

WESTTOWN TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE TASK FORCE MEETING

Stokes Assembly Hall
1039 Wilmington Pike, Westtown Township
January 26, 2017 – 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; John Snook and Meredith Mayer of the Brandywine Conservancy; Jennifer Leister Reitz of Thomas Comitta Associates; Gail Guterl of the Westtown Historical Commission and those mentioned below.

Call to Order

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

Presentation: Historic and Cultural Resources

Mr. Snook first made a presentation of a digital “flyover” of the proposed Toll Brothers/Crebilly development. The presentation served as an introduction to the overall topic of historic and cultural preservation. Specifically the presentation illustrated how the development will impact the Brandywine Battlefield areas from a visual standpoint with denuded landscaping. He then explained the digital homes are scaled to the same height as the proposed Toll homes and described the GIS process used to develop the presentation. Mr. Snook then led the Task Force through a series of renderings that illustrated how the development will look taking into account the natural grades and overall geography of the site. He concluded his presentation by illustrating how the site can be reorganized to maximize the density on the eastern side of the property in order to preserve the western areas impacted by the Battle of Brandywine.

Mr. Kane asked if homes currently exist in the area of the “battlefield swath” outside Crebilly and Mr. Snook stated much has been built in these outside areas. Mr. Sennett stated the importance of preserving what is left with so much already built. Discussions on vegetative screening and the Liseter development in Newtown Square followed. A discussion on environmental concerns and the Constitutional mandate was then briefly discussed prior to Ms. Guterl made her historic resources presentation.

Ms. Guterl stated the Historical Commission (HC) states their primary mission is to educate the residents on historical resources. She stated that people tell her they are constantly surprised by the wealth of historic resources in Westtown. In order to do this, they developed a historic resources listing in order to formally recognize these features. She first described early efforts from the 1980s in the Township as well as County resources to make the initial listing that was subsequently reviewed by an architectural historian prior to BOS adoption. Ms. Guterl then discussed their classification system for historic resources and how they are applied.

She first discussed properties either eligible or on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). She indicated the only listed structure is the 926/Goose Creek Bridge and significant structures eligible for it include the Westtown Inn and Oakbourne Mansion. She then discussed the other four categories as being of local significance, structures of at least 100 years and older, potential archeological site and buildings with a historical element. Mr. Patriarca stated he believes at one point consideration was given to formally listing the Oakbourne Mansion on the

NRHP, but there were concerns with how the designation may impact the overall ability to fully utilize the property by the Township. Ms. Guterl then gave examples of designated structures and/or properties representing all of the five categories of historic resource within the Township. She then stated the HC has sent letters out to all of the listed properties requesting to take photographs and/or oral histories of each of the properties for their file and noted to date they have had on 32 responses for the 132 properties. She also noted Westtown cannot prevent a demolition or significant alteration of a structure on the listing, only request a delay in order to photograph the property in its existing state prior to its alteration or demolition. Mr. Foster noted the oldest structure in the Township was on the old Marshall Jones Farm, but was demolished by the school district to construct Rustin High School.

Mr. Sennett asked if the Brandywine Battlefield were on the listing. Ms. Guterl stated it was not, but that it should be as an archeological site on a future update. She further noted at the time the listing was developed, information on the Battlefield as it related to Westtown has become more known. Mr. Snook discussed further the more recent information discovered on the Battle.

Mr. Snook next made a presentation on ways by which to best preserve historic resources. He first noted these resources do not always have to be structural, but that they can also be landscapes and that historic resources need to be invested in to be sustained. Mr. Snook further be regulated utilizing land use tools similar to those already in place. Act 167 for Historic Districts and MPC zoning codes are the two principal tools available to municipalities in Pennsylvania to preserve historic resources.

Specific to the Historic District Act, Mr. Snook noted this is used for contiguous areas of historic resources. He did state an area that would constitute a district does not presently exist in the Township, but that previously the Darlington Corners settlement at the 202/926 intersection may have qualified. Mr. Snook further stated the review boards that oversee historic districts vary in the degree to which resources are preserved.

Mr. Snook then discussed the MPC historic preservation tools and noted preservation is listed as a "shall" and not a "may" in the context of the MPC. He noted his frustration with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and their lack of tracking of the various historical preservation ordinances throughout the state. He did note the MPC resource preservation is appropriate for Westtown as the resources are more spread out and not concentrated. He further suggested that regulation should incentivize potential reuse of historic properties instead of just demolition. He then presented a series of examples of preservation from across the state. He first discussed the Bethlehem and Lancaster experiences and their utilization of multiple preservation methods.

Relevant to the development of a historic resources listing, Mr. Snook first emphasized the importance of having in place an adopted resources listing and map. He noted the listing needs to be very specific as to identify all resources on a single property, not just the property itself. He then spoke of the Olney Township experience of having the entire Township listed as a historic resource. He then discussed ways by which to better educate the public on the issue of historic preservation. Mr. Foster noted previously there was a fair degree of pushback in the Township as a whole to regulation of historic properties. Mr. Guterl stated she believed the concern was with establishment of a HARB and how a historic property may be regulated. Mr. Snook stated in his involvement of historic resources in East Bradford, he was only aware of four demolition requests for historic properties. Specific to demolition, Mr. Snook spoke of the issue of "demolition by neglect."

