

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WILMAPCO Zoom Virtual Meeting, August 16, 2021

Minutes prepared by Dawn Voss from recording.

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

1. ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Mark Blake, GHADA
Bill Dunn, Civic League for New Castle County
Patricia Folk, Cecil County
Carlos de los Ramos, AARP
Ken Grant, AAA Mid-Atlantic
Mike Kaszyski, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce
Bill Lower, Committee of 100
Deanna Murphy, Cecil Board of Realtors
Ken Potts, Delmarva Rail Passenger Association
Barry Shotwell, 7/40 Alliance (Vice Chair)
Vic Singer, Civic League for New Castle County
Dave Tancredi, Milltown-Limestone Civic Alliance

Absent:

Kevin Caneco, SNCC
Katherine Caudle, Pike Creek Civic League
Kathryn Economou, University of Delaware
Tom Fruehstorfer, City of Newark and PAC Chair
Dick Janney, Southern New Castle County
Givvel Marrero, Delaware Hispanic Commission
Glenn Pusey, Bear Glasgow Council
Jawann Saunders, Simonds Gardens Civic Association
Gail Seitz, City of New Castle

Staff Members:

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

2. Approval of the June 21, 2021 Meeting Minutes

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Vic Singer and seconded by Mr. Ken Grant the PAC approved the June 21, 2021 meeting minutes.

Motion passed

(08-16-21-01)

3. Public Comment Period: None

4. Executive Director's Report:

Ms. Zegeye shared the following public outreach information:

- The Council met on July 8th. There were no action items. There were presentations on the Churchman's Crossing Plan Update, the Union Street Reconfiguration and Streetscape Improvement Study, WILMAPCO Freight Studies Updates, the Route 9 Paths Plan, and the WILMAPCO Video: How an Idea Becomes a Project.
- Staff is coordinating with CADSR on a new analysis of bus connectivity to transportation justice areas. The Transportation Justice Working Group was reestablished to guide this study. Anyone who would like to join should contact Mr. Bill Swiatek.
- The Townsend Walkable Communities Workshop was held on July 12. A presentation will be made to the Townsend Council on September 1st.
- City of New Castle Transportation Plan hosted a pop-up outreach event in conjunction with the concerts in Battery Park on July 28th.
- Staff are supporting Collaborate Northeast in the implementation of an EPA grant that will examine emerging mobility solutions in the Prices Run neighborhood.
- Staff are supporting DART for an Areas of Persistent Poverty FTA grant.
- Staff is presenting the Transportation Justice Plan at the North Carolina Public Transportation Association's conference on August 27th, at the Transportation Research Board's annual meeting on September 13th, and at FHWA's Environmental Justice Screening Peer Exchange on September 21st.
- The Churchman's Crossing Plan Update project team is developing the draft which will be presented to the Advisory Committee on September 27th and to the public on October 25th.
- Hargreaves Jones and JMT were selected to conduct the I-95 Cap Feasibility Study. The scope and contract are currently being finalized with the firm. A kick-off meeting is scheduled for August 30th.
- MDOT/MTA and MARC staff gave an in-person and virtual briefing to Cecil County and local elected officials on July 22nd at the Cecil County Municipal Center. The update was well-received and state and local officials will receive updates as the current study continues to move forward.
- The Concord Pike Monitoring Committee kickoff meeting is scheduled for August 17th.
- The City of New Castle Transportation Plan Online Public Workshop is scheduled for September 13th. Registration is available on the WILMAPCO homepage. An in-person meeting in conjunction with the New Castle City Council is being planned for October.
- The TIP/CTP Public Meeting is scheduled for September 15th.
- The Upper Eastern Shore MDOT Pre-tour will be held on September 8th.
- Air Quality Partnership is planning a car-free week social media campaign for the week of September 20th, including a kickoff event and scavenger hunt with prizes for winners.
- A Walkable Communities Workshop for Downtown Middletown is scheduled for September 29th. To register, visit the WILMAPCO homepage.
- Be sure to subscribe to WILMAPCO's YouTube Channel, LinkedIn, and Instagram.
- The digital version of WILMAPCO's Transporter newsletter was launched. Visit our homepage to read it and subscribe.

