

**PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 21, 2005**

The special meeting of the Planning Commission of the Township of Upper St. Clair, duly advertised and posted in accordance with law, was called to order by the Chairman at 7:00 PM, Thursday, February 21, 2005, in the Board of Commissioners Meeting Room, 1820 McLaughlin Run Road.

PRESENT: Joel M. Helmrich, Chairman  
Robert J. Ridge, Vice Chairman  
Scott R. Slagle, Secretary  
James Sekela  
David Wade (arrived at 7:12 PM)  
Shannon Miller Planning and Zoning Administrator  
John Vogel Representing the Township Attorney  
Ruthann L. Omer Township Engineer  
Kathleen R. Oberle Recording Secretary

ABSENT: Marvin Haddox  
Douglas L. Shuck

PUBLIC: Approximately twenty-five (25) persons

Mr. Helmrich introduced A. J. Schwartz and Carolyn Yagle of Environmental Planning and Design (EPD) and explained that they would be presenting an overview of the 2005 Comprehensive Plan process. Mr. Helmrich then turned the meeting over to Mr. Schwartz.

Mr. Schwartz explained that this was the first “community listening session” on the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. This process was begun in late summer of 2004. He noted that while the Comprehensive Plan is not a legal document such as an Ordinance, which is adopted by the Township Commissioners, it is designed and used as a guide for planning and development over the next ten years. Adoption by the Board of Commissioners will be accomplished by Resolution. Mr. Schwartz then narrated a power point presentation (Attachment 1), which highlighted the following points:

- Purpose of Comprehensive Plan
- Components of Comprehensive Plan
  - Municipal Planning Code Requirements
  - Additional Elements Specific to Upper St. Clair
- Participation Process
- Project Schedule: Timeline
- Quality of Life Survey Summary
  - Purpose
  - Example of Quality of Life Survey Question
  - Return Statistics

**PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 21, 2005**

**2.**

- Key Observations:
  - Quality of Life and Municipal Services
  - Cultural/Recreational
  - Transportation and Land Use
  - Common Write-In Comments
- Benchmark Analysis Summary
  - Purpose
  - Expected Outcomes
  - Selected Benchmark Communities
    - Pine Township, Allegheny County, PA
    - City of Upper Arlington, Franklin County, OH
    - South Fayette Township, Allegheny County, PA
    - Peters Township, Washington County, PA
    - Lower Makefield Township, Bucks County, PA
  - Municipal Services
  - Health and Care Services
  - Public Transportation
  - Government Structure
  - Cultural Resources
  - Recreational Resources
  - School System
  - Land Use
  - Data Collection Examples (year 2003)
  - Benchmarking Indices Examples
- Next Steps

An open discussion followed.

Annette Shimer, 1609 Terrie Drive, asked if the Allegheny County Comprehensive Plan has been completed. Mr. Schwartz replied that it is just beginning. The Township Comprehensive Plan will be sent to the County and to neighboring communities for their review.

Bill Bates, 1185 Polaris Circle, asked if there will be a more extensive study of demographics. Mr. Schwartz explained that they have conducted a fairly extensive overview of demographics and the benchmarking communities were chosen based on their similarities with Upper St. Clair Township.

Mr. Wade questioned how each apartment or unit at Friendship Village or The Grand Residence is treated in the demographics. Mr. Schwartz explained that they are counted as a “household,” which is the same method used by the US Census.

**PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 21, 2005**

**3.**

Concerning a finding indicating there is an interest in having access to more grocery/convenience stores, Mr. Wade wondered if the question included asking how far residents must travel to reach these stores. According to Mr. Schwartz, this kind of detail will be explored as the process continues and as it relates to exactly what the Township wants to pursue. The source for these answers will be obtained through input by the Planning Commission, the Board of Commissioners, the Township staff and focus groups.

In answer to a question by Mr. Sekela, Mr. Schwartz replied that the survey was sent not just to property owners, but to all residential households.

