

MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING AUGUST 19, 2019

Attendees: Dave Shula, Sherri Glantz Patchen, Patrick Doran, Vince Manuele, Peter Cornog, Bob Dambman, Scott Quitel, Charles L. Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning & Zoning, Krista Heinrich, Township Engineer, T&M Associates and Kimberly Baptiste, Township Comprehensive Plan Consultant from *Bergmann*

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

Announcements:

- This being a special meeting, it was advertised in the Times Herald on August 8th.

Correspondence:

- MCPC Announcement-PMPEI Course in Zoning (September 10, 17 & 24)

3. Approval of Minutes:

- Mr. Cornog moved to approve the minutes from the July 23, 2019 meeting; seconded by Ms. Patchen. Vote 4-0-3 (Mr. Shula, Mr. Doran and Mr. Dambman abstained, not present 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; Continued Discussion. Ms. Baptiste stated this is a revised Future Land Use Plan per the recommendations of the Commission at the last meeting; the mixed use character area was broken into two distinct character areas to differentiate between mixed use corridors and mixed use nodes.
- Goals for the meeting tonight: review the current version of the draft future land use plan character areas; specific feedback from Planning Commission members on any changes or refinements that you would like to see to the future land use plan so they can go back and make those modifications prior to the next meeting.

Park & Open Space Character Area– these areas indicate existing parkland; areas that are intended to be preserved as open and natural over the 10-15 year comprehensive plan planning horizon; areas where the desire is to preserve existing site features, viewsheds, greenspace, some are publicly owned green spaces some are privately owned; and areas where open space is a priority over any future development.

Feedback from the Planning Commission:

- how are you defining the difference between open vs. natural or how is natural being defined (green space, naturalized areas, undeveloped areas, areas being preserved over any future development); possibly conduct inventory by PC members and others interested to distinguish types of open spaces;
- how are we setting our goal to connect open spaces if we are setting out to have a set of disconnected areas of open spaces (this does not define connections; the focus is land use; connectivity may be in a greenway plan which is above and beyond purview of the land use plan);
- how are these areas being used should be more fleshed out in the plan;
- priority on healthy ecosystem has to be a key point for Whitemarsh and a starting point would be to differentiate between Miles Park and a park where it is mostly wetland, forest or prairie, having a

base overlay, distinction is critical and higher priority (breakdown parks vs. natural areas into 2 character areas; could run into problems of distinction; may be able to accomplish this by text instead of additional mapping);

- how difficult is it to get existing conditions map to use as an overlay;
- how is the park and open space map different from existing conditions;
- we need to know what we have, need an existing conditions map.

Feedback from the Public:

- Steve Kaufman – on Steering Committee and does not recall discussion of these things. Plan is confusing to have acquisition targets on same map as open space.
- Eli Glick – Hopes there is public comment after each section. McCarthy Park surrounds “Victory Fields” – Wilderness Park. Need a before and after map for each character area.
- Sydelle Zove – is the area behind Woodbine Way or other similar ones shown on the map (no, not of a scale to show up). This character area is based largely on existing maps of parks and open space.

Conservation Residential Character Area – the intent of this residential character area is to think about facilitating and allowing residential development but in the context of recognizing that these areas have value from a natural resource open space viewshed perspective and that as the plan transitions into subsequent zoning updates and possible overlay districts, that consideration be given to ensure residential development doesn’t occur in a way that negatively impacts those resources. Looking at potentially large lot minimums so you are preserving some of that greenspace or cluster developments to allow and facilitate the residential development without sacrificing all the natural resources and greenspace that is present in these areas.

Feedback from the Planning Commission:

- we should be careful on how we define density maximums for cluster developments;
- likes the areas, thinks zoning ordinance is where it will be better defined;
- incentivize the regulations in the zoning ordinance to get the results we want.

Feedback from the Public:

- Linda Doll – what does density mean, what does open space mean, they need to be defined. Thinks we should give other properties their own distinctions, they all don’t fit into the same mold. Thinks the Land Development process is done backwards.
- Sydelle Zove – natural conservation features need to be inventoried.
- Steve Kaufman – Conservation/Growing Greener works for larger sites; other techniques needed for in-fill sites, smaller sites need attention in zoning.
- Eli Glick – Germantown Pike from Thomas Road to Church Road is not included in this character area but should be. This process should not be left to consultants or Mr. Guttenplan, it should be run by the Planning Commission Members.
- Frank Scarpello – will the Planning Commission have input into the actual zoning language.

