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MEMO

TO: Jim Wendelgass, Township Manager
West Vincent Township

FROM: Richard M. Tralies, RLA
Director of Municipal Planning
Ann Hutchinson, AICP
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DATE: September 10, 2015

RE: West Vincent Township Ordinance Review Summary

Natural Lands Trust (NLT) has reviewed the West Vincent Township Zoning and Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances, in order to assess their effectiveness in protecting water quality. The ordinances address many issues which affect water quality at a large and small scale. Conservation Subdivision regulations preserve natural features within large open spaces, while required seepage pits encourage infiltration on individual lots. The scope of regulations contained within the ordinances represents some of the most sophisticated in Pennsylvania and the standards protect water quality reasonably well. We've identified ordinance sections which could be "tweaked" to protect water quality even further.

The following assessment summarizes the key findings and offers recommendations that the Township may consider implementing in order to improve water quality.

1. Natural Resources Protection

- A. **Waterways and Wetlands** – Many streams and their tributaries flow through West Vincent Township, including French Creek, Birch Run and tributaries of Pickering Creek. These streams and their associated floodplains and wetlands are important assets to the community as they play a role in groundwater recharge and flood prevention and provide recreation opportunities.

Recommendation: Zoning Ordinance (ZO) Section 2307 requires 150' wide buffers on special protection streams, and in new, non-agricultural activities. This section could be strengthened with buffer restoration and planting requirements, providing *forested* riparian buffers. Where slopes over 25% occur, the buffer should be measured from the top of slope. Although agricultural uses are excluded from the buffer requirements, an

outreach program to encourage forested riparian buffers, or review of disturbance within the buffer zones is still advisable.

Recommendation: ZO Section 2305 states that a 100' wetland margin shall be established and no more than 20% of that margin shall be disturbed, unless the Board deems that a greater amount of disturbance is acceptable. Buffer restoration and planting requirements would also ensure that the edges are restored to a forested state.

Recommendation: ZO Section 222.C includes standards for raising animals. This section could be strengthened to include requirements such as fencing or setbacks, intended to keep animals out of streams and wetlands. Additionally, the Floodplain Conservation Overlay District could be amended to restrict pasturing from the floodplain.

- B. **Trees** – The conservation subdivision requirements adequately protect woodlands through greenway land delineation requirements. However, other sections of the ordinances can be tweaked to more effectively protect individual trees.

Recommendation: ZO Section 2231 includes a chart of specimen trees. The section permits removal of these trees with replacement required at 1/6th the dbh of those trees removed. The required quantity of replacement trees could be increased to more effectively replace the trees removed and to act as a greater deterrent to removal. Additionally, ZO 2231 requires a one year maintenance period on replacement trees. This can be extended to an 18 month maintenance period, the customary guarantee period for nursery stock.

2. Conservation Subdivision & Transfer of Development Rights

Conservation Subdivision provisions appear to be effective in protecting streams and wetlands. A five step design process is required. Zoning also include a French Creek Scenic River Corridor, which encourages less disturbance in this area.

Recommendation: The Zoning ordinance permits TDR from any property. However, this section could be strengthened by incentivizing transfer of development rights away from water resources such as stream corridors.

3. Greening of Development & Redevelopment

Much of West Vincent Township is currently undeveloped. Where development does occur, reduction of paving and greening of parking lots and other built features can help to maintain or improve water quality as well as improve the aesthetics of new development. Provisions

regulating paving, parking and landscaping of parking lots and stormwater management facilities, could be strengthened to better protect water quality.

- A. **Stormwater Management** – The ordinances include many regulations which directly impact water quality and recharge, including disconnection of roof drains and infiltration through seepage pits. Some of these requirements could be strengthened further through minor changes.

Recommendation: SLDO Section 610.G.2.k requires roof drains to be disconnected from the sewer system. This requirement could be amended to require rain gardens or vegetated swales to accompany disconnected roof drains, in order to encourage infiltration.

Recommendation: SLDO Section 610 includes stormwater management facility requirements. This section could be amended to include landscaping standards for facilities, including perimeter plantings and establishment of wet meadows in basins.

- B. **Parking Lot Enhancement** – Parking lot greening can greatly improve stormwater management within the lot while also beautifying it. The ordinances currently require some landscaping, but can be amended to better protect water quality.

Recommendation: The zoning ordinance currently requires landscaping of parking areas, but also requires curbing and raised beds. The ordinances could be amended to require a greater amount of landscaping, along with sunken, uncurbed beds, which can capture and infiltrate stormwater.

- C. **Street Trees** – Shade trees of 3 inch caliper are currently required to be planted every 50 feet along subdivision streets, within a tree lawn. The street tree requirements are adequate, but could be tweaked.

Recommendation: The street tree interval could be reduced to 40' of street length, a more typical standard.

Recommendation: SLDO Section 611.J.4 states that if the planting strip is less than 7' in width, trees can be planted on the lots. This section could be changed to require the planting strip to be no less than 7' in width, and for the trees to be planted within the strip. By keeping the trees closer to the road, they have the added benefit of acting as traffic calming devices and shading the pavement. The landscape strip can also be a valuable infiltration area if graded as a shallow swale.

D. Reduction of Paving – The street and parking standards within West Vincent Township’s ordinance could be amended to better serve water quality and infiltration by reducing the amount of required paving. Reducing paving amounts also reduces the heat island effect, saves the Township repaving costs and potentially “calms” or slows traffic, making areas safer for pedestrians.

Recommendation: SLDO 611.B.2.c states that an additional cartway width should be provided for parking along streets. Where on-street parking is proposed, local streets would be required to be between 28 and 36’ in width. For local street standards, we rely upon the publication *Residential Streets*, 3rd edition, jointly published by the Urban Land Institute, National Association of Homebuilders, American Society of Civil Engineers and Institute of Traffic Engineers. This publication recommends an 11 to 12 foot moving lane and 6 to 7 foot parking lane for local streets, or a total width of 18 feet; where parking is located on both sides of the street (rare in West Vincent) the width would increase to 22 to 26 feet total. The reduced width slows traffic, which could improve safety on local streets. Less paving would also reduce the amount of impervious surface as well as stormwater runoff.

Recommendation: SLDO Section 611.F.4.c requires culs-de-sac to be paved a 40’ radius. This radius could be reduced to 30’ or expanded to accommodate a planted center island which could collect stormwater and beautify the street.

Recommendation: The zoning ordinance requires parking spaces to be 10 x 20’. This could be reduced to 9 x 19’, thereby reducing the amount of paving.

E. Natural Resource Overlay. The Township zoning ordinance includes Article XII, Steep Slope Overlay District and Article XXIII, Water Resources Overlay District. The Township might consider creation of a “Natural Resource Overlay District” that consolidates floodplains, steep slopes, woodlands/specimen vegetation, and water resources into one article.