



TOWNSHIP OF MORRIS

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TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

(973) 326-7360

August 18, 2020

Dear Residents,

I write to update you on our plans for the upcoming (8/26) Public Hearing on the Abbey.

Per the certified letter that was sent on 8/11/20 to residents who live within 200 feet, we do plan to begin the Public Hearing at 6 PM on Wednesday, August 26th. This letter provided information about the Zoom-access component of this meeting. Unfortunately, it did not reference our plans to also include provisions for in-person attendance (which had not yet been finalized at that time). Regrettably, this omission has led to confusion and frustration, and for that, I sincerely apologize.

My purpose here is to provide complete information about this upcoming meeting so residents have a full understanding of what to expect.

Please know that all of us on the Township Committee fully understand how important it is for anyone who is comfortable and interested to be able to attend this meeting in person. We are doing everything we can to ensure safe in-person attendance for as many people as possible.

Given the unprecedented challenges COVID presents, our intention all along has been to conduct this Public Hearing via a "hybrid" model: with Zoom-access for anyone who is not comfortable attending in person while also providing in-person attendance to the extent that State guidelines allow.

The latest COVID guidance from the State limits indoor gatherings to no more than 25 people and outdoor gatherings to no more than 500 people. Strict rules re: social distancing, masks, personal hygiene, and equipment cleaning apply in both of these circumstances and will be strictly enforced accordingly.

Given the full range of tech and logistical challenges posed by holding this meeting at an outdoor venue (especially the challenges of producing reliable hotspot internet connectivity as well as weather-related considerations), **our plan for conducting this meeting is as follows:**

In our meeting room at Town Hall, we will set up in-person attendance for any member of the Township Committee (TC) and any of our professionals who are comfortable attending in person. Any of our TC members or professionals who are not comfortable attending in person will participate via Zoom. This "comfort level" is a matter of individual choice, which we ask everyone to acknowledge and respect.

In our parking lot at Town Hall, we will set up a large screen and sound system. Video of the meeting will be projected on the screen. Socially-distanced seating will be available in the parking lot for anyone who's interested. Per State COVID guidelines, social distancing (6 feet between unrelated persons) is required and will be strictly enforced. Masks are strongly encouraged but not absolutely required outdoors provided that social distancing is being strictly followed. Folding chairs will be available, but bringing your own (possibly more comfortable) lawn chairs is recommended.

During this hearing, anyone who wishes to share their questions or comments in person will be able to do so. Approximately 3-5 people at a time will be escorted into the meeting room where they will be able to speak directly to the TC members and professionals who are there in person.

Video of these interactions will be aired on the large screen in the parking lot. Mask-wearing in the meeting room is required.

If weather conditions that evening do not permit outdoor video projection, our back-up plan will be as follows: The large screen and outdoor seating in chairs will be cancelled. The meeting will be carried out largely by Zoom – with primary access being from your own home. For anyone who has a strong preference to share their comments in person, we will allow 3-5 individuals at a time into the meeting room to do so, but in this case, access to video of the meeting will have to be through your own device (phone or I-Pad, for example) from a location outside the meeting room – most likely your car. While we anticipate that most people will not want to do this, we will offer it as an option for anyone who is interested.

We also have plans to address some of the tech challenges residents have brought to our attention - including the following actions and resources:

- We will be conducting two “training/practice” sessions for Zoom participation: one on Thursday 8/20 from 7-9 PM and another on Monday 8/24 from 3-5 PM. Both sessions will be conducted by Zoom.
- Further information about the content of these training sessions and log-on links to participate in them will be shared on the Township’s [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) as well as via the Municipal Messenger.
- Anyone who is not already signed up for the Municipal Messenger is strongly encouraged to sign up. The sign-up link can be found on the homepage of the Township’s website or [here](#).
- Additional training resources can be found in the following link from the Township’s website: [Having Issues with Zoom? View Video Tutorials Provided Here to Learn More](#)
- Anyone who is not able to get on Zoom at all should send an email which includes your PHONE NUMBER, to our administrator, Tim Quinn, at administration@morristwp.com. Tim will have a tech volunteer call you and guide you through the process of activating Zoom.

On July 16th, I sent a [Message to Residents](#) who had reached out to express their thoughts re: the Abbey. This message (which is posted on the Township’s [website](#)) provides detailed information re: the challenges COVID has forced (and continues to force) upon us and the reasons for the choices we made at that time – and now. Excerpts of that letter are included in the mailing we are sending to residents in the surrounding neighborhood on 8/17. I encourage anyone who plans to participate in the upcoming Public Hearing to read this message beforehand.

At this point, for all of the reasons enumerated in detail in my July 16th Message to Residents, we do plan to proceed with the Public Hearing on the Abbey at 6PM on August 26th as outlined here, and if more time is needed, on September 3rd as well.

The link to log on to the 8/26 Public Hearing can be found [HERE](#) or on the Township’s website.

I hope this message has helped to clarify your understanding and expectations re: the upcoming (8/26) Public Hearing on the Abbey. While this situation is extremely difficult (clearly there is no ideal solution that will satisfy everyone), at the same time, I hope you can see that we on the Township Committee are working very hard and in good faith to implement safe, in-person attendance for as many people as possible given the unprecedented challenges COVID is presenting for all of us.

In that spirit, a majority of us on the Township Committee believe it serves the best interest of our community to proceed with the Public Hearing on this project on 8/26 as outlined here. We look forward to seeing as many residents as possible at that time and to keeping in touch in the meantime.

Best to all,
Cathy
Cathy Wilson
Morris Township Mayor

From Mayor Cathy Wilson's July 16th Message to Residents ...

