

WESTTOWN TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE TASK FORCE MEETING

Stokes Assembly Hall
1039 Wilmington Pike, Westtown Township
February 23, 2017 – 7:00 PM

Present

Task Force Members – Barbacane, Bevilacqua, Davidson, Embick, Foster, Hatton, Kane, Kurth, Sennett and Van Tine. Absent was Pomerantz and Yost. Also present was Township Planning Director Chris Patriarca; John Snook, 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.

Guest Speaker: Community-wide trail planning

Mr. Snook introduced former East Bradford Supervisor John Spangler as the guest speaker to discuss his experiences with both community-wide trail planning as well as funding for them. Mr. Snook stated he brought Mr. Spangler to focus on funding mechanisms to demonstrate how monies can be found and awarded for plan implementation. Mr. Spangler stated his initial contact with the comprehensive plan was as a Supervisor and has since come to appreciate the planning process more as it represents a consensus of the community and gives the Township the backing when applying for grants and other funding sources for its implementation.

Mr. Spangler stated in his experience with regional trail planning he noted a rail trail in the Township complied with the comprehensive plan. He then discussed how a piece of Township open space was transformed into bike trails with the cooperation of the biking community and was consistent with the comprehensive plan that identified the need for trails. As part of the arrangement, the Township entered in an agreement to have the cyclists maintain the trail network in the open space. Mr. Spangler noted this was an example of groups who traditionally do not work together, working as one and emphasized the importance of the Township being open to these unique situations.

Specific to raising capital funds, Mr. Spangler spoke of grants. He specifically stated the likelihood of successfully receiving grant monies is enhanced if the project is identified in a comprehensive plan, in multi-jurisdictional and has other outside groups involved. A specific example of this is the 322 bridge replacement and the Brandywine Trail. He noted that with the new PennDOT project, clearance has since been provided to allow for the safe passage of the trail across 322. Without this noted in the comprehensive plan, the likelihood of PennDOT making this accommodation would be significantly less.

Mr. Spangler next spoke of a multi-municipal project involving Bradford Avenue. He noted it could be transformed into a more attractive corridor and placed this in their comprehensive plan. Although West Chester borough did not include this in their plan, greater improvements for it can be leveraged as a result of the East Bradford plan. He then noted of a lost opportunity for improvement associated with an Aqua project. Mr. Spangler then encouraged the Task Force to think boldly and design a plan as to not miss opportunities to implement the plan as a whole.

Mr. Hatton asked he would recommend costs not necessarily factor into the final plan recommendations, and Mr. Spangler stated he would recommend this action. He stated this to be the case as the comprehensive plan should think boldly to allow for greater opportunities for its implementation from outside sources. Mr. Bevilacqua stated that Westtown should invest more resources in identifying and procuring grant monies when available. Mr. Kane asked if numbers of users have been determined for their trail use and Mr. Spangler they have not but that antidotal evidence suggests the trails see heavy use. He further encouraged a more regional approach when thinking about planning issues. Ms. Barbacane asked if trails were already in place or if the implementation of additional trails connected separate lengths. Mr. Spangler stated they started with the overall vision of the regional Brandywine Trail and have worked to continue to expand it.

Mr. Snook stated in the PennDOT example, the Department will pay for the design work and construction of the bridge to allow for the trail crossing, but that it would have been less likely to occur if not identified in the comprehensive plan. Mr. Davidson asked if trail design and construction takes into account the potential for commuting uses. Mr. Spangler stated some trails are designed for recreation, but that others can be used for more commuting purposes. He then spoke of the planning issues and connectivity resulting from the proposed Tigue trail. Mr. Foster noted it is difficult to define what constitutes a trail, and Mr. Spangler stated this is a variable definition and that he recommends flexibility in this definition when planning for them. Specific to trails as transportation, he noted this is difficult due to the existing development patterns of the community. Mr. Patriarca stated it is important to identify important features such as trails to be able to take advantage of situations to implement them as they become available.

