

**MINUTES**  
**PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING JULY 23, 2019**

Attendees: Sherri Glantz-Patchen, Vince Manuele, Peter Cornog, Scott Quitel, Charles L. Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning & Zoning, Laura Boyle-Nester (BOS Liaison) & Krista Heinrich, Township Engineer, T&M Associates

1. Call to order: 7:00 PM by Chair Manuele
2. Announcements & Correspondence

**Announcements:** None

**Correspondence:**

- E-Mail from Roy Wilson, dated 4/24/19 regarding Comprehensive Plan Update
- E-Mail from Erin Reilly, dated 7/15/2019 regarding Comprehensive Plan Update
- Mr. Guttenplan also read an e-mail dated 7/23/19 from Patrick Doran agreeing with all comments from Erin Reilly, his wife, regarding the Comprehensive Plan.

3. Approval of Minutes:

- The approval of minutes from the June 25, 2019 meeting was tabled to the next meeting – no quorum present of members in attendance at that meeting.

4. Zoning Hearing Board Appeals: None

5. Subdivision & Land Development Applications: None

6. Conditional Use Applications: None

7. Old Business:

- Comprehensive Plan (Selective) Update; Review and Discussion. Mr. Manuele stated this issue was before the Planning Commission in the past and this will be a multiple meeting process. The intent is to hear from the consultant regarding the status of the plan and to hear from her with respect to the recommendations that were received from various sources including the County and the Pennsylvania Historical Society. Kimberly Baptiste, Comprehensive Plan Consultant with Bergmann, was present. Mr. Guttenplan briefly stated this is a fairly lengthy process. The Comprehensive plan started in August 2017; the draft document was completed by April 2019; and it's been on the Township website as well as at the Township Building, William Jeanes Library and at the Park & Recreation facility (Koontz Park). He then explained the intent of these meetings is that at some point after hearing presentations, the Planning Commission making comments, asking questions, making recommendations, giving the public a chance to give their input and for everybody that wishes to weigh in, come up with a final draft document everyone agrees on, then the Planning Commission has a Public Meeting that is advertised and at that meeting the Planning Commission will make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors. the Board of Supervisors will then have one or more Public Hearings; then the Plan will be adopted by resolution. This is all according to the State Planning Code in order for it to become an official comprehensive plan.
- Ms. Baptiste presented a PowerPoint in which she gave a process recap, discussed Plan organization and topic areas that the Plan touches on. She started a facilitated discussion around some of the comments received to date from various organizations and individuals. She provided a recap of the engagement process, noting there were six Steering Committee meetings in 2017-2018; multiple meeting with Township staff; 3 public workshops; multiple stakeholder meetings with various individuals within the Township; a senior workshop and Planning Commission Workshop. The key themes that were integrated into the Plan development included: the preservation of existing open space; preservation of historic areas/buildings;

walkability and linkages; consider environmental impact of development; account for natural resources; incorporate renewable energy opportunities; and limit additional traffic generation. The Plan Organization and Topic Areas were based on a series of goal areas (Land Use, Housing, Circulation & Quality of Life), each with multiple policies under them and then specific actions that needed to be accomplished in order to assure that the goals were addressed.

- The Land Use goal is to maintain and enhance Whitemarsh's character and quality of life by managing future growth and development. The Future Land Use Plan's intention is to provide a generalized visual and narrative representation of the community's desired land use pattern; identify where general development patterns and types are most appropriate; and to convey an overall vision for the future. It is not intended to mimic existing land uses and to be regulatory-it is the basis for updating zoning. There are seven land use categories/"Character Areas": Parks and Open Space (existing parkland; areas intended to be preserved as open and natural), Conservation Residential District (ensure large lots are not over-developed), Residential (covers quite a bit of the township, does not go into detail about levels of residential development; that is for zoning to do), Golf Course (preserve and protect existing golf courses), Mixed-Use (the goal is to allow a range of uses), Waterfront District (preserve open space and natural features allowing more opportunities for the public and the community to enjoy the waterfront area incorporating more amenities while also facilitating mixed-use development) and Research and Development/Business (retain existing employment centers and allow for their continued use and expansion).
- Housing is another goal area. The focus is to encourage diversification of housing stock while preserving the character of the Township.
- Circulation focuses on the balance the system considering vehicular traffic and truck traffic to access some of the employment centers as well as walkability and bikeability in the township to make sure residents are not negatively impacted by the existing circulation network.
- Quality of Life focuses on healthy living and strengthening the Township's existing character through open space preservation, natural space preservation, and Park and Recreation Programming incorporating various sustainable policies in the township.
- To date, comments were received from the general public, the Township Open Space Committee, Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office and the Montgomery County Planning Commission. Comments from the general public consisted of providing additional information relative to outreach and engagement activities; creation of an Environmental Sustainability Task Force; incorporate climate change and local impacts; strengthen commitment to sustainable design requirements; and 'downzoning'.
- Comments from the Township Open Space Committee consisted of strengthening actions to highlight the use of the Township Open Space Fund; add reference to the 2006 Open Space Plan; add action tracking open space acquisitions; and add action regarding partnering with land trusts and conservation organizations.
- Comments from the PA State Historic Preservation Office consisted of a thorough inventory of historic resources; recommend zoning requirement relief for historic structures; request clarity and additional detail to existing actions; and request augmentation of existing narrative descriptions.
- Comments from Montgomery County Planning Commission consisted of mixed use character areas; acknowledge transit oriented development areas; strengthen desired land use and differentiate mixed use nodes and mixed use corridors (the consultant agrees to creating two mixed use categories; one focusing on centers and the other on corridors; adding detail regarding possible land uses that are appropriate to assist with zoning updates and that will help facilitate high level zoning); the Riverfront Area – their request was to incorporate more substantive detail from the 2016 Riverfront Plan (consultant agrees to incorporate specific land use recommendations from the 2016 Riverfront Plan which influence future land use planning); Residential Character Areas – their concern is that the two categories is too simplified and the discussion on possible land uses should be strengthened (consultant agrees for all of the character areas they will add more detail context regarding preferred land uses and more detail for all the character areas but feels the

‘Conservation Residential’ and ‘Residential’ future land use areas are consistent with the direction of the Steering Committee); Research & Development Character Area –they questioned whether an area of this category should be added at Joshua and Cedar Grove Roads (consultant feels that this is too minor an area to include). They also had comments on the circulation goal area; they made reference to the Ridge Pike Improvement Project; reference and incorporate the Bike Montco Plan that was recently completed; prioritize transportation projects; and update regional trails data and mapping (consultant agrees to add description of Ridge Pike Project and Bike Montco and update Regional Trails Map and narrative; No prioritization of transportation projects as this is beyond the scope of work). The last component had to do with Townhouse Communities. The County wants the discussion of townhouses strengthened; incorporate best practices from County’s ‘Building Better Townhome Communities’ document and consider adding supplemental regulations (consultant agrees to incorporate reference to County document).

Comments from the Planning Commission included:

- if the Township is expected to grow 4%, where will this growth happen, this needs to be controlled through the Zoning Ordinance;
- some (land use) categories are too broad, need to be more specific;
- open space acquisition-have to be more aggressive about identifying properties desired for open space acquisition;
- who set the scope of setting priorities for goals/priorities of the Comprehensive Plan (a Comp Plan Review committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors decided Land Use and Housing were priorities);
- can we do zoning changes quicker outside of this effort so that we’re not waiting until January 2020 (yes, recognize this is a larger effort with its own process);
- we need to pin down specific map areas;
- what are we legally mandated to do regarding the Comprehensive Plan (not mandated to even have one, but when you do, it should be reviewed every 10 years);
- we need more strategy than vision;
- does not want to see status quo continue (Philadelphia for example is greener and more walkable);
- timeframe needs to be now rather than later;
- Planning Commission should take recommendations & action items and do their homework,
- prepare written recommendations for discussion at the next meeting and encourage input from the residents, in writing;
- would like to see Wissahickon Creek and other water surfaces on the map; and
- would like the consultant to define ”mixed use” better, with different focus for the different areas.

Public Comment: Steve Kaufman, Chair and Chris Lane, Vice-Chair of the Open Space Committee; Erin Reilly, Township resident; Peter Blood, Fort Washington; Susan Epstein, Lafayette Hill resident; Eli Glick, 7 Whitefield Drive; Linda Doll, Fairway Road; Sydelle Zove, Harts Ridge Road; Joe Corcoran, Militia Hill Road; Elise Kaplan, Black Walnut Lane; and M.J. Fisher, Farmar Lane all spoke.

Their comments and concerns included: need dedicated in-house professional to develop open space opportunities; consider buying down density; utilize open space funds to purchase or protect open space benefits; how does plan get implemented (Mr. Guttenplan explained the process); environmental sustainability should be first and foremost so it can be the umbrella of the whole plan; what happened to Fort Washington in this plan; Germantown Pike corridor (improvements) never happened, concerned about aging residents on Germantown Pike and selling off to developers; zoning code needs to be updated; all future meetings for the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors regarding the Comprehensive Plan must be properly advertised so the public is made aware; Montgomery County Planning Commission is using the draft plan for their review, this is not appropriate; does not adequately address historic resources (historic element of a comp plan is separate from land use and housing elements); all problems discussed can be fixed by changing zoning; people’s front yards should not be considered open space (referencing Paone’s ‘Maple Hill’ development); a lot of ambiguities regarding the Shade Tree Commission references; subdivision and land development ordinance needs to be looked at; County’s 2040 plan focuses on development close to Philadelphia, wants to see high density in Whitemarsh; no accommodations on the plan for existing historic

properties in Fort Washington; Heavy Industrial not acknowledged; this is a flawed process, vision is designed by a secret committee and less than half are Township residents, need more input from the public.

8. New Business: None

9. Public Comment: None

10. Adjournment:

- There being no further business, meeting was adjourned at 9:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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Charles L. Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning & Zoning

The Planning Commission is appointed as an advisory group to the Board of Supervisors and the Zoning Hearing Board with respect to comprehensive land use planning, existing land use, and various land use and zoning applications in Whitmarsh Township. No formal decisions are rendered by the Planning Commission. Formal decisions are rendered by the Board of Supervisors or Zoning Hearing Board, as prescribed by law, based on the type of application.

All written or graphic material that is presented to the Planning Commission at a public meeting shall be kept in Township files and is subject to examination under the PA Right-to-know Law.