

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WILMAPCO Hybrid-format Meeting, December 12, 2022

Minutes prepared by Dawn Voss.

Mr. Mike Kaszyski, PAC Chair, called the meeting to order.

1. ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Tracy Chamblee, Southern New Castle County Alliance
Bill Dunn, Civic League for New Castle County
Patricia Folk, Cecil County
Mike Kaszyski, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce and PAC Chair
Bill Lower, Committee of 100
Glenn Pusey, Bear Glasgow Council
Barry Shotwell, 7/40 Alliance
Vic Singer, Civic League for New Castle County
Joshua Solge, City of Newark

Absent:

Serene Abiy, University of Delaware
Mark Blake, GHADA
Mario Gangemi, Cecil County Chamber of Commerce
Ken Grant, AAA Mid-Atlantic
Richard Janney, Southern New Castle County
Deanna Murphy, Cecil County Board of Realtors
Anna Quisel, League of Women Voters of New Castle County
Gail Seitz, City of New Castle
Dave Tancredi, Milltown-Limestone Civic Alliance

Staff Members:

Dave Gula, Principal Planner
Randi Novakoff, Outreach Manager
Bill Swiatek, Principal Planner
Dawn Voss, Administrative Assistant
Tigist Zegeye, Executive Director

Guests:

Mike Reppy, Citizen

2. Approval of the October 17, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Bill Dunn said that he did attend the October 17, PAC meeting, but was listed as absent.

ACTION: On a motion by Mr. Vic Singer and seconded by Mr. Glenn Pusey the PAC approved the October 17, 2022 meeting minutes with the correction.

Motion passed

(12-12-22-01)

3. Public Comment Period:

None.

4. Executive Director's Report:

Ms. Tigist Zegeye shared the following public outreach information:

- WILMAPCO Council met on November 10th. Action items included amending the FY 2023 TIP to include the SR 9, New Castle Avenue, Landers Lane to A Street project; amending the TIP to include SR 1 and US 13 Southbound Merge project; approving the technical scoring for Project Prioritization for FY 2023 New Castle County TAP program and the Delaware Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Candidate project; and approving proposed PAC member reappointments. Presentations included the RTP, Ardens Walkable Community Workshop, the Ardens Transportation Plan, and the Southbridge Transportation Action Plan.
- The TMA Certification review took place on November 9th and the public meeting was from 6:00-7:00 p.m.
- The Governor Printz and North Claymont Monitoring Committee meeting was held on November 10th.
- Staff attended Delaware's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Plan public meeting on Monday, November 14, 2022; at 5:00-6:00 p.m. and at 6:00-7:00 p.m.
- The Ardens Transportation Plan Steering Committee met on November 15th.
- The I-95 Cap Feasibility Study Advisory Committee met virtually on November 15th. The final public workshop for the study was held on November 17th at Ursuline Academy.
- The Churchman's Crossing Monitoring Committee met on November 16th.
- The Southbridge Transportation Action Plan Steering Committee met on November 29th. A youth engagement event for 4th, 5th, and 6th graders was held on December 6th.
- Staff presented our Transportation Justice work to a University of Washington Health and Sustainable Transportation class on November 29th.
- The US 202 Corridor Monitoring Committee meeting was held on November 30th.
- Staff attended a US DOT best practices outreach training on December 7th.
- Staff presented the Route 9 Master Plan and implementation work to Nemours Executive Leadership on October 28th. The Route 9 Monitoring Committee met on December 8th.
- The Bayard Safe Routes to School team met on December 12th.
- Staff will attend the Riverfront Development Corporation Riverfront East Bank public meeting on December 14th.
- The Newport Transportation Plan Monitoring Committee will meet on December 14th.
- Staff will attend the Townsend Bike/Ped Master Plan public workshop January 4th.
- Safe Kids Delaware is working with Downes Elementary School to plan a safety rodeo January 17th -18th and a bike to school day and rodeo next May.
- The Air Quality Partnership is working to convert the in-person Tropo assembly to a digital version.

