



## MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

**MINUTES:** Regular Monthly Board Meeting  
Wednesday, April 13, 2022  
Approved: May 11, 2022

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

**STAFF ATTENDING:** Matthew Edmond, Anne Leavitt-Gruberger, Bill Hartman, Ellen Miramontes, Matt Popek, John Miklos, John Marlatt, Karina Caddick

**GUESTS:** Steve Wray, Sr. VP, Principal, Econsult Solutions; Chad Dixson, McMahon Associates; Sid New, Gannett Fleming; Tamara Holt, Executive Brand Ambassador, AVE by Korman Communities

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### I. Call to Order/Board Comments

Steve Kline called the board meeting to order.

### II. Minutes of March 9, 2022

The board approved the minutes from the March 9, 2022 regular Board meeting.

***Motion:** To approve the March 9, 2022 Board minutes, by Mr. Kline, seconded by Mr. Ernst, and approved by all present.*

### III. Public Comment

None

### IV. Perkiomen Valley School District Walk and Bike Audit, Action

Presenter: Anne Leavitt-Gruberger

Anne Leavitt-Gruberger requested that the Board approve the Perkiomen Valley School District contract for a Walk and Bike Audit. The school district has requested a full study of all the schools within the district. The study will provide infrastructure recommendations to improve and encourage more students to safely walk and bike to school. The contract term is from April 1, 2022 through April 1, 2023 for a total cost of \$15,359 with a School District share of \$11,519.25.

***Motion:** To approve the Perkiomen Valley School District Walk and Bike Audit contract, by Mr. Kline, seconded by Mr. Ernst, and approved by all present.*

### V. Return on Environment Study

Presenter: Bill Hartman, Ellen Miramontes

Guest: Steve Wray, Sr. VP, Principal, Econsult Solutions

Bill Hartman, Ellen Miramontes, and Steve Wray with Econsult Solutions, Inc. (ESI) presented the Return on Environment report. Dulcie Flaharty who served as Chair for the Advisory Committee provided opening remarks. She spoke about the Return on Environment (ROE) report, which highlights that protected open space produces significant value. Ms. Flaharty reviewed the thirty-year history of previous efforts, reports, and studies for investing in and promoting open space. She thanked Econsult Solutions, Planning Commission staff, the dedicated Advisory Committee, DVRPC, DCNR, and the County Commissioners for their support and contributions. Ms. Flaharty expressed hope that the report will lead to updated planning, changes in policy, and increased investment in open space and green infrastructure. Mr. Hartman provided a

background summary of the Montgomery County ROE report. In 2020, DCNR awarded DVRPC with a grant to prepare a Return on Environment report specific to Montgomery County. Econsult Solutions was hired to perform the study, managed by DVRPC. Planning Commission staff provided technical support, assembled the Advisory Committee, collected data, prepared the case studies, and provided photographs. Mr. Hartman also spoke about the final products, which included the final report, a slide presentation, and a summary brochure. Ellen Miramontes then defined the ROE study as a report that quantifies the value of protected open space. She added that protected open space encompasses public parks and trails, preserved farmland, and privately conserved land. Four areas where open space adds value were examined in the study. Ms. Miramontes displayed a list of the 32-member Advisory Committee and spoke about the invaluable role of the committee.

Steve Wray from Econsult Solutions reviewed the Return on Environment: The Economic Impact of Protected Open Space report. Montgomery County has over 46,000 acres of preserved open space. Permanently protected open space is proven to provide significant economic, environmental, and public health benefits to the surrounding communities. Mr. Wray spoke in detail about the four key areas that open space adds economic value: Home and Property Value, Economic Activity, Environmental Services, and Direct Use Benefits. The Advisory Committee and Planning Commission staff selected a case study for each of the key areas to demonstrate the value of open space. For Home and Property Values, the case study focused on the Green Ribbon Preserve and Trail. This case study examined properties within ½ mile of the preserve and found that 13.5% of the property value is attributed to its proximity to the preserve. The Economic Activity case study looked at the Schuylkill River Trail in Pottstown. The study found that there was a total annual economic impact of \$8.3M from trail user spending. Mr. Wray also spoke about how protected open space provides Environmental Services. The Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust case study was used to evaluate the environmental and ecosystem services benefit which resulted in a total of \$1.2M in annual ecosystem services benefits. The final economic benefit for protected open space in the study was Direct Use Benefits. The committee selected the Norristown Farm Park for this case study. The study valued the total annual recreational benefit associated with households within a 1/2 mile of the park at \$695K. In closing, Mr. Wray stated the hope is this Return on Environment report will be used by elected leaders and policy makers to make informed decisions. Open space conservation is a long-term investment with a positive economic return.

