



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES: Regular Monthly Board Meeting
Wednesday, April 10, 2019
Approved: May 8, 2019

BOARD MEMBERS ATTENDING: Steven Kline, Chair; Dulcie Flaharty, V-Chair; Charles Toretta; David Cohen; Jill Blumhardt; Scott Exley; John Ernst

STAFF ATTENDING: Jody Holton, Eric Jarrell, John Cover, Jon Leshner, Claire Warner, Julia Detwiler, Jamie Magaziner, Scott France, David Long, John Marlatt, Karina Caddick

GUESTS: Crandall Jones, Norristown Borough Municipal Administrator; Jayne Musonye, Norristown Borough Director of Planning & Municipal Development; Jerry Nugent, Executive Director, Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority

I. Call to Order/Board Comments

Steve Kline called the board meeting to order.

Dulcie Flaharty thanked the Planning Commission for the articles that are included in the board packet each month.

II. Minutes of March 13, 2019

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

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

III. Public Comment

None

IV. 2018 Median Prices for Housing Report

Presenter: Daniel Farina

Daniel Farina provided an overview of the 2018 Median Prices for Housing Report for Montgomery County. The county had a total of 12,036 market rate sales of homes. This is a slight decrease from 2017, which had total sales of 12,202. The median sales price of all housing units was \$295,000, which is a \$10,000 or 3.4% increase from the prior year. These figures indicate that Montgomery County has a stable housing market that is growing in price and at a healthy rate above inflation. During 2018, the median price for a new home was \$455,000, an increase of \$2,000. The median price for existing homes was \$280,000 in 2018 or a 2.2% increase from the previous year. The individual housing types of detached, attached, and multifamily homes all saw an increase of over 3%. Mr. Farina displayed a map of Montgomery County that highlighted the median sales price by municipality. It shows that the highest median prices for homes are around the areas of the PA Turnpike, Rte. 476, and Rte. 309 interchanges. The most affordable housing in the county is in Pottstown, Schwenksville, and Norristown. The highest median sales prices were in Lower Merion, Lower Gwynedd, and Whitmarsh.

V. Norristown State Hospital Report

Presenter: John Cover

John Cover presented a summary of the Norristown State Hospital Land Planner Feasibility Study prepared by Michael Baker International for the Pennsylvania Department of General Services (DGS) and Department of Human Services (DHS). The study was completed in March of this year. The study states that the current in-patient capacity of the hospital is 289. There are 102 beds in the general psychiatric unit which services the five counties of Pennsylvania: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia. There are 187 beds in the regional psychiatric forensic center. The forensic center is for the criminally insane or those in the criminal justice system that need intake to diagnose their condition. Mr. Cover provided a map that highlighted the 19 counties on the eastern part of PA that are serviced in the Norristown facility. The Norristown State Hospital has 754 employees and there are an additional 441 employees in campus facilities leased to Montgomery County and non-profit mental health providers.

The Mental Health Procedures Act of 1976 requires that the Commonwealth provide for the treatment and rights of mentally disabled persons and for voluntary and involuntary examination and treatment of those charged with a crime or under sentence. In addition, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 2016 obtained a ruling from the court calling for the reduction of waiting times for forensic in-patient treatment. To accommodate the ruling, DHS set in motion a plan to increase the number of forensic beds at its Norristown facility which would result in the renovation of Building #10. Learning of this plan, Norristown's elected officials along with the local business community wanted to know what this change would mean for the Municipality of Norristown. In response, Governor Wolf met with Norristown officials and committed to several actions. The first was to embark on a land planner study of the state hospital to determine its ultimate disposition; the second was to increase transparency between the DHS, DGS, and Norristown; and finally, he stated that if the facility were closed, the Commonwealth would come up with an exit plan to turn over that portion of the property located in Norristown to the Municipality in a development ready condition.

Mr. Cover provided a map of the 198.8 acre state hospital campus which encompasses the Township of West Norriton and the Municipality of Norristown, and pointed out that the many of the buildings lie within the Municipality of Norristown's 133.4 acres. The study looked at 55 buildings and determined that most were structurally unsound and beyond repair and, therefore, recommended for demolition.

The consultant developed four alternatives for the long-term disposition of the Norristown State Hospital. Alternative One called for full property conveyance to West Norriton and Norristown to include the removal of all substandard buildings and supporting utilities and leaving the property in a development ready state. The Commonwealth would then have to find another suitable location for the development of a new mental health facility. Alternative Two called for the partial conveyance to Norristown of 78 acres in a development ready state, and relocating all existing mental health facilities from that portion to new and renovated buildings on the remaining 121 acres. Alternative Three called for the conveyance of a slightly smaller footprint of 67 acres to Norristown in the same condition as Alternative Two. Alternative Four called for the Commonwealth to retain the entire property and make all the improvements identified in Alternative Two. The Study recommended Alternative Two to DGS and DHS. Mr. Cover also noted that DGS has a line item in its current budget of \$30 million to be applied toward the ultimate disposition of Norristown State Hospital.

