

# WESTTOWN TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE TASK FORCE MEETING

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

## **Present**

Task Force Members – Barbacane, Bevilacqua, Davidson, Embick, Foster, Hatton, Kane, Kurth, Pomerantz, Sennett, Van Tine and Yost. Also present was Township Planning Director Chris Patriarca; Sean O'Neill of the Chester County Planning Commission (CCPC); John Theilacker, Rob Daniels, John Snook 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.

## **Vision and Mission Statement: Subcommittee Volunteers**

Mr. Pomerantz stated that he, Ms. Van Tine, Ms. Barbacane, Mr. Davidson and Mr. Yost will be on a subcommittee to work collaboratively on the vision statement for the comprehensive plan.

## **Jake Michael from CCPC: The Millennials and Chester County**

Mr. Snook introduced Jake Michael from the CCPC as the guest for the evening on the issue of millennials in Chester County. Mr. Michael stated there has been much interest in the topic of millennials across the County as they surpassed the Baby Boomers as the largest group in the USA. He stated when projecting the future needs and likes of millennials, it is very difficult as it has changed so much thus far. Attracting millennials is critical for the community moving forward as they do constitute such a large demographic group. A specific concern with them in Chester County is whether or not they will be drawn back to the larger lot, single-family homes many grew up in as opposed to a denser, more urban lifestyle.

Mr. Michael then proceeded to describe some of the recent Census trends. He noted the 15-34 demographic within Chester County has been recently declining. Ms. Barbacane asked why the Generation X demographic was excluded from their analysis. Mr. Michael stated he was both surprised and concerned with a lack of attention placed on X, and speculated it was as a result of them being of a smaller generation when compared to the Boomers and millennials. He further stated that several of the economic concerns expressed by the millennials have also been expressed by the Xers.

Mr. Michael next presented several surveys that illustrated the trends and tastes of the various generations and focused on the average rent of \$925 discovered as part of the survey. Specific to perceptions, Mr. Michael noted that these generally do not always align with the actual realities. Specific to millennials, Mr. Michael believes the recent trends of developers focusing only on the needs of the millennials has been overblown to a large extent. Issues that were rated as being of higher importance to millennials than other generations included public transportation, multi-cultural backgrounds and a greater willingness to move away from their hometowns. Mr. Michael further stated that a significant number of millennials within the County are from an immigrant background and the most concerning issue for many is education/college debt.

Mr. Hatton asked if age of housing has been evaluated as part of this as he sees a general correlation between older units and affordability, and Mr. Michael stated this variable has not been specifically accounted for.

Specific to housing, many millennials see themselves as less likely to own their home and rent instead when compared to the older generations. Further there is a general trend towards smaller, more affordable homes which leads to some concern over the future of housing across the County. He further stated average rents in the County are in excess of \$1,000 per month adding to the overall concerns with housing. Mr. Embick stated the response to willingness to move is significantly impacted by where a person is in their overall life experience, not necessarily a product of just age. Mr. Michael stated he was unsure if the “young people moving” phenomena was wither a millennial or just being young issue, but did state economic uncertainty as being more if a uniquely millennial issue. He attributes this to the recession and fewer job opportunities, and Mr. Yost noted this will likely evolve as more Boomers exit the workforce through retirement.

Mr. Pomerantz followed by asking how we plan for millennials as part of the comprehensive plan update. Mr. Michael stated the current trends in housing prices are still in flux and no one is sure where it will level out making it difficult to plan for moving forward, resulting in planning for multiple scenarios relevant to housing. He further stated that some can be learned through recent trends of less ownership and higher numbers of renters and the impacts associated with this trend. He further stated that developers utilize the same data sources the CCPC utilizes when making these projections. Mr. Pomerantz then asked how the Township should plan for the significant number of residential units proposed for the Township over the next few years. Mr. Michael spoke of the evolution of a large scale development project in Chester Springs that changed as a result of the economy and to reflect the new reality.

Mr. Davidson stated his concern with the issue that what cause the recession have not been adequately addressed and the implications of this as well. Mr. Michael stated this has been a concern with many of the Boomers he has talked with, especially with regards to how much they will ultimately be able to sell their property for. He further reiterated his belief that there needs to be more flexibility in developing recommendations as part of the planning process to account for the uncertainty in the overall economy since the recession. Ms. Barbacane also stated some of the change with millennials may be attributable to their general starting of families later in life as well as buying of homes later than their parents. Mr. Foster stated that jobs are the magnet for millennial growth and asked what the County offers in terms of high quality jobs. Mr. Michael stated an issue facing Chester County is with its location being only truly close to Philadelphia/Wilmington and not to other centers of the northeast.