Residential Character Area – the intent is not to say this area be zoned as one district (currently about 10 districts). A range of residential densities would be appropriate, consistent with existing character. Specific density and bulk/use requirements would be determined and finalized during zoning update. Would like to see homes with more trees and meadow space and less turf grass.

Feedback from the Public:

- Eli Glick – page 31/32 hope these are stock photos and hope these will not be representative of final document.
- Sydelle Zove – it appears that the Village Commercial District VC-2 along Germantown Pike near Butler Pike is included here (there is a mixed use corridor along the Pike which encompasses more of the VC than Residential does. This is not a historic preservation plan, it’s a Land Use Plan. This is a selective update but wants to make sure we capture relative points).
- MJ Fisher - doesn’t want to see the property she backs up to on Bethlehem Pike as a store, concerned about what will happen on the corridor.

Golf Course Character Area – Steering Committee felt that Golf Courses should be identified as their own character area due to the importance of protecting the existing character of the golf courses and proactively thinking about how do these get preserved and identified as important resources if in the future any of the existing property owners decide to transition the parcels into a new use. There are many options for future development on golf courses but which one is preferred by the Township would need to be defined as part of a zoning update.

Feedback from the Public:

- Frank Scarpello – what can go there now, what are they zoned for (residential with a recreational overlay over some of them).
- Steve Kaufman – what tools are available other than some form of cluster zoning, the primary tool available is the open space fund (conservation easements, transfer of development rights, etc. all addressed in text of the Comprehensive Plan).
- Linda Doll – is the Township able to use eminent domain to purchase a golf course due to stormwater control they provide.

Mixed Use Corridor Character Area - the underlying theme is the recognition that this does not imply a single zoning district or that each of these corridors are identical. The intent is to identify areas within the Township where over time these would be the locations where we would see opportunities for mixed use growth.

Feedback from the Planning Commission:

- Corridors will be a blend of residential and commercial (yes, blends/uses may be different in different corridors, will be addressed in zoning).
- Recommends North side of Bethlehem Pike be residential instead of mixed use and from East Valley Green Road & North should be residential.

Feedback from the Public:

- Eli Glick – with the proposed construction on Ridge Pike, will there be an effect on property values. Pushback on changing Ridge Pike to mixed use.
- Sydelle Zove – surprised East side of Ridge Pike is being considered for mixed use, should be residential, not mixed use.
- Peter Blood – Comprehensive Plan from 2003 speaks of Fort Washington historic character, this does not.
- Frank Scarpello – why is mixed use being considered for Bethlehem Pike (it already exists). What is the depth of the corridor (no depth identified, this is schematic and generalized).

Mixed Use Nodes – largely defined by nearby transit opportunities. Zoning will be unique to each node. The underlying theme with all of these would be promoting a mix of uses, development that is compact, walkable and multi-modal.

Feedback from the Public:

- Peter Blood – Hollywood Avenue should be residential not mixed use, node should be Pennsylvania Avenue only.
- Eli Glick – don't lose sight of environmental concerns in this area.

Waterfront Character Area – this is a replication of the area that was looked at in 2016 Riverfront Plan that was a joint plan with Conshohocken. This is intended to facilitate the vision from that 2016 Plan with the mixed use development, high focus on public spaces, connectivity, getting people to the water, and preserving any existing resources that exist in this confined area.

Feedback from the Planning Commission:

- wants to revert developed area back to natural.
- Vision related to Washington Street plans for paving – do we want area to be accessible.

Feedback from the Public:

- Sydelle Zove – riverfront district is ‘muddy’. Seems like we are promoting development to get the developers to pay for the opening of Washington Street. Was Ashford Farm Land identified in this plan, it is a very significant piece of land (yes, noted in conservation character area).
- Eli Glick – from the bend down to Conshohocken, is going to be well developed, and there is no public access, and doesn’t feel there should be.
- Steve Kaufman – area around Miquon not developable.

Business Park /Research and Development – Steering Committee focused on identifying potential around existing employment uses and employment centers around Camp Hill and Militia Hill Roads. This is where they saw future opportunities for low impact businesses.

Historic District Overlay – not making any recommendations as part of this plan for any changes to any historic boundaries (overlay just shows the extent of Plymouth Meeting Historic District within Whitemarsh), this is out of their purview of the consultant’s task of looking at land use and housing.

8. New Business: None

9. Public Comment:

- Sydelle Zove – thanked the Planning Commission for their well considered comments and effort they are putting into this process.

10. Adjournment:

- There being no further business, meeting was adjourned at 10:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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 Whitemarsh 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.