

**TOWNSHIP OF SOUTH WHITEHALL**

**LEHIGH COUNTY**

**JOINT BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS/PLANNING COMMISSION WORKSHOP**

**REGULAR SESSION**

**MINUTES**

**JUNE 7, 2022**

The Joint Board of Commissioners/Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan Workshop was held on the above date in the Township Municipal Building located at 4444 Walbert Avenue, Allentown, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania.

Members in attendance:

Diane Kelly, President Board of Commissioners, and Planning Commission  
Monica Hodges, Board of Commissioners  
David Kennedy, Board of Commissioners  
Brian Hite, Vice-Chairman Planning-remote  
Trevor Dombach, Planning Commission-remote  
Timothy Dugan, Planning Commission  
Andrew Flagg, Planning Commission  
David Wilson, Planning Commission

Staff members in attendance:

Gregg Adams, Planner  
Robert Emmanuel, Community Development  
Lynn LaBarre, Permits/Minute Taker  
David Manhardt, Director of Community Development  
Herb Bender, Director of Public Works  
Mike Elias, Public Works Utilities/MS4 Program Coordinator

Hannah Clark, AICP-Michael Baker International

**AGENDA ITEM #1-CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Wilson called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. He announced that all meetings are electronically monitored.

**AGENDA ITEM #2-PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/ROLL CALL/MEETING RULES**

Mr. Wilson led the assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Director Manhardt called roll and introduced staff in attendance.

Mr. Adams read the meeting rules.

### **AGENDA ITEM #3-APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Wilson made a change on page 7 of the May minutes. Commissioner Kelly moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Dugan seconded the motion and it passed 8-0 with correction being made.

### **AGENDA ITEM #5-COMPREHENSIVE PLANS GOALS & IMPLEMENTATION**

Director Manhardt reviewed the staff progress we the Comp Plan and reported that we discussed community utilities at the last Comp Plan workshop.

There were two public comments submitted to the township website. The first comment asked for the Ridge Farm development to be stopped. The second comments came from Maria North. She would like the township to conduct a mature tree inventory with the help of a forester, review native plantings verses invasive ones, and encourage the planting of native shrubs in landscaping and native street trees. Also, she suggested that outdoor lighting could be adjusted to minimize light pollution and encourages the use of scenic view sheds within the township.

Director Manhardt would like to include a forest inventory in the township mapping.

David Burke, 1436 Buck Trail Road, mentioned that he was part of Comp plan subgroup that reviewed traffic and asked when traffic issues will be addressed. He was told that it will be done at the July meeting. He found the presentation from the Keystone Engineering traffic engineer helpful. It was noted that each intersection on Cedar Crest Blvd. shows traffic at near capacity and this will be impacted with the Ridge Farms development.

Director Manhardt noted that the models will be repopulated with the future land use plan.

Mr. Wilson asked if the township has a mature trees inventory and was told that we have edge, near edge and core forest. Mr. Emmanuel is working on more woods detail in resource mapping.

Mr. Dugan asked if the township has a tree preservation or protection ordinance and Mr. Adams said that we do not, and this could be added into the Comp plan. In addition, trees could be put under an historical ordinance.

Mr. Wilson noted that our Shade Tree ordinance doesn't protect mature trees. He has seen a concept in municipalities when wooded areas are removed, new woods may be required in another section of land. Director Manhardt liked this idea which would expand areas to create wildlife corridors.

Commissioner Kelly asked if an ordinance change should be done to support tree preservation or should we wait until the comp plan is completed to make these changes.

Director Manhardt said that these adjustments could be prioritized, and recommendations made by staff for the development of new ordinances and zoning changes.

Marie North, 3025 Victoria Lane, built her home on a lot with many trees. Developers cut down large mature trees taking away the benefit to the watershed and carbon capture. The mature 60-foot-tall trees were protected with construction fencing and no equipment was driven over their roots. She had her woodlands certified in 2013 and has learned about the many benefits from mature trees to both wildlife and the environment. Mrs. North has worked with many foresters including Mr. Dugan from Planning Commission. Because her property is a certified stewardship forest, she has several annual visits from the county service forester. A rare bat species nests in her yard and it is illegible to remove these mature trees with the bat living there. The continuous forest and woodlands help wildlife thrive in wildlife corridors. She suggested applying for grants to protect wildlife by building tunnels under roadways.

Mr. Flagg asked if we should have developers provide a tree line in a development to save the good trees.

Mr. Manhardt noted that this would be included in a tree preservation ordinance.

Mr. Adams said that a SALDO requirement is to show trees greater than 6 inches in diameter and we have the capability to ensure tree protection in some developments.

Commissioner Kelly asked if this is a voluntary tree protection by the developer and was told that it is.

Mr. Dombach noted that the State of Maryland has a rather robust tree/forest preservation effort, and they may be some resources there. He said that depending on the site location/proposed development location, a licensed forester needs to review a site like the wetlands.

Phil Ferenschak, 1957 Latta Street, mentioned that many trees in the Ridge Farm project have been cut down; however, can the remaining trees be saved.