Mr. Ridge questioned to what extent the 2005 Plan would be consistent with the 1995 Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Schwartz explained that they began by reviewing the 1995 Comprehensive Plan and actually used some of the same survey questions for the current Plan. Then a comparison of answers was made to see where changes have occurred. In terms of policies, there will clearly be some things from the 1995 Plan, which will remain intact. There will be a blending of the old Plan with the new Plan.

Mr. Helmrich questioned the method by which the benchmarking communities were chosen because he was surprised that Fox Chapel and Mt. Lebanon were not included. From a land use standpoint, Mr. Schwartz explained that Fox Chapel is dramatically different. In terms of school district and affluency, it is comparable. However, Upper St. Clair is more urbanized and provides a greater amount of public services. Many factors were considered in choosing the benchmarking communities. Mr. Wade requested a report of the communities who were not chosen and the reasons why. Mr. Schwartz noted he would be happy to do so. He assured the Commission that the communities chosen represented the highest number of similarities so that the comparison would be between an "apple and an apple," rather than an "apple and an orange." Mr. Wade commented that the findings of these comparisons could provide a very valuable marketing tool for Upper St. Clair.

In answer to a question raised by Jeff Wagner, 1243 Morrow Road, Mr. Schwartz noted that the Municipalities Planning Code requires that the Comprehensive Plan coordinate with surrounding communities on such topics as land uses and amenities.

Mr. Ridge asked how the School District would be incorporated into the planning process. By law, Mr. Schwartz explained that they must be part of the Plan and would be invited to participate after issues of concern to them are identified.

Karen McElhinny of 2337 Southampton Drive and Co-Chairman of the Parks and Recreation Committee, commented on the reported survey result that showed one-quarter of the residents do not use the parks and recreation facilities, which she felt is surprisingly low. She suggested that it be turned around to say that 75% of the residents are using these facilities. She did not want to see a de-emphasis on parks and recreation because of the negative statistic. Mr. Schwartz agreed and apologized for implying a negative result. He noted that what remains to be determined is whether increased use of parks and recreation would be a goal in the Comprehensive Plan. A great deal more data must first be collected.

**PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 21, 2005**

**4.**

In spite of the fact that the survey response percentage is twice as high as normal, Ms. McElhinny expressed frustration that only one in four households answered the survey. She wondered what could be done to increase participation. Mr. Schwartz replied that the Township even encouraged responses through the website and none were received.

Ms. McElhinny questioned whether the finding that one-third of the households who responded do not have children under the age of 20 corresponds with the actual demographics of the Township. Mr. Schwartz stated that it does, and further that this is very common for Western Pennsylvania and is consistent with the US Census statistics.

Annette Shimer, 1609 Terrie Drive, wondered about the survey result that “improvements to roadways were clearly favored by survey respondents.” She asked if this meant local roadways or the Southern Beltway. Mr. Schwartz answered that the question referred to expenditure of funds for maintenance. The respondents would rather spend money on upkeep of roads than other municipal services such as parks. In other words, “getting to and fro seems to be more important.”

A question was raised by Jan Fleckenstein of 201 Gerrie Drive concerning the method by which the comparison communities were chosen. She felt it was important that the communities chosen are ones who are at the end of growth and doing that successfully. She stressed that a community in a similar situation as Upper St. Clair, but who is not successful, would be a poor comparison. She asked how EPD was sure they chose successful comparisons. Mr. Schwartz replied that all but two of the communities are mature. Pine Township and South Fayette are still growing. South Fayette is on the list because it is our neighbor and therefore is a competitor for new residents, so it will impact Upper St. Clair. Pine Township, while still growing, is competitive in terms of where people want to live. Lower Makefield is similar to Upper St. Clair in terms of development, quality and quantity of services. Peters Township is the most comparable.

