

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Tom McKeon called the monthly meeting of the Berks County Planning Commission to order at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was held on Wednesday, October 13, 2021 as a virtual meeting using the platform Microsoft Teams.

The following members were present:

Thomas C. McKeon, Chair
Jodi L. Gauker, Vice-Chair
James A. Adams, Secretary
Glenn R. Knoblauch
James C. McCarthy
Lee C. Olsen, AIA, NCARB
Douglas P. Rauch, Esq.
Christopher J. Spohn
David H. Turner

Also Attending:

Heidi B. Masano, Solicitor
Cheryl A. Auchenbach, Planner III
Beth Burkovich, GIS Analyst
Shanice E. Ellison, Planner I
Michelle D. Franklin, Subdivision Planner III
Michael D. Golembiewski, Trans. Modeler
Devon B. Hain, Trans. Planner II
David N. Hunter, Sr., AICP, Executive Director
Matthew F. McGough, Intergovernmental Planner
Alan D. Piper, Transportation Planner III
Ashley J. Showers, Assistant Director
Amanda M. Timochenko, Planner II
Pauline R. Klopp, Office Support IV
Information System Production
Jeremy Zaborowski, BCIDA
Commissioner Michael Rivera

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

3. REPORTS OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

A. Executive Director's Report

David Hunter spoke about the presentation on the Downtown Plus Strategic Plan by the consultant Stantec. He asked the commission members if they wanted to deliberate on this presentation. As the meeting was going on, he forwarded an email containing all of the comments and questions that were asked during the presentation for the commission members to look at.

Chris Spohn mentioned that he is on the Church Council at Christ Episcopal Church at Fifth and Court Streets and they recognized that the Plan itself is centered around moving back to a town square at Fifth and Penn Streets with a walkability area on Court Street which puts the church in the keystone of that plan. The church is in the middle of doing asset mapping to see what the church can do to provide support for the downtown.

David Hunter mentioned asking the consultant, Stantec, if they could make a presentation to the Planning Commission and possibly the Redevelopment Authority and Industrial Development Authority. Jodi Gauker would welcome recommendations as to how the Planning Commission could help facilitate the plan. David Turner and Glenn Knoblauch agreed with Ms. Gauker's statement. Lee Olsen stated that he supports the Planning Commission being involved. He mentioned that he will speak with Jamal Abodalo.

Discussion ensued on the implementation of this plan and the lack of implementation of previous plans that were done.

Mr. Hunter stated that we will discuss this again at next month's meeting.

Mr. Hunter mentioned that Pam Shupp will be giving the Commission an update on Imagine Berks at one of the upcoming meetings. Lee Olsen asked if there was any interim information the Commission could be given on Imagine Berks. Mr. Hunter mentioned that there is a website: ImagineBerks.com.

Mr. Hunter updated the Commission on the Tri-County Passenger Rail Committee. They have hosted three informational sessions with elected and appointed officials from the municipalities along the route from Reading to Philadelphia. Mr. Hunter stated that he will share the power point presentation with the Commission via email.

Mr. Hunter gave an update on ARP funding in the County. The Board of County Commissioners have formed various sub-committees to discuss how to appropriately spend the money. One of the committees is discussing providing broadband countywide. He mentioned that he will keep the commission updated.

Mr. Hunter updated the Commission on the Freight Study Berks is working on with other counties. Currently a scope of work is being completed and it is hoped to have an RFP by the end of the year.

Mr. Hunter informed the Commission that a few staff had attend the Greenway Conference in Erie PA and he and a few staff will be attending the PA APA conference in Pittsburgh.

4. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes of September 8, 2021

B. DCED MTF Application and PennDOT MTF Application for Governor Mifflin School District Secondary Campus Transportation Improvements

The Berks County Planning Commission had received a request for a letter of compliance from Governor Mifflin School District (GMSD) for the above application to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Multimodal Transportation Fund and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) Multimodal Transportation Fund.

