

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION

Building & Planning Committee

Issue Briefing

Topic: Ardmore Master Plan

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Date: May 5, 2023

I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:

Review and discuss the Ardmore Master Plan.

II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) sets forth requirements for elected officials with respect to master planning in Pennsylvania. The MPC enables municipalities to incorporate master plans, consistent with the adopted comprehensive plan, to guide land use decisions and promote sustainable development.

III. Current Policy Or Practice (If Applicable):

Following the Township-wide rezoning process in 2020, the Board of Commissioners directed staff to complete a master plan for Ardmore. While several goals established in the early 2000s to revitalize Ardmore's commercial corridor have been largely realized, the community's vision and goals for Ardmore have evolved. Therefore, it is important to establish a master plan that reflects these changes and guides future growth and development in a thoughtful and intentional way.

IV. Other Relevant Background Information:

On April 12th, the Building & Planning Committee reviewed the plan, accepted public comment, and provided feedback on the recommendations and strategies outlined in the plan. After the meeting, staff requested additional feedback from the Board and asked to identify priorities for potential zoning incentives and the implementation plan. This feedback was sought to identify specific actions that can be taken to support the plan's success. Below staff has provided a summary of the collected comments and recommended actions:

1. Zoning:

The plan includes recommendations related to the current zoning in place in Ardmore. The recommendations sought to balance limitations identified by property owners, outcomes desired by community members, and potential barriers to future private reinvestment. The plan identified a potential location for an overlay on which modified zoning could be considered.

Following the comments collected from the Board, the plan will be amended to (1) remove the identified overlay areas and (2) require a second step, which is the formation of a future zoning taskforce, to be commenced as directed by the Board. This will ensure that any future zoning changes, if desired by Board leadership, will be a precision instrument which contemplates reinvestment through parcel based sub-zones, based on criteria to be established in the plan for their susceptibility to change and potential for creating strategic change within the study area.

Staff recommends that many of the zoning elements remain in the plan as options, rather than mandates, for the future zoning taskforce to consider. The plan will be refined to clearly explain this approach, which has been utilized for past Township Commercial Corridor Plans, including the Bryn Mawr Master Plan.

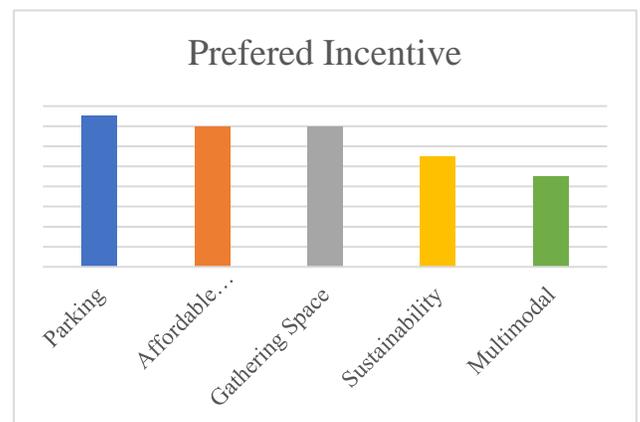
2. Reinvestment:

Many Board members commented on the topic of reinvestment. The plan proposes leveraging both private and public investment to achieve the goals identified by community members through the public engagement process. The plan does not ignore the need for capital improvement projects and infrastructure updates but seeks to work alongside property owners to encourage private reinvestment in their properties. By working in partnership, the public and private sectors can create a synergistic effect, resulting in a more successful and sustainable business district.

3. Incentives:

The concept of zoning incentives has been included as a strategy for a future zoning taskforce to consider. Zoning incentives are special provisions or benefits offered by a local government to property owners to encourage specific types of development or land use within a particular zone or district. Staff sought input from the Board on which incentives should be prioritized by a future zoning taskforce. Based on the input received, the following incentives were identified:

1. Parking: Underground parking or a contribution toward the construction of a future garage.
2. Affordable housing, with the understanding that the regulatory mechanism and amount would be determined by the taskforce in conjunction with the affordable housing sub-committee & Public gathering space.
3. Sustainability, with specific standards to be determined by the taskforce in conjunction with the Township Sustainability Manager.
4. Multimodal improvements.