He then discussed how providing for incentives for historic preservation can result in positive redevelopment potential. He then gave several local examples whereby lot and bulk standards were flexible for historic resources to allow for their economical incorporation into new development. He then spoke of enhanced building uses such as by-right accessory dwelling units as well as provisions for lot and bulk waivers for non-conforming historic structures. Specific to existing Westtown ordinances, Mr. Snook mentioned the provision for bonus density for historic preservation as part of a flexible development. He emphasized that any incentives need to be clearly relayed to property owners as to fully maximize them.

Mr. Bevilacqua asked if trees can be included as historic, and Mr. Snook stated this may be better handled under natural resource protection and noted the regulation East Bradford has in place for "William Penn trees." He further stated they are presently taking an inventory of these trees in the Township. Mr. Kane asked if any Civil War involvement was in Westtown and Ms. Guterl noted the establishment of Camp Elder in the Township for wartime prisoners. She further noted there were not sites in Westtown associated with the Underground Railway to her knowledge.

Mr. Pomerantz asked what the Task Force should consider relative to historic resource preservation. Mr. Snook stated the intent is to provide information on preservation with the end goal being to provide for recommendations to be considered on the issue as part of the plan. Mr. Guterl noted the importance of providing for some regulatory controls in order to preserve historic sites such as the Taylor Burial Ground in Pleasant Grove. Mr. Snook stated he would recommend the Task Force incorporate some of his suggestions on preservation in the plan with immediate needs being directed to Mr. Patriarca for consideration by the BOS.

Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

Ms. Barbacane stated she found the stakeholder interviews to be very informative and was surprised to see some commonality among all of those spoken with. Specific to the PennDOT interview, Mr. Pomerantz found it to be very interesting and commended the Task Force for reaching out directly to him as part of the process. He further stated these interviews will be beneficial for the BOS to hear as part of the overall process.

Update on draft Vision Statement

Ms. Reitz discussed where the subcommittee stood on the issue of the vision statement. She first noted several of the overlying themes that included: open space and agricultural preservation, building of more social communities and affordable/workforce housing. As such the subcommittee developed a vision statement that meets MPC mandates as well as what was discussed by the group. Ms. Reitz asked the Task Force for their thoughts on the draft statement and if it covers the overall vision as previously developed. Mr. Sennett stated to make the vision statement meaningful, a preliminary statement should also be included that provides for more of a mandated legal context to better explain it. The overall consensus to this proposal was positive and viewed as something helpful to better explain the statement to the general public.

Mr. Pomerantz suggested consideration also be given to geographical and not just social connections based on what was learned as part of the stakeholder interviews relative to the east-west divide in Westtown. Mr. Yost explained the thought of the subcommittee was to develop a statement that was not too specific when making mention of connections. Mr. Davidson noted a vision statement does not have to be practical, only establish some general parameters. Mr. Pomerantz noted a general desire of the citizens to have something that is

practical for its implementation.

Mr. Foster stated his concern about how what is proposed for potential implementation as part of the comprehensive plan will actually be paid for given Township funding limitations. Ms. Barbacane stated the Task Force does not have that information, but that is the job of the BOS to determine the overall implementation schedule. Mr. Foster suggested that someone present before the Task Force how the issue of funding can or cannot be addressed by the Township for comprehensive plan implementation strategies. Mr. Davidson stated inclusion of a budgetary statement may give more reason to not do anything for implementation. He further suggested maybe the statement should be modified based on the final document. Mr. Pomerantz emphasized the importance of the prioritization of goals and implementation strategies.

Mr. Snook stated one of the primary reasons for having a comprehensive plan in place is to provide “backup” for grant and funding applications to accomplish its goals. He further stated of his experiences with this in East Bradford. Mr. Embick emphasized that ultimately it is the responsibility of the BOS to successfully implement the plan, and if they are not the onus should go on the citizenry to place the pressure on them to implement the plan.

Discussion on Plan Organization/Focus Areas

Ms. Reitz started the discussion with the Task Force on how the final plan document should be organized and referenced an earlier exercise on this issue. Mr. Sennett noted resources from neighboring communities can be accounted for in the Westtown plan and noted a significant positive aspect of the Township is its proximity to West Chester. Ms. Reitz stated this could be included as part of the land use portion of the plan. Mr. Kane noted that collaboration and innovation are not included in the initial draft and Ms. Reitz stated it could be included in the Township Administration portion of the plan.

Ms. Barbacane stated he concern with how as a Task Force the plan’s vision can be best messaged out to the persons best equipped to implement it. Mr. Davidson stated the plan should provide for an outline of the vision for future growth, but its implementation is left for the BOS to prioritize and implement. Mr. Snook stated he believes the BOS will be very open and respectful to the recommendations made in the final document. Mr. Pomerantz then emphasized the importance of ongoing communication with the BOS on the plan and planning process. Mr. Embick noted the development of the comprehensive plan is similar to that of a political process. Next discussed was what/if anything should be included to ensure the final plan is successfully implemented.

Next Steps

Mr. Snook stated the main topic of the February 23 meeting will be future land use and open space. He also stated they will be providing a full BOS update at their February 6 meeting.

Public comment

There were no public comments.

Adjournment

9:30 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Patriarca

Comprehensive Plan Update Task Force Secretary