

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WILMAPCO Zoom Virtual Meeting, December 13, 2021

Minutes prepared by Dawn Voss from recording.

Mr. Tom Fruehstorfer, PAC Chair, called the meeting to order.

1. ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Patricia Folk, Cecil County
Tom Fruehstorfer, City of Newark, and PAC Chair
Mike Kaszyski, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce
Bill Lower, Committee of 100
Ken Potts, Delmarva Rail Passenger Association
Gail Seitz, City of New Castle
Tracy Chamblee, Southern New Castle County Alliance
Barry Shotwell, 7/40 Alliance (Vice Chair)
Vic Singer, Civic League for New Castle County
Dave Tancredi, Milltown-Limestone Civic Alliance

Absent:

Mark Blake, GHADA
Katherine Caudle, Pike Creek Civic League
Carlos de los Ramos, AARP
Bill Dunn, Civic League for New Castle County
Kathryn Economou, University of Delaware
Mario Gangemi, Cecil County Chamber of Commerce
Tiffany Geyer Lydon, League of Women Voters of New Castle County
Ken Grant, AAA Mid-Atlantic
Givvel Marrero, Delaware Hispanic Commission
Deanna Murphy, Cecil County Board of Realtors
Glenn Pusey, Bear Glasgow Council
Jawann Saunders, Simonds Gardens Civic Association

Staff Members:

Dan Blevins, Principal Planner
Randi Novakoff, Outreach Manager
Bill Swiatek, Principal Planner
Tigist Zegeye, Executive Director

Guests:

Robert Hicks, Resident
Matt Rogers, New Castle County
Peggy Shultz, League of Woman Voters

2. Approval of the October 18, 2021 Meeting Minutes

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Vic Singer and seconded by Mr. Mike Kaszyski the PAC approved the October 18, 2021 meeting minutes

3. Public Comment Period:

None.

4. Executive Director's Report:

Ms. Zegeye shared the following public outreach information:

- The Council met on November 4th. They had four Action Items. Council amended the FY 2022 Unified Planning Work Program UPWP with carry-over funds. Council amended the FY 2020 TIP to include a DTC project for onboard, real-time information systems. Council also amended the TIP with funding for transit vehicle replacement, electric buses, and a charging infrastructure project for DTC. Council approved the ranking of project prioritization for the 2021 Delaware Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Candidate projects, and also approved proposed Public Advisory Committee members: Ms. Pat Folk from Cecil County, Ms. Gail Seitz from the City of New Castle, and Mr. Barry Shotwell from the 7/40 Alliance. There were presentations on the City of New Castle Transportation Plan Update, Southbridge Neighborhood Plan, and Townsend Walkable Community Workshop.
- The City of New Castle Transportation Plan Update Advisory Committee met on October 26th and held an in-person City Council workshop on November 9th.
- Staff moderated a panel discussion on the impact of COVID on planning at the APA Delaware State Conference on December 1st.
- FHWA Transportation Planning Capacity Building Initiative will be highlighting the Transportation Justice Plan as an exemplary model for MPOs and DOTs to follow. Staff also contributed an article about the Transportation Justice Plan to FHWA's GIS in Transportation Newsletter.
- The Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research is continuing to analyze the bus connectivity through transportation justice areas in part to form an analysis of the 2019 Transportation Justice Plan. We plan to have a working group meeting after the new year.
- The draft plan for the Churchmen's Crossing Update was added to the website and was presented to the advisory committee on September 27th. A final public workshop was held on October 25th. The draft report was updated with comments from our partner agencies and will go to the TAC for endorsement in December then to the Council for action in January.
- The Union Street project, virtual public workshop was held on October 27th and a survey with alternatives for that project was available online until November 26th.
- The first visioning community workshop for the I-95 Cap Feasibility Study was held in person on November 27th with about sixty attendees. An online Zoom meeting is scheduled for January 12th.
- A Concord Pike Corridor Monitoring effort kickoff meeting with agency partners was held in October. We had a legislative briefing on December 3rd, and then the first monitoring committee meeting was held on December 8th.
- Staff participated in the DART Service Change Workshop held on December 8th.
- Staff participated in the City of Wilmington Earth Day 2022 planning kickoff on December 9th.
- Staff will be participating in the New Castle County 2050 Comp Plan Winter Forum which is scheduled for December 15th from 6-7:30.

