

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MAKEFIELD
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 23, 2013

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Lower Makefield was held in the Municipal Building on September 23, 2013. Chairman Bush called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

Those present:

Planning Commission: Tony Bush, Chairman
 Karen Friedman, Vice Chair
 John Pazdera, Secretary
 Dean Dickson, Member

Others: Nancy Frick, Director Zoning, Inspection, & Planning
 Nathan Fox, Township Solicitor

Absent: Mark Fried, Planning Commission Member
 Kristin Tyler, Supervisor Liaison

COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Ms. Lisa Wolff, and Mr. Rich Brahler, Senior Transportation Planner, from the Bucks County Planning Commission were present.

Mr. Brahler noted the Draft Transportation Planning Chapter and advised that what has been added is in red, and what is suggested to be taken out is a strike out.

He stated he has been advised that there was no Resident Survey this time so this will be taken out on Page 1.

With regard to Public Transportation, Mr. Brahler stated SEPTA has changed the way they named their lines so changes have been made to the new names.

Mr. Brahler stated with regard to Future Needs, not a lot has changed other than on Page 3 where it discussed the Resident Survey which they did not do this time.

Mr. Brahler stated under Scudders Falls there have been a lot of changes over the last ten years. He stated the Joint Toll Bridge Commission is designing a new bridge as well as improvements to I-95 and the Interchanges on both sides of the River, and he had made the appropriate changes. Mr. Bush asked if there is a timeline as to when they will start construction; however, Mr. Brahler stated he has not heard about a construction schedule, and there is nothing about this on their Website.

Mr. Brahler stated with regard to the Route 1/I-95 Project this was completed, so the references to this have been taken out.

Mr. Brahler stated with regard to Transportation Demand Strategies, changes were made to syntax and clarifying some of the information.

Mr. Brahler noted on Page 6 the information about traffic calming has been removed as they are under the impression that the Citizens Traffic Commission is actually working on this. Mr. Bush stated he does feel that they should state that this is what is going on, and that they encourage that this continue to take place. Ms. Friedman agreed that they should continue to work on this every decade. Mr. Bush stated it is fluid since there are certain areas where traffic calming may have been needed more in the past but this has shifted within the Township. Mr. Brahler agreed to add this back into the Chapter.

Mr. Brahler noted the Recommendations for Action on Page 7 where revisions were made based on what he discussed earlier. He noted the Oxford Valley Road/Route 1 Project has been completed.

Mr. Brahler stated he has not seen any kind of action on a Plan for Access Management. He stated this would involve certain driveways and cutting down curb cuts which makes roadways flow better. He asked if they should leave this in as a recommendation. Ms. Friedman stated this is usually done per Development, and it was agreed to leave this out.

Mr. Brahler asked if they should still leave in Developing a Traffic Calming Plan for the Township as a Recommendation. He stated you can have a traffic calming policy without have a full-scale Plan. Mr. Pazdera stated they usually consider this for an area as projects are developed. Mr. Bush asked if other communities have a Traffic Calming Plan, and Ms. Wolff stated when the representative from the Citizens Traffic Commission was present in the summer she had mentioned two other communities which had Plans. Mr. Brahler stated he feels that those communities have policies and not full-blown traffic-calming Plans. Mr. Bush stated he feels that in Lower Makefield when they are advised about a particular location, the Township considers a strategy for that location. Ms. Friedman stated when they review Development Plans they also address it at that level. It was the consensus of the Planning Commission that they could take this Plan out of the Recommendations.

Mr. Dickson stated SEPTA had introduced a “Doomsday” scenario which would cause certain lines to be discontinued, and this would have an adverse impact on the commuters in this area. Mr. Dickson stated it was also discussed about encouraging New Jersey Transit having their trains start in Falls Township, and Mr. Brahler stated they were trying to make this happen; however, this failed for a number of reasons. Mr. Dickson stated previously it was indicated that people would like to see another Railroad stop at either Stony Hill Road or Township Line Road between the Yardley Station and Woodbourne Station to make it more advantageous for people to take the train. Mr. Brahler stated SEPTA’s current financial shape would indicate that there will not be any new stations. Mr. Dickson stated it would also help some people in the area to have the resurrection of the Newtown Line which he also assumes will not happen; and Mr. Brahler stated he was involved in a study about this, and there were a number of issues with this.

