

NORTH EAST PLANNING COMMISSION
106 South Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901
Tuesday, September 5, 2023
7:00 P.M.

Chairman Mark Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Present included members Judy Duffy and Calvin Wilson. Also present were Chris Mink, Town Engineer and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant. Commissioner Hilary Crothers, Melissa Cook-Mackenzie, Town Administrator and Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning were absent from the meeting.

-MINUTES-

August 8, 2023

The August 8, 2023 meeting minutes were table until the October 3, 2023 Planning Commission meeting.

-OLD BUSINESS-

None.

-NEW BUSINESS-

1. North East Fire Company Inc., Applicant/Property Owner is requesting a modified site plan for the purpose of installing a 672 square foot pole barn accessory building at the North East Fire Company, 210 Mauldin Avenue, North East, Maryland. Also found on Tax Map 031B; Parcel 16. Zoning District "R-1" Single Family Residential.

Bill Streaker, President North East Fire Company, 210 Mauldin Avenue, North East Maryland stated that the North East Fire Company would like to request an amendment to their site plan for the purpose of adding an accessory building. The existing fire house, built in 1954, was renovated in recent years and has recently run out of dry storage space. Mr. Streaker reported that they have looked into adding a second floor to the existing fire house however, that is currently not feasible with the existing budget. They may apply for a grant in the future but have not yet applied for one. Mr. Streaker stated that they would like to store bingo and carnival items as well as other dry storage items in the proposed accessory building. The accessory building will not be heated but it will have electric for lighting. Mr. Streaker also commented that the new accessory building will be the same color and style as the existing accessory building. However, the new building will have one garage door. They do not plan on storing any vehicles in this new accessory building.

Ms. Duffy inquired how close the new accessory building will be to the existing accessory building. Mr. Streaker replied the new building will be located approximately 10 feet from the existing accessory building.

Chairman Dobbins inquired if anyone had any comments however, there were no comments.

Mr. Wilson made a motion to approve the modified site plan for the purpose of installing a 672 square foot pole barn accessory building at the North East Fire Company. Ms. Duffy seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

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2. North East United Methodist Church Cemetery, 101 Cemetery Road, North East, Maryland. Applicant, Site Studios, Incorporated, is requesting a Modified Site Plan for the purpose of installing columbarium niches, sidewalk and parking spaces at the North East United Methodist Episcopal Cemetery. Property Owner: Trustees of North East Methodist Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 522, North East, Maryland. Also found on Tax Map 031C; Parcel 544. Zoning District: "R-1" Single Family Residential

Brian Morgan, Site Studios, Elkton, Maryland, Charles Luck, President and Bob Boyer, Trustee, of the North East United Methodist Church Cemetery, North East, Maryland, presented the case.

Mr. Morgan stated they are requesting Concept/Preliminary Site Plan approval this evening. Mr. Morgan reported that a surveyor was hired to locate the cemetery property lines and it has been determined that the existing mausoleum, on the east side of the cemetery, is 63 feet from property line. The proposed columbarium niches will be located in front of the mausoleum. Mr. Morgan stated that they are proposing precast columbarium niches. They would like to initially construct 2 columbarium niches and then add additional columbarium niches as needed until they reach the 6 columbarium niches as indicated on the proposed site plan. In addition, they would like to add a few of parallel parking spaces along the main drive isle so that there is an area for people to pull off.

Mr. Morgan stated that columbarium niches have increased in popularity and they give cemeteries the ability to accept additional burials. Mr. Morgan gave an example of the National Cemetery in Washington, DC which had been full to capacity. However, by adding columbarium niches they were able to create new burial sites. Mr. Morgan added that cemeteries are committed to perpetual care and by adding columbarium niches, the cemeteries are able to continue to bring in revenue. Mr. Morgan stated that the proposed columbaria will contain 48 niches per structure with a total of 96 niches being proposed initially and 288 overall. In addition, there will be a sidewalk leading from the parking area between and around the columbaria. Mr. Morgan distributed an architectural image to the Planning Commission of the proposed columbarium niches. (Attached) Mr. Morgan reported that according to the county stormwater and sediment and erosion departments, the project would be less than 100 cubic yards of soil disturbed and under 5,000 square feet, therefore there would be no additional requirements from these departments. Mr. Morgan reported that he has received Mr. Mink's comment letter. Mr. Mink stated that since the comments are minimal, submitting the response letter with the final site plan application would be acceptable.

Mr. Luck reported that the cemetery is set up as an LLC and it is legally a separate entity from the church and they report to the Office of Cemetery Oversight in Baltimore, Maryland. The land that is being used for the cemetery was donated to the North East United Methodist Church. The cemetery has the capacity for 6,000 graves and there is an additional 50 acres for future use. Mr. Luck reported that the trustees have researched and visited over a dozen other cemeteries to view different types of columbaria and feel that the style chosen is the right choice and will certainly be utilized in the coming years.

Mr. Mink commented that the submitted site plan stated that the cemetery has a Thomas Avenue address and that Thomas Avenue continued into the cemetery. Mr. Morgan replied that this shall be corrected prior to the final site plan submittal and added that the road throughout the cemetery is a private road. Mr. Mink inquired if any additional lighting would be added. Mr. Morgan replied not at this time.

Mr. Ed Mc Cracken, 117 Edgewater Avenue, North East, Maryland spoke on behalf of the addition of the columbaria and stated that they are not an eyesore and are a great alternative. Mr. Luck added that the cost of burial is only increasing and the columbarium niches are a more cost effective alternative.

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Mr. Wilson inquired about the location of the columbarium niches and parking for clarity. Mr. Luck replied that three parking spaces are proposed on each side of the sidewalk, which is located between the columbaria, along the private road so as not to block others traveling through the cemetery.

Chairman Dobbins inquired if anyone from the public would like to speak, however, there were no comments.

Mr. Wilson made a motion to approve the modified site plan for the purpose of installing columbarium niches, sidewalk and parking spaces at the North East United Methodist Church Cemetery. Ms. Duffy seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

-MISCELLANEOUS-

Ms. Duffy stated that her neighbor had inquired about having the Fire Company turn off the parking lot lights off at night. Mr. Streaker commented that the lights are required to be on per the insurance company requirement that the lights be turned on when there are any people inside the building. Mr. Streaker stated that he will pass the comment on to the hall manager.

-REPORTS-

None.

-COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC-

There were no comments from the public.

-NEXT MEETING-

The next Planning Commission meeting has been scheduled for October 3, 2023.

-ADJOURNMENT-

With no further business, Ms. Duffy made a motion to adjourn at 7:21 p.m. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Respectfully submitted:

Attest:

Lisa Rhoades
Planning and Zoning Assistant

Mark Dobbins
Chairman

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