ACTION ITEMS:

5. PAC Chair Nominating Committee

Mr. Tom Fruehstorfer, Mr. Mike Kaszyski, and Mr. Tracy Chamblee volunteered to be on the committee.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

6. New Castle County Comp Plan – Presented by Mr. Matt Rogers

The presentation began with a video overview of the New Castle County NCC2050 Comprehensive Plan. The comp plan looks at where we are now, where we are going, what we want/need, where we want it, and how we get there. A total of three-hundred and seventy people attended four virtual workshops in the fall of 2020. Forty Youth Planning Board members are participating. Nine-hundred and nine responses to multiple surveys were received. Four-hundred and twenty-six people registered for the first two virtual Public Forums. Eight hundred and thirty-seven people attended the five “Deep Dive” virtual sessions since spring of 2021. Eighty-eight Stakeholder Advisory Committee and Inter-Agency Work Group members attended four meetings. There were more than twenty-four thousand visits to their website.

Throughout the process, the County heard broad support for preserving open space and agricultural land; general agreement that more affordable housing is needed; desire for more walkable, mixed-use development, residential density, and housing type diversity; the need to address climate change action and social justice priorities; and support for improving infrastructure. They have created a number of themes including livable built environment for all, conservation and preservation, robust economy, sustainable growth, thriving places and community character, and diverse engagement.

Draft priorities include focus growth, which directs growth to Delaware’s Level 1 and Level 2 Investment Areas; reduce risk and impact from hazards on low-income and minority communities; preserve at least 30% of land for open space in 30 years and improve ecosystem health; lead in addressing climate change, prepare for clean energy future and become more resilient; create an economic environment that supports a range of industries, including emerging industry; as economic growth occurs, strive for equity; ensure growth and change is coordinated and timed and decision-making leverages best/new data and technology; increase variety and range of price-points and locations of safe, quality housing options for all; implement corridor, watershed-based, and other target-area-based revitalization; increase diversity of engagement with community participants and staff; update the practice for re-zonings and Future Land Use Map (FLUM) changes i.e. have far fewer changes in the Future Land Use Map as we are moving forward and having re-zonings match the NCCO@2050 Future Land Use Map.

The final web forum is from 6:00-7:30 on the 15th. Registration is available on their website, NCC2050.newcastle.gov. All of the elements of the draft plan are also on the website.

Mr. Vic Singer asked where he can find data about the existing population and the number of dwelling units in our present population, preferably separately for north and south of the canal, and where he can find information about how many existing dwelling units are occupied, how many existing dwelling units are unoccupied, and how many parcels are zoned, but unbuilt. Mr. Rogers replied that there are a number of places where you can go. Some documents will be on

the website in some of the presentations that have been given in the past. There is what we have in the census, and we also have in consortium status as far as households, but those are talking about households that are going to be occupied. There is discussion of it in the actual comp plan draft in the housing section, but specific information is harder to find in there, Mr. Singer can email Land Use and the email would be forwarded to Mr. Rogers who does a lot of analysis and can get almost all of that relatively easily, because he had to find it up the Southern New Castle County Plan or other efforts earlier in this process. As far as the question about zoning for the households, Mr. Rogers asked if he is looking for recorded plans and ones that have not currently received a C of O for structure. Mr. Singer said he is looking for how many dwelling units are planned for land that is already zoned for it. Mr. Rogers clarified that he is looking for any residential that is in there. Mr. Singer said there is a distinction between multiple family housing and single-family housing, but he would like to see the whole picture. He would like to compare it to population growth expectations. Mr. Rogers recommended that Mr. Singer send an email with exactly what he wants and mention that they spoke so the email will be forwarded to him.

