

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

October 12, 2016

The Upper Merion Township Planning Commission met for their regularly-scheduled meeting on October 12, 2016 at 7:00 p.m. in the Township Building, 175 W. Valley Forge Rd., King of Prussia, PA.

Present: Jaque Camp, Chairperson; Matthew Popek, Vice-Chairperson; Mark McKee, Secretary; Vivian Peikin, Member; Todd Brown, Member; Kyle Brown, Associate Township Planner.

Absent: Robert Loeper, Township Planner; William Jenaway, Liaison to the Board of Supervisors; Maudy Hedlund, Recording Secretary.

The pledge of allegiance to the flag was followed by self-introductions.

Meeting Minutes: July 13, 2016 September 14, 2016

The July 13, 2016 meeting minutes were approved 3-0.

Matt Popek motioned. Vivian Peikin seconded. The September 14, 2016 meeting minutes were approved 5-0.

Workshop: SEPTA Route 100 Extension

Present: Liz Smith, P.E., PMP, Manager of Long Range Planning, SEPTA.

Highlights from Ms. Smith's presentation:

Ms. Smith's presentation included early renderings of the Route 100 Extension project.

The PECO/Turnpike/First Avenue alternative was compared to the Route 202 and PECO alternatives and was considered the best-performing locally-preferred alternative (LPA) for the following reasons. It has the highest ridership, the fewest residential impacts, in terms of full or potential slipper property takes and building adjacent to residential areas. It also provides *two* additional parking locations: a parking facility at the Henderson Road station and one in the vicinity of the casino to capture a lot of the traffic coming down Route 422 at the First Avenue interchange, where motorists interested in parking their cars can hop on the train.

Its route follows the north-side of PECO's right-of-way; comes off the existing Norristown high speed line; takes a right turn onto the Turnpike's right-of-way; comes behind the Mall and heads north through the Business Park along First Avenue.

High-tension wires:

PECO has future plans to install four sets of high tension wires in their corridor, behind the Henderson Square Shopping Center.

PA Turnpike segment - Elevated Structure:

A big concern for area residents is the 40-50 ft.-high, elevated structure that runs along the Turnpike's right-of-way and, on the other side, along the property lines of Valley Forge and Brandywine Village homes. SEPTA has spent much time rethinking on how to rebuild this corridor.

Mall:

SEPTA is working on obtaining permission from Simon Mall for two rail stations; one as a direct connection to the Mall; the second, closer to Lockheed and the Plaza, for offices located along Mall Boulevard.

First Avenue / Business Park:

Parking in the Business Park will be provided at one of two proposed stations. Ms. Smith described SEPTA's interest in providing access to existing and future jobs in the transit-friendly Business Park. SEPTA is talking with the BID to keep the Connector going as a circulator within the Business Park area.

Casino:

An ADA-compliant, elevated terminal station is proposed in the vicinity of the casino.

Mark McKee suggested preserving the Norfolk Southern Railroad spur at Vandenburg Rd. and as part of the mixed use, preserving the line as a walking trail or paved macadam that could add an easy connection that increases ridership to dedicated stations.

General Facts:

- Construction is expected to start in 2020. It includes a 30% contingency.
- Capital costs are estimated at \$1.1 billion with a slight annual increase of \$5 million in operating and maintenance costs.

Ridership:

Ms. Smith commented that SEPTA's current daily ridership of 10,300 will double. Plans include reducing duplicative bus services; maintaining bus services between Wissahickon and the Mall; making better connections to the Norristown High Speed Line from those areas; significantly reducing buses running from 13th and Market area to the King of Prussia area by providing more localized routes. Rerouting of some bus routes are in place at the King of Prussia Mall's Bus Depot.

Jaque Camp commented that there's lots of interest in the affordable housing industry in finding ways to integrate affordable housing into communities like this where there are large pools of jobs available.

Ms. Smith stated that connecting the three biggest economic hubs of Center City, University City and King of Prussia, will make the region stronger.

Express Service / Travel Times:

An express service reduces travel time from 69th Street to the end of the Business Park from 36 to 22 minutes. The same express service reduces travel time from Center City to the edge of the Business Park to less than 45 minutes. A Park and Ride project with a half hour service schedule is in place for motorists currently using Route 422.

Properties backing up to the Turnpike:

SEPTA listed a meeting summary on its website all of the comments it received at its March public meeting where the focus was on whether the homes on Powderhorn, Bluebuff, and Kingwood that back-up to the Turnpike will have an impact on property values.

The resident's top five comments pertained to:

1. Impact on property values depends on how it is designed. Building an elevated structure behind someone's property could have a different impact than the current line that's down at grade.
2. Sinkhole prone area could create new sinkholes adjacent or further away. Trying to take that into account as to what may have a higher potential for creating a sink-hole area. SEPTA will do a lot of geotechnical work before we go anywhere with it.
3. Privacy concerns. Can passengers on the train see within their homes?
4. Vibration.
5. Construction so close to their homes.

Properties adjacent to Route 202:

Ms. Smith stated that SEPTA looked at the average difference in the costs of the Valley Forge Homes that are adjacent to Route 202 versus those that were further in the neighborhood. It was not significant. Home prices in that area are fairly stable. Building an elevated structure so close to someone's property could have a different impact than the current line that's down at grade.

Group discussion addressed an increase of property values. Ms. Smith provided the Property League's projection of a 5 to 20 percent increase.

Design options:

Instead of a single column, an upside-down "U"-shaped support significantly reduces visual and sinkhole issues. Moving the noise walls closer to residential property lines and the north/south elevated line were presented to the residents of Valley Forge Homes and Brandywine Village at two

separate neighborhood meetings. Ms. Smith stated that, by far, residents said that they could live with this. Their number one choice, generally, is to not have it.

Ms. Smith commented that SEPTA has been holding neighborhood meetings with Valley Forge Homes and Brandywine Village residents; held a couple of Saturday backyard visits and will continue to hold these forums. A citizen's working group that includes two members of the Planning Commission meets monthly through 2023. In all, four committees have been formed.

Ms. Smith gave an overview of DEIS and FDIS plans and the DVRPC's Work Program Project that looks at station connectivity and planning. She added that the County and SEPTA consider it crucial that we start looking at these things now.

There being no additional business, the meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Sincerely yours,

MARK MCKEE, SECRETARY