

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
WORKSHOP MEETING
JULY 9, 2015

The Board of Supervisors of Upper Merion Township met for a Workshop Meeting on Thursday, July 9, 2015, in the Township Building. The meeting was called to order at 7:33 p.m., followed by a pledge of allegiance.

ROLL CALL:

Supervisors present were: Greg Waks, Erika Spott, Bill Jenaway and Carole Kenney. Also present were: Dave Kraynik, Township Manager; Sally Slook, Assistant Township Manager; Rob Loeper, Township Planner; Scott Greenly, Associate Planner; Joseph McGrory, Township Solicitor, and Angela Caramenico, Assistant to Township Manager. Supervisor Greg Philips was absent.

CHAIRPERSON'S COMMENTS:

Chairperson Spott stated an Executive Session was held prior to this meeting to discuss litigation matters.

DISCUSSIONS:

SEPTA KING OF PRUSSIA RAIL UPDATE

Ms. Liz Smith, Manager, Long Range Planning, SEPTA, provided an overview of the public comments on the five build alternatives discussed at the public workshops in March. Highlights as follows:

- Three workshop sessions were held with a total of 225 attendees. There were 35 independent comment cards and 18 email comments.
- Most attendees were in support of the project in general.
- Some positive comments included the project could support existing and future development, it would be alternative transportation for existing commuting residents, senior friendly, offer congestion reduction, provide access for employees to King of Prussia, and be a potential for property value increases.
- Concerns were raised about additional noise the line could create and the need for more parking. With regard to parking, Ms. Smith pointed out SEPTA is focusing only on parking in the "park and ride" areas and not at the stations in between. Some people felt there should be parking at every station along the line. Some residents expressed concern if there is a station near their home without adequate parking people would park in

their neighborhood. Ms. Smith indicated she does not believe there are many areas along the line where a station is identified to cause such a potential issue, but it was brought up at the workshop. There were some basic safety concerns having a rail line in proximity to residential areas as well as impact on property values. Concerns were raised about the appearance of the rail lines. There were questions about funding sources and traffic during construction. Another concern was possible changes in existing bus routes for people who prefer a bus route.

- Some notable comments from previous meetings included concerns SEPTA would not build according to ADA standards. Ms. Smith said SEPTA would be using federal dollars and would be required to do so. All stations would be fully ADA acceptable as well as paths to and from the station. A member of the BID expressed concern about access to and from businesses during construction.
- Peco trunk – concerns about impact on the residential community regarding Peco’s right-of-way which includes high tension wires south of the Valley Forge Homes neighborhood. Ms. Smith indicated this trunk impacts about 55 homes.
- Some comments were in support of the Peco trunk because they felt it had less impact to infrastructure and that it would have the least overall visual impact on the township because it is nestled back in the Peco corridor.
- Noise concerns for adjacent homes were raised about the Peco Turnpike trunk as well as safety concerns because there are areas along the turnpike adjacent to people’s backyards.
- Some prefer an alternative that is not crossing or impacting active roadways.
- The comment heard the most were visual impacts of the rail line.
- Some supported the 202 trunks in that it provides good access to shopping center and opportunities for stations and walkup service to those stations.
- There were concerns about the Pennsylvania Turnpike ramp the county is working on. One of the proposed ramp upgrades is to make the current Valley Forge interchange a full interchange which would bring a slip ramp into First Avenue and Moore Road. *Ms. Smith believes that works really well with the SEPTA rail project.*
- Supportive comments regarding the First Avenue branch were that the effects to residential properties were minimal and that the road diet and BID development plans go well with the rail line.

Mrs. Kenney asked about the 55 homes that would be impacted by the Peco trunk and asked how many residents would be impacted by the turnpike trunk. Ms. Smith responded that has not been quantified as yet. She said they were still working on this section from a design standpoint and are still trying to determine exactly how many homes would be directly adjacent to it. It was noted SEPTA would not be on any of their properties and would be within the turnpike’s

right-of-way. Ms. Smith's guess is that it is around 20 homes that would be impacted.

With regard to the survey which was sent via paper as well as on line, Ms. Smith reported they received almost 1,000 completed surveys (405 on-line responses and a total of 582 by mail). Of the responses 385 identified themselves as residents.

Mr. Waks commented he thought the survey was going to be much longer based on what he heard in the past. Ms. Smith responded they will have more opportunities to survey in the future.

Ms. Smith noted 83% of those who filled out the survey indicated they had not attended other meetings for the project and that the newsletter was helpful in getting more people involved. Seventy-eight (78%) responded the information sent to them was helpful. It was noted 67% indicated they support the extension (58% were residents), 25% responded "no," and 8% responded "maybe." When asked if they would use the extension 53% said "yes," 34% said "no," and 13% said "maybe." When asked to rate the alternatives, there was not a huge difference among the five alternatives, although Peco Turnpike First Avenue edged out slightly ahead of the others. Ms. Smith indicated this aligns very well with what they are seeing from a technical standpoint in that all five alternatives have pros and cons that are different, but there is no real clear winner at this point in time. Over the next four or five months SEPTA will be focused to get this to a point where they can clearly define if one alternative would be better than the other four.

Ms. Smith stated their schedule remains pretty much the same as reported at other meetings. What is changing is the order of how things are done from this point on forward. Originally it was proposed to release the DEIS document this winter. In accordance with FTA's request, SEPTA has been asked to proceed with a new series of steps. The new plan is in late fall/early winter a new series of public meetings will be held called tiers reanalysis. The five alternatives will be reviewed in detail showing the criteria used to go from five to one by way of public comment and input received over the last two years and then a recommendation would be made on the locally preferred alternative. The DEIS would be released in the spring 2016. There will be another public hearing in the spring or summer for the DEIS release to discuss the locally preferred alternative. If a locally preferred alternative presented this winter does not meet with the satisfaction of the public and stakeholders SEPTA will reconsider and may release the DEIS with a different locally preferred alternative based upon the feedback. This means SEPTA would be looking for adoption of the locally preferred alternative again after the two "robust" sets of meetings. Ms. Smith said this is not a decision that will be made without a lot of public outreach in fall 2015 and winter 2016. At that point, the process will move into the next phase of

the final environmental impact statement. FTA is supportive of the revised process.

Mr. Jenaway asked when the resolution should be advanced that was discussed at the [February 5, 2015] workshop meeting. Ms. Smith said there is a lot of technical information to consider in making this decision and asked that SEPTA have an opportunity to present that to the Board first before a resolution in non-support of an alternative is offered. She indicated after the meetings in December [2015] there would be a good opportunity to present the resolution in non-support of one of the alternatives after that. The DEIS will not have been released at that point and the resolution would be captured within that document once the resolution is approved and it would work well within the FTA process.

Based on conversations he has had over the last three months with interested citizens, Mr. Jenaway asked for an explanation of what is meant by environmental study. Ms. Smith responded there will be two environmental impact studies a draft and a final. The DEIS will take the five build alternatives and look at a variety of potential impacts. They will look at things normally identified as environmental such as wetlands, natural resources, but will also look at noise, vibration, property and utility impacts, cost, funding options, hazardous materials, etc.

Mr. Jenaway followed up about the potential environmental impacts should the Turnpike ever widen to four lanes in each direction. He asked if SEPTA has or will consider this and would it change the dynamic of the turnpike alternatives if the turnpike goes to four lanes. Ms. Smith responded SEPTA meets with the Turnpike about every three months and they have discussed with them the potential for widening in that section. They currently have no plans for it and are next looking to construct the section west of Valley Forge. She said when the time comes for SEPTA to enter into legal agreements with the Turnpike they will take that into account.

