

TOWNSHIP OF SOUTH WHITEHALL
LEHIGH COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS/PLANNING COMMISSION

WORKSHOP SESSION

MINUTES

MARCH 11, 2020

The Workshop Session of the South Whitehall Township Board of Commissioners and Planning Commission was held on the above date in the Springhouse Middle School located at 1200 Springhouse Road, Allentown, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania.

Board of Commissioners Members in attendance:

Christina “Tori” Morgan, President
Diane E. Kelly, Vice President
Joseph Setton
Michael Wolk

Planning Commission Members in attendance:

Brian Hite, Vice-Chairman
Alan Tope, Secretary
Diane E. Kelly
David Wilson

Staff members in attendance:

Renee Bickel, Township Manager
Glenn Dorney, Chief of Police
George Kinney, Director of Community Development
David Manhardt, Director of GIS
Gregg Adams, Planner
Anthony Tallarida, Assistant Township Engineer
Jennifer Alderfer, Assistant Township Solicitor

AGENDA ITEM #1 – CALL TO ORDER

President Morgan called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM #2 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

President Morgan led the assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA ITEM #3 – NOTIFICATION

President Morgan announced that all meetings are electronically monitored to facilitate the taking of minutes and will be destroyed if a request to retain a copy has not been made at that time.

Manager Bickel stated that, in the light of the Coronavirus outbreak, the Township is working on plans to deal with the issues. There will be a meeting in the future to establish a policy regarding the cancellation of public meeting and will keep the public informed. She noted that public health notifications will be posted on the Township website. She also noted that the tables and chairs in use for this meeting have been sanitized.

AGENDA ITEM #4 – PRESENTATIONS

A. STAFF PRESENTATION – George Kinney, Dave Manhardt and Gregg Adams

George Kinney welcomed the Commissioners and public and reviewed the Commonwealth requirements for a Comprehensive Plan, elements of a Comprehensive Plan, and the subsequent use of a Comprehensive Plan within the framework of municipal regulations. He stated that, typically, the Comprehensive Plan process is started at the direction of the elected officials, consultants are hired and a Steering Committee established to guide the creation of the Plan. He stated that this current process has been flipped, with resident participation guiding the creation of the Guiding Principles and providing direction as to how and where growth is to be directed within the Township. He stated that the Steering Committee would appear toward the end of the process to facilitate the creation of the required elements of the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that the Planning Commission is the owner of the Comprehensive Plan and will submit the final version to the Board of Commissioners for approval. He stated that Phase 1 of the process was to develop an Existing Conditions Report laying out the state of the Township and to develop a set of Guiding Principles that would inform the rest of the process. He stated that the process is currently in Phase 2, wherein public opinion regarding where growth should be directed is being collected. He stated that Phase 3, to begin soon, will collect public opinion as to how that growth should look. Finally, Phase 4 will feature a number of committees, each headed by a subject matter expert, which will create the individual elements of the Comprehensive Plan using the direction provided by the public in Phases 1, 2 and 3.

Dave Manhardt reviewed Phase 1. He noted that the Guiding Principles were developed through the information collected at the three meetings at the Parkland High School. He reviewed Phase 2, “Where Should We Grow”, which included 4 public stakeholder meetings and two focus group meetings to date. He stated that more focus group meetings are planned before the Phase is set to finish up at the end of the month. He then reviewed the planned Phase 3, “How We Should Grow”, noting that Visual Preference Surveys and an Online Photo Submission Platform are planned to determine how the public wants future development to look like. He requested that those gathered considered submitting photos of things that people would prefer to see in the Township.

President Morgan inquired as to whether the photos should be of things within the Township.

Mr. Manhardt stated that the photos may be of things within or outside of the Township. He stated that once the preferences are collected, meetings will be scheduled to determine which preferences should be associated with which types of development. He stated that there will also be a kickoff meeting scheduled, hosted by subject matter experts, wherein the participants will also be asked to rotate through the subject matter tables and then asked to sign up for individual element committees based on their interest on the subject matter.

Mr. Manhardt stated that future economic trends are an important consideration when developing a Comprehensive Plan and introduced Todd Poole to talk about future trends.

B. CONSULTANT PRESENTATION – Todd Poole, President, Founder and Managing Principal of 4WARD Planning

Mr. Poole reviewed his work as a Land Use Economist and his role in the creation of a Comprehensive Plan. He stated that a Land Use Economist would look at land development trends, demographic trends, and municipal laws and tax policies, as well as develop fiscal impact analyses of potential planning options. He reviewed factors that would most impact a Comprehensive Plan, starting with demographics. He stated that people per household is a large driver in demographic, noting that the large new family unit is no longer typical. He stated that divorce, empty-nesters, and younger people putting off marriage and families are trends leading to the creation of larger number of smaller housing units (such as apartments). He stated that this also impacts school districts. He stated that preference is a second major driver, noting that younger people prefer to settle in urbanized areas with more available services and amenities. He stated that this trend does not necessarily mean that they move to cities and noted that the most popular locations for younger people for most of the years since 2010 were first-ring suburbs. He stated that the third major driver is technology, noting that offices require fewer workers and less space per worker, leading to the disappearance of office parks. He also noted that shopping habits have been changing as a result of online shopping and that shopping has become more experiential rather than a simple function of purchasing items.

Planning Commissioner David Wilson inquired as to the impact of warehousing in the Lehigh Valley and its impact on a Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Poole stated that it is a huge impact, noting the market preference is for medical office, warehousing, light industrial and mixed use. He stated that the Township is well positioned to capture that growth.