ACTION ITEMS:

5. Recommend releasing the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan 2023 Update for Public Comment from January 16 – March 6, 2023

Ms. Tigist Zegeye said staff have been doing these updates since 1996. This update began in January of last year with the Regional Progress Report and the Public Opinion Survey. A number of technical analyses were done including air quality and financial reasonableness. Staff have been going to community members and member agencies to present the draft.

Presentations were made to the DTC’s Elderly and Disabled Transit Advisory Committee, the Town of Elsmere, Centerville Civic Association, Middletown, Newport Town Council, Ardencroft, City of Wilmington Public Works and Transportation Committee, Delaware City, the Committee of 100 Transportation Committee, Arden, New Castle County League of Women Voters, City of New Castle, GHADA, North East, Elkton Mayor and Commissioners, and Old Country Road. Cecil County Council is scheduled in January, as well as Perryville and New Castle County. Staff are asking the PAC to recommend to Council that they release it for a public comment period starting January 16th and ending on March 6th at their January meeting. The Federal Government requires a thirty-day public comment period, but this exceeds that thirty days.

Mr. Bill Dunn asked if there are any questions or similar issues that come up at many of those meetings. Ms. Zegeye said there are no similar issues. Each community has their own interests. We present the long-range plan and air quality analyses and financials. Then, any projects from the long-range plan that are in their area are presented. The challenge is that people want to know what is going on in the next two or three years rather than in the next twenty years. We hear a lot about the TAP program, the Bike Ped Program, or UPWP projects. Mr. Mike Kaszyski said truck parking seems to be a common theme throughout the county because of the rise of warehouses and the queueing of inbound trucks.

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Bill Dunn and seconded by Mr. Vic Singer the PAC approved recommending the release of the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan 2023 Update for Public Comment from January 16 to March 6, 2023.

Motion passed

(12-12-22-02)

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

6. Ardens Transportation Plan

Mr. Bill Swiatek said Connecting with the Ardens: A Transportation Plan is one of two subregional studies that began this year. Staff are working with all three of the communities and the unincorporated portion of the Ardens to address issues that are common to the Ardens with a specific focus on traffic calming, access, and the safety of active transportation. The steering committee includes DART, DeIDOT, New Castle County, and all three villages. The villages have an Inter-Ardens Transportation Working Group that is working with the team. The project began with gathering public input and the existing conditions to work on setting the vision for the plan. Then, the current phase is where the team develops alternatives based on existing data and feedback from the public. A preferred alternative will be developed in the next phase, which will include a public survey to determine the key elements. Those projects will go through a prioritization process. Finally, an implementation plan will be developed. The plan should be finished by the end of the fiscal year.

For community outreach, a public survey was conducted, where postcards were sent to residents in the Ardens and the unincorporated area. Twenty questions about transportation

were on the survey. From a population of about one thousand people, one hundred and forty-five responses were received. Most of the responses were from within the Ardens. When asked how well the transportation system meets your needs, which was also on the Regional Public Opinion Survey, the results aligned with the Public Opinion Survey's New Castle Co. results. People can get around generally and many have a car. The number one issue in the community is speeding. Sixty-seven percent of people are either very or extremely concerned with speeding and safety on Harvey Road, forty-eight percent on Veale Road, and twenty-seven percent on Marsh Road. The data support these perceptions. Comparing the 85th percentile speeds on Harvey Road with the posted speeds shows drivers are going forty-four to fifty miles per hour in zones posted twenty-five or thirty-five miles per hour. Crash clusters will be examined to look for ways to make improvements. More than one hundred people participated in a WikiMapping exercise. The WikiMap captures places that people enjoy visiting. People were asked their preferred routes, which identified a network of trails on which to build. They were asked where it is unsafe and difficult to cross. The team is looking at bus connectivity. Bus Route 11 runs from Wilmington to the Ardens. Most people would like to access the Claymont Train station and about half would like to go to Concord Pike. So, there is a desire for some east-west connectivity. The public workshop, where these results were shared, was well attended. The project is in the second phase, where alternatives are being developed. Another survey will be conducted to determine the preferred alternatives. A youth engagement event is being planned. This information is available at wilmapco.org/ardens.

