

CONSHOHOCKEN BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION
REPORT TO CONSHOHOCKEN BOROUGH COUNCIL

PROJECT: SORA West (Second Final Amended Land Development)
PROPERTY: Fayette Street and West Elm Street
MEETING DATE: November 12, 2020
ZONING: SP-4 Specially Planned Zoning District
ACTION DATE: November 12, 2020

COMMISSION ACTION: Recommendation of approval of amended final land development, subject to the following conditions: (1) applicant shall comply with all previous conditions imposed upon the project, subject to the acknowledgement that the plans have been updated to reflect the changes proposed as part of this Second Final Amended Land Development Application; (2) applicant shall comply with the review letters of the Borough’s professionals, as set forth hereinbelow; and (3) applicant shall work with the Borough’s staff to confirm that the driveways connecting to and from Elm Street are appropriately signed to ensure pedestrian and vehicular safety (internal and external to the site).

MATERIALS REVIEWED: The Planning Commission reviewed the following materials:

1. Amended Final Land Development plans, consisting of sheets 1 through 24, dated July 2, 2018 and last revised October 21, 2020, as prepared by Pennoni Associates, Inc.
2. Hotel Architectural Plans consisting of 13 sheets, dated August 31, 2020 and last revised October 21, 2020, as prepared by DLR Group
3. Hotel Landscape Architecture Plans consisting of 4 sheets, dated September 3, 2020 and last revised October 21, 2020, as prepared by Pennoni Associates, Inc.
4. Office-Plaza Landscape Plans consisting of 6 sheets (A.LD.2, A.LD.3, L100-L102, and AL1.101) dated August 16, 2018 and last revised October 21, 2020, as prepared by Gensler
5. Plaza Easement Exhibit consisting of 1 sheet, dated September 11, 2018 and last revised October 21, 2020, as prepared by Pennoni Associates, Inc.
6. ADA Lift Exhibit consisting of Sheet 1 of 2, dated October 21, 2020, as prepared by Pennoni Associates, Inc.
7. Legal Descriptions for SORA West Public Access Easement 1 and SORA West Public Plaza Area, dated October 21, 2020, as prepared by Pennoni Associates, Inc.

8. Review letter of Borough Engineer dated November 6, 2020
9. Review letter of Borough Zoning Officer dated October 28, 2020
10. Review letter of Borough Traffic Engineer, dated November 6, 2020
11. Review letter of Borough Fire Marshal, dated October 28, 2020
12. Review letter of Montgomery County Planning Commission, dated November 2, 2020
13. Applicant's responses to each of the aforementioned review letters, dated November 12, 2020

MEETING SUMMARY:

This is an application for amended final land development approval. This is the second time the applicant has sought to amend final land development approval for the unified development that is the subject of this application. This second application for amended final land development approval seeks to combine the previously proposed hotel and brew pub into an 8-story, 17,211 square foot footprint hotel/retail/restaurant building with 127 rooms and no parking below.

The following members of the Planning Commission were present: Stacy Ellam, Chair, Elizabeth MacNeal, Vice Chair, and Judy Smith-Kressley, Member. Also present for the Borough were Borough Solicitor, Michael Peters, Esquire, Borough Engineer, Karen MacNair, P.E., the Borough's Traffic Engineer for the project, Al Federico, P.E., and Executive Assistant to the Borough Manager, Brittany Rogers.

Presenting for the applicant were Robert Gundlach, Esquire, applicant's attorney; Carl St. Pierre, P.E. applicant's engineer; Jennifer Rosenberg and Rich Gottlieb with Keystone Property Group; Steven Anderson with the proposed hotel company; and Scott Boyle, applicant's architect.

Mr. Gundlach presented the project to the Planning Commission in general terms, explaining that the proposed changes are to reduce the size of the hotel and the restaurant area, given the realities of current market conditions, including specifically the effect of COVID-19. Mr. Gundlach walked the Planning Commission through the proposed changes to accommodate the changes to the hotel and restaurant, including some changes to the public plaza area to accommodate the changed layout of the hotel and restaurant.

Carl St. Pierre, applicant's engineer reviewed the site plan with the Planning Commission and further explained the changes to the site, including specifically the

connector between the historic firehouse and the hotel, with the historic firehouse serving as the entrance to the hotel.

Scott Boyle, applicant's architect walked the Planning Commission through the proposed hotel's design features, including specifically use of the firehouse and connection thereto.

Mr. Gundlach explained that there are no additional waivers from the Borough's subdivision and land development ordinance in connection with this modified plan (from those previously granted).

Ms. MacNair explained that the response letter indicated that the applicant "would comply" with her review letter. Ms. MacNair pointed out a 12-14 foot wall shown on the plans that was not previously proposed. Chair Ellam inquired into the materials for the wall. Ms. MacNair stated that the wall was shown on the plans as being part-concrete and the loading area brick facing to match the hotel.

Mr. Federico replied that he had no issues with respect to the proposed plan.

Ms. MacNeal had questions regarding how the traffic flow would work around the hotel/restaurant building. Mr. St. Pierre explained how the drop off area would work, including the changes in elevation between the areas. Mr. St. Pierre explained how trucks would access and leave the loading dock. Ms. MacNair explained how the signage was proposed for the various ingresses and egresses to the Property from Elm Street and the methods proposed to control traffic coming and going to and from the site, as well as pedestrian traffic. Ms. MacNeal noted her concern that the area was properly laid out to be safe for pedestrians and drivers alike.

Ms. MacNeal asked whether the hotel would still be served by valet parking as originally proposed. Mr. Gottlieb explained that valet parking was dispensed with, because the parking garage now works well with the hotel entrance.

Ms. MacNeal questioned whether there was sufficient parking for the hotel and the conference areas shown on the floor plans. Mr. Federico explained that the conference rooms would be viewed as accessory to the hotel. Mr. Federico also explained that available parking has actually increased on the site as a result of the reduction in rooms and reduction in size of the restaurant space.

Ms. MacNeal asked what was located within the connector building. Mr. Boyle explained that the ground floor had a lobby and lounge and a kitchen with access to the loading area. The second floor is the restaurant and bar area.

Ms. Ellam asked questions regarding the restaurant area, including the capacity of the restaurant. Mr. Boyle explained that the capacity was 60 persons indoor and 48 persons outdoor on the first floor, and 195 persons on the second floor. Ms. Ellam asked whether an arm had been considered for the loading dock entrance, and Mr. St. Pierre explained the concern that that could cause a back-up out on Elm Street trying to get into the site.

Ms. Ellam asked where the entrance was to the garage for the public. Mr. Gundlach explained that the entrance had not changed. Ms. Ellam asked whether part of the firehouse building would be knocked down to accommodate the development, and Mr. Gundlach explained that the area currently used for banquets was being taken down.

Ms. Smith-Kressley explained that she agreed with incorporating the old firehouse into the hotel building and preferred the current proposed design to the old. Ms. Ellam and Ms. MacNeal echoed those comments.

The Planning Commission unanimously voted to recommend approval of amended final land development, subject to the conditions set forth above.