

**Planning Commission
Minutes
November 6, 2023
7:00 PM**

Present:

Brett MacKay
Joseph Vavra
Patricia Younce
Nancy Becker
Ed Buonocore
Douglas Leach
Dennis McGeehan
Michael Main
Matt Chartrand

Staff:

Will Brugger, Director of Planning, Zoning and Land Development
Mary Stover, Township Engineer CKS

Supervisors Rich Marino

Approval of the September 11, 2023 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Mr. Vavra made a motion to approve the September 11, 2023 meeting minutes, Ms. Younce seconded. All were in favor. Mr. Chartrand abstained.

New Business:

Township Comprehensive Plan Meeting #1 – Simone Collins
Presented by: Peter Simone

Mr. Simone introduced himself and thanked the Planning Commission members for choosing his company. He presented a slide show and stated who would be part of the team. Mr. Simone showed a schedule, explained the scope of the work to be done, and the zoning map of the Township.

Mr. Simone explained the Comprehensive Plan can be used to change sections of the ordinances when faced with chronic issues that are happening in the Township.

Mr. Simone explained the team members who will be looking at the financial and marketing study. They will also do a real estate analysis, give an independent viewpoint regarding development, and fiscal impact analysis. This will be done for areas that have not been developed or need to be redeveloped. He explained that Todd Poole's work from 4ward Planning will be front ended, and he will have his report at the Jan/Feb 2024 meetings.

Mr. Simone stated that on January 30th, 2024, from 7 – 9 PM an Economic Development Committee meeting is planned. At this meeting he hopes to go over the goals, objectives, demographics and look at how the Township Comprehensive Plan compares to surrounding Townships.

Mr. Simone is asking for recommendations for land use, housing plans, transportation plans, community facilities, economic development plans, as well as open space and recreation to be included as part of the Comprehensive Plan. He will also include energy and resource plans. He explained other things can be added such as interest in a cultural aspect or libraries as this Comprehensive Plan is for long and short-term strategies.

Mr. Simone explained that the recent history of the Township will be reviewed, and the Connectivity Plan will be added.

Mr. Simone showed the meeting schedule and stated there will be an online survey. They will present it to the Planning Commission members and the Board of Supervisors before sending it out to the public. They will collect data and trends, planning, zoning, and land use, as well as E-commerce, truck traffic and van traffic information. Mr. Simone explained they will investigate areas that could be catalysts for change such as the educational facilities and the expansion to the high school along with the health of the shopping center. The Township will get status reports and updates with recommendations.

Mr. Simone stated his team will also do a little Planning 101 and explain things to the public. This way they will have a better understanding of what the Comprehensive Plan represents.

Discussion regarding brick-and-mortar stores and office to residential conversions. Traffic patterns changing, aging in place, in-law suites, over 55 housings, change in demographics and storm water management were also discussed.

The current zoning map will be reviewed, and they will prepare a map that shows locations of planned future improvements, recreations, and open space which expresses the Municipality's interest in these things for future use. This is called an "Official Map". Mr. Simone stated they will also list funding agencies for future uses.

Currently, the Simone team is starting to gather data and do some mapping to start to do the work. They will be coming back on Feb 5th with analysis and will have some things to present to the Planning Commission.

Mr. Simone asked the Planning Commission members what issues or concerns they want them to consider. Mr. MacKay asked the members to share their thoughts.

Mr. Chartrand stated he has some thoughts. He explained he is on the Economic Development Committee as well. He believes the turnpike interchange could be taken advantage of, and he is a believer in working with what the Township has. Mr. Chartrand feels there needs to be uses that capture the people in their cars.

Mr. Chartrand explained the idea of what he felt the downtown portion of this area should consist of and talked about the possibility of a bus transportation hub or a park and ride. He referenced the large mountain at the turnpike entrance and the possibility of leveling that area for something useful.

Mr. Buonocore asked Supervisor Rich Marino if the sewer sale goes through and the Township debt is satisfied, will there be a need to bring in more people into the Township. This means more people, more businesses, and more traffic. Is this really what everyone would want if the issue of municipal income is satisfied?

Mr. Marino stated he does not recall this ever being a focus, to bring in more people to satisfy the debt. Ms. Younce stated the goal was to bring in businesses. Mr. Marino explained if the debt was to go away there would be definite benefits to the Township if satisfied. Mr. Marino stated his own opinion is not to increase the population.

Ms. Becker stated people moved here because of the rural aspect and it is a nice place to live. Mr. Marino believes people would like to see what we have developed to have some places to be able to go within the Township but as far as wanting more residents, he has not heard this.

Discussion regarding the current and upcoming trends. Mr. Simone stated that the people who came to the meetings or the Connectivity Study meetings all wanted more trails and more connective sidewalks.

Mr. Main feels in planning the Comprehensive Plan that the people will not walk to everything they will drive to it. Mr. Chartrand agreed and stated people around here are walking for exercise more than wanting to walk to the store, etc.

Mr. Main agreed.

