PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

WILMAPCO Zoom Virtual Meeting, October 19, 2020

ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Bill Dunn, Civic League for New Castle County Patricia Folk, Cecil County Ken Grant, AAA Mid-Atlantic Mike Kaszyski, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce Bill Lower, Committee of 100 Ken Potts, Delmarva Rail Passenger Association Gail Seitz, City of New Castle 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 Kevin Caneco, SNCC Katherine Caudle, Pike Creek Civic League Kevin Racine, City of Wilmington Carlos de los Ramos, AARP Tom Fruehstorfer, City of Newark (Chair) Mario Gangemi, Cecil County Chamber of Commerce Dick Janney, Southern New Castle County Givvel Marrero, Delaware Hispanic Commission Glenn Pusey, Bear Glasgow Council Jawann Saunders, Simonds Gardens Civic Association Norman Wehner, Cecil Board of Realtors

Staff Members:

Heather Dunigan, Principal Planner Dave Gula, Principal Planner Randi Novakoff, Outreach Manager Bill Swiatek, Principal Planner Tigist Zegeye, Executive Director

Guests:

Minutes prepared by Dawn Voss from recording.

Barry Shotwell, PAC Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order.

1. Approval of the August 17, 2020 Meeting Minutes

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Shotwell and seconded by Mr. Dunn the PAC approved the August 17, 2020 meeting minutes.

Motion passed

(10-19-20-01)

2. Public Comment Period:

None.

3. Executive Director's Report:

Ms. Tigist Zegeye said the WILMAPCO Council meeting was held on September 10th.

Ms. Zegeye shared the following public outreach information:

- The Newport Transportation Study Workshop was held on September 30th and a meeting with the Advisory Committee will be held in November.
- The Concord Pike Workshop was held on October 5th. There were two-hundred and sixty-five people registered, but one hundred and two people attended. Comments are being accepted until November 5th and they will be incorporated into the final report. The goal is to have WILMAPCO Council adopt the plan on November 12th.
- Staff attended the Newark TID Public Workshop on October 14th.
- Staff attended the Maryland CTP Cecil Tour on October 16th.
- The City of New Castle Transportation Plan Management Committee Meeting was held on October 21st.
- Staff will be presenting the 2019 Transportation Justice Plan at the national Association of Metropolitan Planning Organization's (AMPO) Virtual Conference which will be held from October 27th to 29th.
- The APA Delaware Annual Conference is set for October 29th through the 30th. The theme is COVID impacts on planning and our communities. Staff will be participating in a transportation panel on the 30th and facilitating other sessions. Registration is open on the chapter's website.
- We have been awarded grants from the FHWA to create videos including the Route 9 video. We hope to have them finalized by the end of October. A scope of work is being finalized for a week of social justice outreach training to be held in March.

Mr. Dunn said that he was in one of the preliminary meetings with Mr. Bing regarding the Churchman's Crossing study. As a participant in one of these meetings, he is interested in how many preliminary meetings Mr. Bing had, and with what groups of people. Mr. Dunn reiterated that he is not asking for specific names, but areas of interest such as engineering firms and the development community. Ms. Zegeve replied that Mr. Bing helped us with meetings with a number of stakeholders in the area including the business community, civic groups, and elected officials. We have no problem sharing who the groups are. We can provide who we met with, but not what they said. The consultant team collects stakeholder input on behalf of WILMAPCO, the County and DelDOT. She reiterated that there is no issue with letting them know who participated in those discussions. Mr. Dunn said he can imagine with Concord Pike planning there may have been meetings with R.J. Miles, Dee Durham, and business interests. In Southern New Castle County there were probably a similar set of meetings. As the vice president of an organization that represents all of those areas, and being very much concerned about his interest in the transportation issues, he thinks it is pretty important to have that information publicly available, to understand the key points of discussion that came at the front end of a public meeting, unless somebody specifically does not want their name made public. Ms. Zegeve said that she does not disagree. The member agencies were not present because we want the people in the meeting to be honest and not influenced by the presence of the public agencies. We want the consultant team to have an open

discussion when going through this process. We will provide the general stakeholders but not what any particular stakeholder said.