Mr. Dickson stated with regard to the Trenton/Mercer Airport there has been a recent groundswell of opinion about Frontier Airlines, and BRAAM is now expressing concerns about noise and low-flying airplanes. Mr. Brahler stated from some information he has seen, he does not feel there is a way that the Township could address their concerns other than requesting that there be a new Environmental Impact Study. He stated he does not know that the County has taken a formal position on this.

Ms. Friedman asked if it would be important to consider exiting from the Township in the event of an emergency since new developments have been constructed over the last decade. Mr. Brahler stated the DRVPC has done some evacuation studies, but he has not heard that any have been done at the Township level. He stated he is not sure how they would address this in the Master Plan as this is policy driven. Ms. Friedman asked if they should have a goal over the next ten years to look into an emergency evacuation plan through the road system or to get to the elderly in the Township in the event of an emergency. Mr. Brahler stated this would be quite an undertaking; and they would have to take in a lot of various factors including stormwater, what roads should be designated, etc. He stated he has not seen this in other Townships. Ms. Wolff stated this could be in a Chapter on Hazard Mitigation since traffic would be a part of this. She stated the Disabled Persons Advisory Board discussed this when they attended the Planning Commission meeting. Ms. Friedman stated she wants to make sure that all residents have access to emergency escape routes. She stated she feels there could be a quick overview of this. She stated they could put a mention of this in that Plan that this should be reflected in case there are areas of the Township that are compromised.

There was discussion on the Park & Recreation Planning Chapter. Ms. Wolff stated this Chapter was seen previously, but some conclusions have changed since that time. She stated after the Planning Commission meeting she met with Ms. Liney, the Park & Recreation Director, as well as members of the Park & Recreation Board.

Ms. Wolff stated one of the main questions was what was the most-recent planning done for Park & Recreation; and there was reference in the current Master Plan to a 1997 Action Plan, and she was not sure at the time they did the first Draft if that was most recent Plan. She stated in talking with Ms. Liney they were advised that is still the current Plan.

Ms. Wolff noted Page 3 which is the existing Park & Recreation Facilities List which has been added into the Chapter. She stated originally the information came from the Township Website. She stated Ms. Liney has provided a lot of additional information which changed this somewhat. She stated the primary change is that the Five Mile Woods was previously included in the first draft, but this has come off of the list because the Park & Recreation Board does not look at the Five Mile Woods as active recreation or a core recreation area; and in the 1997 Plan the way it defines core recreation area, the Five Mile Woods does not fall into this. She stated if Five Mile Woods is taken out, the result is they do not meet the core recreation area needs.

Ms. Wolff stated she also got information on the Samost and Snipes Tracts so they added that acreage and the descriptions of the Tracts. She stated the Peake Farm which is a pocket park has been added and had not previously been included.

Ms. Wolff stated if you take out the acres which makes up the Five Mile Woods and take into consideration the other changes made, there is a total of 281.9 total acres of core recreation.

Mr. Bush stated they have not referenced another small park that is not yet built out. He stated in the Toll Bros. age-restricted community there is a small park which is to have a pavilion. He stated this will be given to the Township. Ms. Wolff stated while she was not aware of this and it will change the totals somewhat, it will not change the conclusions. Ms. Wolff stated she will get the information on this and add it to the Plan.

Ms. Wolff stated the existing Plan looked at core recreation area, and what was adopted in the 1997 Plan was the standard of ten acres of recreation land per 1,000 people. She stated based on the population in 2010 of 32,559, they would need 326 acres of public park to meet that standards. She stated they have 281.9 including Snipes even though it is not built yet.

Ms. Frick asked if this is only land owned by Lower Makefield since the Canal is not included although it is in the Township and is used by the residents. Ms. Wolff stated they are following how the 1997 Action Plan was set up and how they looked at core recreation. Ms. Friedman stated the paths by the Canal are used for walking and biking, and it is a very active area. Ms. Wolff stated they do discuss the Canal but it is not considered as part of the core recreation. Mr. Dickson stated there is also boat access in the Township on River Road.

