



City of Gahanna

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Meeting Minutes Planning Commission Workshop

James Mako, Chair

Michael Greenberg

John Hicks

Thomas Shapaka

Michael Suriano

Michael Tamarkin

Thomas J. Wester

Pam Ripley, Deputy Clerk of Council

Wednesday, December 6, 2023

6:15 PM

City Hall, Committee Room

A. OPEN MEETING

Gahanna Planning Commission met in a workshop session on December 6, 2023. The agenda for this meeting was published on December 1, 2023. Chair James Mako called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m. All members of the commission were in attendance.

B. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Workshop Chair, Mako explained this meeting is an informational workshop for Planning Commission to disseminate information, ask questions, nothing is going to be decided tonight.

i. Sheetz

[2023-0211](#)

Sheetz Site Plan & Renderings

Director of Planning Mr. Blackford said that staff met with representatives from Sheetz in late October. They went over some high-level code requirements, the process, and applications timelines. The zoning of the property is Community Commercial, gas stations are a conditional use and not a permitted use. Staff weighed in and gave their preliminary input on some of the concerns they had with the request. One of them was the Land Use Plan and how the Land Use Plan looks to develop this corridor with more continuation of the Creek Side uses and development patterns. They also talked about the proposed code changes. They are proposed they're not adopted. Once the proposed zoning code changes are made a gas station would be a prohibited use and not a permitted or a conditional use. Staff shared that with the applicant to make sure that they were aware. The applicant submitted applications after that meeting which they're entitled to and then they are vested to the code that is in place at that time. Staff shared some feedback on some design elements that they thought might make the

project fit in better in that location. Blackford show renderings of the building which has oriented the gas pumps more perpendicular with Granville Street rather than parallel with Granville Street, to soften that input. Staff gives recommendations and are not the decision makers on conditional uses. When staff is not going to support something having a workshop with Planning Commission who would approve or deny the request would be beneficial to the applicant so they can move forward accordingly based on the commissions feedback.

Attorney Mike Shannon, Underhill and Hodge, 8000 Walton Parkway New Albany. Is here on behalf of the Skilken Gold Company and Sheetz. He was not involved in the initial iteration of the previous Sheetz project, but he was involved in a couple appeals related to it. He is mindful that the commission is familiar with the Sheetz products and operations. They feel that Sheetz is primarily a restaurant. Most of the revenue that is generated at the store does not come from the gasoline. It comes from the restaurant and sale of other sundry items. They think they have found a better site than the one previously submitted to the commission. This is not vacant land that is waiting to be developed. This site is more urban in nature and kind of the downtown of Gahanna. This site checks a lot of the boxes in terms of what he heard last time in terms of the other site. It was offered as to what would be a more appropriate site. They have spent a lot of time and money to identify such a site. As staff indicated the base zoning is Community Commercial which has this use as a conditional use. He references the criteria for conditional use because that is what they are here for in the long term. To get approval of a conditional use and one minor variance. The standard of review for the conditional use, city code uses the word shall. That approval shall be given if the use meets the development standards in the code. They think they will do that with one minor exception that the development is in accord with the appropriate plans for the area. That is where they could be splitting hairs and saying that the current plan, the current code contemplates such a use. But as Mr. Blackford explained the master planning document looking at future goals and objectives, he thinks calls for a mix of uses here. Maybe residential office and/or some other type of retail. They check the box for the retail component. They do not think the development will have undesirable effects on the surrounding areas and they think that it is keeping in use with the existing land character. The subject site is a bar, directly across the street is a car wash. Which is obviously an automotive related use. They think that the infusion of this type of development could be the catalyst for development of the parcels to the east and to the west. It is his understanding all of three parcels are the same owner. Collectively he thinks it is about 3.9 acres. The subject site is about 1.25 acres right in the middle. The remainder of the tract is on either side of the building. They think the access is a natural from a traffic perspective, with the streetlight. It is conducive to providing easy access. They think that for Gahanna residents that are going to venture down and get on I-670, or 270 down Granville Street it makes sense to have a gas station of this quality. You hear it over and over again, but it is not really doing it justice to call it just a gas station. There are 35 Sheetz stores that have been constructed and approved in the central Ohio and Dayton area in just two and a half years and there are another eight to 10 under construction within Franklin County. Sheetz wants to be part of the Gahanna community.