Discussion regarding a fresh set of thinking and that maybe they would end up back with the Village plan or maybe they can offer something different.

Ms. Younce thinks it would be a great idea for Todd Poole to speak to the developer PSDC as often times various commissions or even the Board of Supervisors do not agree with what the developer wants to do.

Mr. Marino asked if Todd Poole will have demographics for the available work force and knowing talking to PSDC that they may be able to open something but will they be able to get staff. Mr. Simone stated we can discuss bus services and things available for that type of work force and housing will come into consideration as well.

Mr. Main commented on the schedule for the Comprehensive Plan and asked if there should be some type of committee formed to make progress. Mr. Simone felt this was a great idea and explained it is up to Planning Commission members to see if they wanted to have another subcommittee. He believes it is called for and is important to make a positive effect on the residents of the Township. The more input given to them, the better.

Ms. Becker asked Mr. Brugger to put this on each agenda. Mr. Brugger agreed and stated he could create a Google Doc format that everyone can put their ideas on.

Mr. Chartrand asked for guidance on this and areas to focus on.

Mr. Buonocore asked about a questionnaire asking about what the residents think contributes to the quality of their life in the township. He believes heavy traffic makes life miserable.

Ms. Younce also would like to know if people are in favor of more high density in the township or not. She would like to see what people think and if the people want more.

Mr. Vavra stated that it seems PSDC is planning for more. Mr. Buonocore stated he feels there are too many cars, and he is not in favor of a transportation station.

Mr. Simone states every township he has worked with and that has done an update to their plan complains about traffic.

Mr. Simone explained young people want to live in apartments and what is the areas rental housing availabilities. They will do research on these things and the typical balances.

Mr. McGeehan asked if the residents can give opinions like the previous study for connectivity and Mr. Simone stated they did not do a Wiki map for this as it would not be as effective.

Mr. Main mentioned the importance of keeping the history of Towamencin and the tradition of the area where it does not become a Skippack or a Lansdale, but somewhere in between.

Discussion regarding allowing other uses in the village and growth.

Mr. Main feels because of the Village Overlay the Township has more say. Mr. Simone agreed and said no matter what happens at the Village area Towamencin is essentially a suburban development area set and to whatever happens.

Mr. Marino stated the one complaint they get is that the people want a use for the people who live here. Quality of life for people who live here and building something for the residents to go to within their community. He feels this should be a guiding principal of developing this plan and making things for people to use. Mr. Marino also feels it is important to create a Mission statement and Mr. Simone agreed.

Mr. Main asked for help with what the Planning Commission can do. Mr. Simone explained he will give them an outline for the Google Doc. And this will be helpful. Mr. Brugger agreed to distribute it to everyone to contribute information and ideas.

Discussion regarding the plan retaining a sense of history in the Township and how important this is.

All the Planning Commission members are excited about this and thanked Mr. Simone for his presentation.

Old Business:

Electric Vehicle Charging Station. Zoning Amendment
Presented by Mr. Will Brugger

Mr. Brugger explained the zoning amendment was sent to the Montgomery Count Planning Commission. They had minor edits, and they were redlined in the version before the Planning Commission members at tonight's meeting.

The language was cleaned up and it was determined the Township did not feel the equipment and identification would require building permits.

The section regarding privately owned and publicly available stations was taken out.

Mr. Brugger explained that CKS Engineers' comments were incorporated.

Mr. MacKay stated we can make a motion.

Ms. Younce made a motion to recommend to the Board of Supervisors the Zoning Amendment for Electric Vehicle Charging Stations and Ms. Becker seconded. All were in favor.

Additional Business:

Mr. Brugger stated PSDC submitted land development plans for three pad sites along Forty Foot Road and Allentown Roads and will need an amendment for the Entertainment Lifestyle Overlay district as it did not meet up with our zoning.

Ms. Stover explained the map and the area in green and the amendment was to remove this area as a residential portion and make a provision that allowed retail. She explained PSDC would like to put two fast food places and a bank. Ms. Stover further explained they want to take the green section of the overlay out and allow all the all the uses in the Entertainment Lifestyle Overlay district, with keeping the same restrictions on height and setbacks.

Ms. Stover stated this proposed change will come back to another meeting and then go to the January meeting.

Mr. Brugger informed the Planning Commission members that a permit was issued for the Chipotle. He also stated they are working on the changes needed for the ham radio ordinance.

As far as WaWa, it was discussed that things will happen soon and no building permits have been issued to date.

Ms. Stover mentioned that Belfair Square asked for additional waiver requests, so this will come back in December at the next meeting.

As far as Delp Drive and their progress, they have not addressed the issue with trees. They received the improvement to remove three trees and then came back with wanting to remove twelve trees. They have requested a three-month extension.

Mr. MacKay asked if there were any other issues. Hearing none, Mr. Vavra made a motion to adjourn at 8:34 PM, and Ms. Becker seconded. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Shisler

Carolyn Shisler
Towamencin Township
Zoning and Code Enforcement