Ms. Friedman stated she feels they should include a notation that there are 281.9 acres of recreation land plus bike paths and the Canal so that it is understood in the Master Plan that this is part of what they perceive as a form of recreation. Mr. Bush stated he would not include the Canal since this is only discussing Township land.

Ms. Wolff stated Page 4 was changed somewhat under the Walking and Bike Path system based on discussions with the Park & Recreation Board, and it was noted that there are approximately 25 miles of existing walking and bike paths in the Township. Ms. Friedman stated she would like to see this stated in the area about core recreation as well.

Ms. Wolff stated the 1997 Plan specifically indicates that the Golf Course does not count toward core recreation.

Mr. Bush asked if “core recreation” is defined anywhere, and Ms. Wolff stated in the 1997 Plan it is defined: “Core recreation land is active recreation land and land that is suited for passive recreation adjoining active recreation land.” Ms. Wolff stated there was a debate whether Five Mile Woods was considered active or passive recreation, but the Park & Recreation Board did not consider it to be active as they were looking at playing areas, fields, and those types of facilities that are considered more active. She stated the Five Mile Woods is also not adjacent to active recreation. Mr. Bush asked if there is a discussion about non-core recreation which would include the Golf Course, the bike paths, etc. and Ms. Wolff stated she does not feel they defined non-core in the 1997 Plan.

Ms. Friedman stated she feels Five Mile Woods should be considered core recreation since they hold classes there, and children do use the facilities for learning and playing. Mr. Bush stated they are not saying it is not recreation – they are saying it is not core recreation. Ms. Friedman stated she feels there is something wrong with the definition. Ms. Friedman stated if “core” means sports then the Golf Course should be included in this. Ms. Wolff stated the definition is coming from the 1997 Plan and this term was not created for the Master Plan document. Mr. Bush asked if other Municipalities draw these distinctions, and Ms. Wolff stated she has not come

across the term “core recreation” previously although they do look at the standard based on population. Ms. Friedman stated the Golf Course is not just open space as it is actively used, and she feels this is a form of recreation. It was noted that the Pool is included as core recreation even though the Golf Course is not.

Ms. Friedman stated she feels that they may want to see how much land is left for possible recreation facilities to build on taking into consideration that Samost and Snipes are included on the list even though they are not yet developed.

Mr. Bush asked if they should also consider what other Park & Rec needs might exist. Ms. Friedman stated they could consider what might be needed and where they could be put in the Township. Ms. Friedman asked if the Golf Course were put in the calculations of acreage available as recreational land would this prevent them from approving another area of recreation. Mr. Bush stated this may be the concern of the Park & Recreation Board which may be why they did not include it in the calculation. Ms. Friedman stated she does not feel that this would prevent them from having additional smaller recreation areas. Ms. Friedman stated if the Pool has been included she feels the Golf Course should be included as well since it is a sport. Ms. Wolff stated she thinks the Park & Recreation Board feels that to adequately serve the Township resident, a wide variety of uses and facilities are needed; and if they added the Five Mile Woods and the Golf Course, that would not be representative of what the Township population as a whole probably needs. Ms. Friedman stated they could also say this about the soccer fields since most of the adults and the elderly in the Township do not use the soccer fields.

Mr. Pazdera asked how the NRPA define recreation land and how does this align with the Township’s definition in the 1997 Plan.

Ms. Friedman stated she feels that they should be proud of the Golf Course that the Township has this amenity to offer as a form of recreation.

Mr. Bush asked if a Golf Course or a property like the Five Mile Woods is normally included in these calculations, and Ms. Wolff stated she feels it depends on how it is viewed. She stated the 1997 document specifically says the Golf Course should not be considered as core recreation, and the Planning Commission may want to decide if they want to add something about this.

Mr. Dickson stated there are walking trails in Five Mile Woods, and he questions if core recreation does not include walking and hiking. He stated Five Mile Woods is Township-owned land which can be used by Township residents for recreation.