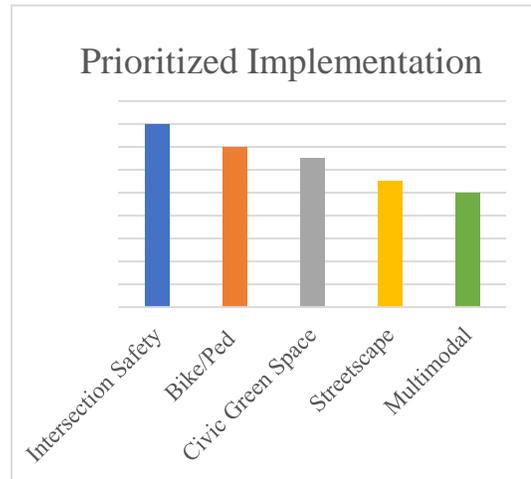
Staff recommends including all the identified incentives in the plan to provide future implementers of the plan with options, while noting the preferences indicated by the Board at the time the plan was completed.

4. Implementation/Prioritization:

Staff sought direction on which improvements to prioritize in the Implementation Plan beyond the near-term actions. On Page 22 of the plan, strategic public investments are identified, which include improvements for streetscapes, green civic spaces, bicycle/pedestrian connections, multimodal, and intersection safety. Based on the input received, the following improvements were identified:

1. Intersection Safety Improvements
2. Bike/Pedestrian Improvements
3. Civic Green Space
4. Streetscape Improvements
5. Multimodal Improvements

It was noted that many of the Intersection improvements identified in the plan will require PennDOT approval. Staff coordinated with PennDOT throughout the process, presenting the potential toolkit options, which were conceptually acceptable to PennDOT subject to further analysis and planning.



5. Retail:

During the discussion, Commissioners expressed their interest in boosting the Township's retail recruitment efforts within the commercial corridor to fill vacant spaces and discourage unwanted commercial uses. The Planning Commission suggested removing the recommendation for retail use separation (#2) as it's better to have a less desirable use than a vacant space. However, the Board pointed out that separation requirements have been successfully implemented in other zoning districts. Staff agrees that this strategy should be included in the plan as it could provide a potential solution for dealing with nuisance or unwanted uses, regardless of whether it's used or not.

V. Impact on Township Finances:

There will be no impact on Township finances.

VI. Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board consider the master plan and provide direction as needed.

