

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
October 13, 2010

The Upper Merion Township Planning Commission met for their regularly scheduled meeting on October 13, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. in the Township Building, 175 W. Valley Forge Rd., King of Prussia, PA.

PRESENT: Robert Krutsick, Chairman; Ken Forman, Vice-Chairman Mark McKee*, Secretary; Steve Elgart; James Shelton; William Jenaway, Liaison for the Board of Supervisors; Robert Loeper, Township Planner; Scott Greenly, Associate Planner, and Maudy Hedlund, Recording Secretary.
*Arrived after the Minutes were voted on.

Mr. Krutsick called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. A pledge of allegiance and an individual introduction of members followed.

Meeting Minutes: September 22, 2010.

Mr. Elgart made a motion to approve the September 22, 2010 Minutes. Mr. Shelton seconded. Mr. Forman, who did not attend on the September 22 meeting, abstained. A 3-0 vote in favor carried.

Mr. Krutsick turned the meeting over to Mr. Loeper. Mr. Loeper informed members that he is awaiting a response from the owners of the Valley Forge Shopping Center to discuss their vision and plans for the center with members of the Planning Commission. He added that the owner of the Valley Forge Beverage Center informed him that she has not been contacted by the Shopping Center or Target.

Workshop

Form Based Codes: Potential Applicability (continued from September 22, 2010).

Mr. Loeper thanked Mr. Greenly for producing the color-coded visuals that clearly illustrated the floor area ratios of buildings at the King of Prussia Mall.

Tonight's presentation relied on land use data from the County's Board of Assessment to determine the square footage of lots and the buildings constructed on them. An FAR or floor area ratio measures the density of a building. A building whose square footage is equal to the square footage of its lot is said to have an FAR of 1. FARs are not applied to natural (T-1) or residential (T-3) districts. Mr. Loeper informed members that any form-based changes would not apply to residential areas.

Mr. Greenly produced visuals of the Mall, as it currently exists, to models of the Mall under form-based zoning, illustrating a more compact, denser development with space for amenities such as transit-oriented development. Mr. Loeper noted that a good public transit system within a commercial district requires an FAR of .5 or above.

Mr. Greenly described an example of a mixed-use facility, the new Navy Yard. It looks like high-density, feels like office district and relies on structured and surface parking. He stated that form-based zoning is prescriptive. It would not drastically change Upper Merion.

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A lively group discussion began, comparing the current to the proposed form-based zoning. The following excerpts are applicable *only* to the General Urban (T-4), Urban Center (T-5) and Urban Core (T-6) areas:

The first principle of form-based code is based on a regulating plan. The second involves the application of form-based, whether it is street-or transect-based to a section of a municipality. Future engineering applies largely to the General Urban and Urban Center districts.

The goal is to make the Urban Center district more mixed-use with residential to enable it to accommodate people during the day and at night, and to affect a development that will facilitate public transit.

The General Urban, Urban Center and Urban Core are already structured for transportation centers.

With the existing residential on either side, a transect could be drawn from Beidler Road down through the Gulph Mills area, bringing the T-6 core out from the middle towards the Route 202 / Henderson / First Avenue / Allendale Road, to the Urban Center.

We've been charged with updating the zoning code. It would be a waste of time to only update Route 202. A form-based code removes some of the existing use aspects and deals more with what buildings look like.

T-6 has the "bones" that could support some kind of residential around it. We should allow someone to locate some residential on the tracts that become available in the near future.

The less visible but very developable Continental Business Park and the surrounding land of 8th and 9th Ave." has a huge potential for redevelopment. This area with its 200+ acres and open space has relatively few owners. We must be certain that when a site like that becomes redeveloped, that it can be developed in a creative manner. Sometime in the next twenty years a site like that will be something else. We are not in a position to encourage mass transit. We should come up with a scheme to link good mass transit that exists to these cores.

We cannot have any more commercial development unless some of this goes hand in hand with an incentive system, such as a train line that connects Philadelphia to the Norristown or Metro. The County is moving forward with a scaled-back Schuylkill Valley Metro. It will provide an alternative so that, perhaps, we won't need to build extra lanes on Route 422.

Mixed use is fine. We can make use of shared parking and do not need any more macadam. We can solve storm water management by incorporating the infrastructure with compatible uses.

There are ramifications to all of this. Opening up the Mall as a town center and allowing residential will have an economic impact on the development of the Valley Forge Golf Course and on every existing residence.

Residential would be permitted. There is no demand for it and it's not going to happen overnight.

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Road enhancements are expensive and congestion patterns will be here for at least a decade. Modified zoning would give us a marketing opportunity that the Business Improvement District has been talking about.

What kind of litigation problems this would set up for the Zoning Hearing Board?

What is beneficial about form-based planning is that it creates more by-right developments which, by their nature, should reduce the burden on the Board. Where you run into a potential concern will be, possibly, in adopting a plan because the effect of a plan can be to alter property values.

Members suggested:

- Putting together a proposal and developing a plan.
- Circulation of a public discussion document to the Board of Supervisors, members of the BID, the ECDC and other groups.

Mr. Krutsick requested feedback from the Land Use Committee of the BID. Mr. Loeper proposed a meeting between the Planning Commission and the BID for the spring of 2011.

Mr. Loeper announced that the Citizen Board Appreciation Luncheon will be held Oct. 31.

Mr. Elgart stated that he would not be able to attend one of the upcoming meetings.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

MARK MCKEE, SECRETARY

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