

WESTTOWN TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE TASK FORCE MEETING

Stokes Assembly Hall
1039 Wilmington Pike, Westtown Township
April 12, 2017 – 7:00 PM

Present

Task Force Members – Embick, Foster, Hatton, Kurth, Pomerantz, Sennett and Yost. Absent were Barbacane, Bevilacqua, Davidson, Kane and Van Tine. 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.

Plan progress report

Ms. Mayer opened the conversation on the overall progress of the plan update and provided for an overview of progress to date. Mr. Hatton stated his concern with the amount of material to be completed through the end of the summer. Mr. Snook stated the consultant team will be developing the document text over the summer with review by the Task Force in late summer with a large public meeting scheduled at that time as well. He also stated that a public survey will likely occur in early summer and Mr. Patriarca stated in addition to the digital survey he wants to have a paper version available. Mr. Snook stated the public will have opportunity to comment on the topical areas at future meetings and the materials will be available on-line and the final document will be presented before the PC at a future meeting.

Mr. Pomerantz asked at what point will the process will they be able to have the principal goals identified as well as have some sort of baseline on the costs associated with implementation of them. Mr. Snook stated the Task Force will prioritize their most important while still allowing for comment on additional strategies from the public. He then spoke of how the goals will be focused on the priority and secondary issues. Mr. Pomerantz then asked when the BOS will be involved in the issue of goals and if the Task Force will be in a position to identify theirs by the fall public meeting. Mr. Snook stated his concern with giving an appearance the goals have been determined prior to full public comment and that after this meeting the Task Force will finalize the overall goals and objectives of the plan. Specific to the public survey, Mr. Snook stated it will be used to help shape the final recommended goals and implementation strategies. Mr. Pomerantz stated he would like a more clear understanding of how the proposed public steps will be implemented into the process.

Ms. Reitz noted the public meeting as required by the MPC will occur with the PC at a future date to comment on the final document. Mr. Snook reiterated his belief the public should have every opportunity to comment without any perception of a predefined outcome. Mr. Patriarca then provided for his thoughts on the survey as being a process to help focus goals and implementation strategies. Mr. Pomerantz expressed his concern with getting though the materials before the Task Force in order to have a successful survey. Specific to the survey, Ms. Reitz stated there will be a sub-committee of the Task Force that will finalize its questions. Mr. Foster stated this survey needs to have very straight-forward and objective questions.

Future land use analysis

Ms. Reitz opened the conversation on the future land use analysis asking for the Task Force to focus the direction of the conversation. Mr. Hatton first noted that redevelopment can occur outside commercial areas and noted the plan should work to address this issue. Mr. Snook stated this has not been identified as an issue as the Task Force has not weighed in on the issue. Mr. Hatton reiterated this should be considered as it is already occurring in neighboring areas and may be an issue for attracting millennials to the community. He further noted the redevelopment and gentrification of older neighborhoods may significantly impact the established populations. Mr. Foster noted a significant contributor to future residential redevelopment is with the issue of public sewer availability as it dictates how much land is available for redevelopment. Mr. Patriarca stated neighborhood redevelopment may overly impact more affordable neighborhoods and reduce the available amount of workforce housing in the community as a whole. Mr. Hatton noted the Garden Circle community as an area that may face these types of redevelopment pressured resulting from their location and sewer availability.

Mr. Yost asked what can be done to mitigate issues resulting from losses to workforce housing from a regulatory standpoint. Mr. Snook stated it is generally left for the market to sort out, but that the municipality can provide for ordinance specifics to promote provisions of workforce housing. He further suggested that sewer expansion will have a significant impact on this issue. Mr. Embick stated the current Township policy is to retain on-lot systems throughout the Township and has adopted a management program to certify their continued use as being appropriate. This in turn greatly reduces the potential for further sewer expansion in the area and associated redevelopment pressures short of significant technological changes to septic treatment. Mr. Foster further noted the issue of sewer is a very political issue with a significant portion of the population against further sewer expansion.

Mr. Sennett stated if a provision of workforce housing is an objective of the plan, then issues such as sewerage should be addressed. However, if not addressed he noted many residents do not view high housing costs and values as being a negative issue. Mr. Patriarca stated the planning process is the vision for the Township with the formal police implemented at a later time as directed by the Board of Supervisors. Mr. Snook stated the “tear-down” issue comes to mind for him as a result of the numerous, smaller lots not served by public sewer that at some point in the future may need to be resulting from failed on-lot systems and no availability for replacement systems. This scenario can further result in economically vulnerable properties without access to proper sewage disposal. Mr. Hatton further noted the addition of public sewer could potentially result in new “infill” lots being created that are out of character with the rest of the neighborhood. Mr. Snook indicated in addition to lot and bulk requirements, stormwater management may also serve to limit what can and cannot be constructed on an individual property.

Mr. Foster noted infill can occur that is consistent with existing neighborhoods as vacant, individual lots are developed. Mr. Snook noted the consultant team is not suggesting mixed-housing types in existing residential neighborhoods, and Mr. Sennett spoke of this issue and how it relates to the Runnymede Farms development in Edgemont. He further stated if the comprehensive plan identifies “community character” it can be something the Board uses to direct future development. Mr. Snook noted the consensus of the Task Force as it relates to neighborhood conservation is for preservation of both neighborhood value and character.

