

WESTTOWN TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE TASK FORCE MEETING

Stokes Assembly Hall
1039 Wilmington Pike, Westtown Township
July 27, 2016 – 7:00 PM

Present

Task Force Members – Bevilacqua, Davidson, Embick, Foster, Hatton, Kane, Kurth, Pomerantz, Van Tine and Yost. Absent were Barbacane and Sennett. Also present was Township Planning Director Chris Patriarca; Sean O’Neill of the Chester County Planning Commission (CCPC); John Theilacker and Meredith Mayer of the Brandywine Conservancy; Jennifer Leister Reitz of Thomas Comitta Associates; and those mentioned below.

Call to Order

Mr. Pomerantz called the meeting to order around 7:00.

Visioning Session Update

Ms. Reitz first provided the Task Force with a summary outlining what was learned as part of the visioning workshop. She indicated that there were over 80 people in attendance that is a very good turnout for one of these events in her experience. For the mapping of places that were “loved,” Ms. Reitz noted was great distribution throughout the Township of these places. Specific to the “places loved” the top four were Oakbourne Park, the Crebilly Farm, Pete’s Produce/Westtown School, and Rustin High School. The Task Force were not too surprised with this listing of places. For the mapping of places that were to be “improved,” Ms. Reitz noted the most identified place was the 202/926 intersection and the Marketplace shopping center.

Ms. Reitz next discussed the goals that were evaluated as part of the workshop. She stated the goals of improving transportation/coordination with PennDOT, open space/farmland preservation and trail creation were the most selected by the community. One of the items that came out of the meeting that was identified as an important topic but could not necessarily be placed on a map was the public sewer system.

Ms. Reitz next discussed the goal identified by the community from the 2001 plan they felt were no longer relevant. She stated that nothing really came out as something that is no longer relevant to contemporary Westtown. Ms. Reitz concluded by stating the information learned from the workshop is only one source of input available to the Task Force as they go through the planning process. She then reiterated the overall consistency with the top items identified at the workshop.

Ms. Reitz then asked the Task Force if they have any questions about how the data was collected and tabulated and/or how it may be utilized further in the planning process. Mr. Foster stated that he felt that much of what was learned was not a surprise to him and suggested the process utilized during the open space plan was a more impactful process. Mr. Bevilacqua agreed with the sentiment of Mr. Foster. Mr. Kane noted that some of the issues raised such as the ones involving PennDOT and emergency services may be outside the overall score of what the plan can accomplish. Mr. Embick though the workshop was well managed but was not too significant overall as only 80 persons attended, with many familiar faces. Dr. Davidson stated the persons in attendance are the vocal members of the community and that a positive view of the attendance is the possibility that many in the community are content with the way things are.

However, this also could mean there is not much projection into the future and looking towards innovation. He suggested the Task Force provide the innovation and vision.

Mr. Kurth indicated his only surprise was with the sentiment favorable for an alcohol referendum. Mr. Yost stated that the most interesting aspect for him was the discussion at the end of the workshop where people projected where they felt the Township would be 10-15 years out. Mr. Hatton stated that he was not surprised by what was learned, but did not know why this was the case. Further he asked what can be done by the Township to meet these goals. Ms. Van Tine would have liked to see more in attendance, but did state afterward she has met persons from the meeting and as word spreads through the community, more people will likely get involved. Mr. Pomerantz stated he was happy with the turnout and thought the input was very interesting. He then asked the consultant team how consistent was the feedback when compared to other municipalities and Ms. Reitz stated the feedback is very consistent with what she hears in Chester County. Mr. Pomerantz stated he learned a lot by just the way people spoke on issues and their immediate reactions.

Ms. Reitz then stated that nothing truly surprised her from the workshop. She did state that she felt the discussion had at the end would have been better at the start of the meeting. Ms. Reitz stated this information learned will be revisited in the fall to help guide the further development of the plan. Mr. Pomerantz stated that he was confident that future public meetings will be well attend. Dr. Davidson stated that he felt the Township could minimize the fallout from future meetings on land developments by requiring things such as trail connections and open spaces. Mr. Patriarca then spoke of how the plan impacts future development specific to rezonings and conditional use applications.

Mr. Pomerantz then asked Mr. Foster how he viewed the comp plan when he serves as a Supervisor. He stated that the plan was very useful in preserving the farmland adjacent to Oakbourne Park as the plan was very specific about farmland preservation. Mr. Patriarca stated an additional implementation mechanism that comes from the comp plan is the direction that it provides in the amending of the zoning and subdivision ordinances. Mr. Kane asked if Crebilly is beyond the scope of the planning process, and Mr. Pomerantz stated that the plan will not be complete before an application is made. There was then a general concern from the Task Force as a whole that the timing of the plan approval is not that good due to the pending development projects. Mr. Embick stated the plan is not legally binding for the decision makers, and as such they need to constantly be informed of where the process stands as to not be surprised later on.