Tracy Buckman, 1535 Redfern Drive, felt that the survey questions were very generically written. She is very interested in recreational and stormwater management issues and is looking for keys and marketing tools to separate our community from others. She questioned if the Plan will look at the evolutionary process of the recreational process into other non-typical eastern recreational aspects; i.e., trail systems, sidewalk systems, open space management versus traditional highly maintained types of facilities. She wondered how we could best market the Boyce Mayview Park and the Gilfillan Park, which are amenities not afforded by other communities. In reply, Mr. Schwartz explained that EPD will make recommendations, but they will be broad and not specific because Upper St. Clair already has specific plans in place.

Bill Bates, 1185 Polaris Circle, asked if the Statement of Community Goals listed in the 1995 Comprehensive Plan will change in the 2005 Plan. Goals will not be formed, Mr. Schwartz explained, until at least half way through this process, which would be this summer.

Jennifer Schuler of 2286 Clairmont Drive expressed disappointment with the 27% response rate. She noted that she is familiar with surveys due to her job background. She questioned what methods could be used to get other residents involved. She felt it is difficult to learn anything

**PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 21, 2005**

**5.**

that is statistically significant from such a small group of people for the overall population, and added that the residents in attendance at this meeting are the same ones who are always in attendance. She felt that the survey didn't work well, or the response rate would have been greater. She also wanted to know how EPD is "slicing and dicing the data" because surveys can be very misleading. Mr. Schwartz replied that the public will have access to the same level of detail as the staff and the Planning Commission etc. He added that the staff and EPD are looking at ways to stimulate citizen participation. Different techniques have been tried in the past. For example, a meeting where food is offered will often bring larger attendance. The survey results are not meant to be taken as absolutes but rather the higher numbers indicate a red flag for further study.

In answer to a question by Denise Goebel of 1340 Rose Circle, Mr. Schwartz explained that the focus groups will be chosen in the summer based on specific issues and qualifications to address those issues. Ms. Goebel noted that although they have been residents for only three years, she answered all of the questions. They purchased their home for two reasons, one because of the school district and two, because of the open space behind them. She hopes to be considered for the focus group on land use and preserving open space. She added that the timing of the survey mailing was not good, and suggested that it should have gone out in January or February.

Mr. Ridge posed the following questions: 1) will the minutes from this meeting be published; 2) are surveys still being accepted; and 3) will the next sessions be topic specific?  
The answer to all three questions was yes.

Mr. Sekela asked if tax rates would be a part of the benchmarking. The reply was yes with a provision of actual cost per household to live in Upper St. Clair as compared to other communities. Mr. Sekela also noted that he would like to see a comparison with other communities of access to regional assets, citing the ability to easily take public transportation from Upper St. Clair to Oakland.

Replying to Bill Bates' question, Mr. Schwartz replied that a focus group of realtors could be formed. Ms. Shimer added that she felt it is important that the focus groups be represented by all sides with all perspectives. Mr. Schwartz agreed. Ms. Shimer questioned fences, sidewalks and the McLaughlin Run corridor as quality of life issues. She asked if fences, which discourage "easy interaction from one house to another," and the lack of sidewalks to encourage neighbors to communicate are issues that will be considered. Mr. Schwartz replied that the Comprehensive Plan will deal with broader issues, not specifically with fences. However, the issue of how to create community and maintain community would be considered. Concerning possible future commercial development of the McLaughlin Run corridor, Mr. Schwartz noted that could be considered as the Plan proceeds.

Preston Shimer of 1609 Terrie Drive would like to see other methods of transportation within the Township such as bikeways and the expansion of the rails to trails project. He objected to having to go to Peters Township to bike ride.

Executive summaries were passed out to interested parties. (Attachment 2)

**PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 21, 2005**

**6.**

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, it was moved, seconded and carried unanimously that the meeting be adjourned at approximately 9:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kathleen R. Oberle, Recording Secretary

Attachments

1. Print of Power Point Presentation
2. Executive Summary