Previously Provided Recommendations for the Ardmore Master Plan

1. Any future zoning overlay(s) as contemplated by the Master Plan should be carefully crafted to give due regard to the impact of higher density development on specific existing conditions, neighborhood characteristics, historic resources, traffic patterns, and overall quality of life. For example, developments consisting of 4-6 stories may be appropriate in many areas within the overlay (e.g., between Lancaster Avenue and the railroad), but not in other areas (e.g., abutting single family homes). The zoning overlay should be a precision instrument. This could entail the creation of sub-zones with the overlay, creation of a 3-D model, or other methods to ensure that the impacts of a new zoning overlay are examined on a more micro-scale.
2. Remove recommendation for retail use separation as a less desirable use is preferable to a vacant use.
3. Zoning strategies should include a recommendation to include gathering space or privately owned public space for all new developments exceeding specified square footage.
4. A Private/Public Partnership for construction of a secondary garage structure should be considered. A future zoning taskforce should consider options for contributions strategies to encourage centralized town center parking.
5. Improvements on Rittenhouse Place for additional streetscape amenities, traffic calming, or bike lanes should give due regard to the need for parking, both short term and longer term, necessary to support businesses.
6. Include parking strategies aimed at protecting small businesses, including the establishment of a parking committee to consider on-going needed adjustments and incentives to encourage employee parking in underutilized locations and making on-street parking available to business customers.
7. Ardmore has one of the lowest tree equity scores in Lower Merion. The Master Plan should address the need for creation and maintenance of green space-i.e., green infrastructure-including to support shade trees. Any future zoning overlay should require greening. New developments over a certain size should require green space, such as courtyards or other areas, preferably where shade trees can be grown. Green spaces should be planned—not an afterthought.
8. Develop a streetscape maintenance and improvement plan for Ardmore, including providing green infrastructure for street trees.
9. Removal of the recommendation that code regulations could be reduced to enhance the financial feasibility of affordable unit. De-regulating development does not seem advisable. Preserving existing affordable housing should be a key consideration.
10. Recommendations in the Master Plan should incorporate reliable data supporting identified strategies, particularly data presented related to building height and parking utilization. Such data should be made readily available to the public.
11. The Master Plan should include images, particularly of traffic calming improvements, that reflect aspirational conditions. Because the Master Plan is a guiding document, it should not include images that we would not want to recreate in Lower Merion.
12. Inclusion of language that acknowledges that affordable housing strategies should be Township-wide and considered in all planning documents, not specific to Ardmore.

13. Remove reference to a 45-degree setback related to building height, as the existing setback requirement is sufficient.
14. Improvements to Schauffele Plaza should give due regard to the need to provide vehicular access, short term, and handicapped parking to proximate businesses. While most parking could potentially be eliminated, some may be required to support businesses. Consideration should also be given to whether maintaining a vehicular throughway is beneficial to provide access to the One Ardmore parking garage.
15. Additional Background: Staff recommends adding more information to the plan to provide context for past planning efforts undertaken within the last 20 years. This should include acknowledging the change in zoning from C1/C2/ASDD to the MUST Overlay to the current VC/TC1, as well as a demographic analysis. This information will be critical for future users and implementers of the plan.
16. Vision: Staff recommends further refining the vision statement to reflect Ardmore's position as a town center for the Lower Merion community while also providing for local needs and services. The current vision references a village, which historically has been used to identify smaller neighborhood-focused commercial uses such as Gladwyne and Penn Valley. However, the 2016 Comprehensive Plan identified Ardmore as a Traditional Main Street, recognizing its central position, concentration of community services and amenities, transit access, and ability to serve the commercial needs of a larger portion of the township's population. Staff recommends that the scope be expanded to recognize Ardmore as a town center, while also recognizing its unique accessibility to the surrounding residential neighborhoods.
17. Susceptibility to Change Map: Staff recommends that the consultant team provide definitions and criteria for the different levels of susceptibility and justification for selecting specific properties based on those criteria. The map should help the public determine the desirability of change and help the future zoning task force better understand the reasoning and need.
18. Housing: Staff recommends that the applicant provide additional clarification on the identified strategies. The Township currently administers a housing rehab program, and staff would like clarification on whether the consultant means to expand on the current program or if this was an oversight. Additional information on establishing a housing trust and its advantages should be provided so that it can be further considered with future housing studies within the Township.
19. Parking: Staff recommends that a future zoning task force contemplate how fee-in-lieu parking could be achieved to leverage funding for the garage construction and public-private partnerships.
20. Traffic Calming: Several community members in North Ardmore have commented on the need for intersection improvements in the study area located at the intersections of Montgomery Avenue. Staff recommends that the plan identify the intersection of Montgomery and Woodside for improvement. Additionally, staff recommends providing a matrix to better understand which toolkit treatments would be appropriate for the identified intersections. This would enable staff to refer to the plan as changes are proposed incrementally.
21. Implementation Plan: Staff recommends revising the Implementation Plan to prioritize the design and engineering of Schauffele Green, establishing a parking committee, working

with Ardmore Initiative to develop a streetscape maintenance and enhancement program, and developing a signage plan to bring more visibility to the parking garage.