

# WESTTOWN TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE TASK FORCE MEETING

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

## **Present**

Task Force Members – Barbacane, Bevilacqua, Embick, Foster, Hatton, Kane, Kurth, Pomerantz, Sennett and Van Tine. Absent were Davidson, Kane 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; Sean O'Neill of the Chester County Planning Commission and those mentioned below.

## **Call to Order**

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

## **Guest Speaker: Grant applications and awards**

Jason Lang who serves as the Parks and Recreation (P&R) Director for East Goshen (EG) was introduced and made a presentation on grant opportunities available and his experience with them at EG. He provided a brief background on his experience with other P&R departments in other communities. Specific to the comprehensive plan, he noted it provides for an overview of all of the needs of the community over the defined time horizon. In the EG plan, they identified their needs as being how to attract new residents, how to increase property values and to better position within the West Chester region.

Mr. Lang emphasized that due to the finite financial resources available that a clear prioritization of the goals and implementation strategies of the plan should be defined. In EG the priority was identified as completion of the Paoli Pike trail. Specific to plan implementation, the comprehensive plan provides focus for prioritization in the event of political change that may not agree with what is proposed. Mr. Lange then discussed how the comprehensive plan gives focus to what grant opportunities should be applied for. He emphasized how applications are more positively viewed when they incorporate other plans seeking similar results.

In the EG experience, Mr. Lang used the Paoli Pike trail as a case study. This trail is proposed to connect public facilities along Paoli Pike across EG from West Goshen to Willistown. It was identified in a County bikeways plan and as such the comp plan update reflected the Paoli Pike trail as an important piece of infrastructure for EG. Having it referenced in multiple plans reinforced its importance for EG as a whole and their grant applications were further bolstered with “shovel ready” components completed, public meetings held and identification of safety needs the trail would address. This gives the project greater urgency. The regional nature of their project was also critical in the total amount of grants awarded for the project as a whole.

Specific to the comprehensive plan once more, he noted the importance with adoption of a “realistic” plan with goals that can be implemented in its time horizon. Mr. Lang further stated the importance of having a robust public participation program when applying for grants and spoke of his success in involving school-age children in conjunction with the WCASD as part of a recent grant application to rebuild a playground. Speaking of grant opportunities, he suggested the comprehensive plan keep in mind the potential grant resources and develop the final document accordingly.

Mr. Pomerantz asked what can Westtown do to better implement their various plans with the help of grant funding and Mr. Lang suggested the proposed projects be more realistic from a funding standpoint to ensure better results. Specific to his job at EG he noted they did not have a person specifically dedicated to parks planning and that his position filled that void. Mr. Pomerantz then asked if EG would be successful in being awarded grants without his hiring and Mr. Land stated there should be at least a part time person or volunteers that assists with this process. He then emphasized the importance in having someone familiar with parks planning preparing grant applications for P&R. Mr. Bevilacqua asked what resources are available for municipalities to access when searching for grant opportunities. Mr. Lang stated for trails and open space that local representatives can be contacted for opportunities and Ms. De Wolf reference a "Getting the Green" document that lists state grant resources.

Mr. Sennett asked if during the EG plan update served as only a guiding document or if it also provided greater detail on specific projects such as the Paoli Pike trail. Mr. Lange stated the plan identified the Paoli Pike corridor as the commercial corridor of EG and sought ways to improve it overall. This provided for the framework to authorize an engineering feasibility study for the trail which in turn resulted in the successful grant application. Mr. Lang stated one of the ultimate goals of the EG comprehensive plan was doing more to attract millennials in order to have successful housing transition and increase overall property values. He emphasized the EG BOS were all on board for the completion of the Paoli Pike trail. As it relates to other townships, he stated one of the number one overall issues raised in comprehensive plans is trail construction in order to in part attract millennials. Mr. Pomerantz asked in the absence of a professional to focus on the heavy lifting, would they be as successful as EG in grant funding. Mr. Lange stated it is possible to do without if there is a staff person well educated on grants, but that professional relationships and knowledge are also very important in conjunction with comprehensive plan recommendations.

### **On-going CPTF communications**

Mr. Pomerantz led a discussion on the recent conversation had via a group e-mail among all of the Task Force members relevant to a proposed survey. He first spoke about thoughts on the process to date, the timing of a resident survey and spoke of his experience in executing them. He stated a survey on the front end could be considered a "push" survey that elicits expected feedback instead of unbiased feedback. He then listed the variety of public input had on the plan to date including the visioning meeting, stakeholder interviews and task force members themselves and stated additional public session will occur. He stated his belief that once all of the input is collected, then a survey should be conducted to see if what is proposed matches the will of the community.

