



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES: Regular Monthly Board Meeting
Wednesday, May 11, 2022
Approved: June 8, 2022

BOARD MEMBERS ATTENDING: Steven Kline, Chair; Dulcie Flaharty, V-Chair; Charles Tornetta; Jill Blumhardt; Obed Arango; Jonathan Rinde

STAFF ATTENDING: Scott France, Matthew Edmond, Pattie Guttenplan, Eric Jarrell, Bill Hartman, Ann Leavitt-Gruberger, Ellen Miramontes, John Marlatt, Karina Caddick

GUESTS: Dan Nemiroff, Project Mgr. Bus Revolution, SEPTA; Claudia Aliff, Planning Analyst, SEPTA; Brandon Ford, Asst. Township Manager, Springfield Township; Lucas Oshman, Partnership TMA of Montgomery County; Mike Thompson, Abington Township Commissioner; Jacqui Baker-Rollins, Partnership TMA; Judy Stern-Goldstein, Gilmore & Associates

I. Call to Order/Board Comments

II. Minutes of April 13, 2022

The board approved the minutes from the April 13, 2022 regular Board meeting.

***Motion:** To approve the April 13, 2022 Board minutes, by Ms. Flaharty, seconded by Mr. Rinde, and approved by all present.*

III. Public Comment

None

IV. Planning Assistance Contracts Rate Update, Action

Presenter: Eric Jarrell

Eric Jarrell requested that the board approve an adjustment to the Community Planning Assistance Contract program rate schedule. The goal for the county commissioners is to make planning assistance available to all communities. The planner day rate is therefore intended to cover 50% of our costs. An annual review of the fees set in 2021 shows that we recovered 51% of our costs. For 2022, the computation included the addition of two contracts and a salary increase of 2.75%. 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 \$714 for the first year, \$721 for the second year and \$728 for the third year. The Short-term Contract rate would also increase by 1% to \$735. The Flat Fee Schedule would be \$714. Eric Jarrell requested that the Board approve a 1% increase of the Planner Day Rate effective June 1, 2022.

***Motion:** To approve the Planning Assistance Contract Rate Update, by Ms. Flaharty, seconded by Mr. Rinde, and approved by all present.*

V. Bus Revolution and Reimagining Regional Rail

Presenter: Matt Edmond; Guests: Daniel Nemiroff, SEPTA; Claudia Aliff, Planning Analyst, SEPTA

Matthew Edmond introduced our guests Daniel Nemiroff and Claudia Aliff from SEPTA. Septa has been investing in Planning and has embarked on two key initiatives as part of its SEPTA Forward Plan. Bus Revolution and Reimagining Regional Rail are a complete rethinking of these two transportation systems.

Daniel Nemiroff provided an overview of SEPTA's Bus Revolution initiative. The initiative is a comprehensive redesign of its bus network. SEPTA's strategic plan recommended this as one of its key project ideas. The process will involve identifying and prioritizing capital investments, updating service design guidelines and introducing new service models and technologies. The project began in 2021, and early research revealed that the existing network is too complex, duplicative and provides indirect, slow and unreliable service. However, bus service during traditional peak hours has been shown to be reliable. SEPTA has developed two network options with a goal to provide reliable service, improve the rider experience and increase access to opportunities for all riders. Mr. Nemiroff provided a detailed summary of each of the proposed network options, which included changes in routes, frequency and microtransit zones. Microtransit service is a new on-demand service option that allows the rider to schedule service within a dedicated zone when needed. This type of service would work best in low density, high need areas. Background Information and details on the two proposed networks are available on the project site. The website includes a Storymap that explains the two network options; and bus route maps that provides a good view of the network options. SEPTA is also seeking public input through a survey. They are also seeking input through pop-up events, a Project Bus as well as area specific virtual conversations.

Claudia Aliff spoke about Reimagining Regional Rail. SEPTA's regional rail infrastructure is the best in North America. This initiative is looking to improve upon what we already have. Ms. Aliff stated that before the pandemic 132,000 people used Regional Rail daily. Ridership is down 40% now. Regional rail does provide a great service for many, but it also leaves people behind. What prohibits some from using regional rail is cost, accessibility and frequency. The reimagining project has three phases: understanding the system and sentiment, deep dive into scenarios and sharing the vision for regional rail. Ms. Aliff spoke about the results of the survey, pop-up events, and focus group sessions. The common responses were that regional rail is confusing to understand, schedules are inconsistent, stations are difficult to access and it is difficult to make connections. After evaluating the survey and public engagement information SEPTA created three possible scenarios proposals for the future of Regional Rail. Scenario 1 focuses on regional coverage with 30 min all day service everywhere. Scenario 2 focuses on metro frequency with high frequency where demand is highest. Scenario 3 focuses on all day speed with all day express service integrated with Amtrak service. The benefits and tradeoffs for each scenario was discussed and will help shape the final vision for regional rail. All three scenarios are a long-term vision because they require significant capital projects investment. The next step for the project is releasing the scenarios for public review and outreach.

