



## MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

**MINUTES:** Regular Monthly Board Meeting  
Wednesday, March 10, 2021  
Approved: May 12, 2021

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

**STAFF ATTENDING:** Scott France, Matthew Edmond, Pattie Guttenplan, Bill Hartman, Matt Popek, Aaron Holly, Mike Lowrey, Ellen Miramontes, John Marlatt, Karina Caddick

**GUESTS:** Harold Windisch, P.E., Assistant District Executive for Construction, PennDOT District 6-0; David Bryant Morgan, Ambler resident; Kim Haymans-Geisler, West Norriton resident; Tamara Holt, Executive Brand Ambassador, AVE by Korman Communities

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### I. Call to Order/Board Comments

Steven Kline called the Board meeting to order.

Steven Kline introduced Johnathan Rinde as a new member of the MCPC board. Mr. Rinde recently retired after 31 years as a lawyer at the law firm of Manko, Gold, Katcher, & Fox. Prior to becoming a lawyer he was an environmental planner. He will be stepping down from the MCPC Farm board after 26 years of service to join the Planning Commission Board.

Steven Kline also welcomed Nicole Kline-Elsier as a new MCPC board member. Ms. Kline-Elsier is a Regional Service Leader for Traffic at McMahon Associates. She has worked at McMahon, a transportation engineering firm, for almost 19 years. Ms. Kline is a Lower Pottsgrove resident and is looking forward to serving on the Planning Commission Board.

### II. Minutes of February 10, 2021

The minutes from the February 10, 2021 regular Board meeting were approved by the Board.

***Motion:** To approve the February 10, 2021 Board minutes, by Mr. Kline, seconded by Mr. Ernst, and approved by all present.*

### III. Public Comment

David Bryant Morgan from Ambler, PA made a comment regarding Affordable Housing. He referenced the Montco 2040 Report and was interested in more information about transit oriented development in Norristown around Main and Lafayette Streets. He wonders if some of the funding for the justice center can be devoted to affordable housing and to revitalize high density areas. Mr. France responded and spoke about a Strategic Plan that is underway that should be available before the end of the year. There is a lot of opportunity and TOD and we hope that there will be development interest for affordable as well as market rate housing. Additionally, board members spoke about infrastructure updates like the turnpike slip ramp and a rail extension from Norristown to King of Prussia. These developments can create more opportunities for the residents of Norristown. The board does acknowledge that there needs to be more focus on low income and affordable housing and also a focus on the inequities for minorities which has been highlighted during the pandemic.

#### **IV. Major PennDOT Projects Update**

Presenter: Matt Edmond; Guest: Harold Windisch, P.E., Assistant District Executive for Construction, PennDOT District 6-0

Matthew Edmond introduced Harold Windisch from PennDOT who will be providing an update on two major PennDOT projects. The two transportation projects are located in Upper Merion and Norristown. Mr. Windisch provided a summary of the Schuylkill River Crossing Complex Transportation Projects and provided some historical background. He spoke specifically about improvements that began construction in 2016 after nearly two decades in design. The scope of the work involved five bridges including US422 over the Schuylkill River, two highway interchanges, installation of a sound barrier wall, two retaining walls, Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) connections, concrete pavement and also drainage enhancements. The funding for most of these projects was made with Act 89 transportation funds. The current contract value for the Schuylkill River bridge and the PA 23 interchange is over \$97M and will be completed in May 2021. Mr. Windisch also provided a summary of a section of the Markley Street construction in Norristown. This part of the Markley Street construction is from Main Street to Elm Street, where the previous construction left off in 2016. The construction also includes about 700 feet past Main Street on the Dannehower Bridge and sections of Main Street. The construction began in January 2020 for a contract value of almost \$23M. The timeline was disrupted due to the COVID pandemic but will be completed by October 2022. Mr. Windisch stated that the Markley St. project scope includes rebuilding the existing 4 lane roadway between Main and Marshall Streets. They will reconstruct and widen Markley Street between Marshall and Elm Streets; and also on Main Street between Water and Barbadoes Streets. The construction will replace two bridges and will rehabilitate another. Other upgrades include railroad crossings, traffic signals and ITS components. The upgrades also include new concrete sidewalks with ADA-compliant ramps. Currently, they are working on the northbound side of Markley. This project was funded at 80% Federal and 20% State. Mr. Windisch spoke about future PennDOT projects in the Norristown and King of Prussia areas that are planned which are on North Gulph Road (US 422 River Crossing Complex Section 2NG); Route 202 from Johnson Hwy to Swede Road (US 202 Section 61S); and sections of Route 422 are being studied now for active lane management. Mr. Edmond mentioned there are similar future efforts to add technology to the I76 Schuylkill Expressway to actively manage lanes there, too. The Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) brochure was distributed over chat to the MCPC board for their review of all the projects in design in Montgomery County.

#### **V. County Transportation Grant Program Update**

Presenter: Matthew Popek

Matthew Popek provided a summary of the County Transportation Grant Program. This is a competitive grant program to improve locally owned transportation infrastructure. Funding for the program comes from the \$5 vehicle registration fee. About two thirds of the fee collected each year goes to fund county assets and \$1M is set aside annually for this program. Montgomery County has 62 municipalities, and 21 of them contain no county owned roads or bridges. The transportation grant program benefits municipal-owned roads, bridges and signals which are normally funded by municipal Liquid Fuels payments or general funds. These funds have recently declined. The overall goal of the program is to equitably distribute the vehicle registration revenue across the 62 municipalities and to improve the County's transportation infrastructure investments. Mr. Popek provided a summary of the awards for the first three rounds, from 2018 to 2020. There was a total of \$2.9M granted for 29 projects in 21 municipalities. A status summary of the awarded projects was provided to the board. We are currently approaching the fourth year of the program and anticipate Commissioner approval for grants up to \$1 million, which has been set aside in the 2021 County Capital Budget. Similar to previous years, only municipalities can apply for a transportation grant, but they can partner with a private organization. The funds must be used for actual construction activities, with a maximum award of \$500,000. There is a local match requirement of 20% for the first \$200,000 and 50% match for anything above the \$200,000 up to the \$500,000 maximum. Mr. Popek spoke in detail about the review criteria that municipalities should consider when presenting their applications. The new County Transportation Grant Program guidebook will be available on our website beginning on April 1st. Municipalities will have the months of June and July to submit their applications for consideration. Then, the review board will spend August and September reviewing the applications. We anticipate that the County Commissioners will be able to award the grants in October.

**VI. Schwenksville Borough Community Planning Assistance Presentation**

Presenter: Aaron Holly

Aaron Holly presented an overview of the Schwenksville Borough Community Planning Assistance Contract. Schwenksville is in the western part of the county and part of the Central Perkiomen Regional Planning Commission. Mr. Holly spoke about the demographics of the borough and displayed the land use map. The borough has a downtown Main Street area with residential, mixed use, retail and office space. The main attraction for Schwenksville is its open space, which includes the popular Perkiomen Trail and Meadow Park. Previous contract work included a comprehensive zoning update and initial work for a SALDO update. Other work included creating a map of Meadow Park, which highlights the improvements in the area. The recent improvements included the construction of a new Borough Hall and Community Center, the Fire Co. Museum, a Main Street Mural, additional parking, walking paths, and a boat ramp for users of the Perkiomen Creek and Perkiomen Water Trail. Mr. Holly spoke in detail about the zoning updates which included design and streetscape standards and also updated use regulations and coded uses into categories. The current contract work will include a continuation of the subdivision and land development ordinance update, and an audit of the Revitalization Plan and revitalization efforts. Schwenksville's focus is to encourage and support the growth of businesses on Main Street. The Borough is currently considering a Main Street Business Overlay district to promote active commercial uses that help attract users of the Perkiomen Trail to visit Main Street.

**VII. Ambler Borough Planning Assistance Presentation**

Presenter: Mike Lowrey

Mike Lowrey provided an overview of the Ambler Borough Planning Assistance contract. Ambler is about one square mile and located in the eastern part of Montgomery County. Mr. Lowrey presented a summary of the demographics and reviewed the current land use and zoning. Ambler is a popular commercial destination with a walkable retail corridor, several public parks, and is serviced by a SEPTA regional rail station. The borough is known for its diversity of population, land use, transportation options, and varied residential design forms. The previous contract included an update of the Open Space Plan, zoning ordinance updates, as well as a pocket park design which is currently under construction. Mr. Lowrey spoke about the recent projects and code amendments which included stormwater, telecommunications, and mural ordinance revisions. Ambler Square, the pocket park to be completed this year, will serve as a multi-use area for public gathering on the Butler Avenue corridor. Recent development projects included a proposed bank on Butler Avenue which will be located across from the Ambler Station. The borough also recently adopted a resolution to transition to 100% renewable energy by 2050. Consequently, a strategic plan including policy guidance for this transition was produced by borough officials, the Planning Commission, and MCPC. Additional recent work includes a study of borough parks analyzing the provision of active recreation amenities at each park. Playgrounds, athletic courts, trails, and public access are being presented for public discussion at several workshops hosted by the Planning Commission. The workshops and subsequent planning effort will identify the current conditions at each park and provide recommendations for improvements. The Planning Commission is also assisting on a streetscape design for Pickering Field which includes sidewalk improvements, a potential road diet, and an analysis of the existing street trees. The current contract scope includes continuing public engagement work for the Parks Study; design for the Pickering Field streetscape; stormwater management and ongoing zoning and SALDO amendments.

