

WESTTOWN TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE TASK FORCE MEETING

Stokes Assembly Hall
1039 Wilmington Pike, Westtown Township
November 17, 2016 – 7:00 PM

Present

Task Force Members – Barbacane, Bevilacqua, Embick, Foster, Hatton, Kane, Kurth, Sennett, Van Tine and Yost. Absent were Pomerantz and Davidson. 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. Hatton called the meeting to order around 7:00.

Status of Vision and Mission Statement

Mr. Theilacker stated the planning team is on track with the timeline as outlined as part of the VPP grant. He stated they will work to have the draft vision statement ready for review by January and start work on mission statements. He also stated in January the Task Force will evaluate cultural resources in the Township. Mr. Sennett requested a reminder on the topic in early January for the Task Force to start thinking about it again after so much time off.

Discussion on the Crebilly/Toll project

Mr. Patriarca gave the Task Force an overview of the initial Planning Commission held on November 16 relevant to the Toll Brothers/Crebilly flexible development application. Ms. Barbacane asked if traffic along West Pleasant Grove Road was discussed and Mr. Patriarca stated it was not specifically but that traffic was the number one concern for many in attendance. Mr. Hatton stated he thought the meeting was as successful as it was as a result of the PC clearly defining the roles of the various entities as well as the rights of the property owner to develop in accordance with Township regulations. Mr. Embick agreed the meeting was very well run, noted that much of what was discussed was not unexpected and that only one person discussed the Constitutional mandate for preservation.

Mr. Kane asked why the Historical Commission (HC) was completing a report on the historic resources of Crebilly if the project is destined to occur. Mr. Hatton stated the HC report will help guide negotiation with Toll on potential preservation and/or incorporation of historical elements into their project. Mr. Patriarca further stated this historical analysis was critical in the initial site layout in attempting to preserve ground associated with the Battle of Brandywine. Next followed a brief discussion on previous proposals for the development of the Crebilly property. Mr. Patriarca stated that Toll will need to demonstrate they have adequately addressed negative impacts as part of the conditional use process prior to any sort of grant of approval. Mr. Hatton stated that Toll views their project as being an iterative process that will be refined further as it is reviewed by the PC and BOS.

Mr. Sennett noted that the comprehensive plan could impact the Toll development in terms of issues such as trails and open space. Mr. Foster further noted this is in place as part of the approved open space plan and expressed concerns over Toll's desire to connect to public sewer. Mr. Kane asked about the process involved with PennDOT approvals and Mr. Patriarca

spoke to this issue starting with the initial scoping meeting with the agency.

Plan for the Protection of Our Natural Resources

Mr. Theilacker led the conversation on natural resource preservation as it relates to the comprehensive plan. He noted the recent open space plan provides for much guidance on preservation of natural resources as well as referenced the Sustainable Communities Assessment developed over the summer. He stated natural resource preservation is a critical component of the plan update as well as a discussion on restoration of degraded resources.

Mr. Kane asked if anyone was aware of state regulations that prevent municipalities from working with each other to resolve common issues such as TMDL reductions in shared watercourses. Mr. Theilacker stated regional, multi-municipal stormwater management efforts underway across the Commonwealth to address these issues in a more collaborative manner. Mr. Kane asked why more local collaboration is not occurring on stormwater issues in Chester County. Ms. Barbacane stated her surprise to find out so many of the local waters as being impaired and Mr. Theilacker stated this has been a result of more rigorous DEP standards for pollutant classification. Mr. Embick then provided for more detail on the DEP process of mitigating polluted waterways, and Mr. Theilacker discussed the borough stormwater fee as an example of a recently implemented stormwater utility and how it will function in the borough.

Mr. Theilacker stated the primary reasons to plan for this are from the MPC requirement for its inclusion in a comprehensive plan and the intrinsic value natural resources add to overall quality of life. He spoke of being “forever green” first through resource preservation, and then presented a map to illustrate the existing Township resources. The first resource discussed were surface waters. He noted Westtown is in the Ridley Creek, Goose/Chester Creek and the West Branch of the Brandywine Creek as being the three drainage basins within Westtown. He then provided an explanation of how various streams are classified. Mr. Theilacker also noted areas of wetlands, especially within the vicinity of the existing stream network. Mr. Kane asked about the impact of the sewage treatment facility on Township streams. Mr. Patriarca stated this discharge is safe and highly regulated as part of their NPDES permitting through the DEP.

