

Proposed Major Subdivision Next to 1761 Brearley House, Lawrence Township, Mercer County, New Jersey

Review comments of Proposed *Trail at Princeton Pike* Application, Block 5101, Lot 18, Lawrence Township, Mercer County, New Jersey

By:

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The Brearley House is a significant national, state, and local historic site. It is on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. The house has survived almost intact from its construction in 1761, and was recently restored by my firm for the Lawrence Historical Society and Lawrence Township. While the farm buildings have been lost, the land around the house has had very few changes to this point in its history.

This proposed development on the adjoining land, which comprises part of the Brearley farm, will change all that. The Environment Impact Statement states on Page 15 that the subject property is “not located in or immediately adjacent to a historic or archeological district”. That is clearly untrue based upon the proposed site plan. In fact, the project would place extensive development directly in the view shed of the Brearley House severely impacting its historical context.

Archeologist Ian Burrow, who has extensive knowledge of the site, has concluded in his report that the site plan of the development will destroy archeological resources on the site. It will also adversely affect both the historic space and setting of the farmstead. I concur with both of those statements, and will direct my review toward the site plan and design characteristics:

- In the site plan documents, there is little to no mention of either the historic Brearley House or the Lawrence Township’s Maidenhead Meadows Park immediately adjacent to the proposed development.
- The Lawrence Historical Society and Township Commission are not listed as agencies for regulatory approval which may not be correct. I believe that they are advisory to the Planning Board.
- The design is for a very dense development that completely covers the site with roads, curbs, parking, site drainage features, and proposed construction with minimal set-backs.

- There appears to be little to no common recreational or open space other than a detention basin. It seems that the developer will be relying on the adjoining historic site and the Lawrence Township Park to provide common space. That is not fair to other applicants who are required to provide such features in their site plans. It is also unfair to the Department of Public Works personnel who take care of the Park and the Brearley site.
- There is no consideration given to appropriate set-backs to preserve the Brearley House landscape context and views, attractive landscaping along the perimeter of the development, nor screening of the development with landscape buffer. This is not mentioned anywhere in the submitted documents nor is evident in the site plan design.
- In my opinion, the developer should be required at a minimum to provide landscape buffers and additional set back from the property line to protect the Brearley House viewshed.
- The present dense, site design requires several variances for building size, parking set-backs, and other dimensions which do not conform to the zoning codes. This is unwarranted in my opinion. My recommendation is to reduce density and change the design so that variances will not be needed.
- A lighting plan was not evident in the package that I reviewed. Site and building lighting should be carefully designed and documented to avoid spillage onto adjoining properties which could negatively impact them.
- In my view, the building designs themselves are unimaginative and inappropriate for this section of Lawrence Township. Specific comments are as follows:
 - Why are attached rowhouses being proposed for a tract of open land in a zone of farms and single family houses? These proposed structures are more appropriate for an urban center like Newark or Trenton than a suburban context like Lawrence Township.
 - The houses are 3 ½ stories tall with high roofs having the option for adding dormers, making them 4 story structures. Conformance to the height limitations in the zoning ordinances should be checked. This is taller than other residential structures in the area, and will be highly visible from the Brearley House.
 - The material choices for the townhouses are odd. Why stone bases and clapboard upper stories? This has nothing to do with architectural traditions of the region. What are the actual materials proposed? Why do the window sizes vary so much?
 - The street fronts of entire first floor of the townhouses is taken up by large garage doors. This is an unattractive design feature for a building that is detailed like an attached townhouse.
 - Other inappropriate features are the shutters that are neither properly sized nor mounted (or drawn) correctly in relation to the window openings.
 - The rear elevations of the houses are featureless and should not be. They should be detailed with trim, windows, and shutters to match the fronts of the

buildings. These elevations will be visible from the Lawrence Township Park and the Brearley House.

- In summary, I would encourage the developer to look at other successful developments in the Lawrence Township/Hopewell Township region, reduce density of this development, reconsider the product being marketed, and substantially change the design approach to the buildings and the site to be more compatible to context.
- The “Sustainability Design Assessment Report” submitted with the application does not mention any mitigation of the effects of this development on the contiguous Lawrence Township Park and open space, the Brearley House National Register historic site, nor the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park. In my opinion this is a clear shortcoming of the application that needs to be addressed in detail.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this application.

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