## **VI. Montco Pikes**

Presenter: Matthew Edmond, Matt Popek

Guests: Chad Dixon, McMahon Associates; Sid New, Gannett Fleming

Matthew Edmond and Matt Popek introduced Chad Dixon from McMahon Associates and Sid New, Gannett Fleming. The group will provide an update on the two-year Montco Pikes Study, which is wrapping up this spring. The Planning Commission received a \$300,000 federal grant in the region's TIP to examine six county-owned roadway corridors. The study provides a vision to prioritize and plan possible future improvements to these county roads. The six corridors examined are Butler Pike, Easton Road, Germantown Pike, Geryville Pike, Sumneytown Pike and Swamp Pike. There was extensive stakeholder and public involvement to receive input on existing problems and what the community would like to see improved.

Chad Dixon and Sid New provided a detailed overview of the Montco Pikes Study. Mr. Dixon spoke about the stakeholder and public involvement. There were common issues received for the six corridors, which total 42 linear miles. They included safety, congestion, lack of connectivity, narrow or no shoulders, inconsistent lane configurations and the impact of improvements for community services. Mr. Dixon spoke about developing the future vision of the corridors. Montco Pikes is a conceptual look of what each of the corridors should look like in the future and the improvements that could be considered. The study included the relative construction costs for planning and budget purposes. The study also included general priorities, impact, ease of implementation and funding opportunities for the county. Mr. Dixon and Mr. New provided some highlights, examples and improvement recommendations for each of the six corridors. Implementation for Montco Pikes by the county will include the Highway Occupancy Permit review process during land development and potential capital improvement programming and grant opportunities. Municipalities can also help to implement these improvements through land development review and long range planning and ordinance updates. The final draft of the Montco Pikes report will be available by summer.

## VII. Lower Frederick Township Planning Presentation

Presenter: John Miklos

John Miklos presented an overview of the Lower Frederick planning assistance contract. Lower Frederick is a rural community located in the western part of the county with a population of approximately 4,800 residents. It is in the Perkiomen Valley and a member of the Central Perkiomen Valley Regional Planning Commission. Mr. Miklos provided a brief overview of the demographics of Lower Frederick and displayed the current land use map. The majority of the land use in Lower Frederick is residential. What remains is mainly agricultural, open space and undeveloped land. The villages of Lower Frederick are where half of the townships population live. Mr. Miklos spoke about recent events like flooding during the Isaias, Ida and other storms. He also spoke about a new Natural Resources Protection Ordinance that sets standards for new development. The township formed an Open Space Committee and is currently working on a Parks and Open Space update. During the previous contract, work included land development and ordinance reviews and the completion of the Comprehensive Plan. The comprehensive plan, Lower Frederick 2040, included recommendations to update the Open Space Plan; protection for natural resources through Conservation Zoning; and a Roadway Improvements Plan. Other recommendations included updates to their Connections Map that includes sidewalks, paths and trails planning. The comp plan also recommends an update to street designs and zoning updates within their villages. The new contract work will include flexible assistance such as grant application assistance, updates to the Connections map, a Roadway Improvement Plan and Comprehensive Plan implementation.

## VIII. Director's Report

1. Matt Edmond provided the directors report. For staff news, we recently hired a new community planner Matt Lubitz who starts on May 9. The Planning Commission currently has three open positions, a Transportation Planner, Environmental Planner and Assistant Section Manager of Design.
2. The Montco 2040 Grant program committee is currently reviewing grant applications. We are anticipating that the county commissioners will announce grant recipients in May.
3. Montgomery, Berks and Chester Counties are moving to create the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority. This is to extend passenger rail from Norristown to Reading. Public hearings will begin next week.
4. Mr. Edmond announced that the county's Recovery Office is accepting ideas and projects to receive federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding through April 30. MCPD is also working with other departments with their applications.
5. The Planning Smarter brochure was distributed for board review. The next event is a course in zoning administration in Towamencin Township. This will be followed by a Hot Topics virtual event called Big Changes on a Small Scale on May 24. On June 16 at the Hill School, we will host an event called Strategies to Enhance Walking and Bicycling in your Community.
6. Mr. Edmond shared that the 2022 Montgomery Awards program is open for nominations and closes on Friday, May 6.
7. The Calendar of Events list was distributed prior to the meeting for board review. Mr. Edmond highlighted several events which included the Lafayette Street Interchange public meeting on April 13; the Delaware County Sustainability Conference on April 21; ribbon cutting for the Pennypack Trail on April 27 and the Ridge Pike section D groundbreaking ceremony on April 29.

*The meeting was adjourned at 11:30.*

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***The next Board meeting will be on May 11, 2022 at 9:00 AM.***