

Friends of Abolition Hall

UPDATE #4: Corson Homestead and Proposed Townhouse Development

January 30, 2018

Planning Commission Meeting

On January 23, K. Hovnanian's team presented its Conditional Use Site Plan to the Whitemarsh Township Planning Commission. Neighbors and other concerned citizens filled the large meeting room, and listened closely as commission members questioned the developer's engineer, traffic consultant, and lawyers about traffic volume, traffic flow, parking, Cross County Trail connections, storm water management, and townhouse density. Their answers were vague at best. Commission Chairman Vincent Manuele then asked the team to respond to the concerns raised by the Montgomery County Planning Commission. To this they said that despite the "cc" notation on the County's document, they had not received those comments. After a ten-minute recess to review the comments, the team returned and asserted that until their engineer had the opportunity to reflect upon the recommendations, they could not respond. At this point, the Planning Commission decided to continue its deliberation until February 13 (the next regularly scheduled meeting).

In consideration of the large public turnout, the chair proceeded to open the floor to comments. Sydelle Zove, who has been coordinating the activities of the Friends of Abolition Hall, kicked off the public comment period. Her [prepared statement is available here](#). Ms. Zove drew attention to the presence of an environmentally sensitive wetland that could be imperiled by the proposed townhouse development. Approximately 12 people followed Ms. Zove, each raising concerns about issues such as the loss of open space, increased traffic congestion, increased flooding and erosion, and the threat to the historic integrity of the land and structures.

Planning Commission Meeting -- Part 2

The developer's team is expected to **return on February 13 when the Planning Commission re-convenes**. Once again, the public will be invited to comment. We anticipate that Commissioners will then take a vote – to recommend approval (with or without conditions), to recommend denial, or to simply refrain from taking a position but agree to allow the plan to move on to the Board of Supervisors.

Next up -- Conditional Use Hearing

At a date yet to be determined, the Whitemarsh Township Board of Supervisors (BOS) will hold a public hearing on the Conditional Use Application. The BOS fills a quasi-judicial role in this formal proceeding, similar to that of the Zoning Hearing Board. The developer's attorney will present testimony supporting the assertion that the plan meets the requirements for conditional use approval, as specified by the Township's Zoning Ordinance. At its discretion, the BOS can choose to hear from members of the public without requiring that each enter an appearance as a party to the matter. A court stenographer will document the proceedings.

Party Status and Legal Representation

The Friends of Abolition Hall is conferring with counsel regarding the Conditional Use Hearing, and welcomes contributions in support of its opposition to conditional use approval; several Friends are considering the possibility of asserting legal standing as parties to this matter.

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