Introduction and Overview:

The applicants would like to respond to points from the last several hearings and provide clarifications on what the Sycamore Grove plan delivers and explain the plan in the context of the planned district portion of the Township Zoning Resolution.

First, to be clear -- the applicants believe the proposed development will be positive --- and that new housing in the range of $350,000 to $400,000 will not hurt Township residents, but will in fact enhance existing property values. Bringing new home buyers into the area, who will succeed economically and gain roots in the community, mean they will also buy existing high value homes in the future as they continue to move up. This is the natural progression of building housing equity and value that healthy real estate markets and existing owners need. This addresses the question, who will buy my home for value when I am ready to sell.

Second, the applicant has listened, responded and made many changes throughout this process to improve the site design to better fit the character of the area, to enhance buffering and natural preservation and to create a rural aesthetic. We have documented those changes in writing to the Commission.

Third, the applicant has filed a valid application under the code section that supports the proposed plan. This is not a variance process or a rarely used code section. The planned district code section is the norm -- not the exception for modern developments. The Township Planned District code section encourages diversity in housing types, site design, different lot standards and density alternatives compared to the historic, large lot development pattern. Reading from the code, the Planned District section specifically encourages Planned Residential Districts to achieve:

(a) a maximum choice of living environments by allowing a variety of housing and building types and permitting an increased density per acre and a reduction in lot dimensions, yards, building setbacks and acre requirements;

As well as:

(b) a more useful pattern of open space and recreation areas...;

The Planned District section not only allows modifications from base code provisions, but even encourages alternative lot sizes, density and approaches to open space.

At this site, doubling code open space requirements and providing open space and natural areas access that approaches triple the amount of base code open space requirements and providing for 100% buffering for neighbors -- justifies slightly higher density than standard code.
Sycamore Grove Enhances Adjacent Property Values and The Character of the Area:

One of the main purposes of zoning law is to protect existing property values. Sycamore Grove meets this purpose because it will protect and likely enhance adjacent values. Sycamore Grove fits the character of the area because the prevalent development pattern already balances large lot properties with high value subdivision developments.

We have documented that the homes Rockford builds in central Ohio, and will build here, exceed the average values for properties adjacent to this site. The average Auditors’ value of the 57 properties around this site is $269,500 with an average square footage of 2400. Within two miles of this site, in 2019 there were 52 home sales of homes with 4 bedrooms, 2 ½ baths, an average square footage of 2,362, and an average price of $300,390. This was through most of calendar year 2019.

Rockford sold 103 homes in all of central Ohio through mid-2019 at an average price of nearly $394,000.

If being conservative, a $350,000 market value home (the low end of the estimated price range), the proposed Sycamore Groove development represents an estimated $94,000,000 in real estate investment. Subdivision style development at such price points has not proven to harm other existing property values in the Township. The opposite is true, as property values in general in Violet Township are appreciating.

Similarly, high value subdivision development with appropriate amenities and significant open space, has co-existed with large acreage property and large lot zoning without a negative impact on value. There is no evidence to suggest high quality subdivision developments like Meadowmoore, Heron Crossing, or Estates at Lake Forest, that are all PRDs in the vicinity of this site, have negatively impacted large lot home values or the values of large acreage properties. Again, both large lot and high quality subdivision properties in the Township and Pickerington are appreciating, not declining. Subdivision communities like Meadowmoore and Violet Meadows have existed for years alongside large acreage properties. And newer communities like Heron Crossing and Estates at Lake Forest have been approved and built without damaging Township property values. A review of the Township zoning map visually reveals a prevalent development pattern and character that includes both subdivision and large acreage properties successfully co-existing. Heron Crossing is approximately 1500 feet from the Sycamore Groove property. Thus, Sycamore Grove does not change the balance and character of the Township.

The trajectory of Township property values -- that are going up in general -- will not be negatively affected by Sycamore Groove. It would be difficult to produce an objective market study, or other evidence to suggest $350,000 to $400,000 new housing will negatively impact other $400,000, $500,000 or even $600,000 and up housing or property. That is because the standards for new developments enforced by this Township in fact support and enhance existing property values. This is what the previous PRD approvals near this site have done and what nearly $100 million investment at Sycamore Grove will do.

Large lot properties of 5, to 10 to 25 acres or more, in proximity to higher value subdivision development is also the historic and prevalent land development pattern in several other high-end central Ohio communities like Dublin, New Albany, Powell, Liberty Township and Jefferson Township.
Like Violet Township, these areas support property value growth over time with a mix of large lot properties and high-value subdivisions.

**Appropriate Density on This Site Meets Market and Developability Requirements**

At the market price to buy this property, with the cost to install central sewer utilities, the cost to make road improvements, and the need to keep overall development costs within reason so that home prices are at a level that match area market prices....all these factors mean the traditional density limit would greatly challenge this site’s viability in the market. It is also very expensive to buy large portions of open space at development prices, and set it aside without a business yield.

The housing market has already defined this site by the following measures:

- Average adjacent Auditor’s property values bordering this site at around $269,000
- And sales at neighboring Heron Crossing at around $343,000 through mid-2019
- And Township new build home values around $362,000 on average through most of 2019

Sycamore Grove must keep pricing in a range of $350,000 to $400,000 on average to be viable. The way to accomplish this is with a plan with slightly higher density, that also provides substantial perimeter buffer for neighbors and greater natural open space to create and protect value.

