

WESTTOWN TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

Stokes Assembly Hall
1039 Wilmington Pike, Westtown Township
November 5, 2014 – 7:30PM

Present

Commissioners – Rodia, Whitig, Pomerantz, Hatton and Lees. Adler and Criddle were absent. Also present were Township Planning Director Chris Patriarca and those mentioned below.

Call to Order

Mr. Pomerantz called the meeting to order at 7:30 and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Adoption of Agenda

The Agenda was adopted and approved as amended unanimously (BW/JL).

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the Planning Commission (PC) meeting of October 22, 2014, were approved unanimously (RH/BW).

Reports

Mr. Pomerantz presented the November 3 Board of Supervisors (BOS) meeting. At their workshop the BOS held an executive session and discussed on-lot assessments, a RFQ for sewer engineering, the SPCA contract and the third quarter budget analysis. At their regular meeting the BOS had several reports presented to them, discussed several ordinance amendments, had a public comment on the process for a liquor referendum and paid the bills. Mr. Pomerantz followed with a discussion on the historic property located at 1142 Old Wilmington Pike.

Announcements

Mr. Patriarca made several announcements. He first stated a presentation will be made at the November 17 BOS workshop by John Snook to present options to the BOS on how to expand the existing historic preservation portions of the ordinance. He also stated Rustin SALDO and Malvern School conditional use will likely be back in December and that the mini-cell tower ordinance will be before the PC by January.

Non-agenda Public Comment

There was no non-agenda public comment.

New Business

Comprehensive plan, zoning and SALDO

Mr. Patriarca stated the purpose of the discussion was to determine which of the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance and/or SALDO the PC would prioritize first for amending, recognizing the PC supports the budgeting of any of these items for update. Further he noted that the PC would continue to make the “housekeeping” ordinance changes as needed during this process of update. Mr. Pomerantz stated the BOS reacted positively to the PC being proactive on these issues when brought up at their previous meeting.

Mr. Rodia indicated that it makes sense to start with the comprehensive plan and there was

unanimous agreement it should be prioritized first. Mr. Pomerantz asked if zoning and/or SALDO updates would fall by the wayside as effort is focused on the comprehensive plan and what happens after PC approval. Mr. Patriarca stated he believes the open communication between the BOS and PC will result in a plan being approved by the PC that would ultimately be adopted. He further stated that ordinances will continued to be updated as needed, and that adoption of a new comprehensive plan should give momentum to updates of both the zoning and SALDO ordinances.

Mr. Pomerantz next led a discussion on if the plan should be developed from scratch or incorporate existing plan elements. The overall consensus of the PC was to not start from scratch. The thought behind this was to include components that have previously been adopted as part of the plan and update them as necessary when appropriate. This “hybrid” approach would allow for updates of previous materials and the addition of new content to reflect contemporary Westtown. Mr. Hatton asked about the timing of these documents, to which Mr. Patriarca responded timelines for completion would applied to each based on VPP grants awarded for their development. Mr. Hatton then noted these undertakings would likely involve more of a time commitment to undertake, and Mr. Patriarca followed with a conceptual timeline for completion of a plan.

Mr. Pomerantz asked if the comprehensive planning process can start prior to the grant cycle. Mr. Patriarca stated that things such as data collection and development of the overall scope of the plan could start earlier. Mr. Pomerantz then asked if the role of the consultant is as a facilitator or to do the majority of the “heavy lifting.” Mr. Patriarca stated he sees that relationship with the consultant to be a partnership with the Township in the development of all aspects of the comprehensive plan. Mr. Patriarca then stated although not guaranteed, the likelihood of having VPP grant awarded is more likely if the plan is consistent with the County’s Landscapes2. Mr. Pomerantz asked if it would be possible to have a consultant selected prior to the start of the grant cycle in order to have a quick and effective start to the process. He then described his experience with a comprehensive planning process in Charlotte and how this type of start gave the entire process more momentum towards its completion. Overall the PC felt the development of a budget for the comprehensive planning process is critical in getting the process initiated.