Mr. Sennett stated he would like to see more distinctions between what Westtown offers when compared to the needs of the millennials. He further stated this can help put into focus the positive assets of the community to build upon. Mr. Michael stated that access to transit has been identified as an important issue to address going forward. Ms. Barbacane stated that in her experience there was no suggestion they would also work within the Township, but rater chose Westtown as it is a desirable place to reside and raise a family. Mr. Davidson stated that housing should be constructed to attract buyers who work within the general vicinity of the community as a whole. Mr. Pomerantz then expressed his concern with placing such an emphasis on millennials that other generational groups are left more neglected. Mr. Michael stated he agrees there has been much emphasis on the millennial issue, and again emphasized that you cannot rely solely on the trends of the past as part of the planning process and must

instead plan for a variety of outcomes. Mr. Sennett argued one of the factors that makes the millennials different is their higher use and understandings of technology and the use of the internet.

### **Demographic Analysis and Residential Build-out**

Mr. Daniels with Brandywine led the Task Force through a presentation on Township demographics as it relates to the comprehensive plan. He first stated the general trends of the community show extensive growth between 1960-1990 with growth in Westtown slowing since the 1990s. Regionally speaking, Westtown is expected to see moderate growth through 2045 with an additional 2,700 residents envisioned to be added to the Township. Mr. Daniels then discussed population pyramids for Westtown. For the 2000 pyramid, Westtown exhibited a more traditional population distribution with a median age of 38.7. For the 2014 pyramid, Westtown saw more of a flattening of its population and an increase in its median age to 41.7.

Looking at education variables, Mr. Daniels stated Westtown is highly educated with education levels higher than the averages for Chester County as a whole. Within the WCASD, Mr. Daniels stated there is an expectation for a decline in overall enrollments into the future. Additionally, although the total enrollment has remained stable, there have been greater enrollment of minority students in the WCASD.

Specific to incomes, Mr. Daniels noted they have all increased since the previous Census. Income levels and income growth are greater than those levels for the County as a whole. Relative to unemployment, Westtown has a higher rate than the County average, but Mr. Daniels is not sure what is at the root of the large increase in the Township. Relative to employment, the most prominent sector for Westtown residents are in the service sector.

Mr. Daniels then presented overall commuting trends by Township residents. He stated residents still predominately drive to work and that average commute times have increased since 2000. Relative to housing stock and tenure, Westtown is consistent with the overall trends experienced in Chester County. Specific to housing values, Mr. Daniels noted that home in Westtown have fully rebounded from the losses of the recession. Overall, housing affordability is generally the lowest in eastern Chester County.

Mr. Pomerantz asked the Task Force what their overall takeaways from the presentation were. Mr. Davidson stated his was to allow for flexibility and options to handle the array of issues facing the Township. Mr. Sennett stated the data presents a relatively stable community with higher incomes and home values. Mr. Foster echoed this sentiment and noted Westtown is a bedroom community in a broader sense. Ms. Barbacane stated she was not concerned with a small population decrease as the area is still experiencing population increases and will continue to as more new housing units come on-line. Ms. Van Tine stated the presentations verified her general perceptions of the Township. Mr. Yost asked if ten years out people will still want to reside in Westtown or if there needs to be a change in how persons are attracted to the Township. Mr. Embick stated some of the uncertainty with future projections may present an opportunity for positive change, and Mr. Hatton also generally agreed with this sentiment. Mr. Pomerantz stated a concern he has is with affordable workforce housing within the Township.

Mr. Patriarca encouraged the Task Force members to utilize the data as part of their overall decision making. Specifically he identified the aging population as an issue that can impact overall goals and implementation strategies in terms of how to best accommodate and provide services for them. Mr. Foster stated that Westtown has a wide assortment of housing and what

can be done to promote reinvestment in older properties. Mr. Snook stated a major issue with housing affordability is for first time homebuyers who struggle to save for an adequate down payment. Mr. Snook stated the information learned at the meeting will be incorporated into goals and implementation strategies as the plan progresses. Further, this information will be helpful in the development of future land use scenarios that will be presented at future meetings.

Mr. Theilacker next presented the build-out analysis developed by the Conservancy. He first provided for an overview of “available” land and did not include Westtown School and current WCASD properties as part of the analysis. He further stated pending and future development are included in the analysis. Based on the present zoning of the “available” properties, the Conservancy estimated 390-440 residential dwelling units could potentially be developed. He further stated this does not necessarily account for redevelopment potential. Mr. Snook then suggested that redevelopment could be accounted for if one of the recommendations of the plan is to amend the zoning to allow for direct redevelopment.

### **Stakeholder interview update**

Mr. Pomerantz provided for an overview of the recently completed interviews. Speaking first about the one with Chief Bernot, he noted the growing demands of the force and ever-changing technological needs as being the most pressing issues facing the force. He further spoke of their focus on community-based policing as the move forward. Specific to crime in Westtown, the most significant issue is with internet, phone and mail scams. He next spoke about the interview with WCU President Dr. Fiorentino. Dr. Fiorentino focused on the issue of affordable housing as well as the current challenges facing the University. Mr. Snook stated the key themes learned from the interviews will be utilized in part to help develop goals and implementation strategies.

### **Next Steps**

Mr. Theilacker stated the main topic of the November 17 meeting will be natural and environmental resources.

### **Public comment**

There were no public comments.

### **Adjournment**

8:45 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Patriarca  
Comprehensive Plan Update Task Force Secretary