Mr. Theilacker next discussed special protection waters in the northeast portion of the Township. This designation results in the state prohibiting discharges into the watercourses that may negatively impact this standing. Specific to impaired streams, he indicated this classification is determined through the PA DEP as well. The reasons for impairment can be many issues ranging from sediment to phosphorus and Mr. Theilacker then described how the determinations is made whether or not a stream is impaired and what the Township responsibility is to improve them. Mr. Embick stated the DEP determines discharge limits for different industries, but if pollutant loads increase then things are reevaluated further. He then led a brief discussion on how impaired streams have negatively impacted Westtown Lake and the overall impacts of this pollution. Mr. Theilacker also talked about ecological issues that can be identified as part of TMDL determination.

Mr. Hatton noted recent ordinance amendments related to stormwater runoff, but expressed a frustration that the Township cannot require older properties to update facilities to better manage stormwater. Mr. Patriarca further stated that only areas of new proposed impervious surfaces are subject to compliance with current ordinances as part of a new development application. He stated the incremental improvement made by the project is better than the pre-construction state of the property. Ms. Van Tine suggested consideration may be given to a recommendation for requiring properties comply with the current stormwater ordinance at the

time of any proposed redevelopment at least in an incremental manner. Mr. Theilacker then discussed the differences between stormwater facilities that only retain water versus facilities that also serve to treat runoff.

Mr. Theilacker next discussed prime farmland soils. He noted the area does have some of the best farmland soils in the world due to their annual crop yields and noted these soils are present at Westtown School, Crebilly Farm and the Stratton Farm. These soils are only shown on non-developed areas as developed areas tend to have mixed soil classifications. Mr. Theilacker next discussed hydric or wet soils that are generally located in the vicinity of watercourses and are not conducive for development. Specific to steep and prohibitive slopes, Mr. Theilacker noted they are in excess of 25 percent slopes in areas adjacent to watercourses. He noted it is best to having none to moderate slopes due to erosion potential.

Mr. Theilacker next discussed biotic resources. He first spoke of areas of woodlands, and focused on the wooded areas of Westtown School and as open space areas of the Township. He noted the data was based on land cover from the DVRPC. Specific to riparian buffers, Mr. Theilacker noted their value in protecting and enhancing water quality and well as the environmental corridors they afford. He noted the importance of restoring riparian buffers back to their initial state. Specific to wildlife, Mr. Theilacker provided for an overview of the common species of Westtown and referenced the Chester County Wildlife Inventory and also those endangered such as the bog turtle. Mr. Embick then spoke of how Westtown School managed the relocation and repopulation of red bellied turtles as part of their lake project. Mr. Theilacker then spoke of the serpentine barren area on South New Street and how it is of a global significance as a result of two specific plant types found on the property and the rarity of the habitat. He noted if serpentine areas are not managed properly, the rare grasses cannot grow and the area will simply become forested.

Mr. Theilacker next spoke of the various approaches to protect natural resources. He noted the roles of the DEP and EPA for water resources. Specific to rare and endangered species, he spoke of the state agencies tasked with their protection and some of the methods they utilize to meet this end. The Township has numerous tools including the development, stormwater and zoning ordinances. Specific to agricultural security areas (ASAs), Mr. Theilacker presented a map illustrating their locations and noted this designation guarantees certain rights to farm from impacts associated from local ordinances. Additional areas that could be added to the ASA were also included in the study. Mr. Hatton asked if there are financial benefits to being an ASA, and Mr. Theilacker stated he was not aware this is the case, but there are other programs that do provide tax breaks for farmland.

Mr. Theilacker next discussed ways to protect properties with non-regulatory means. He specifically noted areas of Township and HOA open space that are protected areas. He. Noted school properties are not included as schools always retain the right to further develop their ground. The most common threats to natural resources are related to development and redevelopment projects such as Rustin Walk and the Crebilly proposal. Mr. Theilacker then discussed several of the larger remaining parcels that have potential for future preservation as larger open properties still present in the Township.

Mr. Theilacker then spoke of land protection practices. He spoke of land purchase and placement into land trusts as well as working with private property owners to move land into conservation. He noted incentives in current ordinances for conservation design and resource protection through clustering. Mr. Theilacker then discussed the concept of transfer of

development rights (TDR) whereby a property sells the development rights of their property and transfers the increased density to a designated receiving area to preserve open space and environmentally sensitive areas. He then discussed the use of an official map whereby the Township can designate areas for future public need to allow for the Township to negotiate for the land directly with a landowner prior to the commencement of a development project.

Next followed a discussion by the Task Force on potential recommendations on how to best preserve the remaining open areas of the Township. Mr. Theilacker further stated the open space plan will be incorporated into the plan update.

Public comment

There were no public comments.

Adjournment

8:45 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Patriarca
Comprehensive Plan Update Task Force Secretary