Mr. Adams noted that trees will be preserved for the slopes of the Ridge Farm development.

Mr. Wilson discussed a PNDI Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Index which shows data about endangered and sensitive species.

Director Manhardt said this layer is included in the natural heritage layer in the mapping. For example, the Crackersport Ponds has one flora (Dog hobble) and one fauna species to consider.

Marie North reported that she was on Kohler Ridge Park Committee which performed an inventory of trees and shrubs to identify what to keep and what is invasive and should be removed.

### **COMMUNITY UTILITIES GOAL**

Director Manhardt reported that the main goal in this category is to ensure that the Township is sufficiently served by utility infrastructure appropriate to the level of development and within the available capacity of the utilities. The other goal that Public Works Department expressed are to develop sound economic strategies that considers compliance, maintenance and expansion of utilities. He reviewed several strategies for each section. There is both an expansion of customers and extension of the utilities system. In addition, an increase in users also increases the revenue which warrants more maintenance to the systems. Finally, infrastructure data must be improved with maintenance planning. Compliance with legislation changes will impact budgets. Inflow and infiltration were discussed for the sewer systems. Also, the group discussed stormwater, lead and copper with the water systems, renewable energy, energy conservation and Broadband issues.

Mr. Wilson asked how the township is doing with utility data collection.

Director Manhardt reported that our GIS information is missing some of the elevation data such as pipe diameters and the material that the pipes are made from.

Mr. Bender reported that the new sewer truck uses a GIS camera and every night the truck downloads its information to our computer and data is checked. His goal is to mark all repairs on the GIS system which may warrant replacement and not just repair.

Mr. Flagg asked about the call outs noting that 3 of 5 are township responsibilities (water, sewer and stormwater) while the other two are services that are brought into the community.

Director Manhardt noted that there are things that the township can do through ordinances or working with franchise agreements to encourage choice.

Ms. Clarke said that funding will flow to the township for Broadband access. In addition, there are matching grants available for renewable energy.

Mr. Dugan asked if there are opportunities to build in some conservation by design and LEED construction concepts.

Director Manhardt has seen the building code changing with more focus on energy conservation. LEED concepts can be built into an ordinance.

Commissioner Kelly asked about expansion, maintenance and compliance and how this will be implemented.

Director Manhardt said that this implementation ties back to zoning. Baseline information is critical and this information flows into our process to make informed decisions.

These ideas will be placed on the website for public comments.

Mr. Bender discussed the lead and copper pipe program for water testing. Samples of water will be collected and sent to the lab and residents will be notified of the results. Consumer water audit report is done annually in the township. Aqua will also run their own water testing. In addition, all schools and day care facilities will have their water tested this year.

Both Mr. Hite from 1273 Eck Road and Mr. Dombach from 4004 Hampshire Court would like to participate in the lead and copper pipe program.

Commissioner Hodges asked if this is on the website and was told that there were only 10 openings. If they don't get residents to offer samples, they will put a statement on the next water bill.

#### **D. HOUSING**

Mr. Adams led everyone in a game of Jeopardy "Planning Concept-Housing Edition". Candy prizes were awarded to the winners who were present. Director Manhardt shared his book of definitions and said that we could all continue learning about housing concepts.

The working group recommendations were shared by Director Manhardt:

- Cluster incentives
- Affordable housing and affordable housing incentives.
- Review & amend zoning ordinance to ensure all types of housing are provided
- Transfer of development rights
- Planning for walkable/bikeable communities
- Replicate success of age restricted communities for communities without age requirements
- More frequent updates to the Comp Plan

Director Manhardt reviewed the 2009 Comp Plan goals and recommendations. One recommendation covered the idea of Transect which is the continuum of development. This was built out in the 2009 Plan and will be used in the new Comp Plan but will not be tied directly to the Transect concept.

Nine future housing goals were reviewed with the following 3 questions considered:

- What are your top 3 to 5 priorities?
- What is missing?
- What could be removed & why?

Mr. Flagg asked if we should we be looking to incentivize developers to build in other regions because of the increased traffic in the corridor regions.

Mr. Adams said that if we develop the rural areas, we will still have traffic issues. He listed the major routes in the township noting the traffic issues will continue. What areas still have traffic capacity available? The only way to improve roads is to develop or re-develop an area. There will be \$13 million of traffic improvements from the Ridge Farms project. Traffic impact ordinances could be considered.

Director Manhardt mentioned that there may be a housing recommendation that we want to undertake; however, when we come to the traffic recommendations, there may be a conflict.

Mr. Wilson reminded the group that the Pennsylvania Code makes it illegal to require a developer to make offsite improvements outside of their property frontage. We need to follow Act 209.

Commissioner Kelly asked about design standards in future planning to keep character and aesthetics within the community.

Mr. Dugan asked if the 2009 recommendations are being carried over to the new Comp Plan. He would like to see the walkable & bikeable community idea carried over.

Director Manhardt said if there are key issues from the 2009 Comp Plan, we will carry them over. One of the future LV goals is to create a local balance between jobs and housing. Equal jobs and equal living units which a community will strive to have. A “Bedroom Community” is where they sleep only and commute elsewhere to work. Jobs housing balance makes sense in some sections of the township.

