

WILKINS TOWNSHIP BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

PUBLIC HEARING (LERTA) MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2015

The Public Hearing (LERTA) of Monday, October 26, 2015 was brought to order at 6:30 PM by President Sylvia J. Martinelli. A quorum was present as follows:

Mrs. Martinelli Ms. Criner
Mr. Boyd Mr. Costa Mr. Wells

The purpose of the Public hearing is to listen to recommendations concerning the location of the boundaries of a proposed Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) district as determined by the criteria established in the Urban Redevelopment Law of 1945 (P.L. 991, No. 385) and the Neighborhood Assistance Act of 1967 (P.L. 636, No 292).

The title of the proposed ordinance is: "An Ordinance of the Board of Commissioners of Wilkins Township adopting the Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) program providing for tax exemption for certain deteriorated areas within the Township, providing for an exemption schedule and establishing standards and qualifications of participants."

In accordance with §4711-202 of Chapter 72 of the Pennsylvania Statutes, prior to enacting a LERTA, the Township is required to hold at least one public hearing to establish the boundaries of the LERTA. At that hearing, the Board of Commissioners shall hear the recommendations of the Planning Commission. The Wilkins Township Planning Commission met on Thursday, October 22, 2015. At that time, the Planning Commission unanimously recommended that that Board of Commissioners establish LERTA boundaries consistent with those properties falling within the C-1 Zoning Designation in the Route 22 corridor. Mr. Arnold, Township Engineer, provided copies of the map which will be attached to the proposed ordinance as Appendix A.

The recommendation of the LERTA boundaries was based upon a review of properties in the recommended corridor that meet the definitions "blighted area" as determined by the Urban Redevelopment Law. The following properties were highlighted for the Board of Commissioners:

1. Lot/Block 453-D-175; 1300 Rodi Road. This two story brick office building has been vacant for more than one year. The property is 4.05 acres and has an assessed value of \$611,400. The building previously housed Durr Marketing. The location of the building is such that it lacks light and open space due to inadequate planning of the area.
2. Lot/Block 542-E-95; 3412 William Penn Highway. This one story restaurant is located on 1.04 acres of ground. The current assessed value is \$825,000. The site was purchased by the current owner, DFK Monroeville in 2014 following the bankruptcy of the previous restaurant, D'Imperio's. The property has remained vacant since acquisition. Preliminary plans to raze the structure and construct a hotel were withdrawn due to inadequate parking. The property is located behind another structure (Wendy's) and relies upon easements from surrounding property owners for ingress and egress. The property is overgrown with weeds and has begun to accumulate trash.
3. Lot/Block 542-J-201; 600 Penn Center Boulevard. This building has been vacant since ProCare moved to Monroeville in 2009. This seven story structure has an assessed value of \$1,700,000 and is located on 3.53 acres of property. The property will require significant interior renovations prior to occupancy.
4. Lot/Block 542-K-35; 400 Penn Center Boulevard. The property is located on 28,750 square feet of space and was most recently occupied as a daycare center / private school. The building has been vacant for about 6 months. Previously, the building served as a Honey baked Ham and Alexander's, a gym club. The building is one story and is located immediately adjacent to Penn Center Boulevard, with limited parking. The assessed value of the property is \$813,700.
5. Lot/Block 542-E-150; 3420 William Penn Highway. Most currently Popeye's, this one story free-standing fast food restaurant has opened and closed regularly over the course of the last decade, serving as a donut shop, a pizza shop and Popeye's. The lot is 20,168 square feet and fronts on William Penn Highway. The drive-thru lane is poorly planned and creates poor traffic circulation.
6. Lot/Block 542-F-90; 3466 William Penn Highway. Brewstone's Beer Company, formerly John Havard's has been vacant for two years. The building is owned by PCELL, LP and is part of a larger commercial strip mall. This property is ready to be occupied, but due to other blighted structures within the Penn Center plaza, no tenant has been readily identified.