Mr. Hatton asked if their plan also envisions ancillary facilities such as parking areas and restrooms. Mr. Spangler stated these issues are considered and handled as the opportunities arise. He did note that some property owners are still resistant to trails and trail easements, but that this mindset is evolving. Relevant to condemnation, Mr. Spangler stated it had only been utilized one time for trail acquisition from an out-of-state property owner, but there was political fallout with a Supervisor losing election in part based on this action. Mr. Foster then noted in Westtown there has been trouble with trail construction in existing easements due to neighbor opposition. Mr. Spangler stated trails associated with development need to be constructed on the front end prior to home occupation in order to eliminate opposition to their construction.

Board of Supervisors presentation and future plan survey

Ms. Reitz stated that she and Mr. Snook met with the BOS in early February. She noted the BOS was opening to providing for additional resources if needed, and at that time Mr. Foster suggested an additional survey be made for all Township residents to participate on. Ms. Reitz stated this survey will likely occur in June and will include draft goals and objectives for the public to react to. She further envisions this survey to assist in the prioritization of goals and objectives as identified by the Task Force. Mr. Foster then provided for a draft survey that he provided and noted some of the questions came from the Open Space Plan survey. Mr. Patriarca stated that a future survey would be timed for an announcement to be included in a future Township newsletter. Next followed an update on the Toll Brothers/Crebilly project and the Planning Commission recommendation on it.

Revised Thematic Outline

Ms. Reitz started the conversation on the thematic outline and noted the changes suggested in the January meeting had been incorporated into it. She further stated it is a work in progress and will be expanded further as the process continues. She then stated the next step is the

mapping of future land use areas to be associated with the outline. Specific to connectivity, Ms. Reitz noted they include both physical and social connections and indicated this is one of the areas where trail planning and the like can be incorporated.

Mr. Kane asked if the demographic analysis is only inclusive of Westtown or of Chester County as a whole, and Ms. Reitz noted the outline is general but that Westtown's demographics is generally representative of Chester County as a whole. Mr. Theilacker stated the demographics are Westtown specific, but that outside influences will impact demographic trends in the future. Mr. Embick next discussed issues relevant to public sewer and on-lot systems within the Township and how this may be impacted by the plan as a whole, and both Mr. Theilacker and Mr. Snook stated the plan should in part provide for consideration if septic systems ultimately fail.

Mr. Davidson noted the term sustainability and others should be clearly defined as to not cause conflict with other persons who may define the word in a different manner. Next followed a discussion affordable housing and how it could be encouraged from regulatory controls and incentives. Mr. Kane then asked with an aging demographic, why is there a need for additional ballfields in the Township with the limited open space that remains. Mr. Theilacker noted this issue was brought up as part of the stakeholder interviews. Mr. Sennett noted that as part of the comprehensive plan, it should incorporate resources of surrounding municipalities, and the issue of ballfields may best be handled in this manner. Mr. Snook stated that the population planned for as part of the update is not static and will likely evolve resulting in a need for the plan itself to be flexible with its recommendations. He then suggested instead of focusing on ballfields, the focus should be on recommending a more efficient use of existing recreational facilities instead of recommending new ones.

Mr. Kane asked how collaboration can be encouraged among townships. Mr. Patriarca stated collaboration can naturally occur in an effort to reduce overall costs of projects impacting multiple jurisdictions. Mr. Snook noted the regional planning commission has been disbanded, but the regular communication occurs as part of the regional council of governments. Mr. Davidson emphasized the importance of having a united front when working through agencies such as PennDOT. He further suggested that greater coordination with other municipalities should be greatly encouraged. Mr. Kane empathized the importance of collaboration and innovation with our neighbors to solve larger issues.