Mr. Pazdera stated one of the recreation needs stated in the plan indicates, “One of the most pressing needs is for indoor recreation space. Needs range from public meeting rooms to gymnasiums.” He stated the Golf Course has indoor spaces that can be used.

Mr. Bush stated the real question is what does the National Recreation and Park Association say should be included since this is the standard they are comparing against. Ms. Wolff stated she has not come across this in looking at the NRPA information and even the standard developed is a general average. She stated she has seen the NRPA more recently talk about the fact that it is not easy to pick one standard since there are different types of users and different needs. She stated now the NRPA tries to promote surveys and getting a good handle on the needs through public outreach to see what the community wants and needs.

Mr. Bush asked if the concept of putting in this number of ten acres for every 1,000 people is even relevant. He stated if they take this out, they could eliminate this whole issue. Ms. Wolff stated she feels it could be eliminated from the Master Plan since it would still be in the Park & Recreation Action Plan. Mr. Bush stated he does not feel they need a statistic since they have cited everything the Township has in terms of active and non-active parks.

Mr. Dickson stated even though the Canal is owned by the State, it could be included since it is available to Township residents. Ms. Friedman stated she feels it is one of the most appealing aspects of the Township.

Mr. Pazdera stated there could still be an objective to obtain additional land, and Ms. Friedman agreed.

Mr. Bush suggested they take out all of the references to the standards, but leave everything else that identifies the park land. He stated they should also make mention of the Golf Course, the Canal, and the Five Mile Woods as additional Township amenities.

It was agreed to leave out references to core and non-core recreation since it is irrelevant for purposes of the Master Plan.

Ms. Frick stated there is an Ordinance which is updated yearly for Fee-In-Lieu of recreation.

Mr. Dickson stated he feels they should also mention the State-owned boat ramp located in the Township.

Ms. Wolff noted the Section on the Walking and Bike Path System, and she stated there have been some revisions to this section primarily the second paragraph on Page 4 and onto Page 5 which discusses that the goal is to provide bike path connections to recreation areas, shopping areas, etc. She stated it also references the Park & Rec Road Tour which summarizes the facilities and acreage. This document states that there are approximately twenty-five miles of existing bike paths in the Township. Ms. Wolff stated she also added a sentence citing examples of areas where existing paths connect neighborhoods with certain facilities.

Mr. Bush stated the Fred Allan Complex is not connected; and while they wanted this included in the development of the Samost Tract when the baseball fields were constructed, it was not included. He noted there is a sidewalk on the other side of the street. Ms. Wolff agreed to take out the reference to this connection.

Ms. Wolff stated there is a plan of where there should be connections, but there are a lot of gaps. She stated it is difficult to get these where there are existing developments. She stated there is a mention of the difficulty of completing the bike paths where there are already developed lots.

Ms. Wolff noted Page 7 under Current Planning Priorities, and she will make further changes that will take out the term core recreation. She stated this is in the existing document, but the Planning Commission still asked that this be taken out.

Mr. Bush stated they may want to state that the Township should continue to explore new recreational ideas based on the needs of the community.

Ms. Wolff noted #5 - Year Round Recreation Opportunities, and she stated that the 1997 Plan is the current Plan; but since the current Comprehensive Plan was adopted there were site selection options for the Community Center, and a decision was made to locate the future Community Center on the Township-owned Samost Tract. Ms. Frick stated she feels it would be better to define the 1997 Plan as the 1997 Park & Recreation Action Plan, and Ms. Wolff agreed.

Ms. Wolff noted #7 – Pocket Parks - which is currently in the Plan. She stated the Park & Recreation Board had suggested she check with the Planning Commission to see if they encourage these when Plans come in for review. Ms. Frick stated she is aware of the Peake Farm where there is a tot lot. Mr. Bush noted the tennis courts in Yardley Hunt. Mr. Bush stated there is Township owned recreation land within some developments, but the Township residents do not usually know about them or know that they are able to use them.

Ms. Friedman stated she does not feel there is any harm keeping in the reference to pocket parks in case there is a situation which arises where they may want one. It was suggested that the wording be left in the way it is.