7. Churchman's Crossing Update – Presented by Mr. Dan Blevins

The Churchman's Crossing Plan Update is nearly complete. The Update began in July 2020 with a listening tour. There were four major public meetings and three advisory committee meetings. Considering the process was adjusted for COVID, there was good attendance at the workshops. In October, the fourth public workshop went over some of the final results. Earlier meetings covered technical elements with analysis that can be found in the appendices for this project. Much of this meeting was spent on implementation strategies, which are in appendix G. TIDs and CCEDs are new tools that can help implement parts of the plan, much of which will be imbedded into the New Castle County Comp Plan. TIDs and CCEDs were discussed at this meeting to seek feedback on the draft report. At the October workshop, there had been several weeks of public comments on them. At this workshop Spanish translation was available upon request. When attendees signed up, they could indicate if they wanted the translation. At the workshop, there was a brief introduction delivered in Spanish by a member of the consulting team and then they communicated directly with Spanish-speaking attendees if they had questions. All the polling was also both in English and Spanish.

The report structure begins with an introduction going through the planning process. The project vision includes Planning and Environmental Linkages that will make the NEBA process easier. Much of the information about existing conditions is pre-COVID from 2019 and available to review in detail on an interactive map. The team went through many iterations of this update with New Castle County to align the land use alternatives with the transportation alternatives. This led to the creation of a matrix showing the transportation options with their scores, which led to the preferred concept plan and project recommendations. Several concepts in the plan were removed from consideration. In the next steps, the recommendations will be added to our 2050 long-range plan, the TIP, the CTP, or to something like TIDs or CCEDs. Appendices A through H have a lot of that technical data about the PEL including the efforts made for the scenarios, cost estimates, the TID Strategic Plan, which if any parts of the plan become a TID this will assist with moving forward with that.

The materials on the website are organized to make it easy for people to find the draft report, the appendices, recordings of the virtual meetings, and topic-specific clips that discuss some of the alternatives. The interactive map shows each project, which when clicked reveals the name, a description, the estimated cost, and where more details can be found in the plan.

The final draft is on the website with a few of the comments that were received since September. We are scheduled to seek approval from Council in January. It will include all the recommended projects in the RTP and TIP. A monitoring program is planned so it is a great place to keep people informed and involved with implementing the project.

8. South Wilmington Neighborhood Plan Update – Presented by Mr. Bill Swiatek

Southbridge is located in the southern part of Wilmington, south of Downtown and to the east of the Riverfront. The task was to update a community plan from 2006. This update was funded by Healthy Communities Delaware and the partners for the South Wilmington Planning Network, of which WILMAPCO is part, and the Southbridge Civic Association. There was a strong approach to outreach with this plan and a lot of challenges with the pandemic. Southbridge is a community that is a tech desert, so there was a need to have in-person meetings. The civic association was well represented with eight paid representatives who received a stipend for their work with the steering committee. A youth representative from the Civic Association, WILMAPCO, the City of Wilmington, and many non-profits that work in Southbridge were involved in the steering committee.

The project had three phases beginning last year. In January, phase one was to understand existing conditions. Door-to-door surveys were conducted, as were interviews with stakeholders. During phase two, in the spring, working group meetings were held, a draft of the actions from what was gathered in the field was created, and additional questionnaires were distributed. Over the summer, the report was finished, the action items finalized, and a public workshop was held. The key challenge was doing this outreach during the pandemic. There were forty interviews with key staff in the city and residents. Five steering committee meetings were held either in person or virtually. The best approach was to have one in person and one virtual option. A community barbecue over the summer was well attended as well.

People love Southbridge's strong sense of community and identity. The community is proud of the Southbridge Wilmington Wetland Park, which not only will alleviate some of the chronic flooding in the area, but also will be a natural park next to the neighborhood. Neighborhood institutions are also something residents love. Southbridge has a lower crime rate than other parts of the city. Challenges include elevated poverty as the poverty rate is about 30% in Southbridge, and high unemployment/underemployment. The community is more bus dependent than other areas. Southbridge is surrounded by industrial land and vacant land.