On July 16th, I sent a letter to residents who had contacted me to share their thoughts re: the Abbey. The full text of this letter is on the Township's website. The portion that remains relevant to present circumstances – considerations re: the upcoming (8/26) Public Hearing – are highlighted here...

Having worked with COVID-related realities now for months, many of us on the Township Committee have reluctantly come to accept a truly bitter pill: that holding this meeting in person may not be possible until this pandemic ends and/or a vaccine is in place – neither of which is likely before next Spring (2021) at the earliest. If we wait until then, our ability to even consider this proposal will be lost. It is not reasonable to expect Restoration Hardware to wait until Spring 2021 for us to begin considering this proposal. They will not do that.

I understand that some residents would be happy to see Restoration Hardware move on. But there's another reality we all need to be aware of. If the Restoration Hardware proposal is taken off the table, the most likely scenario is that this property will be turned into condos. The outcome of the upcoming hearing is in no way certain. But at least it preserves this proposal (or some variation of it) as a choice. To me, that is an important consideration in working to serve the best interest of our community.

Given the full range of the ever-shifting uncertainties COVID presents, we have reached a point where we now have two basic choices:

- 1) Continue postponing this meeting until in-person attendance is certain – i.e. most likely next Spring (and thereby lose the ability to consider this proposal at all)
- 2) Proceed with the decision-making process on this proposal even if in-person attendance is not possible.

Speaking for myself: as much as I am committed to holding this meeting in person, I also believe we owe it to our community to make a decision on this proposal one way or the other. I do not believe it serves the best interest of our community to continue postponing this meeting indefinitely because by so doing, we lose the ability to even consider this proposal at all.

Postponing the meeting date even by a few months will do nothing to increase the likelihood of making in-person attendance possible. In my view, the opposite is true: given widespread predictions of a second wave in the Fall, the longer we wait, the less likely it becomes for in-person attendance to be possible.

For all of these reasons, a majority of Township Committee members support the need to proceed with the Public Hearing on 8/26 (and if needed on 9/3) even if in-person attendance is not possible and participation has to be limited to Zoom only.

The thought that we MAY have to do this total anathema to me. But it's important to me that you understand well in advance that is possible – and why.

I also want to correct some misconceptions about the public hearing: the notion that the plan on the table is “take it or leave it” is simply inaccurate. Modifications can, should, and will be made to address concerns that have been and will be brought up. Discussing residents’ concerns and the options for addressing them is the most important purpose for holding the Public Hearing in the first place. No one can say for sure what the final proposal will look like. That is yet to be determined as part of the public hearing. But we have to proceed with the decision-making process or the possibility of even considering this proposal will disappear.

As participants in this process, my goal (and the goal of every member of the Township Committee) is to reach a decision that serves the best interest of our community. Each of us will listen carefully and reflect deeply on every comment and suggestion that is shared. We know we need time to process and digest all of the information, ideas, and modifications that will come up. That is why we have committed NOT to vote at the public hearing but will vote at a subsequent meeting instead.

In summary: We are doing everything possible to ensure that the meetings scheduled for 8/26 (and if needed 9/3) allow for in-person attendance by anyone who is interested. Our hope is to secure a large indoor venue that meets COVID guidelines and allows plenty of room for safe social distancing. If we are unable to secure a venue (indoor or outdoor) and meet all the requirements for holding an in-person meeting, it is likely we will proceed by Zoom-only participation.

I hope this has helped you understand the exceedingly difficult circumstances COVID is presenting for all of us.

I also hope we can work together in a collaborative spirit to approach these challenges with a shared goal in mind: what can we all do to serve the best interest of our community?

I look forward to keeping in touch and working together in that spirit in the days ahead.

Best to all,
Cathy

Cathy Wilson
Morris Township Mayor

TOWNSHIP OF MORRIS
MORRIS COUNTY, NEW JERSEY
AUGUST 26, 2020
SPECIAL MEETING NOTICE

KINDLY TAKE NOTICE that the Township Committee of the Township of Morris has scheduled a special meeting that will be held on Wednesday, August 26, 2020 at 6:00 P.M.

This special meeting is for the public hearing and final consideration of the following Ordinance:

AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF MORRIS, MORRIS COUNTY, NEW JERSEY, RECOMMENDING THE ADOPTION OF THE ABBEY/ALNWICK HALL REDEVELOPMENT PLAN REGARDING THE PROPERTY IDENTIFIED ON THE TOWNSHIP'S TAX MAPS AS BLOCK 8409, LOT 1 (355 MADISON AVENUE MORRIS TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY) PURSUANT TO THE LOCAL REDEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING LAW, N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1 ET SEQ.

Formal action may be taken by the Mayor and Township Committee of the Township of Morris at this meeting.

By order of the Township Committee
Cathleen Amelio, Township Clerk

You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

When: Aug 26, 2020 06:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Topic: Abbey Redevelopment Public Hearing

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87877129136?pwd=U2FnNjRMVjRDM1kxTlhlRHJGaDdRQT09>

Passcode: 652846

Or iPhone one-tap :

US: +13126266799,,87877129136#,,,,,0#,,652846# or
+19292056099,,87877129136#,,,,,0#,,652846#

Or Telephone:

Dial(for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):

US: +1 312 626 6799 or +1 929 205 6099 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 346 248
7799 or +1 669 900 6833 or +1 253 215 8782

Webinar ID: 878 7712 9136

Passcode: 652846

International numbers available: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87877129136?pwd=U2FnNjRMVjRDM1kxTlhlRHJGaDdRQT09>