

**MINUTES  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
MAY 24, 2022**

**Attendees/Participants:** Sherri Glantz Patchen, Bob Dambman, Patrick Doran, Aaron Kostyk, Elizabeth Shaw-Fink, Charlie Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning & Zoning, Krista Heinrich (Township Engineer), Jacy Toll (BOS Liaison), Dave Sander (Township Solicitor's Office)

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** 7:00 pm by Chair Kostyk

2. **ANNOUNCEMENTS & CORRESPONDENCE:**

- This meeting was advertised on May 6<sup>th</sup> and May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022 in the Times Herald as the required 'Public Meeting' to review the **Spring Mill Multi-Modal and Land Use Study** as an amendment to the Township's Comprehensive Plan.
- It was requested that people talk directly into the microphone so that we can easily hear the recording.

3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

- The April 12, 2022 meeting minutes were deferred to the next meeting; no quorum. (Mr. Dambman, Mr. Kostyk and Mr. Doran were not present at that meeting)
- On a motion by Mr. Dambman seconded by Mr. Doran, the Planning Commission moved to approve the April 26, 2022 meeting minutes as written (Mr. Kostyk and Ms. Glantz Patchen abstained, not present at that meeting). Vote 3-0-2
- On a motion by Mr. Doran seconded by Ms. Glantz Patchen, the Planning Commission moved to approve the May 10, 2022 meeting minutes as written (Ms. Shaw-Fink abstained, not present at that meeting). Vote 4-0-1

4. **ZONING HEARING BOARD APPEALS:** None

5. **CONDITIONAL USE APPLICATIONS:** None

6. **SUBDIVISION &/OR LAND DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS:** None

7. **OLD BUSINESS:** None

8. **NEW BUSINESS:**

- Public Meeting for "Spring Mill Multi-Modal and Land Use Study" (Comprehensive Plan Amendment)

Attendees: Krista Heinrich, Township Engineer; Emily Paskewicz, Landscape Architect; Damon Drummond, Transportation Engineer all with Gilmore & Associates, Inc.

Mr. Guttenplan gave a brief introduction: This is a study that is an outgrowth of a number of studies including the last Comprehensive Plan adopted at the end of 2020 and the various riverfront plans that were done the last 5-6 years. Gilmore & Associates was chosen to be the consultant to do the study and Ms. Heinrich and her colleagues are here to present the study and discuss with the Planning Commission with the hopes that at the end of the discussion the Commission will be in a position to make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors for adoption. This will be a public hearing item at the June 9, 2022, Board of Supervisors meeting. This study was done under a grant that requires it to be completed and adopted by the end of June. There was a very active Steering Committee that assisted the consultant and staff in preparing the study. Jacy Toll was the Board of Supervisors Liaison and Bob Dambman was the Planning Commission representative on that committee.

Copies of the Executive Summary from the Study were distributed.

The Gilmore team made a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the Study:

Ms. Heinrich introduced the project team and the study.

Ms. Paskewicz commented this is a planning study funded by a TCDI grant through DVRPC. It is important to understand that with planning studies that all the proposed recommended solutions are conceptual in nature so this plan does provide a lot of recommendations, ideas, conceptual plans and sketches for ways that the Township could address the various issues that they examined in greater detail through the study. However, it doesn't provide a one size fits all solution to any given issue within the study area and it doesn't provide detailed engineering plans or detailed cost estimates.

The project location essentially follows part of the length of Washington Street into Conshohocken Borough, runs up North Lane and encompasses the properties along North Lane as well as the PECO Right of Way and then travels west out to Cherry Street in Conshohocken Borough and east to the intersection of Barren Hill Road and East Hector Street.