Mr. Mike Kaszyski said he is seeing with some projects that they are not really going with HAWKS but with flashing signal beacons. Mr. Swiatek said that the idea of a HAWK signal, or similar, is something they are considering on Harvey Road and Veale Road. The team will present some of those ideas to the community, and people will choose options they would like. Mr. Kaszyski said the other thing that DeIDOT is looking at is a lane diet. Now you have the opportunity where you might have had a three- or four-foot shoulder that now can be a six-foot shoulder. Mr. Swiatek said the challenge with this area is that it is often already very narrow. We are looking to slow speed in places that are already pretty narrow with mini roundabouts or chicanes. Mr. Kaszyski said or even just emphasize crosswalks or getting bump outs.

Mr. Vic Singer asked at what point do you put a price tag. Mr. Swiatek said a rough cost will have to be generated for the top alternatives. The current phase is when we come up with alternatives. Part of the decision making in the community includes cost. Mr. Singer said it might be nice to have the information available of which General Assembly Districts are there or nearby. Mr. Swiatek said the team met with Senator Gay and Representative Lambert at the workshops. They are well aware of the study and support it. Mr. Singer said the key question is how much of the individual slush funds is who willing to commit. Mr. Kaszyski said there is an opportunity for TIP funding with this and the transportation improvement or infrastructure improvement funds. Mr. Gula said it was more of a business-related improvement. Mr. Kaszyski said this is the perfect example DeIDOT needs to expand the fee for sidewalks. It does not make sense to construct sidewalks where you do not have many pedestrians.

7. Southbridge Transportation Plan

Mr. Bill Swiatek said the Southbridge Transportation Action Plan includes a study area in South Wilmington. The Southbridge neighborhood is in the center and the study considers the development near Southbridge including the Riverfront East Development to the west and the Port area. The Project Management Committee includes City of Wilmington, DART, DeIDOT,

the South Wilmington Planning Network (SWPN), The Southbridge CDC, and the Southbridge Civic Association. The advisory committee is being run through the South Wilmington Planning Network. Community ambassadors encourage public feedback for the study, especially with the civic association. Two dedicated representatives were appointed from the civic association. It is a challenge to get survey results in Southbridge, so two local survey takers help with surveying within the community. The schedule is similar to the Ardens Transportation Study, but with less community visioning. This study is building off of a neighborhood plan that was just done last year in Southbridge. The transportation vision was established in the neighborhood plan. Some work was done to confirm that vision, but this plan can move forward more quickly with assumptions and alternatives. This plan should be completed by the end of the fiscal year.

The foundation for this plan is the Southbridge Neighborhood Action Plan, the 2008 Southbridge Circulation Study, the Statewide Truck Parking Study, the Port of Wilmington Traffic Circulation Study, and the Route 9 Master Plan. There are many development projects within the study area. The Riverfront East Development will have a public meeting next week about the investment in new roadways for this development. A trail connects into that network to better connect Southbridge to the Riverfront. There is bridge replacement over the railroad tracks. In Southbridge, there has been some streetscape work as the result of that 2008 study. As part of the bridge replacement, there will be a road diet on Heald Street. As part of the Route 9 Master Plan, the idea is to have a road diet south at Terminal Avenue. One idea being considered is extending these road diets into Southbridge. One of the four focus areas of this work is looking at traffic and road diets, which was recommended in the neighborhood plan. Trucks and freight are major issues because of their proximity to the port and industry. There are bike and pedestrian issues with reaching destinations nearby. Transit is also a key concern for the population here, where many people rely on transit.

An existing conditions report was done and a map showing crash clusters was made so the team will be looking to make improvements at those intersections within Southbridge. A survey was done with a postcard mailing. The team did a couple of engagement events in person. It is a challenge to get results within Southbridge because it is a tech desert. Forty-three survey responses were received online and in person with about half from residents. The other half were commuters or workers. The survey asked about the challenges residents have in terms of transportation. Forty-four percent said it is a challenge to get to healthy and affordable grocery shopping, whereas only ten percent in the county found that a challenge according to our Public Opinion Survey. It is also more challenging for the residents of Southbridge to get to social activities, jobs, and medical care. Fifty-seven percent said better bus service is needed to grocery stores. Fifty-two percent said better bus service is needed to shopping, and forty-three percent to jobs. When asked if walking and biking access is important, most said it was important with four percent saying it is not. When asked how important each of the key focus areas are, reducing traffic speed was most important. Reducing truck traffic was second, followed by improving sidewalks.