Mr. Theilacker noted some communities promote “transitional” areas adjacent to commercial corridors may be appropriate for mixed uses and housing types where only single-family homes

currently exist. Mr. Foster noted this was proposed as part of the Bozzuto development, but that it was opposed by much of the public. Mr. Patriarca stated this may be appropriate in only limited places along routes 202 and 3. Mr. Snook stated the only place he has witnessed full-scale redevelopment of an established residential areas as being in Arlington, Virginia as part of Metro construction.

Mr. Hatton expressed a concern with how remaining open spaces interact with surrounding properties. Mr. Snook then noted the large number of institutional uses throughout the neighborhoods of the Township that significantly contribute to their overall character. Mr. Hatton agreed with this point specific to schools and churches. Mr. Foster spoke of his concern with non-conforming uses such as Gaudenzia that are not necessarily compatible with residential communities and what can be done to address these types of uses moving forward. He further noted that maybe consideration be given to the development of an institutional zoning district in the Township.

Mr. Hatton asked how non-conforming structures/uses are impacted by the zoning ordinance. Mr. Patriarca then provided for an overview of this and how it relates to zoning. He further suggested the issue of non-conforming uses, not structures, is more problematic, especially as Pennsylvania state law requires all uses be provided for in all municipalities. Mr. Patriarca next spoke of the issue of “granny cottages” and indicated they are growing in popularity and noted issues with the present Township ordinances regulating them. They next discussed the issue of “elder cottages” which serve as temporary housing for relatives needing constant care and are ultimately removed when no longer needed. Mr. Snook elaborated further on both of these issues and Mr. Patriarca stated there have been about four applications for accessory dwelling units over the past few years. Specific to sewage disposal, any application for an accessory dwelling unit also requires health department approval if served by an on-site system.

Mr. Sennett asked how the issue of AirBnB is addressed, and Mr. Patriarca stated the Township presently has standards in place to handle bed and breakfasts, but that this does not apply to non-owner occupies short-term rentals. He acknowledged this is not an issue in Westtown at this time, but this does not mean this will be the case in the future.

Mr. Patriarca then asked if the group agreed that “neighborhood conservation” was the correct term to use in describing how to manage existing residential areas and the consensus did agree with its use. Next, the issue of infill development was discussed. Specifically the task force does not oppose infill, but thinks that it needs to be done with sensitivity to character and surrounding uses. Mr. Patriarca suggested this type of protection can be provided through amended zoning.

Specific to the potential development of a separate zoning district for “institutional” uses, the Task Force did agree this would be appropriate and may also serve as a way to control so-called “non-desirable” uses. Next discussed was the issue of traffic calming. Mr. Patriarca suggested the Township consider a procedural approach rather than just considering and accommodating all requests for traffic calming as they come in from residents. He further discussed the types of traffic calming that could be used and Mr. Foster discussed where traffic calming was installed and then removed as a result of citizen complaints. Mr. Snook asked if consideration should be given to roads that serve as through streets with multiple driveway accesses as candidates for traffic calming. Mr. Sennett asked if the issue of traffic calming is a safety or quality of life issue, and if it is safety it should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Mr. Yost next spoke of traffic issues along South Concord Road and how what some may view as safety, others may view only as convenience and careful consideration should be given in

the evaluation of the incorporation of any traffic calming measures. Mr. Hatton noted the only place where traffic calming existing presently in the Township is along Ponds Edge Road. Next discussed was how enforcement of traffic laws impact how roads are utilized throughout the Township.

Mr. Snook next led a discussion on public water and sewer issues and noted both the pros and cons of implementing both. Mr. Embick noted the issue of public sewers has been determined for the foreseeable future as a result of the implementation on the on-lot management program by the Township. He further noted as a result of the program, many repairs have been completed on septic systems, but that if there are failures in the future it will be handled at that time. Mr. Patriarca stated the issue of public sewers is a very political issue in the Township. Mr. Snook next discussed the possibility of sewer expansions resulting from new development and spoke of the example of Guthriesville in East Brandywine as an example. He noted incentives can be provided to developers for sewer infrastructure improvements. Mr. Hatton then spoke of how sewer expansion resulting in major home construction in Concord Township. Mr. Sennett suggested the plan could include language to incentivize inclusion of public infrastructure, to at least have developers consider it as part of their project.

Mr. Patriarca next asked the Task Force what makes their neighborhoods desirable that could be included as part of the discussion. Mr. Yost noted the significance that open space provides in what defines a neighborhood and enhances its quality of life. Mr. Snook suggested consideration may be given to promoting of more connections to open space areas and providing for greater access to these areas. Mr. Patriarca then stated his concerns with direct references to property values in planning documents as they are market driven, not Township driven. Mr. Snook noted this is generally meant in a relative, not literal sense as it relates to property values.

Mr. Hatton asked if people are required to connect to sewer is available. Mr. Patriarca stated this can be done, but that in Westtown there is no provision for mandatory sewer connections. He further suggested that incentives could be considered to require new infrastructure be “oversized” to allow for additional connections as needed.

Public comment

There were no public comments.

Adjournment

9:10 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Patriarca
Comprehensive Plan Update Task Force Secretary