested by our professionals. The small building at the westerly end will be attached to the longer building, by way of adding an office and a manager's apartment in that area. This will make it three groups of buildings, instead of four. Most of the exterior changes will happen on the westerly side of the property and that is because the parking surface is in poor condition and buckling and heaved up mainly due to the large tree there. It is right in the middle of the drive aisle and it is going to be removed, as well as all the root system, so it does not do more damage. Since the tree needs to be removed, they will be losing one parking space and will need a variance for one parking space since they will only have 27 and 28 is required. They feel the variance is justified since it will make the parking area better, as well as the traffic flow on the property.

Bob – that tree is probably 200 years or more and it is in great condition as to what he can see and personally he hates to see it go as part of the history of Absecon.

Mike -it does really look bad in the location that is there. The drive aisle would be clear then for easier access and for emergency vehicles if needed. He does not see how that tree ended up there, but the roots will continue to grow and cause a lot of damage. If there was a way to save it, we would.

Bob – inquired about the gazebo and if they had the plans to show us what it will look like. The bocce courts look like they are on a sloped site, and he wanted to know how that would be addressed.

Bill – it is the Arlington model from Home Depot that he passed around. It was marked it exhibit A5. The bocce courts suggestion was to realign them, do some grading and turn them to run with the contour. The horse shoe pits do have a drop and we might be able to move the gazebo down and do the same thing as the bocce courts.

Lou – asked if each unit would have their own individual HVAC unit.

Harry – yes, they will and they will sit on the back wall, so you do not see rows of wall units outside.

Lou – are the buildings required to be sprinklered?

Harry – no, but they require a fire alarm system with a central alarm system in the office. It is a heat and smoke detector and it will read which room it is coming from.

Mike – we received the police and fire review letters and they both had no concerns.

Gladys Krasicki – gave a little background of herself. She is a disabled veteran and retired from the service in 2018 and always had a dream to provide housing to veterans. There are so many veterans looking for a place to live and there is certainly a need for housing. These rooms have been inspected by the VA and HUD to make sure they meet their requirements. Mike questioned her to explain the procedure of acquiring the housing. She explained the process of applying for a room and who qualifies. Every veteran is assigned a social worker and care manager through the VA. The property itself will have a manager 24/7. As to the variance for the room sizes, we originally were going to have 13 rooms instead of 26 and make them bigger, but the VA said they would rather have more rooms. A 12-month lease is required of the tenants.

Betty – said this looks like a great project and asked what they would name it.

Gladys - Veteran's Village of Absecon. It will be an onsite manager in the small unit in the back, this way someone is there all the time. Most residents do not drive and some never will. It is not a full HUD project, but they can get vouchers from the Veterans Administration. They will try to get services for the veterans and help them out. She feels there is a need for this.

Bob – asked what happens if you get one bad egg in there.

Gladys – there are certain requirements for them to retain their voucher, so if they are not doing what they need to do, then they would have to find an alternative place to go. They will police each other, so it is not ruined for everyone.

Bob - how are the four affordable housing units going to be different?

Gladys – once they qualify for affordable housing, we would take their application.

Deb – what could happen in 4 years or so if this shuts down.

Mike – these units would be deed restricted and the city will get their housing credits. It is a big deal to have those 4 units. The approval runs with the land, so someone could take it over, but there is always going to be the deed restriction.

Eliot Tawil – owner and applicant – spoke about his vision for the project and how it came about. It is a rewarding project. The veterans have given so much to all of us, and we should help them. We would like to start as soon as possible if we get our approvals.

PUBLIC PORTION

Patricia Tatum – an air force veteran and president of south jersey regional standdown and other positions. She has taught with Gladys in the church and has a passion for the homeless and at-risk veterans. She appreciates what the board does and wanted them to know that homelessness is a large factor in veteran's suicides. She appreciates

Jane Babli — Atco, NJ - a past department president of the American Legion Auxiliary and has served on Veterans Haven South as a chairman, which has been open almost 29 years as a volunteer. She has seen them come and go, but to watch homeless veterans need a place to live and be able to stay there, is wonderful. At the Haven South, they can only stay two years. We recently just had a suicide there, and this one close. We are lucky to have vans, but they all know public transportation. She has guys waiting to come in. This will be a great asset for down here.

CLOSE PUBLIC PORTION

Chris D. – with the updated plans, most of his comments and recommendations were addressed. He is also sad to see the tree, but he does not want to override any engineers as to how it will impact the site. He has never seen a tree covered in asphalt and still be able to thrive. There are a few waivers and two variances required: one for the room sizes and a parking variance. All the other variances are existing. 55 and older is required by the overlay district and the 4 affordable units as well. In his opinion, he feels all 26 units should count as affordable housing for the city, but they are only required to deed restrict 4 of them as part of an inclusionary development. The other 22 units are not standard market rate units and feels they will all qualify for affordable housing, but he does not know how it will get counted by the courts in 2025. They could provide a list of each of the other 22 units, with a statement of the annual rent charged and the income of that tenant and it would probably be enough to show that all 26 should qualify for affordable housing credits.

Bob – given the request for a variance for the room size, can you comment on the quality-of-life issue and the ability of the 225 sq. ft. room satisfying the needs of the residents?

Chris – frankly it depends on how much stuff everyone has. He personally lived in a 400 sq. ft. apartment in Asbury Park for 5 years.

Chris Eaton (appearing for Andy) – Andy's report is dated 10/17. Chris personally met with Mr. Roesch at the property and most of the comments have been addressed in the revised plans, but Andy has not seen them yet. There are some issues that need addressing: more signage to direct the traffic flow around the site; recreational components should be addressed with regards to being ADA compliant; they are taking care of portions of the paved surface and it is rough to say the least, but most of it is in bad shape and it all should be at least milled and overlayed, but they are open to any other suggestions by the applicant. He does understand the concerns with the costs.

Mike – we are not in disagreement that there are areas in dire need of repair, and that is what this plan revision is. We looked at the areas that need it the most. The goal is to do the entire parking area, but currently, it is not part of this proposal. The remaining areas will be in a functional condition.

Bill M – went through the positive and negative criteria. The variances are for room size and parking. They feel it qualifies under the C1 and C2 criteria; which is a having a hardship and advancing the purposes of zoning. The density proposed is appropriate, since they are using the existing infrastructure. A desirable and visual environment is being creating by the substantial upgrades that are being done. They feel there is no detriment to the public good and it is not impacting the neighboring properties.

Bob – inquired about the lighting at the site

Chris E. – both Andy's and Chris' reports covered the lighting issues and the applicant is proposing that they will be examined before installed.

Chris D. – he does not have a problem making the lighting approval being part of the resolution conditions and it would be better to submit a lighting plan, so we do not go out to the site and then they need to be moved or changed out.

Jessica – this is a great plan and addition to the city and will help people

Bob – his appreciation and respect and the need for this project, over shadow the love of the tree

Gladys – said that the tree that needs to be taken down will have a table and benches made from it

Joe – the motion would be to approve the preliminary and final major site plan with a parking variance; the size of the unit variance and a variance for all the existing conditions of the property. This will include all conditions of approval that will be shown on the updated site plan to be submitted for final review. They have agreed to provide annual financial information regarding the tenants, so that the city can possibly have additional compliance with the affordable housing act. They will also submit a lighting plan to be approved by our professionals before installation.

Motion was made by Lou Strugala – second – Michele Kirk

ROLL CALL: Howell, yes; Kirk, yes; Reilly, yes; Thompson, yes; Strugala, yes; Preston, yes

DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED ORDINANCE 17-2023 AMENDING THE CODE OF THE CITY OF ABSECON, CHAPTER 224, LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT, ARTICLE XXIII – SIGNS

Joe – explained the council introduced this revision of the sign ordinance at their last meeting and we need to review and comment on it. The board decided to discuss it the December 13th meeting.

Chris – spoke as to what it is and board's role in it. It would be providing comments back to the governing body or any feedback; you will not be approving or denying anything. By law, they are required to address these comments on the record before being adopted. In a nutshell, it would be allowing feather signs with conditions stated in the ordinance. He does not have many comments on this. He does not see it as being a substantial departure from the master plan.

Bob – had some comments about the placement of them and liability issues.

Joe – Chris could do a letter or report with our comments that could be submitted to council

APPROVAL OF BILLS

Chris Dochney - \$391.50 for BigLand LLC and \$696.00 for SNS Land Holdings LLC

Andy Previti - \$2,268.50 for SNS Land Holdings LLC; \$655.25 for ENV Growers; \$185.00 for Crest Motel

Joe McGroarty – \$104.00 for ENV Growers; \$182.00 for Big Land LLC; \$1,443.00 for SNS Land Holdings; \$520 for 301 Absecon LLC

Motion to approve – Jessica Thompson – second – Michele Kirk

All were in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn – Lou Strugala – second – Michele Kirk

All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,



Tina Lawler, Secretary

Approved: 12-13-2023