He can respond to specific questions. He pointed out the minor variance that they have identified. At the far northern part of the tract where the dumpsters are outlined in white, typically there is a 10-foot setback requirement. They wanted to push that back north as far as possible to accommodate the brick enclosure that replicates the architecture. They tried to be sensitive in terms of landscaping and mindful that there is a park to the north. The way he sees it, and he could be wrong, but this looks like the primary access to that park. This access looks like it is a very important access. In attendance tonight are civil engineers, traffic engineers, representatives from Sheetz, and D.W. Route, Skilken Gold. There is a conditional use application that they would like to try to move forward with and a minimum variance request. He was not in the meetings with Mr. Blackford, but it was said that the fuel canopies will be perpendicular as opposed to parallel. They thought that the only way to do that would be to pull the building up to the front. They do not think that is the most efficient use to the site. They would be willing to discuss it further. Typically, the expectation of people fueling their vehicles is that they are visible from a public right-of-way, for reasons that are fairly obvious. They think the building sitting back where it is as proposed is more functional and having those fuel dispensaries visible from a public right-of-way is a standard in the industry, not just with Sheetz.

D.W. Route Skilken Gold, 4270 Morse Rd. Columbus OH, Project Manager, introduced the team. Braydon Putnam, V3 Companies, Drew Laurent, Carpenter Marty Transportation, Kareem Amr, Skilken Gold, Mike Casal, Sheetz. Mr. Route was not involved in the original project. Route said Sheetz is a family run business started in 1952 and it is still a family run business. Skilken Gold is also a family run business. The partnership was a very natural partnership, and they take it very seriously when they present these projects. The projects and the quality are very important to them. When they pick these sites, it is very intentional. They picked Gahanna because they value the community. They want to enhance the community. They have looked at this site with the park in mind as a connective space to bridge the gap from the street to the park. In terms of the site layout there are some engineering difficulties with changing the site any different than it is currently laid out. Traffic studies are already underway, and they had an initial meeting with traffic. They did not seem to have too many concerns overall. There is an existing light, which helps immensely. The backup to the south is not anticipated because people will be accessing it from Granville Street. That was not a concern, traffic seemed positive on that one. They have met with planning staff, which has been wonderful in helping them navigate the different application processes. They have turned in all of their applications so far, making sure that they are secure in the current zoning, and they can move forward as is, as a conditional use. Their main goal tonight is to get feedback from the commission. They want to alleviate any concerns and address those concerns and then move forward appropriately. The team is available for questions.

Questions from the Commission

Shapaka asked if the landscaping along Granville Street, if it is an agreement with the city for the six two-inch caliper trees. Route said it is what is