The neighborhood plan consists of action items broken into categories such as community empowerment, economic revitalization, and youth and education. To focus on the mobility elements, one major thing that is already happening in Southbridge as a result of the 2006 plan is traffic calming and healthy streets. There is an active streetscape project in Southbridge, which is going into its third phase and is aiming to beautify the center part of the community and reduce the speed of cars. Reducing trucks is also a key community need. Southbridge is surrounded by warehouses and industrial land. The Port of Wilmington is nearby, and many trucks come through the community. Mr. Dan Blevins has been working on a study that looked at recommendations from the Route 9 Plan to try to alleviate some of the truck traffic that goes through Southbridge. Connectivity is another issue being worked on. A new pathway along A Street was constructed in the last few months, which provides residents access to the Riverfront area. A trail will be created through the wetland park. There are efforts to connect the 76er's Field House with some pathways to the southern end of Southbridge. There are a pair of road diets proposed in an effort to reduce the travel lanes and slow traffic to the south of Southbridge. One is associated with a bridge replacement. The other is associated with the

Route 9 Master Plan, which called for a road diet along Route 9 extending at least up to Terminal Avenue. The study recommends extending those road diets into Southbridge, so analysis is being done to evaluate the removal of lanes in Southbridge along New Castle Avenue and Heald Street. Some past efforts like bulb-outs are not slowing the traffic. Another recommendation looks at the D Street sweep removals. This is a road where people can go fast into Southbridge without stopping so there has been many crashes.

Other recommendations from the community include improving connectivity to other places. The bridge across the Christina at E. 4th Street is being considered for walking improvements. Eden Park, which is located to the south of Southbridge, was recently upgraded by the City of Wilmington. People want to go there, but the area lacks sidewalks and easy crossings. Another key recommendation is to slow and reduce trucks. Building off of and fulfilling recommendations of the Port Access Study would help the community. There is truck traffic using roads where it is illegal for big trucks to travel, so enforcement would be helpful. Better bus connections to jobs and healthy foods are needed. DART recently applied for a grant from the FTA to look at ways to improve and expand bus service in Southbridge and the Route 9 area to have better access to the ShopRite grocery store in south Wilmington, jobs at the port and surrounding warehousing, and have a shuttle connection that would connect to the Wilmington Transit Hub. Another key proposal is to reactivate the Main Street Program in Southbridge to support beautification enhancements building off the current streetscape project. There is a Southbridge CDC that has recently received additional funding and this Main Street Program could work on gateway treatments and banners. There are many mobility actions in the Southbridge Neighborhood Plan such as supporting multimodal connections to the Riverfront, expanding the EV charging infrastructure, and monitoring the NEC's future High Speed Rail Plan. Amtrak had a plan that looked at potentially putting a high-speed rail line through Southbridge, which would have negative effects on the community so keeping an eye on how that plan proceeds and advocating for the community is needed.

In terms of implementation, a memo was submitted to the City of Wilmington explaining that Southbridge should be a focus for some of the recovery funding that is coming out of ARPA. Southbridge was not designated as a hard-hit area of COVID. Because Southbridge is located in the same census tract at Christina Landing, the socio-economic data is skewed. The consultants created a memo explaining that. When the plan was completed, the memo was sent to the City of Wilmington. It was received well by the mayor and the administration. Southbridge CDC has been reactivated. It is getting some staffing support and could help drive the implementation of some of the actions in the plan. The civic association is forming action committees to implement mobility recommendations as well as other areas that were studied. To see a copy of the plan, it is on the website SWPN.org.

Mr. Tracy Chamblee asked if this area would be able to meet the requirements for any new funding coming out of Washington in the Infrastructure Bill. Mr. Swiatek said yes, and that was what he talked about with the ARPA memo that was sent. The highest level of funding that the City wanted to set aside from the funding that they received was for areas that were classified by HUD as hard impacted. Because of that data issue, because Southbridge shares a census tract with a very wealthy area, it really skewed the data, so we had to explain that in a memo as an issue and why it should continue to receive that funding. It does qualify and the mayor and other elected officials said that they do want to spend money in Southbridge.

8. Other Business

9. Adjournment

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Vic Singer and seconded by Mr. Ken Potts the PAC adjourned.

Motion passed

(12-13-21-03)

Attachments: (0)