7. Lot/block 542-F-120; 3470 William Penn Highway. The former Sears building is over 100,000 square feet of retail space sitting on a 10 acre parcel. The assessed value of the property is \$6,500,000, but is currently appraised at half that value. The structure is two story concrete and has been vacant for the last three years. The structure has been vandalized twice and all copper has been removed. There are weeds and trash around the facility. The private road behind the building is subsiding.
8. Lot/Block 542-G-75; 3484-3500 William Penn Highway. This 2.9 acre site encompasses six buildings, the front two of which have been closed since the new owner took possession of the site in October of 2012. The property is assessed at \$2,129,400. The owner, Mr. Sahni, presented preliminary plans to raze the site and construct a hotel. Those plans were not pursued. The property is currently for sale and we believe may hold promise of redevelopment soon. Of the six structures crammed onto the site, two are closed, two are in need of significant renovation and two are occupied, one by a transmission shop and one by a tobacco shop. The site is home to weeds and trash. The structures were not planned and appear to be placed haphazardly with no thought of traffic flow.
9. Lot/Block 542-C-250; 3475 William Penn Highway. This vacant commercial property was once the site of Circuit City. Circuit City went bankrupt and closed the store in 2007. The building was razed several years ago because the site was built on fill and the building had begun to slip over the hillside. The property is assessed at \$1,938,000 exclusive of the Pep Boys building, which is assessed at an additional \$815,000. The site encompasses 12.75 acres. There is an opportunity currently to develop this site. However, any development will require a substantial investment to stabilize the area.

Mrs. Bradley stated that she and Mrs. Martinelli met with the Woodland Hills School District Superintendent and the Business Manager several weeks ago to discuss whether the School Board would consider supporting the proposed LERTA. She stated that we believe that at this time, the political will to do so exists at the School Board level. Additionally, she and Mrs. Martinelli met with Bob Hurley and Maurice Struhl from Allegheny County Economic Development to discuss the County's support. Nick Futules, County Council representative, submitted a letter to Mr. Hurley and Mr. Struhl indicating his support of the Township's LERTA. Mr. Hurley advised that the County Council no longer issues blanket LERTA's, but requires developers to complete an application for abatement on a case-by-case basis. As long as the developer meets all of the requirements of the Act, including that the Municipality and District have similar abatement schedules, Council has acted favorably. Mr. Struhl stated that he has several sample resolutions that can be shared with the School District to aid in development of their abatement and also suggested that the Township include lot and block numbers in the ordinance so that a definitive list of eligible properties is available.

Public Comments:

Attorney Harlan Stone of Dickie McCamey introduced himself and Mr. Brian Lamfrom, the owner of A&L Motors. Mr. Lamfrom is currently working with Benderson Development to acquire 3475 William Penn Highway. Mr. Lamfrom intends to move the BMW portion of his Land Rover, Jaguar and BMW business from Monroeville to Wilkins Township and will need to make substantial investment in order to do so. Mr. Stone stated that he had reviewed the ordinance and had some suggestions for changes to the ordinance. He provided the Board with a copy of those revisions and also a copy of a news article that was recently published regarding West Mifflin's offering of a LERTA. Mr. Stone stated the suggested modification would be to increase the term of the LERTA from five to six years and change the percentage abatement from 100-80-60-40-20 (current) to 100-100-100-75-50-25. This is similar to what West Mifflin did in courting Lowes. The most expensive part of a project is the front end – or development. By abating the cost of the improvement at 100% for the first three years, the developer is given a better chance to recoup costs.

Mr. Brian Lamfrom, owner of A&L Motors, addressed the Board. He expressed his interest in the Board of Commissioners continuing to support a LERTA which will aid him in the acquisition and development of the former Circuit City site. His intention is to build a 35,000 square foot facility. At this time because of the instability of the area, he will be required to put 70' support structures in the ground, greatly increasing the cost of the project. He estimates that total construction costs will be about \$10 million. His annual BMW sales are about \$55 million and once located in Wilkins, the company will be required to pay mercantile tax, so the Township will receive an immediate revenue stream.

There were no comments from the Board of Commissioners.

The meeting adjourned at 6:53 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Bradley
Secretary