Mr. Jenaway indicated the widening question arose in a discussion he had related to the Henderson Road slip ramps. When that would happen there would be additional lanes that would have to be installed and at that point ultimately impact this project. Mr. Jenaway commented what Ms. Smith is suggesting is there are ongoing discussions that are taking into account the interchange at Saulin Boulevard/Henderson Road and SEPTA could still accommodate the rail through that area and therefore it has not been discounted in SEPTA's studies. Ms. Smith responded in the affirmative and said SEPTA staff has been meeting directly with Montgomery County and their design engineer, Boles Smyth, to compare plans between the SEPTA project and their Turnpike project and at this point in time both can be constructed in that area. SEPTA can accommodate their acceleration and deceleration lanes and they can design their ramps around some of SEPTA's columns so it should not be an issue. The county is ensuring that SEPTA coordinate with them moving forward on a regular basis.

Mr. Jenaway indicated one comment that came up last night at the Planning Commission dealt with the alternative along the Turnpike and the opportunity to provide access to multiple apartment complexes that might not have access with some other alternative. Ms. Smith responded they did receive one comment that it would be a good opportunity for a station where Route 202 and the Turnpike intersect. SEPTA engineers took a preliminary look at it and while it would be difficult from an engineering standpoint, as they move into detailed design it is something they will consider.

Mr. Jenaway asked if there will be some type of assessment on public safety issues in the environmental impact studies since there will be 10,000 more people a day into Upper Merion Township. Ms. Smith responded in the affirmative.

Mr. Jenaway pointed out the importance of finding a way to get the Village at Valley Forge somehow connected into the rail line to take advantage of that mega complex. He asked why the line that comes out at First Avenue couldn't swing down somewhere to the Village at Valley Forge. Ms. Smith responded they are looking at that same issue because they feel very strongly that it adds a lot of ridership to the line which is something that is important to SEPTA. She indicated a lot depends on a certain property that might come into play in the near future which right now is what is hindering them. SEPTA needs to be able to get the curvature through the property to make that turn.

Mr. Jenaway took exception to SEPTA's position that they are not going to take out any Route 202 lanes. He pointed out the area from Town Center Road to Norristown has an 18 inch center area. Mr. Jenaway indicated any property that would be taken would adversely impact parking counts, parking lots, utilities and infrastructure and will create a major challenge for the community. He said he does not know how this would be done without significant disruption and widening of the roadway or ultimately having some type of an elevated rail system. Ms. Smith responded SEPTA has conceptual plans for that area which does require some widening along Route 202 and it is fortunate that PennDOT has a fairly wide right of way they own in that section so the widening can be accommodated within PennDOT's right-of-way not on private property in that area.

Mr. Jenaway asked about the impact on sidewalks, green space, utilities and the environment that has already been created in that area. Ms. Smith said these are considerations that will be taken into account in the DEIS document.

Mr. Jenaway stated 99% of the public comments he has received deal with the 202 corridor and the dissatisfaction with that option. Ms. Smith indicated they should submit a comment via the website because they still do not see a lot of comments coming through in non-support of 202.

Mrs. Spott asked if there are any studies that have been done or proposed indicating what public transportation availability does for the economics of a community and whether it increases or decreases property values. Ms. Smith responded SEPTA has done studies over the past two years specifically looking at property value impacts around the regional rail stations and there was a significant increase of property values within a certain mile radius of a regional rail station.

Mr. Byron S. Comati, Director, Strategic Planning and Analysis, SEPTA, stated there is a body of analysis research that has been done on the effect of a rail line on property values and it tends to vary among residential and commercial uses. Mr. Comati indicated they will go back and gather some additional information on analyses of other rail stations and provide a summary to the Board.

REALEN/VR-4; VALLEY FORGE VILLAGE HOMES; 134 STACKED TOWNHOMES

Dennis Maloomian, President of Realen, discussed the first “for sale” and lowest density product at the Village at Valley Forge utilizing the new trend of stacked townhomes (one on top of one another). Mr. Maloomian pointed out the location of the 6-acre site for the proposed stacked townhomes just east of CHOP.