Draft Sustainable Community Assessment

Mr. Theilacker led the Task Force through the assessment and the materials received by the Task Force. He stated the assessment is being utilized in part to help frame the comprehensive plan from the viewpoint of sustainability. He further noted the assessment does go very deep into current ordinances, but will be valuable when making recommendations for potential ordinance updates. Mr. Hatton asked if the assessment takes into account some of the issues currently present in the ordinance such as what is permitted as open space with a development project. Mr. Theilacker stated these types of issues can be addressed as they are brought forth by the Task Force as a whole, but can also be handled during the ordinance revision that is planned to be subsequent to this process.

First discussed was the overall concept for the assessment emphasizing environment, economy and society. The focus of the assessment is predominately on the environment as the municipality can have the greatest influence on it through their regulatory structure. The areas of

focus evaluated were based on Chester County municipalities due to the unique needs of this region. Dr. Davidson asked about the importance of food security and production and Mr. Theilacker stated this geared to ensure a municipality is capable of being able to produce its own food. Relevant to transportation, Mr. Theilacker stated the focus of the assessment is with how streets are planned and the modes of transportation available. Mr. Kane asked how the Township can control negative environmental impacts from pass through traffic, and Mr. Theilacker stated more coordination regionally to have a direct impact on this.

Mr. Embick suggested “sustainability” needs to be clearly defined for what it encompasses in this context as it can mean very different things for different people. He stated the importance of environmental sustainability and to have more detail on what it encompasses in the introductory discussion of the analysis. Mr. Pomerantz stated that economic sustainability should also be included as part of the overall assessment. Mr. Theilacker stated the Task Force will determine the overall priority of the issues discussed as part of the assessment.

Focusing on natural resource protection, Mr. Theilacker stated the strengths of the Township were identified as the recently completed open space plan, regulatory protections for steep slopes, floodplain areas and stormwater. He noted an issues is sometimes a lack of consistency between different areas of the various ordinances. Specific to steep slope protections, it generally applies to new development, but may come into play for infill and redevelopment.

Specific to water resources and quality, the strengths were noted as the stormwater ordinance, regulations for groundwater recharge, and on-lot management program to ensure maintenance of septic systems. Areas that present future opportunities were identified as further sewer planning and allowances for more natural ways for stormwater runoff. Specific to land use planning and community character, the strengths were identified as orderly development and some limited mixed-use areas. Weaknesses identified included as not allowing for more mixed-uses where appropriate, providing more pedestrian amenities and to amend zoning to encourage developers to assist in reaching more of these community goals.

Mr. Foster stated that throughout the assessment refers to Smart Growth and TND principles and stated that Westtown is relatively built out, and how can these types of principles be implemented with so little open land remaining. Mr. Theilacker stated as a 20-year plan the Task Force should be thinking about areas that may redevelop and/or areas that may be developed during this time horizon. Mr. Patriarca then gave an example of how these ideas can fit into existing neighborhoods by providing for greater ability for persons to invest in their property as necessary. Mr. Foster again stated his reservations with recommendations for Smart Growth and TND principles as many do not apply in Westtown as many areas are already built-out. Mr. Theilacker stated this is just the starting point and things will become more refined as additional information is developed and studied.

Dr. Davidson stated his feeling of viewing the Township as being static looking into the future. Specifically he noted the physical plant of the Township as a whole will evolve and what exists today may not in the future. Mr. Hatton followed by speaking of the evolution of Wayne and the Great Valley Corporate Center during his lifetime as places that have changed significantly. Specific to climate change, strengths of Westtown include a regional greenhouse study and an ability to work from home. To address climate change, opportunities include promoting different modes of transportation and require replanting of areas with native plants.

Specific to renewable energy, strengths of Westtown include zoning regulations for renewable

energy systems, but that additional recommendations will be included as part of the plan. Specific to mobility and transportation, the focus was on alternative transportation modes (transit, trails, etc.). He further indicated the strengths are with what has previously been identified through the open space study that needs to be updated. Mr. Foster stated that there have been a number of reasons trails have not been constructed throughout the Township and stated some of these issues have been with some residents not wanting to see them constructed on the easements reserved for them and the issue of gaining additional easements through private property to make potential connections. Mr. Theilacker stated a successful approach is to start small and then build from its success.

Specific to public health and safety, strengths of Westtown include parks, open space and a curbside recycling program. In terms of opportunities, they include providing trail connections between public facilities and designing ways to provide for workforce housing as part of new development and an update of a recreation fee in lieu. Specific to food production and security, strengths of Westtown include, an active Agricultural Security Area, Pete's Produce and community gardens. Opportunities are to provide for greater farmland preservation for the remaining active farms. In conclusion, Mr. Theilacker stated it is up to the Task Force to determine how much of the assessment is focused in the plan.

Mr. Patriarca stated from his perspective the most important issue facing the Township in the next 10-15 years will be stormwater management. He stated there are more and more unfunded mandates coming from the state and federal governments on this that will become the responsibility of the localities, although he indicated it should be handled at a regional level instead. He then spoke of some of his experiences with stormwater management in his previous job back in Virginia. Ms. Van Tine stated part of the issue now is the greater frequency of the 100-year storm. Mr. Embick stated the state stormwater program has been ramped up over the past few years and stated at the end of the road is the Clean Water Act and there will be a cost to get there.

Mr. Pomerantz asked the consultant team what the Task Force should walk away with from the assessment. Mr. Patriarca stated with the limited resources available for the Task Force to prioritize the 2-3 most important issues identified in the study. Specific to stormwater management, a new ordinance has been adopted and enforced. An issue to consider is how to retrofit older neighborhoods with stormwater management as well as to provide a better education on this issue and how it may impact them directly. Mr. Theilacker stated part of the job of the consultant team is to design strategies that make sense and is easy to understand for the general public.

Mr. Foster stated that the ideas of the assessment should be prioritized by issues that the Township has the greatest ability to impact. He then stated his experience going to meetings of the Chester/Crum Creek Association and his view that issues such as stormwater do not become a priority until the state makes it one that results in a need for additional taxpayer monies. Mr. Embick followed by stating the need and positive impact of stormwater facilities. He further stated that if something is deemed a priority in the plan and the BOS agrees, then monies could be potentially reallocated accordingly to implement priority goals. Mr. Embick then used the recent experience of East Goshen in developing their trail system and how they have been successful in gaining easements. Mr. Pomerantz then stated the mandate of the Task Force is to develop the plan and identify priorities.

Next discussed was the issue of trails as a priority. Specific to this Mr. Patriarca stated they

were included in a conceptual manner in the 2001 plan as well as more refined in the 2014 open space plan. He further stated that through the identification of possible alignments as part of the planning process, it can more weight to their possible implementation. Dr. Davidson stated that most of Westtown does not want necessarily any change, and that as part of the comprehensive plan it should be built in that residents should pay more attention to issues before they become problematic.

Mr. Embick followed by stating that many of these issues are a political problem and in order to solve them there needs to be a political strategy. Mr. Pomerantz then gave an example of his experience in Florida with how the trees that were planted as part of the landscaping of the developments were not appropriate as they cannot withstand hurricane winds, and city council passed regulations to remedy this. Mr. Foster stated there are state programs for tree plantings, and if the Township is interested they can be bought in bulk. Followed was a discussion on whether or not regulations should be considered for the planting of non-native species.

Ms. Van Tine stated this process should consider the fact that Westtown will not stay the same and be prepared to implement items identified in the plan as it continues to evolve. Next discussed were sewage needs and septic systems in the Township. Dr. Davidson asked if there are monies available for sewer infrastructure, and Mr. Embick stated there is not much money available at this time. He further stated this continues to be a significant problem in the Township and the on-lot management program was authorized by the DEP to confirm septic systems are functioning properly. Mr. Embick then stated his concern that future system failures will ultimately result in the DEP require extensions of public sewers, and as such what will the comprehensive plan say on this issue. Mr. Patriarca noted the 2001 plan envisioned a regional approach to public sewers.

Mr. Embick also stated a priority of incentivizing the use of renewable energies. Ms. Van Tine stated that the city of Dallas has a checklist of sustainable features to be met, but does not have to necessarily have to be LEED certified. Mr. Patriarca stated any additional thoughts should be sent to his attention. Mr. Bevilacqua was asked what elements of the Open Space plan would he like to see incorporated in the comprehensive plan and indicated the issues of the trails and a few other issues but would need to evaluate it further. He further stated some of the lessons learned for the Open Space plan is trying to get people involved, sated how informative the stakeholder interview feedback was and that the final plan should include a succinct, easy to read document for reference. Specific to the final plan, he stated the priorities were all ranked with a master plan for Oakbourne being the most important. Mr. Embick that a vision should start to emerge for what Westtown is and what it can be in the future.

Stakeholder Interviews

Mr. Pomerantz stated that 19-20 persons have been identified to meet with and asked the consultant team to forward some basic questions to serve as a starting point for these interviews. He then listed the persons/organizations that will be contacted as: PennDOT, Ed McFalls from Westminster, Robinson family, John Jaros, Kurt Wolter owner of the Westtown Village, Joe Stratton of the Wynnorr Farm, Westtown School, WCU, Jim Scanlon from the WCASD, West Goshen Sewer Authority, managers from East and West Goshen, Karen Marshall of the CCPC, Chief Bernot of WEGO, Goshen Fire Company, Michelle Kichline of the County Commissioners and Gary Smith of the Chester County EDC. He further stated this list may change somewhat based on availability.

Next Steps/Meeting

Mr. Patriarca stated the August meeting will be canceled and that if anyone has additional questions or concerns to please contact him directly.

Public comment

There were no public comments.

Adjournment

9:00 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Patriarca
Comprehensive Plan Update Task Force Secretary