



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES: Regular Monthly Board Meeting
Wednesday, May 8, 2019
Approved: June 12, 2019

BOARD MEMBERS ATTENDING: Steven Kline, Chair; Dulcie Flaharty, V-Chair; Charles Tornetta; David Cohen; Jill Blumhardt

STAFF ATTENDING: Jody Holton, Eric Jarrell, Scott France, Henry Stroud, Matthew Edmond, John Marlatt, Karina Caddick

GUESTS: David Zellers, Director of Commerce; Molly Duffy, Executive Director, Valley Forge Park Alliance; Randy Waltermeyer, Planning and Municipal Services Leader, Traffic Planning & Design Inc.; Fran Hanney, Senior Manager, Traffic Services Division/ADA Coordinator, PennDOT; Ashwin Patel, Senior Manager-Traffic Engineering & Safety Division, PennDOT; Mike Mastaglio, Deputy Practice Leader for Traffic, Urban Engineers; Larry Bankert, Associate Vice President, Michael Baker International; Leanne Doran, Michael Baker International; Barry Schoch, PE, Senior Vice President, KCI; Bill Walker, Horsham Township Manager; Graham Copeland, Upper Dublin Township; Randy Schaible, Upper Moreland Township; Tom Kohler, Upper Merion; Jack Smyth, Boles Smyth; Kim Haymans-Geisler, resident; Tami Batryn, resident;

I. Call to Order/Board Comments

Steven Kline called the board meeting to order.

II. Minutes of April 24, 2019

The minutes from the April 24, 2019 regular Board meeting were approved by the Board.

Motion: To approve the April 24, 2019 Board minutes, by Mr. Tornetta, seconded by Ms. Flaharty, and approved by all present.

III. Public Comment

None

IV. MontcoForward Commerce Department Initiative

Presenter: David Zellers

David Zellers provided an overview of the MontcoForward economic development initiative for Montgomery County. Mr. Zellers began by showing the board a promotional video that was recently launched on May 3rd. The video was created by the Commerce Department in partnership with the Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board. The video is narrated by a series of residents, employers, business owners, and entrepreneurs who choose Montgomery County. It provides a look into the many assets that Montgomery County has to offer for someone looking for a place to live, work, learn, and invest. Mr. Zellers also spoke about a website at MontcoForward.org that was developed to provide the user a place to find local information for smarter, faster and better site selection and business plan decisions. The many tools include demographics, industry trends, local opportunities, environmental data, work force, and even transportation information to name a few. Mr. Zellers provided an example using the Industry Trends option. After entering an industry prospect the website listed trends, benchmarks, profit margins, and other useful information that would be helpful for someone hoping to start or expand a business in Montgomery County. Montgomery County is one of the largest counties in the country in terms of population and we have a lot to offer residents, business owners, and visitors. The next step is to get these resources out to the public.

V. North Gulph Road Trail Feasibility Study

Presenter: Henry Stroud, Guests: Molly Duffy, Executive Director, Valley Forge Park Alliance; Randy Waltermyer, AICP, Planning and Municipal Services Leader, Traffic Planning & Design Inc.

Henry Stroud introduced Molly Duffy from Valley Forge Park Alliance (VFPA) and Randy Waltermyer from Traffic Planning and Design (TPD). They recently completed a feasibility study for the North Gulph Road Trail in Upper Merion Township. The proposed trail would connect the Chester Valley Trail to the Schuylkill River Trail. The trail will travel through the Village at Valley Forge and Valley Forge National Historical Park (VFNHP). Ms. Duffy spoke about the VFPA which is the non-profit partner to Valley Forge Park. One of their roles is connecting the community to the park and also doing public outreach. The proposed trail will serve to connect the community to the Valley Forge Park and to the County Trail Network. Mr. Waltermyer spoke in detail about the feasibility study. Traffic Planning and Design developed five scenarios for the potential N. Gulph Road Trail. He explained that there are two significant highway overpasses that narrow the right-of-way on N. Gulph Road at the Rt. 422 and the PA Turnpike overpasses. PennDOT has plans to widen Rt. 422 in the future to 6 or 8 lanes so we can anticipate a 14ft shoulder with a 10 ft. trail at that time. In the interim, a narrow 5 or 6 foot trail under the bridges could be built and barrier-protected from traffic. This alternative may require bicyclists to dismount to pass underneath the bottleneck, but would allow us to build the trail over the next 5 years, instead of waiting the 15 or 20 years that it may take to widen N. Gulph Road underneath Rt 422. The turnpike also has future plans to widen and replace the North Gulph Road Bridge. However, they are uncertain on a timeline for the project but have agreed to set aside the width to accommodate for a 12-foot trail on N. Gulph Road. Mr. Waltermyer displayed detailed maps and overhead drone photos to illustrate the scenarios. The implementation process and next steps would include deciding who would own and maintain the trail. There are grants funds available, but VFPA would like to partner with the Township, County and KOPBID to determine who will be the applicant and provide any required matching funds. The cost estimate for construction is expected to be just over \$9 million. The VFNHP recently applied for funding to construct a portion of the trail within the park.

