

July 21, 2017

TO: Planning Commission Members

FROM: Christopher Leswing, PP, AICP, Assistant Director, Planning

SUBJECT: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

Background

The 2016 *Comprehensive Plan for the Preservation, Infill, and Redevelopment of Lower Merion Township* (the Plan) is the fifth Comprehensive Plan for the Township and continues Lower Merion's long standing commitment to innovative long-range planning. The Plan is an issues-based, solution-driven document designed to correct past oversights, address current issues and to manage future growth consistent with the community vision. The Plan is both visionary and pragmatic. The application of issues-based techniques engaged Township stakeholders, regardless of their prior familiarity with planning principles, to constructively participate in solving individual problems while balancing larger community goals.

The Plan was based upon the early 20th century comprehensive planning ideal of integrating social and economic concerns within a physical planning document. This process involved internal collaboration between Township departments along with the participation of five (5) Comprehensive Plan Committees comprised of 63 volunteer stakeholders, local advisory bodies, non-profits, business owners, institutions, residents, the School District and elected officials. The resulting document reflects the broad support and diverse interests of Lower Merion Township.

Implementation Update

The Board of Commissioners and the entire community has taken an active role in implementing the Comprehensive Plan. Following the adoption of the Plan, the Planning Commission prepared a 30-minute television segment for the Township's local cable channel, LMTV7, to educate and inform residents about the Comprehensive Plan and its major recommendations. The major recommendations that have effectively been implemented to-date are highlighted below:

- **Land Use Element**

- The ***Zoning Code update is underway*** with the retention of DPZ Partners, LLC to analyze, synthesize, and update the Zoning and Subdivision and Land Development Codes with an emphasis on maintaining established neighborhoods, managing institutional growth, and promoting the revitalization of commercial areas.
- In 2016 a ***Preservation Planner was hired*** to ensure the Township has the staffing capacity to advance the goals and recommendations outlined in the Comprehensive Plan, specifically as they relate to historic preservation. This has resulted in consistent ***updates to the Historic Resource Inventory*** (HRI) and educational programming in partnership with the Lower Merion Conservancy, as well as increased review and inspection of architectural conditions of approval. The planner also works to implement projects supported by grants from the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, including additions to the HRI (expected to be adopted this Fall) and the ***creation of preservation-focused design guidelines***, expected for completion in Fall, 2018.

- **Water Resources Element**

- The Township retained Amec Foster Wheeler to ***conduct a Comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan*** to ensure the efficient, equitable management of stormwater runoff and to assist the Township with meeting its requirements under our MS4 permit with the PA Department of Environmental Protection.

- **Circulation Element**

- The Public Works Department has integrated the ***Low Stress Bike Connectivity Plan*** into regular road restriping resulting in interconnected routes for bicyclists throughout the community. The Low Stress Bike Connectivity Plan essentially calls for road striping on all tertiary roads to calm traffic and provide a dedicated space for cyclists. Tertiary roads tend to have lower traffic volumes and function as neighborhood connectors. The plan also proposes physical improvements at intersections between the low stress network and higher stress automobile oriented roads.
- The 2017 Capital Improvement Plan includes a source of municipal funding for ***“Sidewalk Infrastructure Improvements”***. The Board of Commissioners is currently evaluating projects identified on the Prioritized Pedestrian Improvement Map and suggested by Commissioners. On Wednesday July 26th, the Public Works Committee will review potential projects, including construction of sidewalks gaps on residential property.
- Township staff is participating with the Montgomery County Planning Commission on the preparation of ***Bike Montco***, a county-wide bike plan that will address the current bicycle needs of the county. The ***Bike Montco Plan*** will examine existing conditions and look at bicycling destinations and preferred routes and the countywide bicycle network utilizing state, county, and local roads, and trails.
- The Township is working with Philadelphia to explore ***improvements to the Cynwyd Heritage Trail and potential extensions to the trail***. Lighting is proposed to be added to the portion of the trail spanning the Manayunk Bridge in 2019. In June, the Township and the City of Philadelphia were jointly awarded a \$50,000 grant by the DVRPC Circuit Trails Program for preliminary design of a trail extension from Cynwyd Station to the Mann Music Center.

- **Community Facilities Element**

- The Township Commissioners and the Lower Merion School District representatives have opened a continued dialogue to plan for student enrollment growth and the need for public facilities, such as parks, fields, and meeting space. However, LMSD has recently denied the Township’s request for data to conduct a detailed analysis of the relationship between existing/future land use and public school enrollment.

- **Housing Element**

- The ***Ad Hoc Committee on Affordable Housing*** resumed meeting to prepare a Housing Plan to address affordable housing needs in the community through policies, projects, and programs. The committee is currently exploring the possibility of rehabilitating underutilized Township holdings to provide living quarters for affordable to low- and moderate-income families, including residents, emergency responders, teachers, etc.
- ***The zoning update***, which is currently underway will include an analysis of the existing affordable housing incentives in the R6A, R7, C1, C2, ASDD-2, and MUST zoning districts. The affordable housing incentives may be revised and/or expanded into other zoning districts.
- The Building & Planning Department continues to administer the ***Residential Rehabilitation Program and the Home Purchase Program*** with the use of CDBG funds. In 2016, eight (8) homes were repaired under the owner-occupied Residential Rehabilitation Program and one (1) home was purchased, renovated and sold to an income-eligible family under the Home Purchase Program.