VI. Trail Feasibility Studies

Presenter: Bill Hartman, Ellen Miramontes

Bill Hartman and Ellen Miramontes provided an overview of two recently completed trail feasibility studies. The two trail studies were funded with an \$85k Regional Trails Program grant from DVRPC. The consultant team, led by Gilmore & Associates and joined by Campbell Thomas & Co., completed the two-year studies in early 2022. The two studies are the Wissahickon Trail Link Feasibility Study and the Cross County Trail Bridge Feasibility Study. Ms. Miramontes provided a detailed summary and maps of each study. The Wissahickon Trail Link study explored the feasibility and alignment for a multi-use connection that would connect Montgomery County and Philadelphia. The existing trail gap between Morris Arboretum and Philadelphia's Wissahickon Valley Park is 0.6 mile. The study explored several trail alignments to complete this important trail link. The study did not identify a preferred alignment although coordination with Philadelphia for future connections will continue. Ms. Miramontes also provided a summary of the Cross County Trail Bridge study. This feasibility study explored the use of a multi-use trail bridge to continue the trail across the intersection of Germantown Pike and Chemical Road. The study included an in-depth investigation of the area to determine the preferred placement for the bridge. Ms. Miramontes displayed the concept level plans developed by Gilmore & Associates. The next steps for the Cross County trail bridge connection entails exploring options for Federal funding. The estimated cost to construct the bridge is between \$8 and \$10 million. Once the funding has been secured, Preliminary Design Phase engineering will begin.

VII. Montco 2050 Comprehensive Plan Process Update

Presenter: Anne Leavitt-Gruberger

Anne Leavitt-Gruberger presented an update on the development of the Montco 2050 Comprehensive Plan. We are required by the PA Municipalities Planning Code to review our comprehensive plan every 10 years. The previous plan, Montco 2040, was adopted in 2015, which puts us at the planning stage for Montco 2050. This long-term project begins with a background section, which is currently underway. These sections will be worked on until early 2023. They include People and Population, Open Space and Historic Resources, Transportation, Housing and Sustainability. Each section will have a focus group that includes a board member, county staff, and representatives from associated boards. Ms. Leavitt-Gruberger spoke about the general timeline, which includes creating a steering committee, identifying key themes and issues, public workshops, commissioner review and adoption of the comp plan in 2025.

VIII. Montgomery Awards Update to the Board

Presenter: Pattie Guttenplan

Pattie Guttenplan provided the board with an update of the Montgomery Awards program. The application deadline for nominations was extended from May 6 to May 16. The program has three awards: The Montgomery Award, The Planning Advocate Award and the Environmental Stewardship Award. The Montgomery Award has six eligibility categories: Land Development, Revitalization, Open Space, Transportation, Environmental and Community. Ms. Guttenplan provided detailed examples from previous Montgomery award winners. Applications are available on the county website.

IX. Director's Report

1. Scott France introduced Matt Lubitz who joins the Planning Commission as a Community Planner II. Matt received his Master's Degree in Political Science from Lehigh University and is currently working on his Master's in Urban and Regional Planning from West Chester University.
2. Mr. France announced that the Transportation Planner position has been filled. Andrew Turner will join us on May 23. The Planning Commission currently has two open positions, an Environmental Planner and Assistant Section Manager of Design.
3. On May 19, the County Commissioners will be announcing the recipients of the Montco 2040 Grant program. There will be a total of \$2.5M will be awarded
4. Mr. France spoke about the formation of the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority. The initial meeting of the Authority will be at the end of June.
5. The Calendar of Events from May 11, 2022 to June 7, 2022 was distributed for board review. Mr. France highlighted Bike to Work Day on May 20. GVF is hosting a group ride from Norristown Transportation Center to Valley Forge Park. The PMPEI planning course on Zoning Administration will begin on May 12 Towamencin. Then on May 24, MCPC will hold a virtual Planning Smarter event Hot Topics: Big Changes on a Small Scale. The next Planning Smarter event on June 16 will be Strategies to Enhance Walking and Bicycling in your Community at the Hill School in Pottstown.
6. Scott France provided a summary of the MCPC ARPA submissions. The application period was from March 1 to April 30. There were 426 project applications submitted for consideration. The projects will be scored and posted online in June with a final plan adoption expected for July 2022. Mr. France provided a detailed summary of the ten applications that were submitted or collaborated with by The Planning Commission.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50.

The next Board meeting will be on June 8, 2022 at 9:00 AM.