

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
JOINT MEETING WITH CITIZEN BOARD CHAIRS
MARCH 13, 2014

The Board of Supervisors of Upper Merion Township met for a Joint Meeting of the Citizen Board Chairs on Thursday, March 13, 2014, in the Board Room, in the Township Building in King of Prussia. The meeting was called to order at 7:40 a.m., followed by a pledge to the flag.

ROLL CALL:

Supervisors present were: Greg Philips, Erika Spott, Greg Waks, Bill Jenaway, and Carole Kenney. Also present were: Dave Kraynik, Township Manager; Sally Slook, Assistant Township Manager; Edmund Campbell, Jr., Vice Chair, Environmental Advisory Council; Michael Trachtenberg, Chairperson, Park and Recreation Board; Jack Smyth, Jr. Boles, Smyth Associates; H. David Rassbach, Chairperson, Media Communications Advisory Board; Howard Hoffman, Vice Chairman, Media Advisory Board; Jennifer M. Schauble, Chairperson, Police Citizen Advisory Board; Ann Marchino, Chairperson, Shade Tree and Beautification Commission; Michael Santillo, Chairman, Upper Merion Transportation Authority, Jaquelin Camp, Chairperson, Planning Commission, Lynne Z. Gold-Bikin, Chairperson, Zoning Hearing Board.

CHAIRPERSON'S COMMENTS:

Chairman Waks stated he wanted to give the all the citizen Chairs an overview of the transportation projects, and he introduced Jack Smyth, Jr., Transportation Engineer, Upper Merion Transportation Authority.

DISCUSSIONS:

TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

Mr. Smyth offered an overview of the Transportation projects and a PowerPoint was presented. Highlights as follows:

- The Transportation Authority works with multiple stakeholders on transportation projects throughout the township. Stakeholders include residents and businesses, the Board of Supervisors, PennDOT, Montgomery County, the National Park Service, and Federal Highway Administration.

Mr. Smyth reviewed some recently completed, current, and future projects as follows:

US 422 River Crossing Complex Projects (4 projects)

The US 422 River Crossing Complex project began in 2000 after the Old Betzwood Bridge was demolished in the 1990's. Originally it was to be replaced with a vehicular bridge and trail. A study resulted to look at expanding the focus from the local road network to US 422 and its interchanges. The Transportation Authority was a key player working with PennDOT, the National Park Service, and the Federal Highway Administration to bring about four different projects.

- Project 1 – US 422/PA 363 Interchange Improvements Project (PennDOT) is under construction now thru 2015. PA 363 will have movements to and from both eastbound and westbound US 422 (currently it is only for an eastbound on ramp and a westbound off ramp).
- Project 2 – US 422 Schuylkill River Bridges, Widening & PA 23 Interchange is in final design. This project will widen US 422 from its current four-lane configuration from the PA 23 interchange to the US 363 interchange over the Schuylkill River. There is going to be a new four-lane bridge for westbound traffic that will be built next to the existing structure. The traffic will then be placed on the new structure and the existing structure will be demolished and a new four-lane structure for eastbound traffic will be constructed. Across the river there will be four lanes in each direction.
- Project 3 – Old Betzwood Multi-Use Trail Project in construction now thru 2015. A multi-use trail will be constructed across the Schuylkill River and will connect from Trooper Road across the Schuylkill River, across the Norfolk Southern Railroad, and down into Valley Forge National Historical Park to tie into the PA 23 intersection with County Line Road. There will now be a direct connection from the Schuylkill River Trail on the West Norriton side across the river into the trail system for Valley Forge National Historical Park.
- Project 4 – North Gulph Road Relocation is in final design and will start construction after the US 422 widening project. This is a project that was also important to Valley Forge National Historical Park (VFNHP). Utilizing the aerial, Mr. Smyth pointed out how North Gulph will be relocated to obtain additional capacity on North Gulph Road to help the congestion. The intersection will be moved away from the Park entrance to allow better gateway opportunities into the Park.

I-76 West Ramps/Henderson/S. Gulph Widening

Mr. Smyth stated there were three projects that went through environmental clearance and preliminary engineering together that were advanced by the Transportation Authority. PennDOT split the overall project into three different phases for funding reasons.