The site is unique from a developability standpoint in terms of the cost of sewer access and the stream corridor and topography, which are being preserved, but which in turn limit development and/or drive more development costs. A large lot, lower density development plan that has been urged as an alternative throughout the hearing process is not viable on this site. A large lot R-2 plan could not deliver 100% perimeter buffering and so much natural area protection. An R-2 plan would increase the development footprint. It would force more land on private lots, develop more ground and open spaces overall, run more streets and utilities and struggle to deliver an efficient plan and cover development costs. (In short, an R-2 plan is NOT viable here based on the development costs and the unit count needed to justify and cover such costs.)

Larger lot, higher end developments are slowing in terms of sales absorption in central Ohio. The market does not support the significant increase in the amount of marginal value per home that would be necessary at this property to share the same development costs between fewer units. This is because the market is more limited at the top. There is a market driven reality to the Parade of Homes being cancelled for the first time in a half century. Meanwhile, demand for first time move-up and moderate priced housing for families is surging.

If anything, the reasons neighboring owners with large lots and higher values should want a different product here. First, because it won’t flood the market with more homes that are too highly priced, thereby diluting their market values.

Second, because, as stated, the younger families and first time move up buyers are the future farm system to buy more upscale homes and larger properties as they develop roots in the community. This is a question of where future buyers will come from. Folks in their 50s, 60s, and 70s in higher value homes and properties should care about this. A recent WSJ article documented that 1 in every 8 occupied dwellings will hit the market from 2017 to 2027 as the baby-boom generation transitions. This is the
reason existing residents should want new buyers and a different, but complementary product in this community. New buyers at Sycamore Grove will not compete with $600,000 and up higher value properties in the market. But Sycamore Grove buyers will become the future buyers of more upscale homes and larger properties when those owners are ready to sell for value.

Purpose of Planned District Code Section, Balance Between Density and Other Goals

Again, it is worth emphasizing that the Code context for this application is Planned District law. Code section 3V1-01 gives meaning to the purpose of a Planned Residential District and the state legislatures and townships intent and policy to encourage flexibility in community design, housing types, density and open spaces, in a manner different than the base code and the traditional development pattern. Any application of the code to this site and its approvability must consider Section 3V1-01 of the Zoning Resolution and what planned districts are meant to achieve. This section reads as follows:

(Ask Kelly to put up code section.)

3V1-01: It shall be the policy of the Township of Violet to promote progressive and orderly development of land construction thereon by encouraging Planned Residential Districts to achieve:

(a) a maximum choice of living environments by allowing a variety of housing and building types and permitting an increased density per acre and a reduction in lot dimensions, yards, building setbacks and acre requirements;

(b) a more useful pattern of open space and recreation areas and, if permitted as part of the project, more convenience and neighborhood compatibility in the location of accessory commercial uses and services;

(c) a development pattern, which preserves and utilizes natural topography and geologic features, scenic vistas, trees and other vegetation and prevents the disruption of natural drainage patterns;

(d) a more efficient use of land than is generally achieved through conventional development resulting in substantial savings through shorter utility lines and streets.

Members of the Zoning Commission and ladies and gentlemen, Sycamore Grove meets all these objectives and is in keeping with the inherent goals of the Planned District section to allow standards, densities, lot sizes and open spaces that are different than base code.

Section (a), encourages choices of living environments, variety of housing, lot sizes, densities and reduced lot standards. This is the purpose and essence of a planned district code section...to produce a development pattern different than the traditional approach under the strictness of the base code. This is a recognition that homes, lots and development patterns with different sizes can have equal or similar value, that diversity and a variety of housing choices create a strong market and community...and that many different housing developments can achieve the same or higher value compared to the traditional approach.
The site design and projected sales prices at Sycamore Grove will accomplish the main goals of Planned District law – to allow a different development design and even slightly smaller lots and greater density, limited to a smaller development footprint to achieve the same or greater value.

With 30% open space and the separate preservation of the natural stream corridor, as well as the buffering on this site, the criteria of 3V1-01 (b) and (c), are met. This creates a more useful pattern of open space and recreation areas because topography, scenic vistas, trees, natural vegetation, natural drainage patterns and about 7 acres of stream corridor will be preserved in perpetuity. The plan also creates approximately 30 acres of natural perimeter buffer and allows it to revert to natural area to the benefit of neighboring property owners.

Criteria (d) relates to greater efficiency and cost savings in land use. It’s a fact that larger lot development means longer and more expensive street and utility runs and greater maintenance costs over time. Sycamore Grove provides a more compact development pattern, clustering development in limited areas, to save more open space and limit street and utility runs. A standard code designed subdivision on this site would push the amoeba out – gobbling up more open space and meaning more street and utilities to install and maintain. As explained, the applicants don’t believe such an approach would be economically feasible based on development costs and the limitation of the stream corridor, and it would certainly mean pushing developed areas into what this site plan has designed as natural buffer areas.

**Conclusion:**

In the end, under the planned district analysis, the property values achieved under this plan and the natural features and stream corridor protected, the large amount of natural perimeter buffer acreage and the overall amount of open space -- that in real terms approaches 3 times base code requirements -- are the main reasons this plan justifies slightly higher density than base code. It is a better plan that was improved during this process, and we urge your favorable recommendation.

**Handouts Provided to The Zoning Commission:**

1. List of all changes made during the process and in response to staff, residents and commission feedback.
2. Application of Zoning Resolution sections related to Approvability.

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