


Memorandum

To: Planning Commission members; Tom Fountain, P.E.

From: Richard D. Barton *rbarton@upperdublin.net* 

Date: May 13, 2016

Re: UD #16-04: Zoning text amendment to the OC – Office Center District

BT Dreshertown, L.P. proposes an amendment to the zoning regulations of the OC – Office Center district to allow a Mixed Use Development as a permitted use. The standards for the OC District are found in Sections 255-58 through 255-62 of the Zoning Code. It is proposed to apply the amendment to a 25 acre tract at the southeast corner of Dreshertown Road and Welsh Road.

Background

The Office Center District encompasses what has been known for years as the “Prudential Tract”. A master plan for office buildings received preliminary plan approval in 1999 (est.). Only one of the proposed buildings was constructed, on Dryden Road. In the last year, BET Investments has purchased 75 vacant acres on the tract. Fifty acres on Dreshertown Road was rezoned this year to ‘A’ Residential to permit the construction of an age-restricted community.

Although this proposal does not change the Zoning Map, it does mark a significant change in the scope of uses permitted in the OC District. The OC District was established “to encourage the logical and timely development of land for office purposes ... ; to discourage any land use which would interfere with the use of the District as an employment and service center and to assure suitable design to protect the residential environment of adjacent and nearby neighborhoods.” (Zoning Code, Section 255-58.A)

As the zoning district currently stands, the permitted uses are office buildings; personal service and/or convenience-type shops, including restaurants; accessory uses associated with office buildings, such as parking structures and recreational facilities; and a “personal use heliport”. (Section 255-60). (Note that the current regulations for personal service and retail shops are intended to serve employees and visitors to the office development, and only incidentally to the general public.)

The proposed text amendment would allow a Mixed Use Development on a property at least 20 acres in area, with the following permitted uses:

1. General retail and commercial establishments, including restaurants, personal fitness center, banks, personal care, day care, and other uses.

2. Apartment Buildings and other Multiple Dwellings
3. Accessory Uses (including parking garage, clubhouse, drive-thru, etc.)

Planning Considerations

Pages 96 and 97 of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan reference the Prudential Tract. Under Land Use / Economic Recommendations, the Plan states that development options were discussed at several community workshops. Most of the participants felt that the area should be reserved for “high-value commercial development”. The Plan recommends that the Township “preserve this site for commercial uses, specifically office development, consistent with the current zoning for the site and the approved development plan.”

As indicated above, the office plan never came to fruition, and shortly after the Comprehensive Plan recommendations were being formulated, the office market in the Philadelphia region and throughout the nation experienced a severe downturn. This change in circumstances has resulted in a different direction for the Prudential Tract, as evidenced in the Board’s rezoning of 50 acres for residential development in 2016.

Some questions for the Planning Commission to consider as they review the ordinance:

- Is the permitted density of 25 dwelling units per gross acre acceptable?
- Are the buffers sufficient to protect the adjacent residential development?
- What would be reasonable limits for building height?