

**MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION
ZOOM MEETING
OCTOBER 13, 2020**

Attendees/Participants: Dave Shula, Sherri Glantz Patchen, Patrick Doran, Bob Dambman, Aaron Kostyk, Elizabeth Shaw Fink, Scott Quitel, Charlie Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning and Zoning, Krista Heinrich (Township Engineer's office), Vince Manuele (BOS Liaison), and Dave Sander, Esq. (Township Solicitor's office)

1. CALL TO ORDER: 6:00 PM by Chair Dambman

2. ANNOUNCEMENTS & CORRESPONDENCE

Announcements:

- Mr. Kostyk was introduced as the new member of the Planning Commission. Mr. Kostyk and his wife have lived in Whitemarsh Township for a little over two years now and he is an Attorney with the Public Defender's Office in Norristown. Prior to that he was in a private practice and had a background in municipal representation and land use and municipal litigation. He is hoping to bring some of his experience to this role and excited to dive right in with the planning stuff and looking forward to working with everyone and doing what is best for Whitemarsh.
- Pursuant to the requirements of Section 302(a) of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, Act of 1968 (as amended) this meeting was advertised in the Times Herald on Monday, September 28, 2020 and Monday, October 5, 2020. That section of the code pertains to the requirement for the advertising of the Planning Commission's public hearing for the comprehensive plan.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- On a motion by Ms. Patchen seconded by Mr. Doran, the Planning Commission moved to approve the September 22, 2020 meeting minutes. Vote 5-0-1 (Mr. Quitel was not present for the vote & Mr. Kostyk abstained; this was his first meeting)

4. ZONING HEARING BOARD APPEALS: None

5. CONDITIONAL USE APPLICATIONS: None

6. SUBDIVISION &/OR LAND DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS: None

7. OLD BUSINESS:

- Public Meeting for Selective Comprehensive Plan Update

Mr. Sander read a prepared announcement leading into this agenda item before undertaking the public meeting which detailed what is to occur at the meeting, its purpose which is not to revise the Plan (that has been done) but to allow the Planning Commission to make a recommendation on its adoption to the Board of Supervisors based upon the requirements of the State Planning Code; he also explained the anticipated sequence of events for this meeting.

Ms. Kimberly Baptiste, consultant for the project from *Bergmann* (Township's consultant for the project) was present for the Zoom meeting and provided a 16-slide PowerPoint Presentation that gave a brief overview of the Selective Comprehensive Plan Update process which has been about 3 years in development. She spoke of the Plan's content that included Vision and Goals, Future Land Use Plan, Actions and Strategies, and the Technical Appendices. She explained that while the update was limited to Land Use and Housing, that it was expanded to look at Circulation and

Quality of Life as these affected Land Use and Housing. She then commented that the focus tonight is for the Planning Commission to make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors and then the Plan would be considered for adoption by the Board of Supervisors after a public hearing (goal to schedule for November 2020). She provided a brief overview of the engagement process, key themes of the plan, and an overview of its content and organization.

- Motion: Mr. Doran moved that the Planning Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors the adoption of the Selective Comprehensive Plan Update that is dated September 2020; seconded by Mr. Shula. Before a vote was taken, the Planning Commission members and public had opportunities to comment, as follows:
- Planning Commission Comments:

Mr. Doran wanted to give his appreciation to Ms. Baptiste, Mr. Guttenplan and to the staff for what has been a very carefully crafted process. He believes what we have here is a very thoughtful and thorough select update that we should be proud of and now it is time to move forward as there is still so much more to do with this. There are a lot of issues that need to be addressed in Zoning and this is a launch pad for more attention to various aspects to make the next 10 or 20 years here in Whitmarsh a more livable and sustainable one.

Mr. Dambman wanted to also acknowledge Mr. Cornog for all his work in this, the members of the public for their comments that have helped shaped it and Ms. Baptiste's graciousness with the different revisions that had to be made. He commented that the core of the plan is pretty much there and he has read through it and feels it is good work.

Mr. Guttenplan wanted to thank Mr. Doran for his words and feels everyone has worked really hard on this. He also wanted to thank Ms. Baptiste, stating her role in this was not an easy one and she has been extremely cooperative and professional and has made this process what it is and a much easier process.

Mr. Kostyk commented he has had the opportunity to review it a few times along with the other documents and it is reflected of a tremendous amount of time of work, it is very well put together and well done.

Mr. Dambman also commented that the (Plymouth Meeting Historic District) Map – Appendix B – was missing the key. Mr. Guttenplan found a key and the numbers matched up. The Comp Plan is about our land use, our open space and the historic district is a very important part of it but the map key does not need to be addressed tonight in order for the Plan to proceed.