Commissioner Kelly asked if we have mapping data to show any jobs and housing information.

Ms. Clarke noted that the US Census offers dataset for any area to see how many are working and living in township. Both origin and destination can be tracked.

Commissioner Kennedy said it would be interesting to see the number of people who live in the township, work from home primarily with an occasional commute to New York City.

Director Manhardt said that we could consider virtual commuting and the impacts it has on housing. In addition, those working from home will need good Broadband service.

Mr. Wilson asked how we get this detailed information. The Census offers this data which has to be collected and sorted.

Ms. Clarke said that 90 percent of the people who live in Allentown work outside the city and conversely, 90 percent of the jobs in Allentown are held by people from outside the city.

Commissioner Hodges spoke about the adjustment of housing and at what point is the township saturated. We want to look at walkability, but we don’t want to lose the feeling of a township.

Director Manhardt noted that utility capacity drives development. In the 2009 Comp Plan, balance was discussed and where we should focus on expansion and where we should keep development out.

Ms. Clarke asked those in attendance to let staff know which recommendations they would like to see carried forward into the current Comp Plan.

Mr. Dugan asked about capacity interaction with the school district and was told that this will be reviewed under the Community Facilities Section and Economic models.

Mr. Dombach asked if we have looked at older housing developments and if they are walkable/connected to township amenities/natural resources/schools.

Director Manhardt said that we should look at the older developments. Our township has a varied housing stock. Walkability can be enhanced in some areas.

Mr. Wilson stated that a controlling growth is a common theme, and we can't completely stop it. We spoke about resource protection to control growth. We must maintain our utilities before expanding. We want to keep rural characteristics of a township, but it is a tough balancing act.

Commissioner Kelly added that using the traditional neighborhoods such as Greenawalds and Cetronia are important in the character of our township and to keep our identity and become something that we are not.

Commissioner Kennedy said that the smaller lot sizes may offer more affordable homes. This would encourage our kids to come back and live where they grew up. The Parkland School District is very attractive, and the smaller homes lead to affordability, diversity and economic impact.

Director Manhart asked the group what topics are most important to them.

Mr. Flagg said he wanted to understand what cluster developments represent. If this is a desirable community, we should not need to offer incentives to get people to invest in development.

Director Manhardt said that the incentives are to get people to build what the community wants. Clustering incentive is preserving an open space area and grouping homes on smaller lots.

Mr. Adams reminded the group that during the past few years apartments and higher end homes were being built. There was not much built in the middle range. Ridge Farm will include both apartments and homes on smaller lots.

Commissioner Kelly asked about density credits which can be used to incentivize.

Mr. Wilson commented that people love living in the Cetronia and Greenawalds neighborhoods.

Director Manhardt spoke about the concept of incrementalism through the natural progression. Because expansion in a zone may be prohibited, re-development can occur when we allow for an increase in density.

Commissioner Hodges noted that our township is not a city, and she would like to see less dense design moving forward.

Mr. Hite said that it's important to remember where we came from as a first-class township and to learn from our history.

Commissioner Kelly spoke about the housing market boom during the past few years with many homes being sold above the asking price. There is a desire to live in this unique community and people move here because of the way the neighborhood feels.

Topics to be discussed at the next meeting will include Community Facilities with representatives from Parks & Recreation, Parkland School District and Emergency response. The Park &

Recreation plan is also being updated and the consultant may give our group an update. In addition, a school representative and emergency response individual will be attending.

Ms. Clarke will present the Public Engagement Strategy at the next meeting to show our how we will discuss the Comp Plan at community meetings and begin the launch of the public comment period.

Mr. Dugan suggested the group consider areas where housing could be permitted or zoned for housing and the impact of that housing on existing or historical area. Once housing comes into an area, it will have a direct impact on those parcels which will change what has been. This will a line with the history and character of the township.

Director Manhardt said that the impacts of development are being addressed. Using the economic and transportation models will help us “plan smart”.

Mr. Hite reminded the group to consider our neighboring municipalities. There are overlapping projects that can affect us. The North Whitehall Township Comp Plan is also being reviewed and there will be some changes made that are very close to our township borders that will have significant impact to our north and south transportation corridors.

Commissioner Hodges asked if we have the resources to cover the growth with staffing in both the Police and Public Works departments.

Mr. Wilson said that we need to make it financially liable for the developer to replicate these neighborhoods that we love in the township opposed to using a denser design for the housing. Do we examine the SALDO conditions and characteristics for the existing neighborhoods which somehow provide relief to developments that mimic these existing ones?

Commissioner Kelly asked if there are other options or development trends from within the valley or state that we can use for our township. Director Manhardt noted that there are many examples that we can use in our review.

#### **AGENDA ITEM #10 -ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Kelly requested a motion to adjourn at 9:03 p.m. Mr. Hite seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

**ADOPTED THIS DATE:**

**ATTEST:**

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**Secretary**

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**Chairman**