proposed currently, and the landscaping is flexible. Shapaka asked Blackford if there is a number associated with the street on trees, one every 50-feet, one every 100-feet. Blackford said that they have not completed the first round of review on the project. If Shapaka is talking about the six trees along Granville Street that are shown in the right-of-way, that is usually the Parks Department that has street tree planting requirements. Typically, those are on new streets not existing ones, but it will be looked at by staff. Shapaka said that the east drive that is coming off where the Chinese restaurant is, that is where you currently access Coaches. There is no stacking there. If he was using Sheetz, he would pull in there but would exit to the west. He would not come back out unless he needed to turn east in favor of the light. He asked for thoughts about moving that further away from Granville Street to get a little bit more stacked. Braydon Putnam, V3 Companies 550 Polaris Parkway, Westerville OH, Design Engineer on this project. With the design constraints of the site, they can look at it more to move it more north, but for their truck routing and deliveries it is tight to get it in the way it is. That is why the building is towards the back of the parcel rather than the front. It has been a challenge to get the truck routing to work, but they will look at it and see if there is a better option to move that drive more north on that east side. Shapaka asked was there a consideration of leaving the west side completely open with a shares drive versus what is to the east with the trees and landscaping. Was there any consideration of just leaving both share drives so you can pull in and out. Putnam said there can be further consideration on that. Drew Laurent, Carpenter Marty Transportation, 6612 Singletree Dr. Columbus OH said they are looking at queuing at that signal to determine what kind of stacking is needed before that drive would be blocked. He asked Shapaka to repeat the question about the cross access. Shapaka said the west side looks like a shared drive with building to the left. He asked if there is a curb there. Laurent said it looks like it is open. Shapaka said you would like the other side to be open a bit more also. He didn't know if they were trying to get a streetscape down to the park. Route said the idea with the landscaping was to try to bridge the connectivity to the park and to try to create a walkway that was pleasant to walk to the park. As opposed to just a sidewalk. They see the right side as the main connection point to the park. All the landscaping is very preliminary proposal, and they are willing to flex if needed. Shapaka said just a comment being a workshop, he asked if there is a sidewalk along the drive that goes back. Route said yes, the idea is to create a connection. There would be a proposed sidewalk connecting to the back of the park. Shapaka asked if the property is being leased for 10 or 20 year or if they were purchasing the property. Route believes it is a 30-year lease. Shapaka said they were going to get a traffic study for the site. Laurent said they received the scope of the traffic impact study from the city two weeks ago. It is currently in progress, collecting the count data and doing all the analysis.

Greenberg asked if there any issues with flooding. He saw there were flood zones and asked if there is concern for flooding on the site. Route said they are aware of the flood zone, and they have looked at it. There is a flood use application that they will have to apply for. There builds site is not in any concern of the flood plain use. Greenberg said the last time Sheetz was before the commission he asked about what the company does as far as recycling and basically, he did not get a real clear answer. There is a

dumpster out back. Is it just going to be a dumpster for refuse or is there going to be one for cardboard and other materials that are coming to the site. Route said he believes it is a typical dumpster use. Greenberg said there will not be any environmental recycling or anything. Route said recycling is not in part of the environmental impact but the other considerations that Sheetz takes into account for the site is well accounted for. There is no recycling for the dumpsters. Greenberg asked Blackford to reiterate what he said at the outset of the meeting that this facility would not be eligible to go into this spot if the new zoning was approved by Council. He asked if this was correct. Blackford said that is correct, it would require rezoning to a different commercial designation than what we are proposing for this area of the city. Greenberg said they are moving quickly to avoid that. Blackford said they do not have to move that quickly. They just have to submit the applications and they have already done that, then they would be vested under those current rules. Greenberg said he understood, but the bottom line for him is the city does not really want to have a gas station in that area and on the street there. They are moving quickly so they do not have to deal with a future regulation on that. Route said it was not necessarily about avoiding anything. It is trying to meet the current standards as is. It is already a developed site. They are hoping this will bridge the connectivity between the park and help with the development to the east and west of that site. Greenberg asked about the bridge to the park, what is that. Route, said the sidewalk and the landscaping bridges the drive back to the park. Also having the Sheetz as a restaurant there for park visitors is a positive impact. The architecture of the Sheetz and the high-quality materials and is not a cheap façade. The whole point is to put a nice development there. Mr. Shannon wanted to address the plan, beat the clock issue so they can get ahead of a change in the code. They are going through the process for a conditional use, whereas in the future if they had identified this site under a new code, they would still ask for a rezoning to zone the subject site to permit a gas station. If he understands correctly the major difference is a rezoning has to go to City Council and a Conditional Use is in the purview of Planning Commission. They are not trying to pull a fast one, they are committed to the site. They think it is a good site and they would try to address all the other concerns that they can to prove themselves. Greenberg said he likes Sheetz; he goes to Sheetz on occasion and obviously they want to be in Gahanna. He asked if there are other sites, they are looking at that are acceptable. Shannon said he is not familiar with all the activity, but he is familiar with two alternative sites that did not pass muster with the criteria they are looking for. They would have been more difficult from a zoning perspective.