Planning Commissioner Wilson noted that the Township may not want to provide for it and that the PA MPC requires that all uses be provided for.

Mr. Poole stated that warehousing requires so much land that zoning a limited amount will send a clear message to developers to look elsewhere. He stated that compatible uses, such as light assembly, may be zoned for to capture the demand without the impact of a large amount of truck on the infrastructure. He also noted that the Township could capture some of the benefits of warehousing without actually providing for much warehousing by being open to the associated housing, commercial and industrial uses that are necessary to support warehousing.

Commissioner Wolk inquired as to Mr. Poole's primary deliverable to the Township.

Mr. Manhardt stated that his current deliverable is as a speaker to inform the Commissioners and public. He may be utilized as a subject matter expert in Phase 4.

Commissioner Wolk inquired as to whether Mr. Poole could assist the Township with a fiscal impact analysis.

Mr. Manhardt and Mr. Poole stated that such an analysis would be of assistance to the Township in Phase 4 to determine how the development strategies proposed would impact the fiscal health of the Township.

Commissioner Wolk stated that studies indicate that residential development cost the Township more than it takes in, while agriculture and commercial cost less.

Mr. Poole stated that such studies don't take into account existing capacity of the Township services. He stated that most municipalities are not operating at or near capacity and often the addition of thirty or forty houses will not require the addition of personnel and equipment, therefore the taxes generated will likely be a net increase in funds rather than a net cost. He stated that a detailed fiscal analysis will allow the municipality to determine how close to capacity they are and whether the proposed growth will utilize existing capacity or require the capital expense to increase capacity.

Commissioner Wolk stated the need for a "Lessons Learned" from the 2009 Comprehensive Plan.

Director Kinney stated that the "Lessons Learned" will be generated during Phase 4.

Commissioner Wolk stated that the results of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan include increased development and the Township needs to have a discussion regarding the path chosen and whether the Township should consider continuing along that path or changing the path.

Mr. Manhardt stated that the staff intends to develop indicators within the plan to determine whether the Comprehensive Plan is achieving the goals set forth.

President Morgan pointed out that the 2009 Comprehensive Plan was developed in a process that worked at the time, but that it should not be considered to be flawed because the community has changed since its adoption. She stated that the situation of

the community today should be reviewed and the direction of the community modified accordingly.

Commissioner Wolk stated that he was not suggesting that the Comprehensive Plan was wrong and that, in his business experience, a “Lessons Learned” is a valuable tool.

Mr. Manhardt reviewed the basis of the evening’s exercise, noting the map is divided into hexes and the each hex shows the jobs and residents within that hex (at 200 per dot). He stated that the goal of the exercise it to have each team place 21 pink dots (representing 200 jobs each) and 21 yellow dots (representing 200 residents each), as well as two green dots (representing things that are to be preserved) and two orange dots (representing two things to be fixed).

Mr. Kinney stated that the teams can write notes on the map sheet to better explain their choices. He also requested that group members complete the attendance sheet so that we can capture the demographic information of the group members.

Gregg Adams reviewed the types of development options that may be considered, including “Greenfield” development (developing agricultural or vacant land), redevelopment (either changing the existing uses, adding new uses, or increasing the intensity of the existing uses). He suggested that existing underperforming commercial areas could be redeveloped, either as commercial (by adding pink dots) or as mixed-use (by adding both pink and yellow dots). He also noted that existing residential areas could be redeveloped by adding a small amount of intensity without changing the character of the neighborhood. He reviewed the impact of traffic on development, noting that traffic in the Township generally orients toward US 22 and that development closer to US 22 will generally have a traffic impact on a smaller amount of roadway than development farther from US 22. He reviewed the impact of public water and sewer, noting that the presence of both allows more intense development than the presence of only one or none. He stated that the Huckleberry Ridge is generally the northern boundary of the public sewer system, while public water is available south of Huckleberry Ridge, along the PA Route 309 corridor and along Lime Kiln Road/Orefield Road between PA Route 309 and the High School. He suggested that participants consider how their growth would be served with water and sewer if they chose to put several dots in the same hex.

Mr. David Burke of 1436 Buck Trail Road inquired as to the status of the Regency at South Whitehall, Ridge Farm and the Park View Hotel within the map presented.

Mr. Adams stated that the population of the Regency was incorporated into the map, as the development was approved in 2015. He stated that the other two developments have not been incorporated into the map and offer excellent locations for placement of dots, noting that Ridge Farm would accommodate 7 yellow dots and two pink dots while the Park View redevelopment proposal would accommodate 3 yellow dots and one or two pink dots. He also noted that infill development, which is

the development of agricultural or vacant land surrounded by existing residential or commercial uses, should be considered.

AGENDA ITEM #5 – WORKSHOP EXERCISE

Mr. Manhardt guided the participants to their tables to start the exercise.

AGENDA ITEM #6 – COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

President Morgan opened the floor up to “Courtesy of the Floor”.

There was no response.

AGENDA ITEM #7 – EXECUTIVE SESSION

None.

AGENDA ITEM #8 – ADJOURNMENT

President Morgan requested a motion to adjourn at 8:02 p.m. Commissioner Kelly made the motion, Planning Commissioner Hite seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

APPROVED: On April 15, 2020, a MOTION was made by Commissioner Kelly, which was seconded by Commissioner Setton, to approve the March 11, 2020 Joint BOC-PC Workshop Minutes. Virtual Meeting Roll Call Vote taken as follows: Commissioners Kelly, Setton, Morgan – All AYES approving said minutes. Motion carried. (Commissioner Wolk was absent and Commissioner Mobilio abstained—he was not at this WS.)