Mr. Embick asked what considerations have been given with regards to Westtown School as the most prominent land owner in the Township. Mr. Theilacker noted with reference to Westtown School, consideration should be given to areas currently farmed by Pete Flynn. Specific to the campus, the idea of an institutional or campus zoning district may make sense as a potential recommendation. Mr. Patriarca asked if the recently completed Westtown School Strategic Plan provided for a vision for future growth of the campus. Mr. Embick indicated the plan keeps the general core of the campus as is but provides for flexibility to develop the campus further as needed. The general consensus of the Task Force is to encourage the preservation of the Westtown School farmlands. Mr. Snook then discussed preservation options such as the purchase of conservation easements as well as grant opportunities to purchase open space outright. Mr. Foster asked if the School has approached land conservancies to this issue without Township assistance. Mr. Snook encouraged the Task Force to continue to review the outline and forward comments back to the consultant team.

Future Land Use Analysis

Mr. Snook started the discussion on the future land use of the Township through a series of maps illustrating land use in Westtown. He first spoke of the 2001 future land use map and noted it reflected the zoning map to a very high degree. He further argued this map should be more thematic in nature based on character and not solely zoning. Specific to existing land use, he noted residential uses were lumped as one and not separated by lot size. Mr. Snook suggested several categories of future land use for consideration by the Task Force.

The first of these categories discussed was neighborhood conservation. This category is meant to preserve the character and quality of life of existing residential areas while at the same time allow for reasonable change to address the needs of changing demographics. The second category discussed was mixed-use and that these areas are only located along Route 202 and Route 3. The third category discussed as open space and these areas include agricultural areas, parks and schools. The fourth category discussed was greenway corridors as a means to provide for greater connectivity through environmental areas. Additional themes discussed were historical preservation and connectivity, but these are more difficult to map.

Mr. Davidson stated the term “conservation” will need to be specifically defined as to keep the proper focus in the plan itself. Mr. Hatton stated that neighborhoods can also include retail and other uses and that maybe consideration should be given to calling one category “residential conservation.” Mr. Sennett noted some neighborhoods take advantage of neighboring facilities such as schools and that a neighborhood like Plumly Farm is inclusive of Rustin High School. Mr. Patriarca stated another way to think about neighborhood conservation is whether or not existing ordinance discourage reinvestment into properties. Mr. Hatton noted housing turnover is not necessarily a bad thing as it brings new families and perspectives to the community.

Mr. Snook then discussed how he views neighborhood conservation as also a vehicle to maintain neighborhood quality and make further recommendations for improvements. He then spoke about sewer and septic needs as an example of this in the event DEP requires some amount of new sewer infrastructure. He then gave examples of how sewer infrastructure can impact neighborhoods in East Bradford. The issue of accessory dwellings were next discussed as a means to provide for affordable, multi-generational housing, and the constraints of their construction such as neighborhood compatibility and sewage disposal were also discussed.

Relative to the mixed-use designation, Mr. Snook stated the areas under consideration for this are along Route 202 and Route 3. He noted the Route 3 corridor is relatively built-out, but that consideration should be given to not fully developed areas for reasonable infill development. Further, he suggested flexibility should be considered for mixed-use residential mid-rise development with retail at the base as potential redevelopment at a future date. He additionally stated these enhanced uses should be allowed by conditional use as to ensure they do not create additional impacts to the Township. Mr. Davidson stated trail connections should be encouraged to these areas to encourage walking and biking to these types of facilities.

Specific to the 202 corridor, Mr. Snook stated if structured parking were allowed, it could result in additional redevelopment potential at locations such as Westtown Village. He acknowledged the opportunities for redevelopment and mixed-uses along Route 202 are more limited than those along Route 3, but that flexibility should be considered for future redevelopment along the corridor. Mr. Patriarca stated that commercial development is not appropriate for the majority of the Township, but that greater consideration should be given to those areas appropriate for commercial development. Mr. Snook then noted the likely change in uses along the corridor resulting from future PennDOT improvements along the corridor.

Mr. Snook next spoke about sewage treatment. He noted the comprehensive plan is not the same as the 537 plan, but that they are intertwined. He stated the Township should promote continued use of functional septic systems, but plan on public sewer extensions as required based on whether or not on-lot systems have failed.

Public comment

There were no public comments.

Adjournment

9:30 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Patriarca
Comprehensive Plan Update Task Force Secretary