

**Upper Merion Township Economic and Community Development Committee
Regularly Scheduled Meeting for July 8th, 2019**

The Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC) met for its regularly scheduled meeting on July 8th, 2019 in the Upper Merion Township Building. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Andrea Esqueda, Chair
Frank Buttarro, Vice-Chair
Joe Brophy
Tim Dooner
Clara Martis
Kyle Brown, Associate Planner
Tina Garzillo, Board Liaison

NEW MEMBER:

The committee welcomed their newest member, Clara Martis.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

The approval the meeting minutes for June 16th, 2019 were postponed until the next meeting when those present are available to vote.

GUEST PRESENTATION: Transitional and Affordable Housing in Montgomery County

Ann Leavitt-Gruberger, Assistant Section Chief of County Planning

Montgomery County is currently working on a Housing-For-All Initiative with an advisory board made up of the planning commission, office of housing, and county commerce departments with the goal of bringing more affordable housing options to locations throughout Montgomery County. As of this moment, 25% of homeowners and 46% of renters are paying more than 30% of their wages towards housing which is considered a housing burden. Areas which were considered the most affordable to live in have experienced large price jumps, with Upper Merion Township seeing a 33% price increase over the last 15 years. In addition, Upper Merion Township's average housing prices are considered above the median price range. Upper Merion Township has seen a rise in children on free or reduced lunch as well as families losing their homes to eviction, and the Food Pantry which opened last year now has over 170 families using their resources. For the most part, these are families with stable incomes but generally cannot afford the cost of living within the township.

There are several obstacles facing Upper Merion Township, as well as the county as a whole, in creating affordable housing. Overall the usual trends are affecting housing like student loan debt, childcare costs, and rising prices without rising wages, but specific issues within the township have been called out. While it is agreed by the citizens that there is a problem with the cost of housing in the area, the public perception of the phrase "Affordable Housing" is overwhelmingly negative and often halts the conversation before it can begin. In addition, the zoning for the township makes it difficult for individual property owners to create accessory dwellings and for developers to build new housing.

The options for social programs to change public perception, mobilize local policy-makers, and garner support of local businesses will be explored, and contact will be made with the Phoenixville taskforce, who is currently developing 2,000 dwellings, to discuss the processes which led to the development.

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UPDATES:

New Township Manager

Tony Hamaday, the new Township Manager, will start on Monday, July 15th, 2019.

ECDC Applicants

There are two more applicants with a third expected. Interviews are in the process of being scheduled.

Catalyst

A meeting will be held on Monday, July 15th, 2019 in the Henderson Room. The library staff and Parks & Recreation department have been invited to attend.

KEY PROJECTS:

Affordable and Transitional Housing

More contacts will be made as the committee continues to pursue viable solutions regarding affordable housing within the township.

Skating Park

The proposal has been delivered 3 months late and has not yet been reviewed, but it is expected that the quote set at \$850,000.00 is still accurate and that opening by Thanksgiving 2019 would still be realistic if ground is broken by October 1st, 2019. It was mentioned that it may be possible to acquire funding from several wealthy families who graduated from Upper Merion and were instrumental in helping to develop Penn State's skating rink.

Moore-Irwin House

A bid meeting was held and a tour of the house was conducted. Despite the house being in worse condition than previously thought, bids for remediation are expected.

Restorations for the arboretum are currently behind schedule, but several landscaping companies are in discussion to assist. The first objective is to clear the area behind the Moore-Irwin House to create an event space and add a wide path from the parking lot leading to that area.

River Park

A joint sub-committee with the Parks & Recreation department has been proposed and will be presented to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

Small Business Saturday

While a partnership with the Chamber of Commerce may be useful, it was determined that a partnership with the Farmer's Market would be the better path as they already have a strong following of local businesses and entrepreneurs. An Upper Merion Gifts Guide, a brochure or map that highlights products produced within Upper Merion Township as well as local businesses, may be created once further partnerships have been established.

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Gathering People

Progress has been slowed by questions regarding zoning and funding, but more information should be available by the next meeting. In the meantime, the vision of the new library will be examined to see if it aligns with the vision for Gathering People in creating a multi-use space for community outreach and resources.

OTHER PROJECTS:

Citizen Board Mixer

The next Citizen Board Mixer will be held on Thursday, September 12th, 2019. A venue has yet to be determined, but the preference would be a local establishment over a chain.

Community Resource Guides

The guides have been drafted with production and distribution currently on hold until funding is available. The guides will be available at 15 different locations throughout the community.

Township Newsletter

A photo of the current ECDC members will be taken at the conclusion of the meeting. A brief overview of the committee and its goals will be completed by the end of the week to be submitted and included in the newsletter.

NEW BUSINESS:

Committee Database

It was suggested that a database containing up-to-date information regarding committee projects be created and updated frequently in order to reduce redundancies throughout the various committees and encourage sharing of resources. The new Township Manager will be consulted on the development should the project move forward.

Upper Merion Township Organizational Chart

It was requested that an organizational chart of Upper Merion Township employees be made available to the committees for contact and project purposes. As a chart was not readily available, a telephone directory was provided in the meantime. Human Resources will be contacted regarding the availability of a full organizational chart.

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

ECDC Regularly Scheduled Meetings

Monday, August 19th, 2019.

Monday, September 16th, 2019.

ADJOURNMENT:

With no further business, Mr. Brophy made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:57 PM. The motion was seconded by Mr. Dooner with all in favor.



