

**MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
NOVEMBER 6, 2023**

The Planning Commission met on the above date in the Conference Room of the Downingtown Municipal Government Center at 7:00 p.m. Members present: Chairperson Geanine Castaldi, Vice Chair David Proctor, Caroline O'Conner, Council Liaison Joe Ferris, Borough Engineer Matt Bush, and Borough Code Inspector, Bob Duncan.

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm

Approval of Minutes

No minutes were approved at this meeting

Restore our Roots, Riparian Buffer Presentation

Zak Hawk and Calem Wylie were present to educate the community on native planting suggestions. Restore our Roots representatives are working on multiple sites planting trees and taking data to evaluate the benefits of new trees. They plant various species and size trees based on the type of plant materials and the conditions of the site (sun exposure and water tolerance, etc.). Zak and Calem presented a brochure explaining the benefits of a planted buffer. Restore our Roots funding comes from various sources and grants. Local Conservation District agencies can provide funding sources.

They also explained that planting trees in this region will not solve flooding problems but plantings will help absorb rainwater. There is approximately 87 square miles of land upstream that drain into the Downingtown area.

Planning Commission members asked about the impact of new trees causing a damming affect if they are washed downstream during flooding conditions. Calem didn't think that was a big problem. Most of the large branches washed downstream are from older trees

Planning Commission members asked about the impact of climate change on the types of trees planted. Calem said climate change is definitely a factor for the type and species of trees planted. The impact of road salts are also a factor.

River Station Phase 3 Discussion

Neal Fisher presented plans summarizing the current phase of this project and the plans for Phase 3, including a request for a few waivers from the design guideline provisions in the overlay district. The density of the project is reduced with fewer apartment units and one of the future apartment buildings will now be located in East Caln Township. Neal answered a few questions from Planning Commission members. Phase 3 will be brought forward for approval sometime in early 2024.

Beaver Creek Elementary School Expansion

TRP presented the results of a traffic study factoring in the impact of the expansion in response to comments provided by the Traffic Engineer, Frank [Tavanni](#) hired by the Borough. This included vehicle stacking during the morning drop off period and afternoon pick up times.

A question was raised about separating the bus loop from vehicle drop off and pick up loop. The plan does separate buses from vehicles but concerns were raised about drop offs on nearby residential streets. Can there be an added bus loop in the front of the property? The Traffic Engineer didn't believe there was enough space to create a bus loop at this location.

The School District representatives were asked whether signage will be installed to help drivers understand the traffic circulation? School District representatives responded that signage will be installed along with aides to help with traffic flow.

The Borough Traffic Engineer, Frank Tavani was asked whether this plan will address the queuing concerns. Frank said this was a significant improvement but there will still be stacking for up to 15 to 20 minutes during the peak flow time periods.

Neighbors asked whether sufficient space exists near the rear loading dock. The engineer did verify that there is sufficient space for vehicle deliveries to the loading dock area. They will review this area again based on the maximum size vehicle that may need access to this area.

The updated stormwater management plan was also presented with an additional stormwater systems added under the parking lot. The existing basin was also enlarged with additional rate control.

The School District will revise the plans per discussion with the PC and the Borough Engineer's letter and resubmit. Applicant will seek approval sometime in the next couple months.

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Hydraterra Professionals, Act 537 Plan Update

Joe Boldaz and Joe Borgione prepared a draft of the Act 537 Plan. This meeting is to focus on the future Growth Plan for the Borough. They factored in newer developments and known possible future developments in the sewer capacity evaluation. An additional 8 parcels were added to the future development growth plan. The Beaver Elementary School site was discussed and is less likely to be developed when considering the current school expansion plans.

The St. John Vianney site was discussed whether to include additional development of this site. There are no immediate known plans for future development of this site. The Rail Yard was also discussed for possible additional development. This plan shows the Borough is just below capacity factoring in future development included in the current draft plan.

The DARA expansion plan was discussed but it was not clear how much capacity they may be seeking.

Joe and Joe agreed to go back and review future growth and capacity plans factoring in comments from this Planning Commission meeting.

Comp Plan Update

Samantha McLean from Baker attended to discuss the growth plan for the Borough. The growth proposals for specific sites were presented and discussed with the Planning Commission. Anticipated growth is approximately 2,000 to 2,500 residents in the next couple years. Public comments included the preservation of the downtown area and existing residential neighborhoods. Land use and zoning maps were included in the future growth presentation.

Input and feedback was requested from the Planning Commission for the railroad site. David Proctor provided a short history of the site but the necessary funding is not available so the site has remained an eye sore and the site remains vacant. The Consultant was looking at connections from this general area to other sections of the Borough. Will this area be considered for a change in zoning once the train station moves? Improved access was suggested creating a safer access area. Growth on the western section of Lancaster Ave creates opportunities for future connections.

The auto mall and Rite Aid site was also being considered for possible future growth. They are looking at future commercial uses in this area. A portion of the auto mall site is located in the floodplain so future development may be limited. This area would likely continue to be similar commercial uses.

Other sites discussed was a portion of the Mattioni site possibly being used as an on ramp at some future time.

Another public feedback open house meeting is scheduled for November 20th. They are focused on four sites to obtain public feedback. Possible additional meetings to discuss plan with Planning Commission include December 4 or December 18. Planning Commission prefers the December 18th meeting date.

Question was raised about flooding policies topics. Samantha agreed that policy suggestions relating to environmental topics will be included with the draft plan.

Zoning Ordinance Floodplain Amendment

Bob Duncan and Matt Bush presented the ordinance to amend the floodplain to permit sheds and decks in the floodplain without the requirement for a variance, subject to complying with a number of flood proofing requirements. This ordinance would also permit a substantial improvement without requiring a variance.

The Planning Commission expressed concerns about allowing any additional structures in the floodplain that might increase flooding or creates a damming impact if structures are washed downstream. After much discussion and concerns about the impact of additional structures in the floodplain, the Planning Commission recommended that this ordinance not be adopted by Borough Council, by a 3 to 2 vote. The Planning Commission also offered feedback to Borough Council should they decide to adopt this ordinance. The Planning Commission recommended that the ordinance be amended to include a definition for “Deck” to provide clarification that a deck doesn’t include an enclosure.

Engineering & Code Department Update

Matt Bush provided an update:

- Woodbine trail lighting has been completed and the project is in the closeout process.
- East Village stormwater pond construction ongoing.
- Permit Reviews (French Restaurant, Farmhouse building, 520 E. Lancaster Avenue)
- Flood Committee has been having discussions on identifying long term and short term projects to help with drainage issues in the Borough. Short term projects include updating Borough website to provide more resources and information to Borough residents.

Council Update

Joe Ferris gave an update:

- Yard waste dumpster – deferred until potential Borough office and Public Works relocation
- Potential hiring of two new police officers
- Train station relocation status
- Kerr Park tree removal to begin on Wednesday
- There is no tax increase proposed for 2024
- The tree lighting ceremony is scheduled for the Saturday after Thanksgiving
- The Christmas parade is scheduled for December 9th

For the Good of the Order

- Joe: September log house tour had 30 visitors and will be open next on October 4, 2022 from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

- Dave: Book collection today through October 5th for Downingtown Public Library. Friends of the Library gave a donation to the Borough.
- Steve: Discussed possible sidewalk extension of Johnsontown trail network.
- Caroline: Sustainability Committee update on presentation to Borough Council including Community Choice Aggregation option for energy supply for the Borough.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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Bob Duncan
Code Inspector