ACTION ITEMS:

None

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

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

The second Public Workshop was held on March 3rd with about ninety-nine people registered. There was continued discussion about transportation scenarios, potential land use options, current growth, and the potential for robust growth. Discussion began about the modelling results using the Peninsula Model and proposed performance metrics. On March 12th, team members attended the DeIDOT Resource Agency meeting to begin the PEL process. At the second Advisory Committee meeting on May 3rd, there was more detailed discussion of the project criteria evaluation, implementation strategies, and planning for the upcoming recap of the March workshop. The third Public Workshop, held on June 23rd with about fifty-nine attendees, was more technical with results and analysis of the modelling.

The team held six sessions for in-depth conversation about modelling inputs for the study. The team went through multiple iterations of land use and had many discussions with New Castle County Land Use and the consulting firm, Urban3. Everything modeled was based upon a land use beyond what is expected from current development activity. Many projects in the study area are already in the RTP including some that are not funded. The team is evaluating the viability and value of those projects as well as a few not in the RTP. Twelve criteria are being used to evaluate the projects including connectivity, effect on person miles traveled, congestion, transit enhancement, mode share, bike and pedestrian level of traffic stress, economic development, safety, constructability, environmental impacts, cultural/historic impacts, and noise/property impacts. Mr. Paul Moser, from DeIDOT, provided the tools to evaluate bicycle and pedestrian level of traffic stress so those projects were scored based on improvement to connectivity. Then a baseline cost was determined. Through the evaluation process some projects were removed from consideration including some ramps on I-95 that were either no longer needed or created weave on I-95.

Two new possible implementation tools include Transportation Improvement Districts (TIDs) and Complete Community Enterprise Districts (CCEDs). The plan will have information about these implementation tools along with the work that the team began in support of them, such as the transportation project list and land use elements. The team is working on the final travel demand model, recommendations, and implementation strategies that will part of the draft plan to be released mid-September. The Advisory Committee will meet on September 27th and a public meeting will be on October 25th.

Mr. Vic Singer asked what the team has in mind for north-south capacity including Routes 2 to 4 to Old Baltimore Pike. Mr. Mike Kaszyski added Kirkwood Highway to Route 40. Mr. Blevins said at least a portion of that is addressed in the Churchman's Road Extension from Route 2 to Route 4. Mr. Bill Dunn said that gets you to I-95 but asked what you would do south of that. Mr. Singer replied there have been many concepts involving that since the late 1960's and none of them have gone anywhere. Mr. Blevins replied that the formerly planned partial interchange on I-95 and Route 72 was going to go all the way through to Pike Creek. When you bring up true origins to destinations, the question is how many people are going from north of this area to south? There are some, but the Journey to Work data indicate people who flow into and out of this area come from several different directions. The Churchman's Road Extension will help greatly because it alleviates a portion going through Stanton and some others. Route 273 would have an additional lane on the portion from Route 4 to get to I-95, and another portion on Route 273 would have some capacity and other improvements. The point of the study is less about moving people just north to south. There are a lot of arterials already here, the study is looking to make circulation around this area better, which in turn improves efficiencies of the existing arterials as they are. If some local traffic is diverted from those it may aid in getting some better peak hour capacities.

Mr. Bill Dunn said in the case of Churchman's Road eight-hundred and fifty homes are coming. There is the fashion center and other commercial interests. There is the potential development of thirteen industrial sites along the Delaware River, so the demands on the lower half of Churchman's Road should go up significantly. Secondly, as far as the availability of open space, the lower part of Churchman's Road could not be better for improvement and shifting traffic flow. If they turn into industrial operations, there will be many engineers, many of whom will come from Hockessin, Pike Creek and Brandywine Hundred. The demand on those roads is likely to increase. Depending on how things go with this \$3.4 trillion infrastructure plan, how much might become available and where will the funding be best utilized beyond what is allocated today? Mr. Blevins said as things are currently in the modelling, using the Peninsula model, it did not show that we needed that in order to accommodate what we have. Part of this plan includes an annual monitoring effort to continue to look at current land development conditions, the current traffic, and the current regional conditions, that will indicate if the plan needs to be adjusted.