Walter Pavelchek – 1050 South New Street: Provided several insights on his past experiences with planning processes with the Township. He stated the process should not start from scratch noting that much work has already been done through other initiatives such as the open space plan. He further stated the 2002 plan was based in part of the County’s Landscapes plan and that the PC should speak with John Snook as he was the consultant for the 2002 plan. He further stated the recent open space plan serves as an excellent example of a well-executed plan.

Mr. Pomerantz asked Mr. Pavelchek if he would do anything different with the comprehensive plan if done now and not in 2002. He stated that its integration with the updated County plan as being the major difference. Mr. Pomerantz asked about if other items not in the current Township plan such as economic development is included in other plans of neighboring Townships. He further asked about what types of information would be included in the update of existing chapters. Mr. Patriarca used public transportation as an example of an item that may have not been considered as an important issue in 2002 that may be viewed as more important today.

Further he stated the identification and incorporation of these types of elements into the plan place the Township in a better position to see there successful implementation.

Mr. Pomerantz asked what the largest remaining properties are in the Township, to which the response was the Stratton Farm, Stokes Farm, Westtown School and the Crebilly Farm. Other issues that could be considered as part of a plan update are infill development and how to maintain the high quality of life in the Township's existing neighborhoods. Mr. Hatton noted in the 2002 plan a task force was established to assist with plan development.

Mr. Pomerantz asked Mr. Pavelchek about the involvement of the consultant in the development of the open space plan. He stated the consultant was the primary driver of the process and received much input from the committee and residents. The consultant also provided much insight on how zoning impacts open space preservation and how to fund initiatives set forth in the plan. Mr. Patriarca stated the process should be driven by the residents being fully engaged. This can be accomplished through a variety of approaches such as community meetings, stakeholder groups, etc. Mr. Hatton asked about how to get the public involved and Mr. Patriarca stated that reaching out to community/civic groups, HOAs, churches, etc. Mr. Pomerantz followed with explaining how they got media involved in his Charlotte experience and suggested the Township dedicate an issue of the Township Gazette to the comprehensive planning process.

Mr. Pomerantz concluded by asking what is needed from the PC to get positive momentum going for the comprehensive plan. Mr. Patriarca stated the unified PC voice to move forward is most important at this point, and then tasks will be developed after a consultant is hired if authorized by the BOS. Mr. Pomerantz asked if it would be worthwhile to have a John Snook or Tom Comitta come in to discuss their previous experiences in plan development in the area. He further stated he believes this is critical in developing the necessary momentum to see the plan through. Mr. Patriarca stated he felt the most appropriate time to have a consultant come in would be in early 2015 if the BOS authorizes funding to update the plan. This followed with a discussion on the grant process.

Sign ordinance

Mr. Pomerantz introduced the discussion and started the conversation on the ordinance. Mr. Patriarca indicated the model ordinance sent out was done to provide for a different way to look at sign regulations based on type and not use. Mr. Pomerantz indicated he was supportive in general to regulating signage based on type as presented. Mr. Lees mentioned the difficulty in the regulation of signage attached to vehicles. Mr. Hatton mentioned his concern for the smaller, "step-stake" signs and their proliferation in the Township. Mr. Hatton expressed that he feels making the necessary changes now would be most appropriate with looking into a full rewrite at a future date. Mr. Pomerantz and Mr. Rodia stated they felt the model ordinance should potentially be considered.

Mr. Pomerantz stated that the discussion should be placed on hold until the entire PC is available for discussion. Once everyone is available, then the PC will have a comprehensive conversation what is the best way to proceed with looking into how to deal with the ordinance. A decision on how to proceed with the ordinance will be made at the next meeting.

Public comment

Walter Pavelchek – 1050 South New Street: Stated the plan is a promise to move forward.

Adjournment

9:00 pm (JL/BW)

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Patriarca
Planning Commission Secretary