- Phase 1 – I-76 West Ramps at Henderson Road was completed in 2011. This was an Economic Stimulus project that was “shovel ready” because the Transportation Authority had bought right-of-way and funded Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Clearance.
- Phase 2 – S. Henderson Road Widening/North Half was completed in the summer of 2013. Initially the widening was to be from South Gulph Road down to Saulin Boulevard. PennDOT indicated there was insufficient funding for the project and the Transportation Authority took over funding for construction with a Pennsylvania Infrastructure Bank Loan. At a cost of over \$4 Million, the focus became doing the most critical area around Church Road.
- Phase 3 – S. Henderson Road Widening/South Half and South Gulph Road Widening (future project pending study).

Church Road Bridge Over SEPTA Route 100 Line

Mr. Smyth stated the Church Road Bridge Over SEPTA Route 100 Line is on PennDOT's Local Bridge Program and is currently in final design. Utilizing the aerial, Mr. Smyth pointed out the detour that will be established once bridge reconstruction begins at the end of this year and last approximately one year.

Mr. Jenaway asked the approximate cost to the Transportation Authority. Mr. Smyth responded the Transportation Authority is paying 2% of the \$5 million project.

Community Center Valley Forge Roadway Improvements

Mr. Smyth stated as part of the Community Center the intersection at Caley and General Knox is being addressed since ingress and egress out of the Community Center's primary driveway is a real concern because of sight distance and the speed at which vehicles are traveling eastbound on PA 23. A right-in and right-out driveway is being proposed. There is a back entrance that has been proposed exiting onto General Maxwell Road and out to General Knox to allow for left turn onto Valley Forge Road. A signal warrant analysis has been submitted to PennDOT for the intersection of Valley Forge and General Knox/Caley Roads.

Mrs. Kenney asked if a traffic/speed study could be done on General Knox Road and asked about the possibility of a speed hump, if necessary. Mr. Jenaway mentioned he has already talked to Sgt. Andreyko (Traffic Safety) about that and was told they were already thinking about some traffic calming options. Mr. Smyth said that may be difficult from a profile perspective, but there might be some other things that are done.

Mr. Smyth stated signalization is something PennDOT needs to approve, and it is necessary to pass the Warrant Analysis test. He was optimistic

PennDOT would review and approve the signal. With approval the next step requirement is a Highway Occupancy Permit to build the roadway improvements.

One member of the group commented on the intersection of Valley Forge and Caley during icy conditions.

Mr. Smyth discussed the proposed trails to and from the Community Center with the first priority being a trail from Keebler Road at the school where overflow parking is designated for Community Center events. From the school the trail would go through the park, through township owned property, and cross over the creek. Grants will be sought for trail construction. The second priority would be from General Armstrong into the top side of the Community Center property.

Future Projects on the Horizon

Mr. Smyth discussed future projects that are either in varying stages of engineering, but are not programmed as yet from either a PennDOT or Transportation Authority perspective.

- PA 23 Trout Creek Bridge Replacement which is a replacement of the PA 23 bridge over Trout Creek around the Mancill Mill area. The bridge is structurally deficient and is not in good shape. The Authority has approached PennDOT with this project and it has gone through a Pro-Team session. The new bridge would eliminate the 90° skew of the PA 23 alignment and would cross the creek at a better angle. Westbound PA 23 would remove the "hour glass" and eliminate the lane drop from Geerdes Boulevard to provide a constant two lane section to Moore Road. There would still be one lane heading eastbound. The intersection with Mancill Mill would be signalized with a left turn lane onto Mancill Mill Road and Beidler Road itself would become a one-way out with right turn only. That is the way it is now proposed because of the disruptive left turn from Valley Forge onto Beidler.

A discussion followed about the Beidler issue and the heavy left turn traffic from Valley Forge Road. Mr. Smyth noted the details are still preliminary and this issue will be further analyzed in Final Design.

Henderson Road & South Gulph Road Widening (Phase 3)

Mr. Smyth recapped the Schuylkill Expressway Henderson Road area. Phase 1 was the I-76 West ramps project, Phase 2 was the Henderson Road widening, and Phase 3 is the remainder of the widening on Henderson Road and the widening of South Gulph Road from Crooked Lane to US 320. Currently a right sizing analysis is being done because residents along South Gulph Road expressed concern about the widening along South Gulph Road. The initial

intent was to widen to two lanes in each direction from where it stops at Crooked Lane to Trinity Road, then keep a second lane eastbound to the US 320 intersection. The residents asked if the second lane is needed because of the new I-76 West off ramp. Travel time and traffic studies were done and it is one of the items that is still being analyzed. Utilizing the aerial, Mr. Smyth pointed out that with the newly counted traffic volumes, the second westbound lane allows shorter signal cycle lengths which will help control speeds. Speed is another major concern expressed by the residents. The volumes are such that without a second lane it would be necessary to increase cycle lengths.