Mr. Cover said that should Alternative Two or Three be chosen, the next step would be for Norristown to prepare a master plan of development. The master plan would encompass their portion of the State Hospital Campus as well as the surrounding community. It would identify needed improvements in transportation and other infrastructure in order to maximize the benefit of new development to the Municipality of Norristown. Mr. Tornetta suggested that the board propose a motion of support to develop a master plan for the Norristown State Hospital campus and the surrounding area. Mr. Kline suggested that the motion be structured in two parts, one would recommend that the Commonwealth choose Alternative Two, and the other would recommend creating a master plan as recommended by Mr. Cover.

Motion: *To support Alternative Two of the Land Planner Study and recommend to Norristown to undertake a master plan for the 78 acres that would be conveyed to Norristown that includes adjacent transportation and infrastructure improvements, by Mr. Tornetta, seconded by Mr. Ernst, and approved by all present.*

VI. Marlborough Township Planning Assistance Presentation

Presenter: Jon Leshner

Jon Leshner provided an overview of the Marlborough Township Planning Assistance Contract. Marlborough is a rural, forward thinking community in the upper western part of Montgomery County. It is home to two villages, Sumneytown and Perkiomenville and has a population of just over 3,100 residents. There are 253 companies located in Marlborough Township and the average home sales price in 2018 was \$306,381. There were only 6 single-family detached housing units built in 2017. Mr. Leshner displayed a land use map and highlighted that there is a lot of open space and single-family detached housing in Marlborough. The previous contract period addressed economic development priorities of the Township, including amending the General Commercial District and Village Commercial District zoning. Marlborough Township is committed to trails as a vibrant economic development opportunity for the future. During the land development process they have secured easements for trails that could be built in years to come. Mr. Leshner displayed an updated trails map that outlines their commitment to this amenity for their residents. Previous work items include a Nuisance Ordinance Code that will be adopted in 2019. It includes regulating property encroachments, prohibited outdoor storage, abandoned vehicles, the discharge of firearms, sidewalk and driveway maintenance requirements, and noise and vibration disturbances. The new contract items include completing the Village Commercial District, a parking study for Sumneytown, a greenway study implementation plan, a comprehensive review of the zoning ordinance, and possible landscape plan for Finland Park. Marlborough would also like to explore the grant opportunities that are available.

VII. Bridgeport Borough Planning Assistance Presentation

Presenter: Eric Jarrell

Eric Jarrell provided a summary of the Bridgeport Borough Planning Assistance Contract. This is the start of a new contract with Bridgeport Borough. The local government includes a seven-member borough council and a mayor. Mr. Jarrell provided a summary of the borough's demographics, including the current population estimate of 4,582, with a median age of 35.7. Also, Bridgeport is a working-class community with a median household income of \$49,800, and a 2017 median housing price of \$187,600 for a single-family detached home. Mr. Jarrell displayed a copy of the current land use map and highlighted the two stations for the Norristown High Speed Line. Bridgeport's most recent planning efforts included a Revitalization Plan that recommends streetscape improvements, the creation of town gateways, enhancing access to the waterfront, and creating additional green spaces. The plan also focuses on providing incentives to new businesses and improving the quality of housing throughout the borough. Recently, a LERTA was approved for Bridgeport, providing a five-year tax abatement for businesses locating in any of the 222 properties identified for revitalization. The work program for the planning assistance contract involves updating the borough's Comprehensive Plan, including the development of revised zoning and subdivision ordinances. The planning assistance contract is from January 2019 thru December 2021.

VIII. Springfield Township Planning Assistance Presentation

Presenter: Julia Detwiler

Julia Detwiler presented an overview of the Springfield Township Planning Assistance Contract. Springfield Township is 6.8 square miles and located in the southeastern part of Montgomery County. It has a population of 19,418 residents as of the 2010 census. It is surrounded by Abington, Cheltenham, Upper Dublin, Whitmarsh, and Philadelphia. Ms. Detwiler presented the land use map and noted that 16% of Springfield Township is open space and just less than 60% of the township is residential. Ms. Detwiler added that only 2.8% of the township is considered undeveloped. There are four villages in Springfield -- Wyndmoor, Erdenheim, Flourtown and Oreland. The previous contract work included several ordinance updates: Off-street Parking and Loading, Historic Preservation, creation of a "Light Industrial" zoning district; and medical marijuana dispensary and grower/processor use criteria. The major recent development proposed in Springfield Township is the Laverock Estate and the Springfield Township High School improvements. The Laverock Estate will include an easement to construct a portion of the Cresheim Valley Trail. The Cresheim Valley Trail is on the county's adopted trail map and will connect Fairmount Park's Cresheim Valley and Forbidden Drive through the Laverock neighborhood in Cheltenham Township to the Wissahickon Green Ribbon Trail. Ms. Holton commented that Henry Stroud and Julia Detwiler worked together with the Township and the developer to establish the easement, and they did an excellent job ensuring the future of this regionally significant section of trail.