There are 4 main project goals:

- Enhance the Multi-Modal Connectivity of Washington Street, Lee Street, and the Wider Study Area
- Evaluate a potential redesign of the waterfront and surrounding land uses
- Identify and evaluate the potential of undeveloped and underdeveloped parcels within the study area
- Identify issues and solutions for the Spring Mill junction of the Schuylkill River Trail, the SEPTA Railway, Spring Mill Station and Station Avenue

This project has been in the works for many years as plans that have come before it including the 2011 Riverfront Open Space Plan; the 2016 Riverfront Plan which was a collaborative plan between Conshohocken & Whitemarsh; and finally built upon the 2020 Comprehensive Plan Update and the General Land Use Recommendations that were provided as part of that plan.

Ms. Paskewicz outlined the project status from 2020 to December of 2021: the project received a DVRPC TCDI Grant; the Grant Contract was Finalized and Executed; the project team made its initial site visit; the Base Map and Site Analysis Plan was prepared; there were a total of 6 Steering Committee Meetings held, one with a site tour; a public survey on Survey Monkey was released, they received 656 responses. Some of the key findings they saw involved parking, traffic and access to the river and the Schuylkill River Trail. There was also a significant concern about flooding, in addition to heavy development within the area; the first Public Presentation and Listening Session was held via ZOOM. The public focused on flooding, recreational access, parking and the impacts of 901 Washington Street and other developments along the river. December 2021, they kicked off key person interviews which included emergency services, Hines Rowing Center, Montgomery County Municipal Managers, Police, Spring Mill Corporate Center, and several interviews with David's Bridal. A final public presentation and listening session was held, and the comments centered around the need for shared parking and the future of the Riverfront Trail. In April of 2022 the final Steering Committee meeting was held and the committee voted unanimously to recommend that the plan move forward on to this presentation tonight and then the Board of Supervisors on June 9, 2022.

The Steering Committee meetings were well attended by all members. The members provided important feedback through the public participation process, the review of conceptual plans, and a full review of the final report. They had significant comments on the initial draft from DVRPC and the County; changes are reflected in the current draft.

The study area was divided into 4 key focus areas:

- Mr. Drummond explained Washington Street's existing conditions and recommended improvements – the site analysis of Washington Street looked at safety concerns, pedestrian accommodations and where they can make improvements. They are looking at public access and connections through Washington Street's current dead end, sidewalks near David's Bridal, and crossing improvements for the SEPTA railroad tracks. Due to the constraints of the limited cartway width adjacent to the David's Bridal building, implementation of a traffic signal is being considered to control two-way traffic over a single shared travel lane.
- Ms. Paskewicz explained the Spring Mill Riverfront's existing conditions and recommended improvements – key considerations for this focus area are public access, continued habitat and environmental protection for Spring Mill County Park, shared parking and the Trail and Café user congestion at the blind curve on Station Avenue. Potential Solutions: provide a gathering space along Station Ave. in the right-of-way of the Spring Mill County Park property to allow trail users, café patrons, SEPTA users, and the public with a place to gather, the ability to add educational interpretive signage that would take advantage of the

unique habitat within the park and provide a protective way for people to engage with that space. Another piece of this design would be speed tables or a speed table with raised crosswalks or something to slow vehicles before they reach the blind curve as well as cautionary signage.