Specific to the e-mail in question, Mr. Pomerantz stated he agrees that people generally do want to be left alone, but that this does not mean do nothing and cited the Crebilly meetings as an example of this. He also objected to the implication the consultant team is biased in the process itself as it is up to the task force to determine the overall direction of the process. He then spoke of the issues surrounding the sustainability assessment. He emphasized that the task force can disagree, but should never be disagreeable in their conversations.

Mr. Sennett did not think it was fair to claim bias against the consultant, but in the dialogue that followed he appreciated the facts and discussion had. Mr. Kurth stated the negativity turned him away from the conversation. Ms. Barbacane stated everyone on the task force should be free to state their opinion but was surprised by some of what was stated. Ms. Van Tine also echoed this sentiment and further stated her belief the task force needs to be the ones to provide

comment and drive the overall direction of the plan. Mr. Bevilacqua stated a positive from the interaction for him was that it caused him to reflect on everything that was presented and even rethink some of the major points discussed. Mr. Embick stated his concern was with incivility in public discourse in general and stated he does not feel it has any place in their discussion. Mr. Hatton stated the conversation caused him to re-read some of the previous documentation, and although he did not interpret it the same way, stated more clarification should be offered. He further stated part of the negative commentary may be tied with an overall frustration with how long the process takes. Ms. Barbacane and Mr. Pomerantz agreed with this sentiment expressed by Mr. Hatton as well. Mr. Foster offered apologized for any overstatement he made, but stated his belief the survey should start from the residents and that what has been done to date has not been driven directly from the residents.

Ms. Barbacane stated one of the frustration all along has been the Crebilly project as one of the issues most stated from residents was open space preservation. The timing of this has impacted discussion somewhat. Mr. Sennett stated as it relates to timing of the project, he noted that all of the information presented to date are elements required for inclusion in the plan per the MPC. Mr. Embick further echoed this sentiment and noted the importance of having the background information in hand prior to taking the next steps and the public will respond accordingly in either a positive or negative manner. Mr. Pomerantz stated the sustainability assessment should not be done in the early stages of the planning process for future projects.

Mr. Snook stated he could do a better job in explaining the activities for the task force as the process is designed for the task force to steer it, and it was never the intent of the consultant team to be the final decision makers for the plan. He emphasized that he did not want to stifle any sort of dialogue as the overall engagement of the Westtown group is better than what he has experienced with other task forces. Ms. Barbacane asked if the Westtown effort is on-track to date, and Mr. Snook stated it is as many elements have been discussed to date. Mr. Bevilacqua requested an overview of where the plan stands to date with the approved scope at the next meeting to better understand where the process is.

Mr. Patriarca agreed with the sentiment that the task force does not have to agree on everything, but that disagreement should be respectful. He further stated if the lasting result of the recent events is greater thought and attention paid to the process as a whole, that it is a good thing. Mr. Patriarca next stated the process to date is in the data collection and reaction stage and that all of the information learned from it will drive the next steps of plan goals and implementation strategies. Specific to the issue of a survey, he stated he believes this should occur when the draft goals and strategies are developed. Mr. Patriarca further stated if any task force member has questions or frustrations to please feel free to call him directly.

Mr. Foster asked the consultant team if the plan is going in the right direction and stated this was the reason for suggesting a survey. Mr. Snook stated with the West Brandywine plan he is working on that it will include a direct mailing survey. He stated this was not budgeted for in the Westtown plan because poor response to an on-line survey, promoted by mailers, and that the only way to truly have a large survey response is via the mail. Mr. Snook did indicate a mailing can be considered as the plan progresses if the Township can commit additional funds. Mr. Embick stated the importance of going through the process with public comment occurring throughout.

### **Future Land Use Analysis**

Mr. Snook suggested due to the late hour, the task force members send their initial thoughts

and questions on the future land use analysis by e-mail with a full discussion to be had at the next meeting. He further stated that any comments should be forwarded back to Mr. Patriarca a week prior to the next meeting which will be held on the alternate meeting date of April 12. Mr. Pomerantz asked who the plan is intended to address upon its completion. Mr. Patriarca stated the plan should address all population groups as Westtown has many needs across generational lines. He further stated consideration should be given to focus implementation on projects and not age groups and much of what will be proposed will impact all age groups. Mr. Embick spoke of the importance the plan is consistent with the Pennsylvania constitutional mandates.

**Public comment**

There were no public comments.

**Adjournment**

9:30 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Patriarca  
Comprehensive Plan Update Task Force Secretary