

Amendment to the Land Use Element of the Master Plan

Township of Harrison



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INTRODUCTION

The Township of Harrison Planning Board held a public hearing on May 18, 2006 to obtain public input on the following amendment to the Land Use Element of the Township of Harrison Master Plan. The Planning Board adopted this amendment on May 18, 2006 (hereafter “Amendment”).

RECOMMENDED ZONING ORDINANCE AND MAP AMENDMENT

A. Expansion of Rowan University Facilities

Over the next several years, the Township of Harrison will undergo significant development in the northeast corner of the Township that is anticipated to have a transformational impact on the community. Specifically, Rowan University is developing a 200-acre research park, known as the South Jersey Technology Park at Rowan University (hereafter “Technology Park”) on the north side of Route 322. The entrance to the Technology Park will be located less than a half-mile from the interchange of Route 322 and Route 55. It is anticipated that when complete, the Technology Park will total 1.5 million square feet of office and laboratory space, as well as conference room and training facilities. According to Rowan University, the Technology Park is being touted as a future hub of economic development for South Jersey.¹ Additionally, Rowan University recently announced plans for the development of nearly 300 acres on the south side of Route 322 with intentions to build a professional soccer stadium, accompanied by student housing, retail outlets, and dining facilities.² Rowan University says that this site is expected to be “Gloucester County’s largest mixed-used commercial and residential construction ever.”³ As a result, the University’s expansion of its West Campus will have profound planning impacts on the community.

B. Impact on Roadway and Community Character

While the Township of Harrison is pleased with the establishment of a technology-based entrepreneurial economy in South Jersey and is excited about having a Major League Soccer expansion team in its backyard, the Township of Harrison, however, struggles with the impact that this growth will have on this rural community.

It is believed that the planned expansion of facilities associated with Rowan University at its West Campus will have a significant impact on Harrison’s roadway system. Outside of the town center of Mullica Hill, the Township of Harrison is a rural community, being primarily agricultural and residential in nature. In recent years, the Township has experienced significant growth. The Township doubled in population between 1990 and 2000.⁴ As a result, the road network is already experiencing increased traffic demand.

¹ Brochure for the South Jersey Technology Park at Rowan University.

² Rowan University President Dr. Donald Farish, Address to the University (March 20, 2006).

³ See Rowan University News, University Relations Press Releases (March 20, 2006).

⁴ US Census Bureau; DVRPC data bulletin, No. 73 (March 2002).

Rowan University's planned development of nearly 500 acres in the vicinity of Routes 55 and 322 will significantly amplify that traffic burden.

Likewise, it is believed that the planned expansion of facilities associated with Rowan University at its West Campus will have a significant effect on Harrison's rural character. Preservation of the Township's rural heritage is important to maintaining its identity. It is anticipated that these former peach orchards will be a "hive of activity with resident students living in a modern town center, anchored by a professional sports facility..."⁵ and the Technology Park will be a thriving hub of economic activity. Consequently, the Township is concerned about the transformational impact on the Township's rural character.

C. Prevention of Adverse Impacts in the Future

It is necessary for the Township of Harrison to prevent additional adverse impacts to the community in the future. Consequently, this Amendment seeks to minimize further large-scale encumbrances on the road network and to prevent further undermining of the Township's rural character, by curtailing large format development in the vicinity. Therefore, it is recommended that a building size limitation be imposed for the area generally bounded by Route 322, Route 55, Lambs Road, and the Mantua Township border.

A building size limitation is necessary, as large-scale "big box" development generates significant customer and truck traffic that would compound the traffic issues that will be triggered by the University's expansion. Large format development is also characterized by large windowless, rectangular standardized facades. Large industrial-style buildings with vast building footprints are out-of-scale and out-of-character with Harrison Township and are not appropriate for this gateway into the community.

Currently, the Harrison Township Zoning Ordinance identifies certain areas where large-scale development is not appropriate. For instance, the C-1 Village Center District and the C-6 Flexible Planned Commercial District have a floor area limitation of 10,000 square feet. The VB Village Business District has a maximum building size of 8,000 square feet and the Main Street District has a 5,000 square foot building size limitation. Here, it is recommended that a new zone be created for Block 24, Lots 2, 3, 4, 5 and Block 24.01, Lot 1 that will contain a similar type of building size limitation.

Block 24, Lots 2, 3, 4, 5 and Block 24.01, Lot 1 are currently zoned C-55, the Flexible Planned Industrial-Commercial District, which is intended to provide for the development of flexible planned industrial sites, planned commercial centers, as well as multi-use areas. Since it is believed that the zoning characteristics of the C-55 district continue to be suitable for this area, it is recommended that a new zone be created that will contain the same zoning characteristics as the C-55 zone (uses, bulk and area regulations, performance standards, etc.), with the caveat that a maximum gross leasable area of 75,000 square feet should be required. This building size limitation will be

⁵ Rowan University President Dr. Donald Farish, Address to the University (March 20, 2006).

consistent with the current strategy to limit building sizes in the adjacent C-6 zone. It will also allow more flexibility than the other zones that have building size restrictions, but will be restrictive enough to help minimize negative impacts on the road network and to help preserve the community's character.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, in order to help minimize negative impacts on the road network and to help preserve the community character of this rural Township, it is recommended that a new zoning district be created for Block 24, Lots 2, 3, 4, 5 and Block 24.01, Lot 1. This district should contain the same zoning characteristics as the C-55 zone, but with the additional requirement that all buildings be limited to 75,000 square feet of gross leasable area.