Project Description:

The proposed project consists of multiple roadway and intersection improvements that would enhance multimodal safety at Governor Mifflin School District's Secondary Campus. The proposed road and intersection improvements along South Waverly Street within the Borough of Shillington include: installing new sidewalks, reconfiguring curbing for crosswalks at all intersections, installing sidewalks to access the community athletic center, paving for crosswalks, widening paving access at Mifflin Boulevard, creating a new entrance drive at southern connection drive to Mifflin Boulevard. The school district is requesting a grant in support of these improvements.

Project Findings:

The grant will enhance multimodal safety for the benefit of community members, students, and faculty. The improvements proposed as part of this project coordinate with a number of facility improvements at the GMSD Secondary Campus to assist in the Secondary Campus becoming a hub of community recreation. The total cost of the entire project is \$62 million, with the main piece being the construction of the Community Athletic Center designed for recreational use by students and community members. The overall project is estimated to create 341 construction jobs in which direct employee compensation is estimated to exceed \$16.7 million. The overall project will also support an additional 183 jobs in the regional economy and generate over \$3 million in state and local taxes.

The transportation improvements proposed under this grant are estimated at \$891,608.60 with a request for \$620,000 and the remainder being covered locally by Governor Mifflin School District. These improvements are anticipated to create 5 construction jobs, support 3 indirect and induced jobs in the regional economy, result in nearly \$1,300,000 in total economic output, and generate over \$144,000 in state and local taxes.

The Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 identifies the majority of this area as an Existing Development Area in Shillington Borough. Within this area, the plan notes that:

“A variety of reinvestment, rehabilitation, and revitalization efforts, will be promoted to take advantage of the extensive infrastructure network in place, to improve the tax base of the urban centers, and keep our older urban areas vibrant. Municipalities are encouraged to create public/private partnerships that jointly support a community-driven comprehensive strategy to revitalize, stabilize and grow older neighborhoods.”

The Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 identifies the southeast corner of the South Waverly Street and South Brobst Street intersection as a Designated Growth Area in Shillington Borough. Within this area, the plan notes that:

“Designated Growth Areas are intended to be multi-purpose activity areas characterized by concentrated density and suburban/urban development. These areas are currently suitable for medium/high density development due to the presence of the necessary public infrastructure services in place.”

Additionally, the Plan’s Transportation Goal is to “provide and maintain a balanced, multimodal transportation system that will safely and efficiently move people and goods.” This goal is supported by policies that encourage redevelopment in existing developed areas that incorporate design elements that include appropriate bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Recommendations:

The Multimodal Transportation Fund application process requires applicants to provide a letter from the appropriate planning agency certifying that the proposed project is in compliance with the comprehensive land use plans.

C. Reports for Approval

- Land Development & Subdivision Activity Report & Summary
- Endorsed Land Development & Subdivision Activity Report

MOTION: Jim McCarthy made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Doug Rauch and passed unanimously.

5. Staff and Stakeholder Reports

A. Census 2020 Update

Michael Golembiewski spoke about the release of the PL 94-171 Legislative Redistricting File which contains detailed information on total persons, voting-age population, race/Hispanic origin, total housing units - occupied vs. vacant by block level. He mentioned this information is being used to redraw all of the legislative boundaries.

Mr. Golembiewski gave a history on the population trends in Berks County and the City of Reading. Berks County’s growth from 2000 to 2010 was comparable with surrounding counties however, from 2010 to 2020 all the surrounding counties, except Schuylkill, were growing without Berks. Overall, from 2010 to 2020, 63% of municipalities in Berks grew and 37% declined. He mentioned that within the last 10 years the larger municipalities tend to be the

ones to grow, although some of the rural areas are now becoming suburbanized. Otherwise there was the usual increase in suburban areas and a decrease in rural areas.

Mr. Golembiewski stated that another outcome of the 2020 census is that Berks County has become more diverse. The Caucasian population decreased, and persons of Hispanic origin increased. The Census also shows a trend over the last few decades in that the County and the City of Reading are continuing to get older. The under age 18 category has been declining since 2000 in the County and that has implications for the school districts. This also affects the workforce as fewer young people would be coming into the workforce and more retirements are leaving the workforce.

Discussion on housing trends ensued. More detailed information is scheduled to come out in 2022.

6. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: David Turner made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:59 p.m.

Thomas C. McKeon, Chairman

James A. Adams, Secretary