Mr. Jenaway commented with anticipated development in the area of Crooked Lane and Church Road traffic will most likely increase significantly. He said it should be considered in consideration of the second westbound lane. Mr. Smyth said the Transportation Authority is currently going through an Act 209 Study which is a way for townships and authorities to assess fees on development as they come into the township. The Transportation Authority assesses a fee but this would bring everything into compliance from a legal perspective. Mr. Smyth noted Mr. Jenaway brings up a good point that the Act 209 Study addresses about keeping the future in mind and not just dealing with now. Keeping the cycle lengths shorter is a point for further consideration.

A member of the group asked if there is anything being done about pedestrians crossing that stretch of South Gulph Road, especially at the Gypsy Lane light. She said currently there is no pedestrian crossing and as a result it cuts off use of the Route 100 station which is within walking distance of that neighborhood. Mr. Smyth responded all three of the projects were together through environmental clearance and preliminary engineering and it was only split into final design. In environmental clearance one of the congestion management strategies was to make sure that a sidewalk was installed from the Route 100 station to Henderson Road in order to connect pedestrians from the station to the bus shelters and the businesses on Henderson Road. There is sidewalk on the right side coming up the hill from the station side to connect with the sidewalk that was installed as part of the I-76 West ramps project.

With regard to shortening the signal cycle length, a question was asked if that means pedestrian crossing will not be allowed at that signal. Mr. Smyth responded in the negative and said there will be an accommodation for pedestrians. Mr. Smyth said minimum walk times would need to be established which is a function of the crossing distance, road speed limit and the walking speed which is 3 ½ feet per second. This will all be taken into account.

An unidentified woman asked if the signal cycles would be shortened on South Gulph Road. Mr. Smyth responded it depends on the selected right-sized alternative.

A member of the group asked if the shortening of the signal cycles means cross streets would have a longer green time. Mr. Smyth said the shorter light cycle is more for speed control. He pointed out one of the good things about short cycle lengths is backups do not go back as far. Side streets would benefit by a shorter cycle and using the example of a pie chart indicated side streets would have more of the pie.

An unidentified member of the group said she lives in one of the neighborhoods and uses Gypsy Lane and is in favor of the pedestrian crossing. She also mentioned on the south side of that intersection there is a large bank which restricts the sight distance. She noted there is no right turn on red restriction, and an ambulance almost hit her when she was making a left turn with a green light at that intersection. Mr. Smyth stated emergency preemption would be part of all the signal installations and upgrades that are being done.

South Gulph Road Widening

Utilizing the aerial, Mr. Smyth pointed out the area starting from Church Road and going down to Long Road by the cemetery. The right-of-way from the cemetery is already in place for the widening. One intent of this project is to address the South Gulph and Church Road intersection which may call for a signal based on a Warrant Analysis. It is close to Brooks Road and would need to be coordinated. The main objectives are to continue the second eastbound lane from where it drops at Long Road down to Brooks as a formal right turn lane. In the opposite direction widening would be done in the cemetery area for a second lane to provide a double left from Brooks onto S. Gulph and head towards US 202.

Potential and/or Modernized PA turnpike Interchanges at Henderson Road & Valley Forge

Mr. Smyth discussed the overall program for the Pennsylvania Turnpike Corridor Reinvestment Study which includes consideration of Upper Merion as Montgomery County's West Zone. The Transportation Authority looked at all feasible interchange options within Upper Merion and it came down to two that the County is including in their overall program. The first option is at Henderson Road in the vicinity of Saulin Boulevard and the Peco corridor. Utilizing the aerial, Mr. Smyth pointed out the exact location of the proposed ramps. The new eastbound ramps would be between the PA Turnpike and Hansen Access Road, overpass the turnpike main line and join with the westbound ramps at a proposed roundabout to provide a full interchange with Henderson Road. This was looked at to relieve congestion at the existing US 202 and Henderson Road intersection because of existing volumes and future development pressure that may come about. It is not a formal project, but the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission is providing traffic projections this summer.

The second option is at the Valley Forge Interchange and would be a full interchange that would tie directly into the Business Park at First Avenue and Moore Road. The other element is to directly connect the Schuylkill Expressway into the Business Park by coming from the toll plaza using the existing ramp onto the turnpike which is overly wide. The returning move would come under the turnpike to get to the Schuylkill Expressway.

