

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
WORKSHOP MEETING  
JULY 11, 2024

The Board of Supervisors of Upper Merion Township met for a Workshop Meeting on Monday, July 11, 2024, in the Township Building. The meeting was called to order at 7:42 p.m., followed by a pledge of allegiance.

ROLL CALL:

Supervisors present were: Bill Jenaway, Greg Phillips, Carole Kenney, Greg Waks and Tina Garzillo. Also present were Anthony Hamaday, Township Manager; Amanda Lafty, Assistant Township Manager; Jarrett Lash, Township Planner; John Walko, Kalie Melchior and Kyle M., Township Solicitor's Office.

CHAIRPERSON'S COMMENTS:

Chairperson Garzillo said they had an Executive Session prior to this Workshop to discuss legal matters.

DISCUSSIONS:

A. STATUS UPDATE by BOLES SMYTH re: Valley Forge Gateway Trail:

Mr. Mike Boles from Boles Smyth Associates presented the Valley Forge Gateway Trail Project, which is funded by a cooperative agreement between the National Park Services at Valley Forge National Park and Upper Merion Township. He said they are preparing the plans for final design for the highway occupancy permit for PennDOT.

The Valley Forge Gateway Trail will begin at Richards Road just north of the 422 overpass and will go underneath the 422 corridors on the west side and continue within the highway right-of-way at US 422 and SR 3039 to the First Avenue intersection where there is a SEPTA bus stop. The trail will cross over the Northside of N. Gulph Road and head over to the Southeast corner of North First Avenue and North Gulph Road then tie into the existing Linear Park Trail near Top Golf.

Mr. Boles mentioned that this project is about 1.2 million dollars but if PennDOT allows them to construct a 4' landscaping retainer wall under the bridge using EP Henry material, the cost of the wall would be significantly less. If this is permitted the project would cost just under one million dollars.

Mr. Boles said on July 3, 2024 his company submitted the 60% submission, which is the completion of the preliminary engineering report and they're hoping to submit their final 100% submission to PennDOT by the end of January 2025. He mentioned that as of now there is no construction funding for this project but the National Park Services is pursuing grants. The next step is to contact some adjacent property owners to work out the details of the existing right-of-way and the potential for easements. He stated that an easement will be required to make the connection to the trail up the higher slope.

He mentioned the intersection at First Avenue and North Gulph Road would require some traffic signal modifications and they have to incorporate ADA ramps where needed. This will contribute to the cost of this project. To help keep the costs low, they recommend instead of removing the paved concrete median to have a traffic lane in both directions to control the traffic while construction occurs they are proposing to redirect the traffic flow. They would like to have only one-way traffic on North Gulph Road and rotate the traffic direction during the day, from 9 am until 3 pm they would detour southbound traffic of N. Gulph Road. The northbound traffic heading out to Valley Forge and out to Phoenixville would be open at all times but from 9 am until 3 pm the recommendation would be that people coming out of Richards Road or any one heading east to continue up to Route 23 to Moore Road back to First Ave.

Mr. Boles said the preliminary construction schedule can start in April of 2025 presuming a construction company is procured. If they start on time the project will probably be complete by the end of October or November. Finally, he said the ultimate objective is to connect First Avenue Linear Park heading south to the Valley Forge Village as well as to the Chester Valley Trail to the south. In addition, heading to the north they would connect the trail to Joseph Plum Martin Trail which is a circular trail that goes through the entire park and continues north to the Schuylkill River.

#### **B. HEALTHY YARD INITIATIVE – EAC / Shade Tree Commission::**

Ms. Theresa Landewe, Vice-Chair of EAC and Ms. Barbara Van Clief, Shade Tree Commission presented their idea for a program called the Healthy Yard Initiative. This program will replace the Shade Tree Beautification Yard Awards that was in existence for many years but was stopped due to participation dwindling. Ms. Landewe explained that she was at an EAC conference and a representative from West Vincent Township presented their Healthy Yard Initiative and said they are willing to share it with Upper Merion Township. So, the Environmental Advisory Council teamed up with the Shade Tree and Beautification Commission to share this program with interested Upper Merion residents.

Ms. Landewe went over the component's residents would need to meet on the Healthy Yard Initiative application and mentioned the benefits of a healthy yard. She said by having a healthy yard it improves the air and water quality, helps stormwater management, it's better for people and pets and the overall habitat for wild life. Then she mentioned Dark Skies, this initiative encourages people to have lower lights at night because bright lights cause confusion to migrating birds, nocturnal insects and animals.

The Township will implement West Vincent's form (application) onto Upper Merion's Website for any Township resident interested in completing the 21 questions. If you have 15 out of the 21 different qualities on your property you would receive an Upper Merion Healthy Yard Plaque that you can display.

Chairperson Garzillo asked if the application will have a list of native plants and if residents already have plants in their garden that aren't native to the area should they be removed. Ms. Landewe said if the non-native plant isn't invasive that would be a personal choice whether to remove it or not. If you wish to keep the plant(s) you can augment native plants into your garden but to win the award you need at least 80% of native plants/trees. Also, resources on the website will have best species for your area that maximizes the amount of wildlife benefits.

After a long discussion about different plants and grass Supervisor Waks asked if Commercial properties are eligible to apply. Everyone felt that was a good idea. He also mentioned that a resident suggested in the Linear Park at First Avenue where there are large green pastures (just grass) if the Township can incorporate a meadow in part of it. Everyone also thought this would be good and would like to prepare a Proclamation to incorporate the Healthy Yard Initiative.

Finally, Ms. Landewe mentioned that the ECA and Shade Tree Commission received a joint BCA grant and would like to make starter kits with a spring, summer and fall plant and maybe include a tree to give to residents at the Community Fair Festival in October.

### C. GIS ECONOMIC ANALYSIS – Urban3 of Asheville, NC:

Jarrett Lash, Township Planner explained the Urban3 GIS Economic Analysis. He mentioned that Urban3 came to a Comprehensive Plan meeting previously to present their program. It was noted that the Economic Stability Component of their program along with some other fantastic applications available would be a valuable resource to the Township. This service/program will analyze a particular project, parcel or area to see which is driving the economic stability, breakdown development fees on what we receive and the actual cost to the Township.

So, in the long run how many of our properties are net winners and net losers, to make sure over all the Township is receiving more in revenue than the cost in services. This will help us define the Zoning Code to reflect the future redevelopment opportunities and the ones that provide more revenue.

Jarrett said this will be a 4 phase, 4-month process beginning in October which will span two fiscal years. By doing this the Township as well as our partner KOP BID who agreed to fund a third, can split the cost over two years. The Township will pay the other two-thirds, one-third from the Township's Planning Operational Budget and the final third will be reallocated from the Capital Budget. Finally, Jarrett said the Township will use this for the Comprehensive Plan; for Project Scoring where you can look at a new project and estimate what it will cost the Township and how much revenue it will bring into the Township so we can readjust a zoning code. The last use will help with the long-term zoning conditions, considering looking at setbacks and minimal building coverage like their height. By taking these typologies examples throughout the Township and apply that into areas that we're considering zoning text amendments can help us work on some ratios to project what a zoning text amendment will do fiscally.

#### D. BUSINESS MEETING AGENDA REVIEW:

Mr. Hamaday reviewed the draft agenda for the July 18<sup>th</sup> Business Meeting. He did note that they are still working putting the agenda together, which will include the swearing in for new and promoted police officers and EMT personnel.

#### ADJOURNMENT:

##### Board Action:

It was moved by Supervisor Philips, seconded by Vice-Chair Jenaway, all voting "Aye" to adjourn the meeting. None opposed. Adjournment occurred at 9:32 pm.

  
ANTHONY HAMADAY  
TOWNSHIP MANAGER

lr  
Minutes Approved:  
Minutes Entered: