



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES: Regular Monthly Board Meeting
Wednesday, March 13, 2019
Approved: April 10, 2019

BOARD MEMBERS ATTENDING: Steven Kline, Chair; Dulcie Flaharty, V-Chair; Charles Tornetta; Robert Blue; Jill Blumhardt; John Ernst

STAFF ATTENDING: Jody Holton, Eric Jarrell, Drew Shaw, Ellis Foley, Henry Stroud, John Miklos, Barry Jeffries, Veronica Harris, John Marlatt, Karina Caddick

GUESTS: Jade Utz, Commerce Department; Ken Christovich, resident; Kim Haymans-Geisler, resident of West Norriton Twp; Terry Bird, Resident of Lower Frederick Twp.

I. Call to Order/Board Comments

Steve Kline called the board meeting to order.

II. Minutes of February 13, 2019

The minutes from the February 13, 2019 regular Board meeting were approved by the Board.

***Motion:** To approve the February 13, 2019 Board minutes, by Mr. Flaharty, seconded by Ms. Ernst, and approved by all present.*

III. Public Comment

None

IV. Upper Merion Community Planning Assistance Contract

Presenter: Eric Jarrell

Eric Jarrell requested that the Board approve the planning assistance contract for Upper Merion. This is a three year contract renewal for Upper Merion. During the previous contract the work items included work on a new Comprehensive Plan which will be adopted in 2019. The current contract will include work on a Moore Park Master Plan, DeKalb Pike Streetscape Plan and general services. The contract term is from January 1, 2019 thru December 31, 2021 for a total cost of \$56,133 with a municipal share of \$28,066.50.

***Motion:** To approve the Upper Merion Planning Assistance Contract, by Mr. Ernst, seconded by Mr. Tornetta, and approved by all present.*

V. Montgomery County Sewage Facilities Report

Presenter: Ellis Foley

Ellis Foley provided a summary of the Montgomery County Sewage Facilities Report. The Planning Commission maintains a sewage facilities database which is updated every 5 to 7 years. This is an important report for planning since development is often driven by infrastructure capacity, including sewage capacity. This report is based on 2015 information when surveys were sent to each of the 62 municipalities. A total of 47 surveys were completed and an additional 5 surveys were partially completed. There were 44 municipalities who submitted maps with their surveys. The maps are very helpful to identify where new lines are being constructed. Ms. Foley spoke about the layout of the report and discussed the seven planning areas of Montgomery County. The report provides daily, monthly, annual, and average daily flow information for each sewage treatment plant in the county. It also lists the excess capacity and information on the non-municipal sewage

treatment plants with a map that shows the municipalities that they serve. Ms. Foley displayed a map that highlighted the current and decommissioned public sewage facilities and the current sewer lines throughout Montgomery County. There are 41 municipally owned and operated sewage plants. Of those plants, 15 plants have excess capacity available, 6 plants have capacity upgrades planned, and 15 plants have inflow and infiltration problems. Between 2005 and 2015 there was an average annual flat rate sewer rent increase of \$158. Ms. Foley displayed several maps that showed that showed changes between 2005 and 2015. There was a map that showed the areas with excess sewage capacity. Another, highlighted where capacity was added since 2005 in relation to the designated growth areas. A similar map highlighted sewer lines constructed in existing preserved open space and conservation opportunity areas. Finally, Ms. Foley spoke about the passage of Act 12 in 2016. This act outlined a method to determine the fair market value of a utility. This provided a way for municipalities to sell water and wastewater systems at market value instead of at a public utility commission evaluation. This Act has allowed municipalities to sell these systems. A negative impact of Act 12 is that the PUC approved a 36.5% increase by 2022. However, consultants estimate that needed investment for these systems would have resulted in higher increases by the municipalities.

VI. Swamp Creek Greenway Draft Feasibility Study

Presenter: Henry Stroud

Henry Stroud provided a summary of the Swamp Creek Greenway Draft Feasibility Study. The purpose of the study is to determine the feasibility and the recommended alignment of the Sunrise Trail. The study will also identify recreational access opportunities along Swamp Creek and will also help to promote the conservation of land within the creek area. The Sunrise Trail was identified in the Montco 2040 comprehensive plan as part of the proposed countywide trail network. When completed, it will provide a connection from the Perkiomen Trail in Schwenksville Borough to the West County Trail, which is not yet built. The Swamp Creek Greenway was also identified in the Montco 2040 Comprehensive Plan as a secondary greenway. A DCNR grant was awarded for work on the Swamp Creek Greenway study and used to hire Simone Collins Landscape Architecture as a consultant for work on the study. Mr. Stroud presented to the board several maps that are included within the plan. He displayed a map of existing land use that highlighted the areas that are currently wooded, agricultural, or institutional and highlighted the areas with single family detached homes. The maps show that it is a rural area with a lot of opportunities for land conservation within the study area. There are large institutional properties in the study area including Camp Laughing Waters, Lower Merion Gun Club, Goschenhopen Society, Camp Hope for Kids and the Perkiomen Middle School. The continued protection and conservation of these properties will be important to preserve the environmental value of the greenway. Historic sites within the study area include the Annie's House, Sunrise Mill, Perkiomen Trail and the Historic Perkiomen Railroad. Mr. Stroud spoke about the stakeholders that were involved in the study. Throughout the course of the study there was public participation, including a steering committee which included board members from the County Parks Advisory Board, municipal staff from the four municipalities, and local officials. There were two public meetings that were very well attended. The feasibility study includes a Greenway Vision and Trail vision. The trail vision identifies the primary trail alignment for the Sunrise Trail and local access trails. It also recommends various trail cross sections or types of trail due to the terrain, on-street sections, and other unique environments traversed. There are maps, descriptions and cost estimates with more details for each of the trail types. Mr. Stroud spoke about a section in the study that describes the responsibility of the county and municipal and how trail ownership works as well as maintenance responsibilities. It also includes funding sources and implementation matrixes. The next step includes a final draft of the plan which will be available over the next few weeks.

VII. Rockledge Borough Planning Assistance Presentation

Presenter: Barry Jeffries

Barry Jeffries provided an overview of Rockledge Borough. It is a small urban borough on the eastern part of Montgomery County. It is less than a half square mile in size with a population of approximately 2,500 residents. The borough has several community parks, tree-lined streets, and a connection to the Pennypack trail. A major scope item in the previous contract focused on the planning, design, and implementation of improvements for Mill Park. The current contract will include park planning as well as grant writing for implementation and administration of those grants. Mr. Jeffries spoke in detail about Mill Park, which is a new neighborhood park. The land was originally the Infanta Knitting Mills, a clothing factory, between 1920 and 1983. In 1995, a fire destroyed the three story structure and in 1997 the $\frac{3}{4}$ acre site was preserved with assistance from the County Open Space Grant Program. Rockledge received a Community Development Block Grant that enabled them to clean up the property of the fire debris, remove an underground fuel storage tank, and address other potential hazards.

Although there has been a vision to develop the property as a park, it has remained vacant and underutilized for over 15 years. The 2006 Open Space Plan and 2012 Revitalization Plan did identify the space as a future community park. In 2014, the Mill Park Master Plan was completed by MCPC staff with extensive public input. Mr. Jeffries displayed the conceptual plan that included a natural landscape and tree elements with a children's play area, rain garden, and a pavilion for social gatherings. A phased implementation plan was developed and displayed. There were three grant applications that were funded. The total that was estimated for the Mill Park project is \$170,000. The 2nd and 3rd phases will be completed in 2019 and include the pavilion, a perimeter walkway, and a reflection garden. Mr. Jeffries spoke about the Jarrett Avenue Park, which is located a few blocks north of Mill Park. Initially, Rockledge planned to renovate the existing play equipment and add some landscaping. After further review, MCPC staff worked with the borough to adjust the plan and include more amenities for recreation and passive uses, naturalized areas to attract wildlife, and stormwater management features. A schematic and concept plan was displayed for board review.

VIII. County Recycling Program Update

Presenter: Veronica Harris

Veronica Harris presented an overview of the 2018 Montgomery County Recycling Program. While municipalities and local businesses contract with trash haulers to pick up regular trash and recycling, the county's recycling program addresses special materials, which are items that are difficult to dispose of like hazardous waste, tires and campaign signs. Ms. Harris provided a summary of the special materials recycling events that are held throughout the county. The household hazardous wastes (HHW) are toxic or flammable materials that would cause a health risk if disposed of improperly. These include gasoline, oil, pool chemicals, pesticides, mercury, fire extinguishers and propane tanks as a few examples. Montgomery County organized seven HHW events in 2018. There are about 1,000 households that are served at each event for a total of almost 7,000 in 2018. These events are generally held in parking lots at high schools, middle schools, and colleges. The Lower Merion Transfer Station is also used annually. The surrounding five counties cooperate with one another and make available to the residents the 29 collective events in the southeast region of Philadelphia. All the events are advertised on our website and run between April and November. For 2018, the HHW events cost \$325,000 to run, and this is a \$33,000 increase over 2017. The events are growing in the number of residents that are being served, the amount HHW that is being collected, as well as the annual cost. Due to a price increase, the cost estimate for 2019 based on 2018 volume is expected to increase by over \$100,000. DEP provides a \$100,000 match grant to assist in the cost of these events, but this amount has not changed since 1996. There is proposed legislation which would increase the match to \$250,000, which would be closer to the 50/50 match that it was intended to provide. These events are free to residents to encourage residents not to stock pile these types of materials as a public safety hazard. Ms. Harris also spoke about the two tire collection events held in 2018. There were four tractor trailers filled with over 4,000 tires and 520 households participated. These events cost the county about \$6,000 to hold which is a cost effective way to remove tires from the environment. Tires are prohibited from the local landfills and incinerators and are required to be recycled. This is also a public health issue since they are mosquito breeding grounds and West Nile is a serious health issue. The tires are shredded and recycled and later used for road surfaces and sound barriers. For 2019, we will add another tire collection to handle the high volume for these events. Ms. Harris spoke about the campaign sign collection that is held after the November election. There are 12 drop off sites around the county and the signs are collected up by the county correctional facility and sorted for recycling. There is no cost to the county for this event.

Ms. Harris spoke about the county's vision for a permanent recycling center for Montgomery County. The site could be open year round and serve the public at convenient hours throughout the week. It would accept HHW, electronics, and other special materials for recycling. Ms. Harris noted that in locations with permanent recycling facilities, the volume of material collected is much greater than what is collected in the special events.

Finally, Ms. Harris displayed a trend chart of the population, trash and recycling data through 2017. The Montgomery County data shows that our population is growing, trash measured in tons is decreasing and the amount that residents are recycling is increasing. Similar figures are expected for 2018. Ms. Flaharty asked about the impacts that cardboard used with online shopping has on recycling. Ms. Harris said that 70% of what comes in for recycling is fiber, which is paper but largely cardboard. The remaining 30% is plastic, metals, and glass. Cardboard still has a decent market even though it has decreased in the last year. She added that future packaging may move toward re-usable plastic type containers for online shopping. J.P. Mascaro and Sons recycling facility is starting a pilot program to recycle plastic film like plastic bags, bottled water plastic wrap, and multilayer food pouches. If the process works, there is a market for this product. The Trex

Company is a business that is already using recycled plastic bags to make its plastic lumber for decking, trash cans and other products. Ms. Blumhardt commented that Lower Moreland School District collects plastic bags and Trex provides a bench for all the volume collected in one school year.

IX. 2018 MCPC Annual Report

Presenter: Jody Holton

Jody Holton distributed a copy the 2018 Montgomery County Planning Commission Annual Report. The report highlights the accomplishments of the Planning Commission. The accomplishments included the adoption of the Bike Montco Plan; the release of the Suburban Homestead guidebook; the completion of the KEEP Specific Plan; and the 14 grant awards of the Montco 2040 Implementation Grant Program totaling \$1.5 million. The inaugural year of the County Transportation Program awarded 17 grants for projects in 13 municipalities which will enhance transportation in our communities. The staff also worked on numerous comprehensive plans as part of our planning assistance contracts. The chapter on Achieving the Vision highlighted the accomplishments and milestones of the Planning Commission related to the Montco 2040 Comprehensive plan. The themes of Connected Communities, Sustainable Places and Vibrant Economy from the comprehensive plan are evident throughout the report. The chapter on Building Great Communities talks about the Act 247 reviews that were submitted during 2018. There were 434 proposals submitted for proposed subdivision and/or land development, and it also includes revisions or amendments to any zoning codes or to local plans. A great accomplishment during 2018 was the transition to the 247-review process to an all-digital format. This has allowed our staff to access the information more easily to conduct reviews. Ms. Holton spoke about the chapter on Tracking County Trends which provides valuable information instrumental to local leaders and business professionals. The information includes the annual summary of subdivision, land development and zoning activity; housing units built; median prices for housing as well as residential and nonresidential construction. During 2018, the Planning Commission worked to integrate GIS mapping into many of our reports and presentations, and converted some reports into ESRI Story Maps. The report highlighted the planning services through planning assistance and regional planning contracts that allow us to help guide development throughout Montgomery County. The Planning Smarter series of events offers courses, seminars and workshops that are available to the community. Ms. Holton noted that the Annual Report will be available on the Planning Commission website and will also go out by email blast. Ms. Holton thanked the staff and board members for their contributions to the annual report.

X. Director's Report

1. Ms. Holton announced that the Planning Commission has begun accepting nominations for the Montgomery Awards. The nomination forms are available on our website.
2. The Planning Commission will be posting a new community planner position to meet the needs of the community planning assistance program which added three new contracts in the last six months. There are 36 community planning assistance contracts and four regional planning assistance contracts.
3. Ms. Holton is the chair of the PA Transportation Advisory Committee and shared with the board that two studies were recently released by the committee and adopted by the State Transportation Commission. The first study, *Risks to Transportation Funding in PA*, identifies the potential risks to transportation funding over the state's 12-year transportation improvement program. The second study, *Keystone Connected: Intercity Passenger Rail in PA* discusses the potential success of passenger rail in major corridors of PA, including the Reading to Philadelphia corridor, which was identified as having a high potential demand for passenger rail.
4. The Calendar of Events from March 13, 2019 to April 10, 2019 was distributed for board review. Ms. Holton highlighted the number of planning events covered three pages, and the board members are welcome to come to MCPC Pi Day and MCPC March Madness Chili Fest that will be held in the Planning Commission office.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00.

The next Board meeting will be on April 10, 2019 at 9:00 AM in the Planning Commission's Office.