VI. Contract Fee Increase

Presenter: Eric Jarrell

Eric Jarrell requested that the Board approve an adjustment to the Community Planning Assistance Contract Program planner rate. The planner day rate is intended to cover 50% of our costs which includes staff salaries, benefits, overhead and incidental expenses. Mr. Jarrell would like to propose a 1% planner day rate increase. The proposed Planner Rate for a three-year planning assistance contract would be \$693 for the first year, \$700 for the second year and \$707 for the third year. The Short-term Contract rate would also increase by 1% to \$714. Eric Jarrell requested that the Board approve the 1% increase of the Planner Day Rate effective June 1, 2019.

Motion: To approve the Contract Fee Increase, by Ms. Flaharty, seconded by Ms. Blumhardt, and approved by all present.

VII. Souderton Area School District Contract

Presenter: Scott France

Scott France requested that the Board approve the Souderton Area School District Enrollment Study Contract. The district is comprised of six elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. There are approximately 6,500 students enrolled in the Souderton School District from Franconia, Lower Salford, Salford, and Upper Salford Townships and also from the Boroughs of Souderton and Telford. The study will include an analysis of demographic trends, birth patterns, housing construction, housing sales activity, and other associated trends. The study will create a model that projects enrollments at each grade level and school building for each of the next ten years. The contract term is from May 1, 2019 thru August 31, 2019 for a total cost of \$10,605 with a school district share of \$7,954.

Motion: To approve the Souderton Area School District Contract, by Mr. Cohen, seconded by Ms. Flaharty, and approved by all present.

VIII. PennDOT Roundabout-Safer Intersection Alternative

Presenter: Matt Edmond, Guests: Fran Hanney, Senior Manager - Traffic Services Division/ ADA Coordinator, PennDOT; Ashwin Patel, Senior Manager-Traffic Engineering & Safety Division, PennDOT; Mike Mastaglio, Deputy Practice Leader for Traffic, Urban Engineers

Fran Hanney provided a general overview about roundabouts. The modern roundabout is a circular intersection where drivers travel to the right into the driving lane and then always exit to the right; they function very differently from post-war traffic circles and shouldn't be confused with them. There has been a recent increase in roundabouts over the last decade. National leaders in roundabouts include North Carolina, Washington, Florida and Maryland. Mr. Hanney spoke about national studies that show that modern roundabouts have reduced fatal crashes by 90% and injury in crashes by 75%. The number of pedestrian crashes has also been reduced by up to 40%. PennDOT has also completed a similar study that shows that PA roundabouts reduce crashes, injuries, and fatalities. Mr. Hanney said the safety improvements that roundabouts provide eliminate the right angle and left-turn crashes as well reduce traffic speeds. There are total of 32 conflict points at a normal intersection which can be reduced to 8 with a roundabout. In a traditional intersection the driver is looking in many different directions, but in a roundabout the driver is only looking in one direction, the left. The speed limit in a roundabout is generally less than 30 mph so it will slow down traffic, but it will keep moving. Studies show that a single lane roundabout is more efficient and can process 30% more vehicles than a traffic signal. Mike Mastaglio spoke in detail about a Roundabouts Safety & Operations Report and a PennDOT Districtwide Roundabout study. The study was a data-driven approach where PennDOT District 6 looked for intersections that had high incidents of crashes with a certain level of traffic volume in each of the region's five counties. The purpose of the study was to identify candidates for federal Highway Safety Improvement Program funding that is available to the region. PennDOT reached out and met with county and municipal officials to discuss their interest in moving forward with the project, and each of the five counties were awarded funding for roundabouts. Mr. Mastaglio provided a summary of the existing, planned, and proposed roundabouts in Montgomery County. The intersection of Old Skippack Road and Shelly Road in Upper Salford is the chosen intersection that is receiving funding in Montgomery County.