Mr. Ken Potts said adding lanes, making better connections for roads, encouraging making Route 58 a through highway across New Castle County will only result in more congestion. If you build more highways then more cars will use the highways, so if we are at a point where this particular area suffers from the ills of traffic congestion, then the strategy ought to be improve the roadways, but not necessarily expand them. Then go to New Castle County and argue that parking needs to be restricted. As parking becomes scarce, the users of the highways will start looking at transit and other ways to get to work. Two significant users of public transit are in this area. JP Morgan and Chase brings employees in via train and then shuttlebus. The Christiana Medical Center is also a significant transit user. However, in higher education, the Delaware Technical and Community College has virtually no transit onsite. They have it out on the highways and do nothing to incentivize staff and students to use transit. So, a new philosophy about development is needed that it cannot be unrestricted. We cannot continue to build more parking lots and more cars as we are responsible for the transportation end, and it is incumbent upon us to speak up under these circumstances. Mr. Blevins replied that the county is discussing with Land Use the concepts that made this area different from other parts of the county, about having things closer to the road. Their consultant, Urban3, has done some work that will be part of their comp plan. That is the agency to talk to about changing the code in this area. In the 1997 plan, some of the transit routes that were put out there have been discontinued because they were not sustainable. In this plan, the proposed transit routes and pedestrian improvements will help with pedestrians, but also with circulation in hopes of having better frequency for people who depend on transit in this area. Mr. Blevins suggested looking into what the county is including in the comp plan that may address building and design.

Mr. Mike Kaszyski asked if DeIDOT is at the point that a TID needs to be established here and if so, if it would function like Southern New Castle County, which is more of a consortium or like Middletown with the Eastown and Westown TIDs, which are different. Mr. Kaszyski said the CCEDs seem great for renewal in areas where we have the facilities, but there are not a lot of thriving facilities in this area. So, it is getting those players to participate in a TID, because it is the commercial side that has been running TISs in this area for the last ten years that are straining the capacity.

Mr. Bill Dunn said his daughter moved to Virginia Beach three years ago and they have seen a huge expansion over the past fifteen or twenty years. They took a much more responsible evaluation in how they approached transportation needs as the development came. There are roadways in the Virginia Beach area where the right-of-way is twice the size of the two-lane road that is going to be expanded in the next five years. They planned ahead for what they are going to need and build it as it occurs. It eliminates getting to a point where we sit through

gridlock after gridlock, year after year, before moving forward with a project that we first started talking about twenty-five years ago. The connection road between Churchman's Road and Kirkwood Highway dates back forty-five years. There is an effort in New Castle County to build a better infrastructure, expand business interests, manufacturing facilities, and industrial sites. The road system should not be fifteen years behind. In the case of the TIDs, and this is something the Civic League has argued since it was first rolled out, that is not how to approach things. The developer throws in ten percent of what the overall costs are going to be, and then we are going to sit and wait for twenty years until we build up most of it. In the interim, every other intersection goes into complete gridlock and people sit through traffic light after traffic light. You are wishing and praying that people are going to get out and start riding bicycles or start riding buses and eventually it might come along, but at this point it is a fantasy and we are spending a lot of money on it. The objective is to make the quality of life better for everybody. We do not want everybody to be a single person in a car driving all around New Castle County, and there were efforts in the 80's and 90's to promote carpools. We must stop talking about improving this system in this very congealed, odd way, but address the problem correctly. We are likely to find ourselves in a position to be provided money for infrastructure, including transportation, that we will never see again. We should be thinking about where we can best utilize those dollars. We may want to buy electric buses or do some other things, but the overall effort should be to improve the quality of life and cut down on the ozone that exists in New Castle County, which does not exist in Cecil County, Chester County, or anywhere the prevailing winds are come from. It is because we are sitting in traffic all the time.