**VIII. Montgomery Awards 2021**

Presenter: Pattie Guttenplan

Pattie Guttenplan provided an update of the Montgomery Awards Program for the 2021 season. The request for nominations will run thru March 31<sup>st</sup> which is a little early as we plan for additional technical elements for this year's awards ceremony. The Montgomery Awards Program is an annual event that recognizes the best in planning, design, environmental sustainability and advocacy in Montgomery County. There are three awards: the Montgomery Award, the Environmental Stewardship Award and the Planning Advocate Award. The Montgomery Award recognizes projects in the categories of land development, revitalization, open space, environmental and transportation. The Planning Advocate Award recognizes citizens and/or organizations that have made significant contributions in advancing planning efforts. Finally, the Environmental Stewardship Award in partnership with the Montgomery County Conservation District looks for projects completed in the last three years that illustrates the practices of environmental stewardship and conservation for water and soil quality. Ms. Guttenplan spoke about the history of the program which has presented 222 Montgomery Awards since its inception in 1967. She also provided

the criteria's and examples of previous winners to illustrate what the awards committee and commissioners are looking for in nominations.

#### **IX. Return on Environment study kick off**

Presenter: Bill Hartman; Ellen Miramontes

Bill Hartman and Ellen Miramontes provided an overview of the Return on Environment study. The purpose of this study is to examine the economic value of protected open space in Montgomery County. For the development of this study, the Planning Commission is working in partnership with DVRPC, Econsult Solutions, Inc. (ESI), and a 30-member Advisory Committee chaired by Dulcie Flaharty. Ms. Miramontes explained that protected open space includes parks, trails, preserved farmland, and open space preserved by land trusts. The study will assess the economic value of protected open space in four ways: home and property values, economic activity, environmental services, and health and recreation. Recent similar studies from the region include: a 2011 Return on Environment study by DVRPC and GreenSpace Alliance which examined the economic value of protected open space in the nine-county DVRPC region; and a 2019 Return on Environment study by the Chester County Planning Commission. A DCNR grant was awarded for this study and Montgomery County has agreed to provide matching funds as well as technical support. Ms. Miramontes reviewed the study process and timeline. The final report, which will be available later this year, will include four case studies. The final products will include a summary brochure, the final report, and a slide presentation to share our findings.

#### **X. Director's Report**

1. Scott France announced that we have hired a Principal Transportation Planner, Laureen Sendel-Grant, who will join the Planning Commission next week. Mr. France also shared that two positions have been accepted but are awaiting Salary Board approval. They are for a Community Planner II and County Planner I. We are still accepting application for a Transportation Planner I that needs to be filled.
2. Mr. France also announced that we two interns Julianne Smith, a Temple University Geology major; and Catherine Lee from Oberlin College majoring in Law and Sociology.
3. The APA PA State Annual Conference will be held in Pittsburg this year. They are planning for an in person event in October. The Planning Commission has submitted four presentations for the conference which are pending approval. They include one on Local Trail Building, Restart Montco efforts, Complete Streets Implementation, and Heat Islands and Vulnerability Analysis.
4. Mr. France provided an update on the Montco 2040 Grant Program. The application period ended on March 1<sup>st</sup> and we received 31 applications for a total \$4M. There is approximately \$2.5M available for distribution. The grant recipients are generally announced at the May Commissioners Board Meeting.
5. Mr. France spoke about and displayed the Planning Smarter brochure for 2021. The popular PMPEI Planning Courses will be held virtually this year. The first event Happy Trails! Planning and Designing Trails for All Users is be held virtually on April 29<sup>th</sup>. Mr. France encourage all interested to attend these events.
6. Mr. France shared the round 2 results of the Montgomery County COVID-19 Municipal Manager Survey. The questions are similar to what was asked in the first round in May 2020 and relate to the impacts as a result of the pandemic. Mr. France presented the results of the survey for the board. There were 40 respondents to the survey and the analysis was also compared to a national survey.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12:00.*

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***The next MCPC Board meeting will be on April 14, 2021 at 9:00 AM***