- Public Comment:

Fletcher MacNeill, 2161 Harts Lane, appreciates the presentation. It shows some aspirational goals for the Township. It looks like an introductory step in the Comprehensive Plan. He would like to see an evaluation of pressure points in the Township (traffic problems, retail development that is well or not well utilized, problems well residential development that is well or not well utilized). He would like to see something more about what the vision really is in terms of this is a retail corridor, pedestrian connectedness, and historic preservation. With what was presented tonight as a Comprehensive Plan, he does see that (though he acknowledged that he has not followed the process until now). What was this evening's presentation meant to inform us of beyond the aspirational goals of the Township to have a livable community? He is looking for substantive planning concepts. On a personal concern, we have to be sure we are attending to the issues of stormwater management because this is really a big problem in the Township.

Mr. Dambman commented he believes all those areas are covered with a strong emphasis on environmental stewardship. The traffic is considered; transportation modes are strongly represented there.

Ms. Baptiste commented that tonight's presentation was just a high level overview highlighting the key elements of the Comprehensive Plan. There are 50 pages of specific action items that are the foundation and the bulk of the Comprehensive Plan and a lot of the substance that Mr. Fletcher is referencing is probably in there and that document can be found on the Township's website.

Sydelle Zove, Harts Ridge Road, She commented she is pleased about the section in the Plan which explains the premise upon which the plan is predicated with the attention on the impacts of climate change and stormwater management. She commented on specific sections of the Historic District when referencing buildings of historical architecture with the suggestion to change the wording to add the word "cultural", feels it is equally important; thinks there is some confusion on another bullet where it says "or tax credits" was added, feels this is misplaced within the bullet and thinks it should appear earlier on; and then finally the key or legend to the Historic District Map in Appendix B has spelling and factual errors. She does think it is important that it be correct, but if not corrected, then perhaps there be a note on it that the Township recognizes that there are some errors that appear on the legend.

Mr. Dambman commented that himself and the staff received her e-mail concerning the legend and suggested that she review it more carefully and suggests to send to Mr. Manuele so that that might be adopted in the final version when the Board of Supervisors act on it.

Steve Kaufman, Harts Ridge Road, would like to express his appreciation. He served on the Steering Committee and stated that Ms. Baptiste walked in with a good attitude and background, inclination to look deeply at issues so she made a good foundation. He referenced page 8 which talks about the environment and stated the phrase "net increase in natural resources", and the idea that we are trying to enhance our environment is tremendously important; we are now committed to not only enforce our existing ordinances but update our ordinances. Now is the time to look and continue the progress that is made in terms of looking at the meat of the ordinances and enforcing them and looking at the literal language. He urges the citizens to maintain their involvement and read the codes and work on the task of reform and enforcement and urges the Planning Commission to attend the Board of Supervisors meetings.

Mr. Dambman commented he agrees that zoning is going to be the teeth and we are ready to move forward with that.

Roy Wilson, 4006 Butler Pike (Abolition Hall), stated that him and his wife are only 1/3 owners but have maintained the property and buildings for 45 years. They have also maintained the history of the buildings giving free tours to individuals, schools and many others. There is a historic marker in front of his house because he and Nancy Corson applied for it. He feels he has to object one more time to being singled out as a private property and to be renamed Parks and Open Space. The property was zoned by Whitemarsh Township for townhouses since the 1970's and has been taxed by the County on that basis for decades. It was never their desire to sell any of the property but the unsustainable land taxes imposed on them by Township zoning made it impossible to own. They tried to get the Township to buy the fields to reduce the tax burden on the remaining historic buildings but were unsuccessful. He would like an explanation to the reason why this single private property is being singled out for Parks and Open Space when all the other open space sections are parks, golf courses and Township property. The new classification appears to be designed to stifle our ability to ever sell the property. He objects strongly to the rezoning of the land without his approval and for which there has been absolutely no consultation with the owners. This is an unjust taking of their land without compensation and amounts to spot zoning.

- Action on Motion

The motion made earlier in the meeting was repeated (that the Planning Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors the adoption of the Selective Comprehensive Plan Update that is dated September 2020) and a vote was taken. Vote 7-0

8. NEW BUSINESS: None

9. PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS COMMENTS: None

10. PUBLIC COMMENT FOR NON AGENDA ITEMS: None

11. ADJOURNMENT

- On a motion by Mr. Doran seconded by Ms. Shaw-Fink, the meeting was adjourned at 6:50 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.