Suriano said he is sure coaches does not see the volume of traffic that a Sheetz might. That current curb cut how you are entering coaches, kind of immediately from the east as you are coming onto the property from the light, do they see any issue with queuing or given that there is a traffic light how that could affect that pinch point. Laurent said there will definitely be some additional queuing at the signal. As the commission knows they have not analyzed anything yet, so they do not have any numbers to share. There are a lot of similar Sheetz sites that are designed like this around Central Ohio. They take a hard look at where that internal access point is. If that thing is blocked and you get somebody trying to turn left into that access, you are

going to back up onto Granville Street. This is not ideal for anybody, as a part of the study I know this is like the initial concept. They are going to be looking into that. There is a rear access at the very northeast section of the property, which in his opinion would be ideal for the ingress and egress. There are other similar Sheetz sites that have had restricted access closer to the main line. Whether it is a right in, right out or something similar. They will be looking at all that in the traffic study once they get further along. Suriano said they have been talking or at least it was mentioned about a bridge to the park. There is not really anything physical that bridges to the park, we still traversing the parking lot adjacent to Shull Park. Shannon said the terminology should be connectivity to the park as opposed to bridge.

Tamarkin said the drawing shows a monument sign, that was not talked about. Frequently variances are needed for monument signs. He asked if this monument sign meet city code in a position far enough from the road where it is allowed as is. Route said they are working on a signage analysis to address any of those variances. If they would need a variance or a change they would apply for a variance application or adjust accordingly. There is a setback from Granville Street, he believes it is 15-feet. They have already adjusted it a couple times on the site plan. It is subject to change. They have enlisted zoning resources to do a signage analysis. Tamarkin said when the commission looked at the other Sheetz there was lots of variances dealing with signage, so when attorney Shannon mentioned one minor variance for the setback on the dumpsters. There could be more variances for signage. Route said they turned in an application for variances for the site. Signage is a separate analysis they are undergoing currently. Tamarkin said they want to move the dumpster back to expand the brick pavement on the east side of the building. He asked if those are picnic tables for outdoor seating. Route said different from the last Sheetz brought forward, this is a much smaller residential size Sheetz. He believes the last proposal had 8 to 10 pumps in the front. This one has five. The store is smaller scale it is 6,000 sq. ft. The scale of this one is a little different than the one the commission previously saw. Tamarkin said it is his understanding that the high school kids leave campus to eat lunch, and they are roughly 200 yards from the high school. He disagrees with the argument that they do more volume in food than in gas. There will be significant high school traffic at lunchtime. Where do they sit, where do they go. Route said that there is plenty of indoor seating. The high school was anticipated as some of their traffic and food service. That is also a reason they picked this location and the connectivity between the Creekside District and the high school.

Wester said about 25 years ago ODOT destroyed Granville Street when they made it five lanes. At the start of the new library project there was some conversation in his words "gentrifying" Granville Street. Take it back to three lanes, bump outs and traffic calming. He was at a meeting where there was a question about traffic calming. He asked if this has been considered in this design. That does not have to be answered now. A couple of years ago some of the members of this commission may remember the issue of late-night deliveries to the BP Station and Donatos. He believes that situation is in effect here, with the Sheetz being a 24-hour operation. When looking at the drawings he asked where the property lines are. Route said this is a 1.5-acre