The site plan features a landscaped entrance off of what will be called North Market Street. Parking will be in the rear. Each townhome has a one car garage and a parking space behind that garage. Mr. Maloomian went over various slides featuring a central green space and some imagery as to how that might be landscaped. It was noted the architecture has not been finalized but it will be contemporary.

Mr. Maloomian described the stacked townhome concept. Floor plans feature the doors side by side in the front of the building. The unit on the bottom is smaller because it is encumbered by the garages. The upper unit is over the garages and has the opportunity for a roof top deck. The bottom unit is about 1,500 plus square feet, three bedrooms and the top unit is 2,400 plus square feet. The top unit is significantly larger because it is over the garages and has an internal stair up to the bedrooms and another stair up to the roof top deck.

Mr. Maloomian commented what is being built on the site now is the urban wrap product that is very common in Washington, D.C. He pointed out this is a special site with special circumstances and predicts the market will embrace the stacked townhome product enthusiastically. Pricing for the lower unit would be in the mid-300's and the upper unit in the mid-400's.

Mr. Loeper mentioned the only real comment at the planning commission last night was whether the visible façade of the garage could be addressed.

Mr. Jenaway asked if a garage with one parking space behind it would be adequate. Mr. Maloomian indicated there would be some guest parking as well. Mr. Loeper pointed out the guest parking interspersed with additional parking.

Mr. Maloomian indicated initially the alleys were a little narrower and after spending some time with the fire marshal the alleys were widened and some other modifications were made in response to his concerns.

Mrs. Spott asked how Mr. Maloomian felt about the SEPTA rail line. Mr. Maloomian responded SEPTA came to them early on because Realen is a stakeholder and his personal opinion was he did not know the routes or strategy at the time. He said he always thought that the area between Guthrie and 422 was an interesting place to run a line without any real major impact. It was noted that is where Realen is planning a major office component and a stop there would be ideal. He did not know what it would be like going down North Gulph Road, but indicated he would have some visual concerns that some others have expressed. In view of its 2,000 residential units and significant office space, Mr. Maloomian said SEPTA would be missing an opportunity if Village at Valley Forge is not included.

QUERUS PROPERTIES, LP (JB WARD & CO) DEVELOPMENT PLAN; 400 W. CHURCH ROAD; CONSTRUCTION OF 1,980 SF PARKING STRUCTURE; 3.48 ACRES, LI – LIMITED INDUSTRIAL

Mr. Rob Loeper, Township Planner, stated this is the site of the former Beck Machine at 400 West Church Road adjacent to John Middleton and Radar Drive. Several years ago J.B. Ward landscaping modified the building by putting in some overhead doors and built a one garage toward the rear of the property. The applicant is proposing a 2,000 square foot garage to shelter a new piece of equipment. In order to accommodate stormwater a 720 square foot rain garden is planned. The rain garden exceeds the minimum requirement for stormwater on the site for the addition. There will be some minor revisions to parking because of loss of parking. It was noted this is one of the plans that formerly was called a minor plan. The applicant is asking for a waiver of land development. While the building will not be heated it will have electricity. This is basically a garage for equipment for a truck.

Mr. Waks asked if the garage would be visible from any adjacent homes. Mr. Loeper responded other than the adjacent homes on Radar the garage would not be visible since it is located in the rear.

Mr. Jenaway noted the planning commission asked several questions and there were no issues.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to come before the Board, it was moved by Mrs. Kenney, seconded by Mr. Jenaway, all voting "Aye" to adjourn the meeting. None opposed. Motion approved 4-0. Adjournment occurred at 8:29 p.m.

DAVID G. KRAYNIK
SECRETARY-TREASURER/
TOWNSHIP MANAGER

rap
Minutes Approved:
Minutes Entered: