

BOROUGH OF BERNARDSVILLE
Mayor & Borough Council Meeting Minutes
August 10, 2023

Mayor Canose called this meeting to order at 7:00 p.m remotely on Zoom only. Present were Council Members Jay Ambelang, Diane Greenfield, Jena McCredie, Chad McQueen, Al Ribeiro, and Christine Zamarra. Also present were Nancy Malool, Administrator, Anthony Suriano, Borough Clerk, and John Pidgeon, Borough Attorney.

STATEMENT OF PRESIDING OFFICER

Notice of this meeting was provided to the Bernardsville News, Courier News and the Star Ledger, filed with the Municipal Clerk and posted on the Municipal Bulletin Board on July 25, 2023.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

PRESENTATIONS

Architect Presentation for Palmer Property, Kevin Smith of Robert A.M. Stern Architects showed slides regarding the redevelopment of the Palmer property. Mr. Smith spoke about the following:

Site Opportunities, maintain a vista from Mine Brook Road and train station; create a point of arrival traveling north on Mount Airy Road; get parking entry off Mount Airy Road; provide discreet off-street loading to improve Mount Airy Road pedestrian experience; maintain Palmer Building as historic memory and terminus of Anderson Hill Road; fix dangerous pedestrian condition at Palmer Building corner; expand and activate streetscape along south side of Morristown Road; complete the retail triangle of Olcott Square; create a signature town center building on Olcott Square.

Historic Bernardsville & Project Precedent, slides with historic pictures of Bernardsville.

Proposed Design, slides showing the proposed design which included the first floor plan, a proposed view along Morristown Road, lower plan number one, a proposed view along Olcott Square, a typical floor plan, and a roof plan.

OPEN SESSION

Mayor Canose opened the meeting to the public.

David Spence, property (commercial) owner of 17 Morristown Road, said he is very excited about this project. He said the scale of the project in the last rendering shown suggests that there's stone work going all the way up. He said in that view it seemed a little heavy and rather large in height. Regarding the eaves or fascia at the roof line, Mr. Spence said he wondered if

the architects can take a look at whether that can be scaled down a bit. He said the overall scale of the building will be the largest and highest building in downtown Bernardsville.

Rhonda Pisano, Mount Airy Road in Bernardsville said the picture shown illustrates how the Palmer building is dwarfed and it really looks out of sync. She said the proposed building is a little too high and would like to see the roof lines brought down. She said it appears there are three sides, a u-shape building with a courtyard in the middle, and we don't really get a sense of that from the plans as we're not seeing it in the other direction coming down towards the train station. She said she's glad to hear that they're going to be removing the addition on the Palmer building. She said she is concerned about underground parking and the number of spaces. She said she is also concerned about the egress and ingress of having just one driveway.

Rosalie Ballantine, Pheasant Hill Drive, said it's a wonderful concept and development. She likes all the attention paid to detail and fitting into our town. She said she wishes it could be one story less so it would be three stories.

Aaron Duff, Crestview Drive, said it looks very similar to the plans that were submitted to the Planning Board in March when Ms. Greenfield was asking Advance Realty and the council to release the architectural plans for the Palmer property. He said the only thing he does not see are the elevations that were submitted. He said you cannot get a sense of scale from the drawings that were shown from low angles that cut off most of the mass of the building. Regarding the history of the site, Mr. Duff said he wondered if the architects took into consideration the history of the two buildings that are going to be raised for the apartment towers as they are both prominently featured in our HPAC's historical downtown walking tour. He said it's one of the oldest buildings in our historic downtown district and mentioned specifically in our Master Plan as a building that should be preserved in any future development of Olcott Square. He said he was not able to see the chart as far as the unit mix is concerned He said when the Planning Board was reviewing this project it was represented that it would be mostly one bedroom but it looks like a lot more two bedrooms which means greater need for parking and greater impact on schools. He said from what he can tell, the sidewalks of the redevelopment plan call for nine feet all the way around but it doesn't look like you get that on the corner by the Palmer building which is being preserved. He said it looks significantly less and it's been stated by a couple of council members at prior meetings that it's one of the most dangerous corners in the borough. He said the underlying zoning in the downtown core requires eight feet sidewalks plus two feet setback so it's 10 feet from the curb to the building.

Christopher Otteau, Post Kunhardt Road, said he and Ross Zazzarino are running for Council. They are very pleased to see a project moving in the right direction. He said he is a top five real estate expert in the state, he's on the Planning Board and getting involved to make sure that the town is redeveloped and it's done responsibly. He said this project is a great step in the right direction and applauds the efforts of the developer for getting us here tonight. He said there's a lot more work to be done and what we don't want is any more hair salons. He said he heard the Essex Building on Essex Avenue will have 10 more hair salons opening up in one suite and that is the old Bernardsville and we want to get away from that. We want to put some life into our downtown and do it responsibly.

Robyn Jacobson, Mount Harmony Road, said she is excited about this project. She said she moved from Bedminster to Bernardsville three years ago on the promise that the entire downtown would be developed and walkable. She applauded Advanced Realty and feels that the quality is top-notch and what we're going to get here is amazing. She urged neighbors and community members to be on board with this project because anything is better than what we have there now. She said she has lots of friends that are entrepreneurs that are opening restaurants and businesses in other towns and do not want to come to Bernardsville with how our town looks right now. She said this will only help the values of our residences and our community as a whole.

Ross Zazzarino, Childsworth Avenue, thanked the Mayor and Council for their careful planning of this project. He said he is excited for this plan because it's a step forward in the revitalization of our downtown, it provides upgraded units for businesses, provides the needed parking for those units as well as increases sidewalk space. He said it's also an opportunity to stay in town for those who need to downsize and an opportunity for future homeowners to establish themselves in our community.

Jessica Walker, business owner in Bernardsville, said she agrees with the comments made by Robyn Jacobson.

Kathy Peachey, Chilton Street, said she appreciated listening to the comments and being able to watch the concept plan and listen to the presentation. She said on page 20 of the rendering she thought the Palmer building in comparison to the other buildings seemed a little dwarfed.

Althea Ridley, Campbell Road, said she thinks the rendering is beautiful. She said she has one question regarding the height since many people have commented that one less story might be better from a scale perspective within the road. She said since it appears that the architectural rendering focuses on featuring what they are considering the base to be, which is the Palmer building, has consideration been done to more of an American look and something that would go back to the earlier roots within the town. She said this might solve a problem with regard to the height.

Mr. McQueen said it was really great that Advance Realty came to the meeting tonight. He said this is a private piece of property and it's always hard when local governments step into private affairs. He said he is very thankful for the partnership with Advance Realty and it was nice of them to spend time talking to the public at this meeting.

Ms. Greenfield said she is concerned about the lack of adequate parking for the project. She said it's not enough parking for the guests, patrons, and employees of the 10,000 square feet of retail and office space that are going to be at that location. She said 138 spots is really not going to be adequate. Ms. Greenfield said she is also concerned about where moving trucks and delivery trucks will be loading/unloading and how that will add to the traffic when they leave the property. She said she is concerned with Fire Department accessibility. She said in the case of an emergency situation, will the fire truck be able to get into the underground parking lot and have access to the back part of the apartment building that is facing the train tracks?

Mayor Canose said the issues mentioned by Ms. Greenfield will be addressed at the Planning Board and there will be expert testimony on parking and traffic.

Ms. Zamarra thanked everybody for taking the time out of their summer to come to this meeting. She thanked the architects for a very thorough presentation. She said she agrees with Mr. McQueen and appreciates Advance Realty as they were very patient and responsive to us throughout the process. She said many towns have faced a lot of the same concerns that Ms. Greenfield and many residents have brought up. Ms. Zamarra said those concerns are not insurmountable and she knows that we can work through them. She said there are a lot of surface parking lots in town that will come into play to help get our parking problems solved. Ms. Zamarra said the drawings as presented look beautiful.

Mayor Canose said this is not typical and architects don't usually do this for the public. She thanked Advance Realty for doing this presentation at tonight's meeting.

Ms. Greenfield said the small courtyard area in the center of the u-shaped building that's on this one acre property is for residents only and not for the general public. She said there is no garden or green space for the public on this property in this project.

Mr. Ribeiro thanked everyone and appreciated the time that Advance Realty put into the presentation. He said he thought it was very well done. He said he mostly wanted to thank the public and it was excellent to have 109 people here tonight which really shows the interest and the excitement for downtown revitalization and this project.

Kerry Haselton, Mine Brook Road, said she wanted to follow up on surface parking lots taking up some of the burden when this project goes through. She said she is struggling to think what surface parking lots would do. She said they appear full and gave examples of the train station lot especially by Grill 73, the bank by the old Library is privately owned, and the Library lot is full even when kids are not in school. She said the Council, Developer, and Planning Board should think about whether there's really going to be surface parking lots picking up, particularly since we're going to be putting in affordable housing in the one that's directly behind this development in the near future. Ms. Haselton said she also has the same concerns as others have brought up earlier in the meeting about the height of the building.

Hearing no further comments, Mayor Canose closed the open session to the public.

CLOSED SESSION

It was moved to adjourn to an executive session to consider Contract Negotiations and that the time when and circumstances under which the matter can be disclosed to the public is when it is finally resolved. The motion was seconded and approved with six yes votes.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m. _____