Mr. Blevins said then we are ahead of our time. Mr. Dunn said beyond what we have at this point and asked if it could be implemented in a moment's notice if suddenly, we got four or five billion dollars poured into transportation expansion and development. Mr. Blevins said projects take a while. Design takes quite a long time. Things take time. Take Churchman's Road for example, it has yet to be determined if it can be built because there is still the question of going over or under. There are a lot of those obstacles to get to shovel ready. Some of these projects are closer to shovel-ready than others. Mr. Dunn said he agrees and hence the reason he talks about the lower end of Churchman's Road. There is some swamp land as you come down away from I-95, then there is open, protected field land where one-hundred feet off the front could be taken to expand it to Route 273 and possibly alleviate some of the load on 273. So much land is getting built out in New Castle County. If you anticipate that five years from now a broader capacity will be needed in this area, get the land now to be prepared to do whatever is needed. Route 141 from Prices Corner to Barley Mill Plaza and all the improvements that were made ten years ago took fifteen years of buying up homes on one side of the road to make it wide enough. Here, open land is sitting there. Obtain the land now and prepare for where the load is going to be, because he does not think will get on a bicycle or look for the nearest bus when he can hop in his car and if the road system is adequate, he can be there in fifteen minutes.

Mr. David Tancredi said because of the increase in people living south of the C&D Canal in the last ten to fifteen years, he knows a lot of people work in the north and live in the south, and there is an awareness that the north-south corridor is a problem. If the right plans were put in place and the public thought that this is something that would alleviate the problem, he thinks there would be a lot of buy in from the public. He says that because he understands from the politicians that there was a lot of push back about closing Harmony Road for two weeks. It is a concern for the people who live south of the C&D Canal and work in the north part of the state. The hospital is a huge part of this, and some of the public comments that came in were mentioned earlier. He asked if there has been outreach at the hospital, because a lot of the people there are impacted by this work. Mr. Tancredi asked if any comments were received from people at the hospital. Mr. Blevins said the TMA agreements that have happened over the

years used to do annual reports listing how well they are working. The idea with circulation is providing options rather than taking an arterial right away and going through all those signals. The staggering of shifts does help but having additional outlets can make an impact as well. Mr. Kaszyski agreed. He further stated that it would be nice to have some sort of connection near Gallagher School and the ball fields back there, or even if it doesn't go that way, if it goes under I-95. They are talking about doing that in Dover where Home Depot and some of those places are, but that's all a question for DeIDOT.

6. South Wilmington Neighborhood Plan – Presented by Mr. Bill Swiatek

The Southbridge Neighborhood Plan was funded by Healthy Communities Delaware and shows the value of neighborhood planning in better health outcomes. Southbridge is located in South Wilmington next to the Riverfront District. The project is an update to a neighborhood plan completed in 2006. Work is being done through the South Wilmington Planning Network and the Southbridge Civic Association. The project consultant is Asakura Robinson. The project was driven by a steering committee made up primarily of people from the civic association, eight of whom were paid including one youth representative. The steering committee also includes the City of Wilmington, WILMAPCO, local businesses, non-profits, and the University of Delaware. The first phase of the project was to understand, so an existing conditions report was done, and local leaders interviewed. Phase 2 was envisioning, which included working group meetings, drafting recommendations and action steps, and two field surveys. Youth conducted the survey door to door, which is necessary in Southbridge, as households have low computer access. In Phase 3, the team will compile the final prioritized recommendations and action steps, then refine them with the steering committee and public.

People love Southbridge for its strong sense of community and identity as one of the oldest African American communities in the city. People love the amenities that are coming, like the Southbridge Wilmington Wetland Park, which will alleviate flooding and provide a natural park. Neighborhood institutions, like the Neighborhood House, Henrietta Johnson Medical Center, and churches are valued. There is a low crime rate compared to other neighborhoods in the city. There are issues including elevated poverty which is at about 30%, high unemployment, and bus dependency as a quarter of the community is bus dependent. It is surrounded by industrial and vacant land. Outreach efforts lead to the creation of a Residents' Bill of Rights calling for community control over development in the area; affordable living, not being displaced by development; economic empowerment; resilience to stressors like climate change; and equitable access to development.

The planning document has five categories: Education; Workforce Development and Local Entrepreneurship; Affordable Living and Quality Communities; Improved Mobility; Resilience to Flooding; Sea Level Rise and Impacts of Climate Change; and More Social Capital to build local leadership. The community wants programming for youth development, better connecting of residents to jobs, support of local entrepreneurs, and the reduction of truck traffic on local streets. Connections for walking, biking and transit can be improved. Traffic calming is part of the ongoing streetscape project stemming from the 2006 Plan, but it needs to become more aggressive. Social capital is in the form of providing more support to local nonprofits, the Civic Association, and Community Development Corporation.

The city has over \$50 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding, some of which will go to Southbridge. The plan needs to be ready to show residents' priority for that funding. Southbridge has had success with Community Benefits Agreements, working with developers to the benefit of the community, which is important when considering the growing socio-economic inequities in the city. There has been a 2% increase in households making over \$100,000 per year, but also a 5%

increase in people living in poverty. Since 1980, income increased for white Wilmingtonians from \$46,380 to \$65,087. After an initial increase, Black Wilmingtonians saw a sharp decline around 2000. The South Wilmington Planning Network created a plan to revitalize the Barbara Hicks Park a few years ago. The \$500,000 plan would fix courts, add play equipment and a walking trail. There is \$5,000 set aside for implementation with the Neighborhood Plan which may go to supporting the Hicks Park work, and the next round of funding is expected to be used to implement the plan through the Community Development Corporation.

Mr. Bill Dunn asked if the Route 9 Corridor Study, the truck study, and this study being done, which seem to be related, can be taken together to look at the data and determine an overall effort that is primary to resolving all the different things in the area. Mr. Swiatek replied that the Route 9 Master Plan was first. Some of the recommendations being considered in the truck study came out of the Route 9 Master Plan, so it is definitely built from that. This Southbridge plan is specific for Southbridge because the Route 9 Master Plan stopped at the city border. It is informed by the Route 9 Master Plan and takes recommendations from it, but it is specific to the needs and geography of Southbridge.

7. TIP Outreach – Presented by Ms. Randi Novakoff

WILMAPCO's TIP is a document that lists the projects for which funding is anticipated for the next four years. The TIP is incorporated into Delaware's Capital Transportation Program and the Maryland Consolidated Transportation Program. The biannual process includes outreach at the beginning of the year to solicit ideas. The TIP is assembled and submitted to DeIDOT and MDOT. Depending on the Bond Bill, the TIP may be amended to match available funding, but this year no changes were needed. To encourage public input, staff are working with DeIDOT to conduct a public hearing on September 15th at the Wilmington Library. DeIDOT will display project boards for major projects and feedback will be sought. Information about the public hearing is available at www.wilmapco.org as well as on our TIP page. Staff will also help DeIDOT host a virtual statewide outreach meeting in the fall. DeIDOT is also working on scheduling public hearings in person in Kent and Sussex Counties in the fall.

Mr. Dunn asked if the city location was finalized. Ms. Novakoff said it is. It was difficult to find a location, so we were happy the Wilmington Library was willing to take us. The hours had to be limited since the library closes at 6:00. Mr. Dunn asked if it will begin earlier. Ms. Novakoff replied that we have started earlier in the past, but people do not come early. The team will set up around 3:30, be ready by 4:00, and be there until about 5:45.

8. What is an MPO Video – Presented by Ms. Randi Novakoff

This is the last of the series of five videos that were created to explain transportation planning in a simple way. This one focuses on who WILMAPCO is and what an MPO is. It is two and a half minutes long. *The video was shown.* The other videos focus on topics like transportation justice planning and walking and biking planning. All of the videos have Spanish subtitles. Staff is working with New Castle County Libraries and with the public access T.V. stations to air the videos, as well as asking our partners to host them on their websites. They are on WILMAPCO's YouTube channel, and everyone is encouraged to subscribe.

10. Other Business

11. Adjournment

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Bill Dunn and seconded by Mr. Vic Singer the PAC adjourned.

Motion passed

(08-16-21-02)

Attachments: (0)