Ms. Wolff noted Page #9 where they added language about the importance of maintaining the walkways and bike paths. Ms. Wolff stated representatives from the Disabled Persons Advisory Board discussed this because it could be difficult for people in wheelchairs if these paths are not well maintained. Ms. Friedman stated this is also important for general safety reasons.

Ms. Wolff noted Page #10 which updates the language regarding the Community Center since previously it was listed as a Senior Center.

Ms. Wolff noted Page #11 which discusses the Samost Tract which is currently under development, and a note will be added that this is where the Community Center will be located.

Ms. Wolff stated with regard to the Snipes Tract, they do have planned improvements although nothing is happening at that site at the current time.

Ms. Wolff stated the Park & Recreation Board indicated that there was a strong vision for Memorial Park, and she reworded this to get across the whole vision.

Ms. Wolff noted #6 regarding the Pool Facility. She stated there was a Feasibility Study in 2001, and the current Plan recommends improvements listed in that Plan should be carried out. Ms. Wolff stated a number of improvements have been made, and they have tried to acknowledge what has happened at the Pool.

Ms. Wolff noted Page #12, #9 – Landscape Standards and Design of Recreation Facilities, and the recommendation was that these be re-examined and revised if appropriate. She stated much of this has been done and changes were made to the Ordinances so she feels this should be taken out.

Ms. Wolff stated she will make the changes discussed this evening, and it was agreed that she could bring these back when she has the second draft.

Mr. Joe Menard, 917 Putnam Drive, stated he is Chairman of the Citizens Budget Commission; and they are doing a Comprehensive Capital Budget for the Township, and they are going to feed off the Master Plan updates. He asked if anything has been put together yet in terms of what they feel are the capital needs. Ms. Wolff stated in terms of cost for maintenance, they have not done this; and they do not really get into those specifics in their planning. She stated the Township has a Capital Improvement Program, and she believes there is a Chapter later on this, and they will get information for this from the Township.

Mr. Menard stated if the Planning Commission feels there is anything that has not been addressed in terms of capital needs, they should make this information available to the Township.

Mr. Menard stated he did not hear anything about the land the Township owns inside the City of Trenton. No one present this evening was aware of this. Mr. Menard stated he was made aware of this thirty years ago, but he cannot find the document showing this. He stated he does not know what it was used for. He stated the Township got it in the 1890s.

Ms. Wolff stated last month they presented the Existing Land Use Map, and this evening she provided small copies to the Planning Commission. She stated this information was obtained from the County Board of Assessments. Ms. Wolff stated when you look at the acreages and percentages of the various land uses, shown in green is Parks, Recreation and Protected Open Space which comes to 1,580 acres. She stated looking at the map in the southwest part of the Township north of the Railroad, along both sides of I-95 there is a lot of green, but she did not feel this is really park land; and the primary use of this area is Residential. She stated because the residents do not own this land, it is considered common land. She stated while this map is not wrong, it could be misleading. She stated they could revise the map as needed. She stated this is also true in Sutphin Pines. It was agreed by the Planning Commission that this is not really open space. Ms. Friedman suggested they show this land in a different color to denote that it is common land.

There was discussion about the category Rural Residential, and Ms. Frick stated this category is not defined in the Ordinance. Ms. Wolff stated this comes up because it is based on the County Board of Assessments for single homes on lot sizes of over five acres.

There was discussion about the need for the Land Use Map in the Master Plan since it was not included in the current Plan. Ms. Wolff stated most Plans do include this. She stated they will need to get the Map corrected particularly with regard to the amount of vacant land. Ms. Friedman stated she feels this is a good reference tool.

Ms. Frick noted the parcels being shown as vacant near the Railroad are owned by the Township.

Mr. Dickson stated Silver Lake is shown as Park & Recreation land, but this is privately owned.

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OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. Frick stated that there will not be a Planning Commission meeting on October 14, 2013 as the Township will be closed for the Holiday.

There being no further business, Mr. Dickson moved, Ms. Friedman seconded and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

John Pazdera, Secretary