The public workshop where these ideas were presented was well attended. Many of the things heard on the survey were confirmed. Some of the things that were emphasized by attendees were the issue of lighting, truck parking and traffic, and flooding. Text messaging is being used for outreach. The Public Opinion Survey results for our region show that how people perceive the effectiveness of text messaging varies based on race and ethnicity. For Whites, about forty-four percent say text messaging is effective. Sixty-six percent of Blacks and seventy percent of Hispanics say text messaging is effective. Southbridge is a community where ninety percent of the residents are Black, so text messaging is being used. A youth engagement event was held for fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. A second, door-to-door survey is planned. Some immediate

concerns and signal timing issues on a couple of streets were communicated to Public Works. The next step is to create alternatives, then conduct the second survey to get some ideas about them before the second public workshop. This information is on our website at wilmaco.org/Southbridge.

8. I-95 Cap Feasibility Study Update

Mr. Dave Gula said the study team worked with neighborhood groups including United Neighbors and West Side Grows Together. The goals established through meetings with the community included reconnecting the community that was separated by I-95; supporting growth, cohesion, and pride in the community; and providing better multi-connections throughout the area.

The first workshop was November 17, 2021. Early in the process, the vision was set by listening to what people want. At that workshop pictures of amenities requested by the public were presented and attendees voted on what they liked and did not like. Initial ideas were presented at the second community workshop, and attendees posted comments on comment boards. The most popular option removed traffic from two bridges to make a more connected greenway. Three concepts were presented at the third community workshop in September. The Secretary of Transportation was at the advisory committee meeting and suggested covering the whole thing. This is encouraging since the State will likely be building the project. The public prefer the concept where play areas are not near the ramps. There is a focus on Adams Street, because it is hard for people to cross, but also because it is closer to downtown.

A large number of comments were received at the final workshop and will be captured in the final report. Comments included the suggestion that there be no development due to concerns over parking. Seeking grant money to build parking over I-95 will weaken the grant application. There may be two sets of restrooms. Traffic calming on Jackson and Adams is necessary for pedestrian and bike connections. An amphitheater is suggested for small performances, but not a major venue. At the November 17th workshop, many features had been added to the preferred concept such as trees, an amphitheater, the children's nature play area, a festival lawn, a promenade, a dog park, a garden, potential areas for art installations, and market plaza. Parking is shown on the streets and there is an area for food trucks. The knoll could also be a sledding hill. A nonprofit café could go in, but for-profit businesses cannot be built over I-95. The community wants to see bird habitats, native plantings, and pollinator gardens. Lighting is needed throughout the park for safety. Specific sports fields/courts were not wanted because they only have one use. The consultant team provided great graphics that give an idea of the scale and how much fits in the space.

Determining the traffic impact of closing bridges was important. The team met with the City, Public Works, emergency services and DelDOT. It was determined that two bridges could be closed to traffic without traffic concerns. Bus service on 8th and 9th Streets was a concern. The buses can come back around on 6th and add bus stops along the new route. There was also the suggestion to make 8th Street two-way because it is very wide. The signals will stay in place to make sure the pedestrians are safe to cross. The best streets to close are 7th and 9th Streets.

Looking at traffic calming, Jackson Street has curb parking and two wide travel lanes, so people travel at higher speeds. One lane can be taken to put in bike amenities or another lane of parking. The traffic counts collected in May of 2021 indicate that a travel lane can be removed on Jackson Street as long as the signals are retimed. Traffic calming could include bump-outs, narrowing travel lanes, raised intersections, on-street parking, or chicanes. A University of Delaware Landscape Architecture Studio has been working on this as a real-world project, and

the students have some good ideas that alter street flow into the cap area. One lane could be made into a two-way, protected bike lane. The raised crosswalk does not need to be raised very much if the surrounding treatments help it stand out. There is no need to wait to do traffic calming. Jackson and Adams Streets are difficult to cross now, so solutions can be put in place sooner than later. A two-lane cycle path can be built now and when the cap is built, it can be moved to the cap park to put in another lane of parking. The city would like to eventually have bike connections from river to river and this could help with that. The bridges are shown with a travel lane and a parking lane. If a turn lane is needed it can be closer to the intersection. The neighbors said they need parking. Parking can be added to the bridges, along Jackson Street, and parts of Adams Street, which adds more than one hundred spaces. If this park becomes a bit of a regional draw, this could be the parking that is needed.

In the study timeline, the four workshops have been completed. Each workshop was accompanied by an advisory committee meeting. A draft final report was received last week. The report will be presented to the TAC on Thursday, and then posted on the WILMAPCO website for a thirty-day public comment period, until the January Council meeting. Much of the technical information is in the appendices. Staff will seek endorsement from the TAC this week, then Council endorsement on January 12th. It is a feasibility study, and what was approved is feasible. A cost estimate will be included in the final report. The feasibility study was conducted at DelDOT's request. The State of Delaware is very interested in this project. A grass roots movement about I-95's impact on the community started the process. DelDOT will be able to show this is feasible and the cost estimate, then decide how to move forward with building and maintaining it.

Mr. Glenn Pusey asked if the city has been very involved in the process. Mr. Gula said the city has been involved at every level throughout this process. They offered their support with things like answering questions and getting together with staff to go over the traffic analysis. There were monthly Wilmington Initiatives briefings and monthly meetings with city staff, DelDOT, and DTC. They were very aware of the process, and they support it.

Mr. Josh Solge asked if participation has been citywide or the local area around the proposed cap area. Mr. Gula said the team was particularly focused on the neighborhoods around the cap area, but people participated from all over the State. The surveys asked people where they are from, what their interest is, and if they work or live in Wilmington. It was a pretty wide audience. There were many people from New Castle County. Anybody on the WILMAPCO mailing lists received meeting notices and updates. There were some meetings held a couple of blocks off the corridor, but meetings were held on the corridor or in the neighborhood. As many meetings as possible were in person because the area is a tech desert. The team wanted representation from the community. There were participants from West Center City, Hedgeville, and all along this corridor.

Mr. Bill Lower said the path forward is really helpful for understanding where this goes from here. He asked Mr. Gula to comment regarding the open or closed concept and the tunnel being created with the lighting and infrastructure that will be needed. Mr. Gula said it comes down to open versus closed and will be a challenge, but the feasibility is done. There may be fire suppression indicated as well, depending on if it is termed a tunnel or a bridge. There is not much guidance from FWHA, but if you do not have venting that is more like a tunnel. We have venting in every block except the southernmost one, so he does not know that this will be a tunnel, and that affects how you treat it. We are working on that and DelDOT has been part of the process. At the end of November, we talked about that process, so they know what they are getting into.

Mr. Tracy Chamblee said he loves this concept. It is beautiful. He was intrigued by the amphitheater and some of the other aspects that are being considered. He asked where parking would be if you put those elements in. Mr. Gula said over one hundred potential spaces would be created as part of the traffic calming, where parking will be added along the perimeters of the open space. That is one of the reasons we stayed away from creating a regional entertainment center. We do not want this to be another step in the National Park system. The idea is for it to be community space. If we have one hundred extra spaces, that should manage the parking. Mr. Chamblee asked if the amphitheater would not be something to attract major musical acts that would drive a lot of congestion into this area. Mr. Gula said that is not the goal. The whole corridor is only about four hundred feet wide. A concert venue cannot be in the middle of a residential neighborhood. This will be a community-sized space. Using federal dollars to build parking over I-95 is going to be very unpopular, certainly not popular with DeIDOT, but it will also make the grant applications much less competitive. Grant applications should show the community benefits, quality of life benefits, and multimodal benefits.

Mr. Mike Kaszyski asked if anyone had looked at existing parking in a four-mile radius. Mr. Gula said they had not done that. As this moves forward, that is something they will need to do. There are not many extra spaces in the community. Mr. Kaszyski said maybe up 10th, 11th, or 12th Streets to the east, there may be parking garages. Mr. Gula said he does not know what Chase has. They may have a garage there. There is an open lot behind the school, which is used for school activities during the week. The church has a lot, which is probably used a couple of evenings per week and on Sundays. Chase has overflow parking that the church uses on 11th Street. There will need to be some collaboration. Mr. Kaszyski asked with this being in the state right-of-way, does it become a state park? It seems like it should be a city park. Mr. Gula said he does not think there is a city park this big. Since this is going to be over I-95, this is going to be state owned. Mr. Kaszyski said with the landscaping tree wells, you will be augmenting the park space itself, but on Jackson and Adams are you looking at upgrades on both sides of the streets? Mr. Gula said we would be looking at streetscaping along there. There is some tree cover already. That might be more for city management. The city rule is if you take down one tree, you have to put two more in. The count is potentially over four hundred trees for this.

Mr. Josh Solge said he is sure the soil depth here is limited and asked what kind of like tree species in height are being considered and what the prospects are for a decade or two. He asked if the plan is for a canopy over this park or if the trees will be decorative, but not big shade casters like the oaks on Bancroft. Mr. Gula said this is affected by the amount of area where there will be fill. If that closed concept version is done, there will be a lot of fill areas where you can have a really big tree without impacting the infrastructure. There will be some limitations, and that is something to figure out as they go forward. The firm that was used has a lot of experience with building these projects. You may not have the tallest trees, but that may be why there are so many of them. Mr. Kaszyski said his concern would be the root mass itself on deciduous trees growing lateral rather than staying within the well.

Mr. Vic Singer said he tried to look at this historically. A lot of concepts have come and gone. The concept of a monorail over I-95, the concept of dedicated travel lanes for multi-passenger vehicles or buses, but by and large, they hinge on the notion these would be marvelous things to have if dollars came from heaven with no local money. The question that arises is how much of this would be built if it had to be paid for locally? Mr. Gula said that is a good question, but that is not part of this project. The Secretary of Transportation and the Governor are interested in this, and they asked us to show the feasibility of it. There is a federal grant designed for this

type of project, which reconnects a community, in the new infrastructure bill. It is designed for moving highways or capping them. It is a fifty-fifty match, so yes, there has to be some local money.

Mr. Singer said Wilmington is not the only city that has been bisected by a highway that went through the center of town, because when the interstate system was planned that was regarded as a worthwhile goal. Our perception of what is a worthwhile goal has changed, but how much money are we willing to spend to achieve the change in the goal when so many other things are threatening our well-being? We do not have any realistic solution yet for climate change. The climate is going to change. In the last two million years there have been seventeen cycles in extreme glaciation and extreme melt. Everything we are talking about regarding climate change is to delay the impact for half of a century. It is another forty-thousand years until we get near the peak. We are not going to change that, because it has been happening to the earth for billions of years, alternating ice ages and extreme melt. We do not have a solution to that. That is a much bigger threat to the well-being of the State of Delaware than the separation of two neighborhoods out of several neighborhoods that have been separated for sixty years now.

Mr. Mike Reppy said he lives three blocks from this area and would support any of the proposals. 9th Street is a vital corridor to the I-95 north onramp, and so by closing it and routing that traffic to 8th or 6th will add a lot of volume to Jackson and Adams Streets' circulation, which is already in trouble. Pre-pandemic morning commutes were terrible because the intersection of 9th and Adams had too much going on. It is an I-95 problem. Why they decided to put the onramp there, he still questions. What did the traffic study project for how all of western Wilmington will get to I-95 north, to that 10th Street onramp? Mr. Gula said we looked at the traffic in the peak hours to see the impact. There will be some dispersal, but when you simplify the operation of the intersection, that will have an impact on traffic flow. Before anything else, the city will close a street for two months to see what it looks like. That will give us a real-world sample, so we will have a better idea of what closing those bridges will do.

9. Other Business

10. Adjournment

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Glenn Pusey and seconded by Mr. Barry Shotwell the PAC adjourned at 7:44 p.m.

Motion passed

(12-12-22-03)

Attachments: (0)