- Ms. Paskewicz explained the Spring Mill Junction's existing conditions and recommended improvements – this is an area with a lot of concerns around safety. Some important considerations are safety, visibility and intersection angle at the trail and Station Avenue junction. There are issues with overgrown vegetation at the intersection as well as public use of private parking and overall lack of parking, and potential Public River Access. They came up with two methods to address these issues: the first option is paving changes, an improved crosswalk, vehicular stop bars and signs and bollards at the intersection points of the Schuylkill River Trail with Station Avenue. Another piece was the proposed vegetation, so they are proposing that they remove or cut back vegetation to improve visibility and any removal to be replaced with native plants and shrubs. The second option is a little less involved and invasive and lower cost. It involves removing or cutting back of vegetation for visibility at that intersection and planting native plants and shrubs and includes bollards and larger warning signs for trail users as well as stop bars and signs along Station Avenue at the drive entrance to the Spring Mill Station parking area and David's Bridal. The preferred user option is not feasible for David's Bridal current operations or future but would include a boat launch or water access to the Schuylkill River, restrooms, installation of the riverwalk trail, parking, a river deck and a staging area. The plan builds on various planning documents over the last decade that have proposed a trail along the river in Whitemarsh Township that connects to the existing trail in Conshohocken Borough. The sketch does propose relocating a portion of the trail to Washington Street and using Spring Mill County Park and Station Avenue to connect to the potential future Miracle-Nature Trail. The trail is required by Township ordinance to be installed by any developer who plans to build along Whitemarsh Township's portion of the riverfront.
- Ms. Paskewicz explained North Lane's existing conditions and recommended future land use – the key considerations in this area were the undeveloped parcels and the possible future development with Spring Mill Corporate Center and the connectivity up and down East North Lane for pedestrians and other multi-modal users. The proposed future land use examines the Spring Mill Corporate Center lot for potential future transit-friendly development and or mixed use. For the two residential lots on the opposite site of East North Lane, they looked at the potential of future transit-friendly development as well as a stronger emphasis on parks and open space preservation as well as improved pedestrian connections from these lots to the Spring Mill SEPTA Station, E. Hector Street and the potential future Miracle-Nature Trail. In addition to support the transit -friendly use they are looking at the potential to expand sidewalks as well as providing crosswalks, and a potential connection point to E. Twelfth Avenue which will link the Spring Mill Corporate Center property to Conshohocken Borough. Beyond the transit-friendly development, some of the other potential uses considered for the Spring Mill Corporate Center parcel were residential – single family attached residences, age qualified residential, institutional or academic uses, food and beverage sales, and fitness center or health club. For the residential parcels, they also considered residential – single family attached residences, age qualified residential, park & open space, institutional or academic uses, agriculture and food and beverage sales.

There were a couple of categories of recommendations in the overall study area that they looked at and Ms. Paskewicz explained. These included:

- Multi-Modal Infrastructure – to make sure all pedestrian crossings are brought up to ADA standards and include detectable warnings and ramps, crossing signals and cross walks. They are also recommending wayfinding and directional signage to help pedestrians navigate, understand distances, and encourage walking and biking.
- Parking was a key concern of the public. The preferred alternative where feasible would be to implement shared parking agreements with private lots within the study area.
- Alternative Parking Garage would be a way for the Township to address parking issues in the study area. The Steering Committee expressed this is not an option they would like to see for aesthetic reasons, etc. It is an option and would involve building a garage over existing parking that is on the Spring Mill Fire Company lot and currently leased to the Spring Mill Corporate Center.
- Flood and Flood Resiliency in the study area. The graphic shown showed the potential to do street art using street paving to delineate the extent of Hurricane Ida's floodwaters within the public paved surfaces and pairing that with educational signage where you could be linked to the Township website that talks about the local floodings as well as what the Township is going to do to address it moving forward. Beyond that, they also recommend the Township will get the potential to adopt higher floodplain management standards in order to improve FEMA ratings and look into the potential

to amending development ordinance along the riverfront as well as some basic design recommendations including permeable pavers and floodproof materials where feasible.

Ms. Paskewicz explained the project timeline – looking ahead for the Spring Mill Multi-Modal and Land Use Study, feedback from this meeting will be compiled, considered, and incorporated into the final report. On June 1<sup>st</sup> a similar presentation will be given to Conshohocken Borough (informative/informal); on June 9<sup>th</sup> they plan to present to the Whitemarsh Township Board of Supervisors for recommendation/adoption. From there, they will prepare and submit the final Spring Mill Study Report to DVRPC as well as to the Township. Looking towards the future of this plan, it is important to remember that this is a planning study and the recommendations presented are conceptual in nature. The goal is that these concepts get translated into solutions with a more complete analysis of specific issues and considerations taking place in the next phases as specific projects move towards detailed design and engineering.