One member of the group said she understands the logic of this because it delivers right into and out of the Business Park and connects with two major highways. She did not see the logic for the option on Henderson Road in a residential area. Mr. Smyth commented the interchanges have different intents, Valley Forge modernization is for economic revitalization of the business park and Henderson Road is to redistribute US 202 and I-76 traffic more efficiently. The Henderson Road interchange also will compliment potential redevelopment of the industrial zoned corridor that has begun as a result of the I-76 West ramps and Henderson Road Widening projects.

A member of the group indicated from Saulin Boulevard there is a single family home residential neighborhood and a lot of parking complexes. Utilizing the aerial, Mr. Smyth pointed out the Henderson Square Apartments and said Saulin Boulevard in this area is more industrial, but ties directly into the “ring road” of Saulin Boulevard which was the original intent to allow for people who were turning right at Henderson and US 202 to not have to use that intersection. One of the main benefits for the ramp at Henderson would be access to Norristown which people are doing now by going from the Turnpike onto US 202 and then across the bridge. Recognizing the Turnpike is more of a commuter road now, this would help to redistribute traffic through the township.

A discussion followed during which a couple members of the group expressed the view the ramp would cause more traffic on local roads.

Mr. Jenaway stated he is assuming that SEPTA is aware of these concepts considering there are three proposed alternatives to bring light rail into King of Prussia. Mr. Smyth responded in the affirmative. He said one of SEPTA’s main alternatives for the Norristown High Speed Line extension is to use the Peco corridor and efforts are ongoing to coordinate with SEPTA.

Mr. Smyth indicated another project in a planning stage is the Prince Frederick Extension which would act as a second bypass ring road to US 202 and Henderson.

A discussion followed about the many ways the Prince Frederick Extension would benefit existing pressure points in the US 202/Henderson area.

Mr. Jenaway mentioned the need to place the US Route 23 relocation back “on the table” for discussion, particularly in view of the vision for the King of

Prussia Business Park. While a member of the group mentioned funding would be a problem, Mr. Jenaway responded it would place focus on how traffic could be managed better within Upper Merion Township and it might result in some smaller projects to help facilitate traffic movement.

Mr. Waks asked if there are any other issues of interest to the Citizen Board chairs.

Mr. Rassback stated the Media Communications Advisory Board is working on a concept which has a direct correlation to traffic in the township. He stated they are looking at ways the Upper Merion Township cameras can be utilized to incorporate smart phone technology to alert citizens of real time traffic situations. Mr. Jenaway commented fire companies and police department have the capability now to access all the cameras in Upper Merion Township, and this technology can be further researched to accomplish the Media Board's goal. He noted many people have the capability now on their cell phones.

Mr. Waks asked Mr. Jenaway to arrange for members of the Media Board to come to the fire department to see how the system works. Mr. Jenaway responded they could set up a time for a presentation of that program by DVRPC.

Mr. Waks mentioned another project the Media Board is working on is electronic informational signage for the front of the Township Building.

Ms. Marchino discussed the tree planting and tree inventory that was done last year. She reported 73 trees were planted in three different locations and the Shade Tree members will be checking on those trees this spring. In addition, another grant application has been submitted for approximately 50 trees to continue the planting effort in Upper Merion Township.

Mr. Campbell indicated the Environmental Advisory Council is studying the possibility of evaluating changes to waste hauling in the township. Informational slides are being prepared for UMGA-TV to provide educational information on stormwater management.

Mr. Trachtenberg stated the Park and Recreation Department received two awards from the state of Pennsylvania for inclusive programs for special needs children. He noted the new program guides will be coming out soon. With regard to the Community Center, demolition is just about finished and construction project will be let out for contract soon. Positions for the new center will be advertised in May. The trail project is moving forward.

Mr. Santillo noted the award the Upper Merion Transportation Authority received for the Business District road improvements. Last year's award was for the Henderson Road widening.

Mr. Waks stated another meeting of the Citizen Board chairs will be scheduled for June or July.

ADJOURNMENT:

It was moved by Mr. Philips, seconded by Mr. Jenaway, all voting "Aye" to adjourn the joint meeting at 8:55 a.m. None opposed. Motion approved 5-0.

DAVID G. KRAYNIK
TOWNSHIP MANAGER

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Minutes Approved:
Minutes Entered: