



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES: Regular Monthly Board Meeting
Wednesday, February 10, 2021
Approved: March 10, 2021

BOARD MEMBERS ATTENDING: Steven Kline, Chair; Dulcie Flaharty, V-Chair; Charles Tornetta; Robert Blue; Jill Blumhardt; John Ernst, Obed Arango

STAFF ATTENDING: Scott France, Matthew Edmond, Eric Jarrell, Pattie Guttenplan, Daniel Farina, Steve Zbyszinski, Claire Warner, John Marlatt, Karina Caddick

GUESTS: Jody Holton, Assistant General Manager, Planning, SEPTA; Ryan Judge, Manager, Strategic Planning, SEPTA; Greg May, Vice President, PA Office Leader, HNTB; Eric Goldstein, Executive Director, King of Prussia District; Tamra Dann, Director, Project Development, Planning & Strategic Initiatives, SEPTA; Daniel Corrigan, Project Manager, SEPTA; David Koerner, SEPTA; Robert Henry, Executive Director, GVF; Kate O'Connor, Chief Engineer, Bridges & Buildings; Tamara Holt, Executive Brand Ambassador, AVE by Korman Communities

I. Call to Order/Board Comments

Steven Kline called the Board meeting to order.

II. Minutes of January 13, 2021

The minutes from the January 13, 2021 regular Board meeting were approved by the Board.

***Motion:** To approve the January 13, 2021 Board minutes, by Mr. Kline, seconded by Ms. Flaharty, and approved by all present.*

III. Public Comment

None

IV. Jenkintown Borough Community Planning Assistance Contract

Presenter: Eric Jarrell

Eric Jarrell requested that the Board approve the planning assistance contract for Jenkintown Borough. This is a three year contract renewal for Jenkintown. The current contract will include an update to their subdivision and land development ordinance, transit-oriented development design, and zoning assistance around the Noble Train Station. The ongoing contract work includes attending Planning Commission meetings and grant writing. The contract term is from January 1, 2021 thru December 31, 2023 for a total cost of \$69,993.00 with a municipal share of \$34,996.50.

***Motion:** To approve the Jenkintown Borough Planning Assistance Contract, by Mr. Kline, seconded by Ms. Flaharty, and approved by all present.*

V. Formation of Montco 2040 Implementation Grant Committee, Montgomery Awards Committee and the Transportation Grant Program Committee

Steven Kline appointed board members to serve on the Montco 2040 Implementation Grant Committee, the Montgomery Awards Committee and the Transportation Grant Program committee as follows:

Montco 2040 Implementation Grant Committee – Steven Kline, Dulcie Flaharty, Charlie Torretta, Jill Blumhardt

Montgomery Awards Committee – Steven Kline, John Ernst, Obed Arango

Transportation Grant Program Committee – Dulcie Flaharty, Robert Blue, Obed Arango

VI. 2020 Annual Summary of Land Development

Presenter: Daniel Farina

Daniel Farina presented an overview of the 2020 Annual Summary of Land Development. The report lists the new proposal activity for subdivision, land development, and zoning submitted to the Planning Commission. These are proposals and not actual construction activity and the report is used as a tool to indicate where development can be expected in the future. The total number of proposal submissions for 2020 was 403 which was a decrease of 9.2% from 2019. This is not considered a significant drop considering the disruptions due to the pandemic. Mr. Farina displayed a map of the county that showed the geographic distribution of the proposals by municipality. The map revealed that there was activity spread throughout the county with the most submissions in Lower Merion, Upper Merion and Horsham. The submitted proposals totaled 805 Acres which was a significant decrease from the prior year. Mr. Farina said that 57% of the total proposed acreage was residential, 23% industrial, and 12% commercial. The total nonresidential proposed acreage was 334 which was a decrease from 2019 but still a significant amount primarily due to large-scale industrial proposals. The residential proposals included 2,236 units which was a significant decrease from the prior year and likely due to the pandemic. The multifamily residential type continues to represent the highest number of units followed by single family attached. Mr. Farina spoke in detail about the ten top residential proposals which were spread across the county and included 610 units in Bridgeport, 274 units in Horsham, and 179 units in East Norriton. The 2020 Annual Summary also details nonresidential development proposals by square footage. Montgomery County had a total of 2,681,190 square feet of nonresidential development proposed. Although this was a 38% drop from 2019 it is still indicative of a stable market. The nonresidential proposals include commercial, industrial, institutional, and office types. Industrial proposals account for almost half of the total square feet proposed in 2020 with commercial at 29% and Institutional at 22%. In summary, the 2020 Annual Summary of Land Development Report reveals a relatively stable market considering the economic disruption due to the pandemic. There were over 2,200 housing units proposed and 2.6M square feet of nonresidential proposals.

VII. Farmland Preservation Program Annual Summary

Presenter: Steve Zbyszinski

Steve Zbyszinski provided an overview of the Farmland Preservation Program Annual Summary for 2020. The preservation program in Montgomery County was established in 1990 and allows for the purchase of agricultural easements. The purchase guarantees that the farms will continue being used for agriculture and can never be developed for another use. Over the last 30+ years the program has preserved 10,196 acres on 177 farms. A Montgomery County map was displayed that highlighted all the farms that have been permanently preserved since the beginning of the program and the farms that are enrolled in a local ASA. Mr. Zbyszinski provided a detailed summary of the seven farms that were preserved in 2020. The seven preserved farms are located in Perkiomen/Schwenksville, Franconia, Upper Hanover, Plymouth and New Hanover. During 2020, the Montgomery County Farmland Preservation Program received nine new applications for consideration and the Farm Board presented offers to eight farm owners. Five farms, totaling 225 acres, have accepted the offers and a map was displayed that showed where they are located in the county. Mr. Zbyszinski shared that the Planning Commission hosted an online webinar last year about the Preservation Program. The main topics included the importance of farming, farming in Montgomery County, the benefits of the program and how to apply for the program. He also spoke about the Stalk Talk newsletter that is produced bi-annually and about the latest spring edition coming out shortly. The Stalk Talk and other reference information about the program are available on our website. The next Keep Farming conference is currently in the planning phase and is expected to occur in 2022. This will be the 6th event of this kind that will be offered by Montgomery County. The conference will focus on the farming industry and related topics that would encourage investment in farming. Topics covered can include soil health, ways to market a farm and farm operations. Mr. Zbyszinski ended his presentation with a celebration video that commemorates the milestone reached last year of preserving 10,000 farms. This was an important milestone that helps to promote the importance of agriculture for the next generation.

VIII. KOP Rail Project

Presenter: Matthew Edmond, Eric Jarrell; Pattie Guttenplan; Guest: Jody Holton, Assistant General Manager, Planning, SEPTA; Ryan Judge, Manager, Strategic Planning, SEPTA; Greg May, Vice President, PA Office Leader, HNTB

Matthew Edmond introduced the SEPTA team and HNTB consultants who are working to advance the KOP Rail project. Mr. Judge provided some initial context about the KOP Rail project. The rail project is a four mile extension of the existing Norristown High Speed Line to the King of Prussia area. This project is critical for the area's economy as it connects the region's major employment centers in Philadelphia, University City and King of Prussia. There are approximately 60,000 jobs in the KOP area making it the highest outside of the City of Philadelphia. Currently commuters, which include residents, workers, shoppers, students and visitors, must drive on congested roadways to travel from Center City to KOP, or they can take certain SEPTA bus routes that use these same roads and have some of the worst on-time performance in the SEPTA system. The trip currently takes about 70 minutes by car. The addition of KOP Rail would reduce the travel time from Center City Philadelphia to 45 minutes each way. The KOP Rail extension would provide a connection to Center City via the Norristown High Speed Line (NHSL) and the Market-Frankford Line (MFL) with a connection at the 69th Street Transportation Center. The extension would be four miles long with five station stops and would run every 10 minutes during peak hours. This reliable transit option can provide opportunity to our region for access to jobs and the colleges that are along the existing line and the new extension. The cost estimate of the project is approximately \$2 billion which is similar to other new rail projects of this size and scale. Funding for the project will come from various government sources, public and private partners as well as innovative financing options. Mr. Judge discussed the project timeline and stated that they have completed 15% of the design and have completed the Final Environmental Impact Statement which completes the federal review requirement. These are great accomplishments as they work towards the next milestones which includes the 20 year financial plan, 30% of engineering and transit-oriented development (TOD) planning. Public input has been an integral part of this process with over 100 public meetings and workshops, which have directly contributed to the design and current alignment of the KOP Rail. Greg May, from HNTB, is the lead engineer for the project and spoke in detail about the refined route and rationale of the five proposed stations. He displayed a video that provided a 3D image of a trip from the 69th Street Station and a rendering of each of the five proposed stations included in the project. The five stops will be at Henderson Road Station, Allendale Road Station, Mall Boulevard Station, First and American Station, and the final stop will be the First Ave and Moore Rd/Valley Forge Station. Mr. May provided detailed information about the amenities, features, parking, connections, ADA accessibilities and elevator access at each of the stations. Additional information about the KOP Rail project is available at www.KingofPrussiaRail.com. The next step for the project is to progress design and to prepare a Transit-Oriented Development Study. Eric Jarrell and Pattie Guttenplan spoke about the Moore Park Master Plan as it pertains to the KOP rail project. The Planning Commission Board thanked SEPTA and HNTB for the great presentation and are looking forward to future updates.

IX. Lower Salford Township Contract Presentation

Presenter: Claire Warner

Claire Warner provided an overview of the planning assistance contract for Lower Salford Township. Lower Salford is in the western part of the county with a population of 15,364 residents and steadily growing. It is part of the Indian Valley Regional Planning Commission. Ms. Warner spoke about the demographic data and displayed the land use maps of the township and region. The township is predominately single family detached and has a significant amount of public and private open space and agricultural areas. They also have a significant amount of public park areas and an extensive multiuse trail system. Lower Salford has four villages Vernfield, Harleysville, Mainland and Lederach. During the previous contract the planning commission worked on a comprehensive update of the SALDO which was adopted in 2020. Ms. Warner spoke in detail about the three large development proposals that were reviewed during the previous contract. The first proposed development will have 62 units of twins and triplex's on 12.34 acres; the second is a 48 single family detached home proposal on 43.24 acres with a lot of recreation connections; the last proposal is a mixed use development with residential and retail space on 44 acres. Ms. Warner spoke about the current contract work that will include a zoning ordinance update; trail connection planning and development reviews.

X. Director's Report

1. Scott France shared that we currently have four open positions. We are currently interviewing and hope to fill those positions soon.
2. Mr. France announced that the Planning Perspectives newsletter that was previously published quarterly will now publish monthly. This newsletter includes a variety of planning related information, local events and grant opportunities.
3. The Planning Commission is finalizing the Planning Smarter Program of events which will be available at the end of February. The first event will be the Trail Diversity & Awareness Study which will be held virtually at the end of April.
4. Mr. France provided an update on St. Gabriel Hall which has been put up for sale by the Archdioceses. A meeting was organized between that included the stakeholders, the Township, Natural Lands and the National Park Service.
5. Mr. France acknowledged Matthew Popek who is on the events subcommittee of the APA PA South East Section.
6. There is an upcoming tri-county meeting with Berks, Chester and Montgomery County to discuss the Schuylkill Valley Rail Project which has gained some momentum. A proposal has been made to form an exploratory committee with the three counties.
7. The Calendar of Events from February 9, 2021 to March 9, 2021 was distributed for board review. Mr. France highlighted the Upper Gwynedd 2040 Comprehensive Plan virtual public workshop on February 17th. Then, on February 16th ULI will have a virtual event called Walking the Talk on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The Commerce Department will be presenting an internal virtual event to discuss Workforce Data and Planning on February 19th. Finally, on February 24th there will be a virtual Ridge Pike Project meeting for public officials at 1:00 and then a public webinar event at 7:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00.

The next Board meeting will be on March 10, 2021 at 9:00 AM.