

The monthly meeting of the Lower Moreland Township Planning Commission was held on the above date in the meeting room of the Township Municipal Building. Present were Messrs. Pollock, Krebs, Costello, Chapman, Ms. Friedrich Fogel, Ms. Souder, Planner Driscoll, Commissioners Devinney and Kuritz, Manager Mellor, Assistant Manager Elton and Clerk Matyas.

Chairman Pollock called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The minutes of the June 26, 2008 Planning Commission meeting, were approved as submitted.

Philmont Avenue Corridor & Greenway Study Presentation presented by Mr. Bob Thomas and Mr. Mike Szilagy, Campbell Thomas & Co., they displayed a slideshow of the proposal. Mr. Thomas noted that the Corridor started Industrial but has changed over time. Mr. Thomas explained that he was looking at the Philmont Corridor to make it walkable. Mr. Thomas stated there is a lot of funding available to help with this project including connecting to other funded projects like the Pennypack trails.

Mr. Thomas talked about creating sidewalks to connect with existing sidewalks for a continuous path. Mr. Thomas noted that with the zoning recommendations and the area becoming walkable it will help the community by making current and future businesses more accessible.

Mr. Thomas explained that the historical locations in this area are disconnected and this proposal will help reconnect them. Mr. Thomas noted that the construction in this area is by default, each property being done one at a time and now the Township is looking at trying to create a plan that makes sense. Mr. Thomas talked about the congestion and unsafe walking conditions that exist along side large areas of open space. Mr. Thomas noted the open space has become spread out and this proposal will reconnect it.

Mr. Thomas recommended the Greenway Trail, sidewalks that complete gaps and creating zoning districts that are designed for walking but also accommodate parking. Mr. Thomas talked about the possible looks of the proposal. Mr. Thomas noted that the flooding issues will not be solved with this proposal but can be slightly improved.

Mr. Thomas explained the Greenway Trail can help people get to public transportation and work, not just for enjoyment purposes. Mr. Thomas noted that people see all the density of the area but they also need to be shown the open space.

Mr. Thomas discussed trail and sidewalk locations and how they all connected.

Mr. Thomas talked about creating zoning districts to encourage businesses the Township wants not just to restrict the area from what is not wanted.

Mr. Thomas explained that the commercial trains in this area are gone for the most part. Mr. Thomas noted the Township has more commuter trains and trying to give the passengers more information and safer ways of getting around is an important part of this plan.

Mr. Thomas talked about the proposed Village Center image, the height of the buildings and the common look and feel that would tie into the proposed plan.

Mr. Thomas explained that median strips with shrubs can be placed along large intersections to help pedestrians cross the high traffic streets. Mr. Thomas also discussed adding landscaping and tree canopies to help increase comfort for pedestrians.

Mr. Thomas noted that creating a build to line rather than a setback can create a more comfortable/social feel along with helping local businesses.

Mr. Thomas explained that with the increase of commuters on trains, parking problems will occur within the Township, so that will need to be addressed.

Mr. Thomas noted that in the proposal, there are about 12 pages with funding information along with whom, when and how the funding should happen.

Mr. Thomas talked about the proposed plan phases and discussed why it was broken down and explained the estimated costs of each phase.

Mr. Thomas noted that phases can move around depending on different circumstances, for example getting extra grant money.

Mr. Thomas explained that working with other Municipalities is a good way to get projects done; Mr. Thomas noted that there was a recent meeting with Bryn Athyn Borough where common projects were discussed.

Mr. Thomas discussed all the different agencies and programs that offer funding that needs to be looked into for this proposal.

Mr. Thomas talked about the players involved with this proposal including local government, surrounding municipalities, local school district, County government and Regional agencies and State and Federal agencies. Mr. Thomas explained that property owners and business need to be apart of the plan, because they will both directly benefit from this proposal.

Mr. Thomas noted that often property owners or business owner will ask for a waiver of certain items like sidewalks because they claim no one walks there, but if there is an adopted plan, they will have to install it as a part of the bigger picture.

Mr. Pollock questioned the sidewalk improvements and who would be responsible for the right of way. Mr. Thomas noted that it would depend on if it was apart of grant funds or a land development application, so it could be the landowner or the Township.

Mr. Thomas explained that continuous improvement must happen and there are short term and long terms goals included in this project. Mr. Thomas noted the proposal includes what should be done the first year and what items will take more time. Mr. Thomas stated some things that should happen immediately; a committee should be created, funds should be

applied for and work should be started with the County and their existing trail project. Mr. Thomas continued to explain some short term goals that should be examined.