#### Planning Commission Comments & Questions:

Asked for clarification on the recommendation of the Spring Mill Junction railroad improvements (both plans recommend bollards; there will be a pedestrian gate for the sidewalk that will be crossing the railroad tracks); asked for clarification of the cut off area for the boardwalk area on the other side of the street for Tricycle café; safety concerns of overlapping commuters and people using the trails that exist today (this plan would propose redirecting train users to use the sidewalk extension which would include a pedestrian gate for the tracks to avoid collisions); concerns on Lee Street and trail conflicts (an opportunity was identified to make a pedestrian bridge from Quaker Park to Hines Rowing); is there an opportunity for an additional pedestrian crossing between Lee Street and Spring Mill Avenue (no, this was not examined; not sure it would be feasible); asked for clarification regarding the trail loop around Hines Rowing Center and not in front of the center (has to do with rowers carrying boats from the rowing center to the river, there would be a user conflict; also based on a settlement agreement from previous Zoning Hearing Board decision appeal); thinks it would be helpful to put the index at the beginning and asked for clarification of the color coding and discussed demographic changes; concerns for safety with the bollards on the trail (the reason for the 1 bollard came directly from the County and one of the Steering Committee members and said that 1 single bollard of their particular approved Schuylkill River Trail style is their standard and was told that is what it has to be); asked for clarification on who is the gathering space intended for (café users, trail users, cyclists, etc.).

#### Public Comment:

Susie Gordon, 365 Roberts Avenue: was there any consideration to have the 2 parcels on North Lane being open space instead of residential.

Peter Gold, 27 Almond Court: commented about the boat launch and parking

Jim McGlinchey, 738 E. Hector Street: concerned with parking issues from the businesses; the proposed developments are impacting the residents at this end not that end of the town.

Michele Zummo, 420 Roberts Avenue: concerned with additional residential areas being developed along North Lane.

#### Presenters Responses:

They recommended the two residential properties for potential transit-friendly development and parks & open space particularly for their size and the amount of undeveloped land there within the study area as well as the PECO Right-of-Way which may contain a future trail. This is conceptual, it is saying there is an opportunity there and both should be looked at. The key here, as currently zoned, there are a lot of permitted uses that are permitted today there and going forward they want maybe to not consider some of those uses; have less intense uses. The goal was to protect those lots from something very intense.

Mr. Kostyk – If there is discussion about development of another parking amenity, that would also hinge on further development around North Lane. Mr Kostyk asked, If they got rid of the parking at Spring Mill Corporate Center, would there would be a discussion about an additional parking amenity at that point? Ms. Paskewicz: Yes. Mr. Guttenplan: there is opportunity for shared parking on the Spring Mill Corporate Center side; both areas are ‘transition areas’ because they are both adjacent to solid single-family areas and would be transitioning from something much more intense – that is another consideration.

Mr. Kostyk - How does it look going forward if the Township is taking action on developing this kind of carve out space along North Lane or proposing additional amenities there? Is there a process involved in doing that as well? Ms. Paskewicz - the real goal with these was understanding that development within the study area has picked up, there are very few undeveloped or underdeveloped parcels within it. They looked broadly at what would be some ideal uses for those spaces. The transit friendly development in this use is included in there given the proximity to the train station and understanding the transit development in that way but it is in no way the only or best recommended land use there.

Motion:

Mr. Doran made a motion to recommend approval of adoption of the proposed plan with the understanding that the timelines will reflect the addition of an ongoing category (for implementation) trying to harmonize with the Comprehensive Plan Update; seconded by Mr. Glantz Patchen. Vote 5-0

**9. PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS COMMENTS:** None

**10. PUBLIC COMMENT FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS:** None

**11. ADJOURNMENT:**

- On a motion made by Mr. Doran; seconded by Ms. Shaw-Fink, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 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.