IX. Southeastern Pennsylvania Mobility Partnership Report Presentation

Presenter: Jody Holton, Guests: Larry Bankert, Associate Vice President, Michael Baker International; Leanne Doran, Michael Baker International

Jody Holton introduced Larry Bankert and Leanne Doran from Michael Baker International who provided an overview of the SE Partnership for Mobility Report. The PA Turnpike Commission, SEPTA, and PennDOT joined together to form the SE PA Mobility Partnership, and then created an Advisory Council made up of major employers, elected officials, civic associations, and transportation agencies in the region. In March 2019, the SE PA Mobility Partnership completed a report that recognized significant transportation projects that are necessary to the region's success, and it identified potential sustainable funding sources that could be pursued to move these projects forward. The study also looked at how other major metropolitan regions have raised funding for significant transportation projects. Many of the transportation projects that were identified in the report are projects that remain on the unfunded lists of the Montco 2040 comprehensive plan and DVRPC's Long-Range Plan. These are projects that would support economic development and help to reduce and manage traffic congestion in the region. However, there is currently no immediate plan or sources for investment in transportation for the commonwealth. Mr. Bankert spoke in detail about how current state transportation funding that was identified in Act 44 and Act 89 is not sufficient to fund these projects. The current funding structure that requires the PA Turnpike to make payments to PennDOT for public transportation will be substantially reduced by 2022, at which point, the state will provide funding for public transportation from the vehicle sales tax revenue. However, the PA Turnpike has needed to assume a significant amount of debt to make these payments, which has stymied their ability to build new interchanges or other improvements. Mr. Bankert spoke about how other regions, like Washington DC, Chicago, Boston, and Denver fund significant public transportation projects and major new highway improvements. The Philadelphia region differs, in that we provide significantly less funding from the region and rely heavily on state and federal funding. Other major cities have the ability to contribute regional funding sources, such as sales or property taxes that are raised at a county or regional level.

Mr. Bankert spoke about the vision for projects of significance for SEPTA, which include the KOP Rail project, Market-Frankford Line capacity improvements, trolley modernization, and new regional rail cars with added capacity. The PA Turnpike projects of significance include new and improved turnpike interchanges such as Rt. 611/Horsham Interchange, Henderson Road, and Welsh Road, as recommended by the planning commission's Turnpike Reinvestment Project report.

The SE PA Mobility Partnership report identified funding options from local and state resources and also identified the need to pass legislation that would allow transportation decisions to be made on the local and regional level.

***Motion:** To endorse the Southeastern Pennsylvania Partnership for Mobility Report, by Ms. Flaharty, seconded by Ms. Blumhardt, and approved by all present.*

X. Director's Report

1. Ms. Holton shared that we had a very successful Open House for the Ridge Pike Project. Matt Edmond, Crystal Gilchrist, Matt Popok, and additional staff were on hand to speak and answer questions about the design of Ridge Pike during the different phases of the project.
2. Ms. Holton spoke about Earth Day and Recycling events at Temple University and the Community Colleges. The Communications and Recycling staff attended these events to share our planning and recycling resources.
3. Ms. Holton shared that we received a grant for staff and agency partners to attend the Walkability Institute – hosted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) - in Atlanta, GA this May. Representatives from PennDOT, DVRPC, an elected official, along with Anne Leavitt-Gruberger attended and spoke about how we can further walkability in the county and the region. They returned home with a project to create a Complete Streets Policy for the region.
4. Ms. Holton attended a CDC National Training with the Department of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity. She spoke about comprehensive planning and the built environment and its relationship with public health outcomes. She also spoke about equity-related public health indicators such as affordable housing, a living income, race, and educational attainment. Ms. Holton also spoke about how walkability and mixed use zoning are correlated with beneficial health outcomes.
5. Ms. Holton announced that Bike to Work Day is May 17th and we will start out from Norristown Transportation Center with the County Commissioners at 7:15 and bike to the Valley Forge National Historic Park where we will meet Chester County officials.
6. The Calendar of Events from May 8, 2019 to June 11, 2019 was distributed for board review.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:25.

The next Board meeting will be on June 12, 2019 at 9:00 AM in the Planning Commission's Office.