Ms. Detwiler discussed the new contract work to update the SALDO with green parking standards and continue work on the Historic Preservation Ordinance to encourage adaptive reuse of historic buildings. We will continue to attend meetings of the Historic Preservation Ordinance subcommittee and drafting updates to the Off-Street Parking and Loading Ordinance.

IX. Upper Merion Planning Assistance Presentation

Presenter: Jamie Magaziner

Jamie Magaziner provided a summary of the Upper Merion Township Planning Assistance Contract. Upper Merion is in the southern part of Montgomery County with a population of 28,395 people. She provided background information on the local government, landmarks, and assets of Upper Merion. Ms. Magaziner displayed the land use map and noted that residential single family detached housing is mainly in the southern and northern central border of the township. There are a lot of highway divisions in the township which makes the township unique. Upper Merion has the King of Prussia Mall, the C.H.O.P Care facility, Village of Valley Forge, the Valley Forge Casino, Valley Forge Historic Park and Norristown High Speed Line as its landmarks and assets. Ms. Magaziner displayed the trail map which includes current and future plans for the Chester Valley Trail, the Schuylkill River West Trail, the Crow Creek Trail and the Gulph Road Trail. She spoke about the proposed KOP Rail line, which is still in the design stage. The previous contract work items included working on the Upper Merion 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The last comprehensive plan was completed in 1987 and land use plan was updated in 2005. The Upper Merion Comprehensive Plan has been drafted. The public outreach for the plan included a community survey and two open houses. The recommendations include improvements that would improve traffic flow, reduce speeding, improve water quality, and preserve neighborhood character. Other recommendations are to enhance sidewalk and trail connectivity and to improve walkability. The future contract work items include finalizing and adopting the comprehensive plan. Once the comprehensive plan is finalized, work will begin to develop a Master Plan for Moore Park. Following the master plan, the Township would like to work on a streetscape design plan for Dekalb Pike.

X. Geospatial Data Hub

Presenter: Scott France, David Long

Scott France introduced David Long, the GIS Manager for Montgomery County. The main priority for David Long when he was hired was to implement the Strategic GIS Plan for the county. One goal from the plan was to make geospatial data from the county more readily available to municipalities and the public. On April 1st the Geospatial Data Hub website was officially launched. Mr. Long spoke about the GIS Steering Committee that meets quarterly to direct the initiatives and projects for GIS. There is also a GIS technical committee that meets monthly to discuss the day to day operations and procedures. The county continues to offer the same services, which includes maps and data. In the past, we mailed CD's and there was a fee charged for preparing the information. The launch of the Open Portal eliminated the fee to share the GIS data. Mr. Long displayed the Geospatial Data Hub site and provided the board with an overview of how the new system works. The website includes featured datasets with dashboards includes County Profiles and Statistics, Public Safety, Land Development, Vehicle Crash Information, Crime, and EMS Incidents. Mr. Long also spoke about the Data Catalog part of the site where you can download datasets for parcels, infrastructure, health, and public safety to name a few. The information is continuously being updated. Some municipalities are also running their own GIS programs, and the county will establish partnerships and share data with them as available.

XI. Director's Report

1. Ms. Holton introduced Claire Warner who joined the planning commission as a Community Planner. She recently moved from Washington D.C. She graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in Community Planning.
2. Ms. Holton shared that the county commissioners voted to allow us to apply for a DCNR Grant to preserve a conservation easement on a 455-acre Girl Scout property in New Hanover and Upper Frederick Townships. It includes a 1.65 mile county trail easement for future development of the Sunrise Trail.
3. Ms. Holton spoke about the DVRPC grants that were awarded from the Circuit Trails Program. They included the County's request for funds to construct a portion of the Schuylkill River Trail in the amount of \$353,700. Other awards

included the Shirk-Hutt & Buchman Trail in Upper Salford received \$175,000; the Peco Miracle-Nature Trail in Whitemarsh was awarded \$40,000; and Philadelphia received \$165,000 for the Parkside Cynwyd Trail.

4. Ms. Holton distributed an updated list of 2018 PA Transportation Grants that includes the recently awarded Multimodal Fund Program. \$3.97M was awarded for five Montgomery County projects.
5. Ms. Holton shared that DVRPC announced a competitive grant round for CMAQ funds. Municipalities need to meet with DVRPC prior to submitting a grant application.
6. Ms. Holton announced that the Southeast PA Mobility Partnership released their final report, and she distributed Executive Summaries to the board.
7. The Calendar of Events from April 10, 2019 to May 7, 2019 was distributed for board review. She highlighted the Anne Leavitt-Gruberger will be at the Walkability Action Institute at Decatur, GA.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00.

The next Board meeting will be on May 8, 2019 at 9:00 AM in the Planning Commission's Office.