site. He showed on the site plan the property lines to the west and east. It sits between two existing restaurants and businesses. It is the Coach's site that is being developed. Initially when they met with the planning department, it was thought they were developing all three parcels. That is not the case they have scaled down much smaller. This is a community size Sheetz operation and restaurant. Wester said the unique thing about this one is there is no drive-thru. He would think that would be one of the things of that conditional use. He has a concern about traffic on Granville Street. He asked if this is pedestrian friendly. What do they have for traffic calming. He does not know what the volume of truck traffic is. Sheetz is a high volume, and it adds to a high-volume street already. When he drives through Westerville on State Street is a very vibrant business district it's three lanes it's got street parking. This Sheetz in Hilliard on Cemetery Road has a side entry off Cemetery Road, and no entry off Cemetery Road. When he looks at those streets and the vibrancy and the business, they are narrowed traffic calming. He is not sure gas stations are catalyst for redevelopment. The Sheetz on Cassidy Avenue, what he is throwing out are items for concern and that is what they are here to talk about today. Wester thinks Sheetz is a wonderful company, great product, very aggressive for growth. But he must look at how it fits within the community and what can he ask for because he is only getting one shot. Route addresses the traffic concerns. This Sheetz has been scaled down. It will serve the existing traffic patterns. It is not a Sheetz that is large scale for trucks. People are not driving off the highway out of their way to go to this specific location. They will have passed three gas stations by the time they get to this Sheetz. This Sheetz is to serve the Gahanna community and the existing traffic patterns that exist. That is why they see it more as a restaurant. The high school kids will be coming for lunch. People will come for a late-night snack. It is to serve more of the community and not as a traffic generating gas station. He understands the concerns with the ones that are right off the freeways. Those generate traffic because it is a destination off the freeway. This one is not; it is a much smaller scale store.

Hicks said he is a fan of Sheetz, a customer and as a parent of a teenager who is high schooler. Regardless of the proportion of restaurant to the gas, this use is an automotive service according to city code and as Mr. Blackford has distinctly and thoroughly illustrated it is a conditional use in current zoning code. Understanding that we must apply code that exists today. It is a conditional use to consider the future use though, this area will not be zoned commercial. It will be the new Creek Side mixed use and automotive services will not be permitted in that area. They also will not be permitted in the neighborhood commercial zone which is where the last project was considered. They will be permitted in the new Innovative and Manufacturing Zoning and there will be a conditional use in what we call the General Commercial Zone as he understands how the new zoning code is going to work. Mr. Shannon pulled out of city code the word shall, and he will defer to his legal eases and understanding. Also, in that same section subsection C it talks about disapproval of conditional uses, and it says the Planning Commission shall only disapprove an application for a conditional use if any one of the following reasons exist. One of the reasons that the commission must consider is the proposed development is not in keeping with the existing land use character and physical development potential of this area. Should

this project move forward that is the area where he is going to be looking when deciding. Rezoning does come to Planning Commission for recommendation for approval to City Council. Should a rezoning be in the future the commission will see it. He hopes that should this project not move forward as intended that there will be another opportunity in the city to consider.

Shapaka said he like the scale of it, and the setback. Right now, he is looking at the existing uses and he knows what the city wants in the future. The tenant to the east just put a lot of money into their project. It is kind of a balance between now and the future and it seems like the Alpine is doing well. He does not see anything really moving no matter if we rezone the property, it seems like it fits.

Suriano said he is a customer of Sheetz. He reemphasized that his biggest issue is with character. He does not think it meets item three and four of the conditional use and he does not think it meets the future potential of the site, given what the City of Gahanna is looking to do for this corridor based on those zoning changes. He worries about looking at a filling station in this location for the next 30 to 50 years. He knows the point is going to be made about restaurant versus filling station. It is going to be a filling station because that is what is in front. If it was not, maybe the pumps would be in the back. He thinks that over time they have had this tendency to push all these buildings off the street with parking in front. It makes for an urban corridor that is not befitting of what we want to see on Granville Street. The fact that it is a filling station, and it is located where it is he does not know how he would be able to move forward with a conditional use approval if this were to come before the commission.

C. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

Pam Ripley
Clerk

*APPROVED by the Planning Commission Workshop,
this
day of 2023.*

James Mako