Mr. Thomas noted that having a plan for desired businesses will help when changing zoning and building codes.

Planning Commission Comments

Mr. Costello, a member of the Philmont Corridor Committee, commented that a lot of work and time was put into this project. Mr. Costello noted this project will help with the look of Philmont Avenue where a lot of vacant buildings exist. Mr. Costello talked about the Township not having many commercial areas so changing zoning in this area would help.

Mr. Thomas explained that mixed use zoning will help with the village center proposal and noted the different areas it should be applied.

Mr. Pollock commented that these properties have issues with flooding, stormwater management, and wetlands which will make them a challenge to rebuild.

Mr. Costello stated that this project needs to start right away rather than letting more and more years pass.

Mr. Krebs commented that the study is good and thorough and this issue really needs to be looked into.

Mr. Chapman mentioned he is close to the trail system and he leads hikes in the area and liked the proposed trail system. Mr. Chapman explained that rezoning of Philmont Avenue needs to be the focus because there is no need for industrial use there, it should be commercial.

Mr. Costello explained that the train stations areas need to have more commercial uses. Mr. Costello noted that more residents would stay in the Township for purchasing and receiving goods if they were available.

Mr. Pollock noted that at the time a storage facility was a good choice but in the bigger picture it probably shouldn't have been in a major intersection.

Mrs. Souder noted that the Township is not walkable and she would love to see trails and paths. Mrs. Souder commented that along Huntingdon Pike lies much charm but because of no overall plan, several hairdressers were placed right next to each other. Mrs. Souder explained that no one is around on the weekends walking or riding bikes due to lack of trails and paths, plus no parking. Mrs. Souder noted this area has a nice rural feel where children can ride bikes, but due to an increase in traffic, safety is a big issue. Mrs. Souder talked about not wanting tall buildings. She likes the colonials that are all around to keep the small town feel.

Mr. Thomas explained the created zoning and building regulations would be needed to shape the image the Township desires. Mr. Thomas noted that multi-use buildings need to be implemented so the area does not shut down after working hours, for example four

banks at an intersection would not be desirable because once the banks close, the area is dead.

Mr. Thomas suggested the Township talk to the owners on Huntingdon Pike and discuss having the sidewalks moved away from the street and have trees and shrubs placed along the road. It would create a safer and more pleasant environment.

Mrs. Fogel recommended lighting too, the old gas style light posts, would help with walking around town. Mrs. Fogel loved the proposed plan and likes the fact that individual property owners will not be responsible for the sidewalks, but the Township through grant money.

Mr. Krebs explained that the Township residents need to be made aware of the upcoming Philmont Corridor and Greenway study meeting and Mr. Rick Mellor, Township Manager, noted that a mailing was done and flyers were posted around the Township. Mrs. Souder questioned if all residents received a flyer and Mr. Mellor explained that it would be too costly to mail to all residents but the flyer can be placed on the website.

Mr. Pollock questioned if the Township has looked into funding sources for this project and Mr. Mellor explained that he has been looking into funding from the beginning and working with Mr. Thomas's company the word got out that the Township is proposing this project.

Mrs. Souder noted that local residents would get very excited about this project and she feels that they are not being reached because a lot of the common areas the flyers were posted, people do not go to. There has to be a way to get the message out to residents.

Mr. Pollock suggested starting a process of obtaining resident emails so a massive email could be sent when meeting and important events are coming up.

Mr. Pollock suggested that more pictures be included in the presentation for a better understanding of the image trying to be achieved.

Mr. Thomas explained that he will bring some pictures of other projects he was involved in to go along with the presentation.

Mr. Pollock noted that more parking is needed to help with this project; bringing visitors into the Township will require having a place for them to park their vehicles so they can walk around.

Mrs. Souder explained that she takes her son to the train station for work and there is not enough parking, she lives within walking distance of the train station but it is not safe to walk. Mrs. Souder felt that this project should be done for the residents; not just possible visitors. She likes living in this area and with some improvements Lower Moreland Township will be more accessible for the residents.

Mr. Paul Driscoll, Township Planner, explained that the plan is great with good detail and the Township Staff is working on compatible zoning along the Philmont Avenue Corridor. Mr. Driscoll noted that a proposal of the re-zoning should be presented to the Planning Commission in a few months.

Mr. Pollock talked about the Planning Commission being involved in the re-zoning from the beginning rather than being presented with a proposal from Township Staff.

Mrs. Fogel commented that the Planning Commission should be able to actually plan.

Mr. Mellor explained that now the Planning Commission has the time to look into these things with the economy slowing things down, planning will get worked in the next couple meetings.

Mr. Pollock talked about having a plan for future developments so that there is more control of the look and feel of the Township. Mr. Pollock also talked about having incentives for developers and builders to come to this Township.

Mr. Driscoll explained that creating a built-to-line and compromising with density requirements can be incentives for builders.

Mr. Tim Woodrow, Township Engineer, commented that the mind set of deterring development must change, because development is needed in the Philmont Avenue Corridor. Mr. Woodrow noted that flooding is an issue, but it can be dealt with it, a good test case is a new proposal for the Huntingdon Valley Dinner Theater on Philmont Avenue which is right in the middle of floodway. Mr. Woodrow talked about the applicants needing to be creative with how to solve the flooding issues with that property. Mr. Woodrow noted that this property would benefit from revised zoning to possibly allow a taller building. Mr. Woodrow stated that this proposal will be at the Planning Commission soon for their review.

Mr. Costello talked about the applicant of the Huntingdon Valley Dinner Theater being in front of the zoning hearing board.

Mrs. Souder questioned Mr. Woodrow about the priority of the re-zoning since proposals are coming up and Mr. Woodrow explained that it is being looked into right now.

Mr. Pollock mentioned a traffic study should be done as a part of this proposal and Mr. Woodrow explained that a traffic study can be just as bad as good; once a study is imposed it can discourage development. Mr. Pollock suggested that a plan of some kind should be made so there is a larger scale for improvements rather than piece by piece.

Mr. Pollock questioned if this plan will benefit bicyclists as well and Mr. Thomas responded that there will be trails and sidewalks for bikers and walkers.

Mr. Pollock talked about moving ahead with this plan and asked Mr. Thomas how to start. Mr. Thomas explained that connecting the Bethayres station to Philmont Avenue would be a great start. Mr. Thomas also suggested starting with creating the brochures mentioned in the proposal and figuring out what businesses are missing from the area.

Commissioner Kuritz commented that she would like to see a small, quaint hotel in this Township for people dropping their kids off to college or visiting family.

Mr. Mellor commented that he was glad to hear the Planning Commission's enthusiasm and knows they want their comments and ideas included in any plans. Mr. Mellor noted that he will try to attend Planning Commission Meeting but Mrs. Randee Elton, Assistant Township Manager, will be attending meetings as a representative of the Township. Mr. Mellor also mentioned that in the future applicants submitting a subdivision or land development application will have a PDF file of the plans which will be projected on the screen in the meeting room.

Mr. Thomas suggested providing a grant calendar to help keep track of when grant applications are due and what is coming up.

Mr. Pollock suggested getting State Representatives involved and Mr. Mellor replied that they have been apart of this process.

Mr. Krebs made a motion to recommend the study as presented and have it implemented as quickly as possible.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Fogel and Mr. Costello, Mr. Chapman, Mr. Pollock and Mrs. Souder vote aye and the motion was carried.

Legislative Review

Mr. Pollock questioned the progress with the Philmont Country Club proposal and Mr. Woodrow explained they appeared in front of the Board of Commissioners and the Board gave them a sense that they are willing to work with them. Mr. Woodrow talked about Philmont Country Club's zoning amendment proposal.

Mrs. Fogel questioned if the re-zoning or the ideas for re-zoning will be ready for this project and Mr. Woodrow replied no. Mrs. Fogel asked if they could be postponed and Mr. Pollock replied the proposals are only sketch plans, no voting will take place. Mrs. Elton clarified that the Philmont Country Club proposal is for a zoning amendment and commented that the President of Philmont Country Club is on the Philmont Avenue Corridor Committee.

Commissioner Devinney noted that the Country Club is having financial difficulties and they are trying to help them with this proposal.

Mr. Costello questioned how they are supposed to review the Dinner Theater proposal in regards to zoning. Mr. Woodrow explained that it needs to be reviewed with the present zoning which is Industrial. Mrs. Elton noted that at the Planning Commission Meeting for this proposal the proposed study can be discussed with the applicant.

Mr. Pollock questioned if zoning relief is needed and Mrs. Elton replied that it is still under review. Mr. Pollock questioned whether the issues will be resolved before the Planning Commission meeting and Mrs. Elton said no.

January 22, 2009

New/Old Business

The next meeting will be held February 26, 2009.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Planning Commission, a unanimous vote for adjournment was in order at 10:00 P.M.



Stephen G. Pollock, Commission Chairman