Mr. Singer said he understood the purpose of this activity was to establish public policy as to what development is allowed, what infrastructure is to be built, and related issues. He asked if any proprietary information was disclosed in any of the meetings, because if nothing proprietary was disclosed, he sees no reason to keep it secret. Ms. Zegeve replied that the purpose of this discussion was not to create public policy, per se. We went to the stakeholders to get their input on Churchman's Crossing; first, to introduce what we are doing, which is the update; and secondly, to ask them how they would like to see this area change if at all. There was no discussion of policy. This is just a listening tour. Ms. Novakoff suggested the PAC return to the agenda. The official request was received from the Civic League and Ms. Zegeye said she will provide the information that she can, then a discussion can take place offline. Mr. Dunn said that when you bring in an outside consultant, even though they are contracted with WILMAPCO, they know the funding is coming from New Castle County and DelDOT, so the only group that does not bring money to the table is the public, civic organizations. Everyone else has stake in the game. Mr. Dunn said he understands, but is not comfortable with it. Ms. Novakoff said the whole purpose of the listening sessions and all of the public workshops is to get public feedback and to hear what the public thinks. We try to advertise to as wide an audience as we can and try to get a good representative sample of people to attend meetings. WILMAPCO is here to collect that feedback. The listening sessions were just the first step in that process to begin to get a sense of how those different stakeholders feel ahead of those public meetings. It is all an effort to collect additional feedback.

ACTION ITEMS:

None

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

4. Governor Printz Boulevard Corridor Study

Ms. Dunigan said the Governor Printz Boulevard Study includes the corridor in northern Delaware stretching from the City of Wilmington to Claymont. By collaborating with stakeholders along the corridor and looking at current and future needs, we are looking holistically at ways to improve mobility for people driving, walking, biking, and using transit. The study area is about six miles long and parallels I-495 and the Amtrak line along the Delaware River. WILMAPCO has been working with partners including DeIDOT, Delaware Transit Corporation, New Castle County, and Delaware Greenways. The Advisory Committee includes municipalities, civic associations, elected officials, property owners, and some organizations that have interest in the area.

Community Visioning began in November 2019 with a bus tour that allowed the Advisory Committee to get the pedestrian and transit user experience. Eighty-one people attended the visioning workshop in January. The workshop began like an open house allowing people to see existing conditions, then broke into small groups where individuals shared their priorities for modal users, then the table had a discussion, reported group priorities, and then everyone voted for their top priorities. The top priorities by vote were connection for walking and biking to Fox Point State Park; protected facilities for people who walk and bike on the corridor; and a road diet option for Governor Printz. Seventy-five people participated in an online survey in January and February. The priorities that came out of the survey include pedestrian and bike access to Fox Point State Park, facilities to walk and bike on Governor Printz Boulevard, and maintaining the existing capacity of the road.

From this outreach, the draft objectives were created. For people who walk, the objectives are safe, separated walkways, pedestrian access to Fox Point Park and nearby destinations. For people who bike, recommendations include low-stress bicycle facilities along the corridor including access to Fox Point Park and improving bike access to nearby destinations. For people taking transit, limited bus service exists at the south end and the Claymont Train Station is at the north end, but most bus stops are on Philadelphia Pike. Additional bus stops and shelters along the corridor are recommended as well as better access to the Claymont Train Station. People who drive mention speed and traffic, and it is recommended that the roadway space be evaluated for a road diet. Objectives for all users include better lighting, more landscaping, and improved stormwater management.

In June, seven draft alternatives and evaluation criteria were shared with the Advisory Committee, but it was decided that was too many and some were too similar. In September, sixty-seven people attended a virtual public workshop, where five draft alternatives were presented. Twenty people asked questions, and poll questions were asked. A YouTube video of the workshop is available on the WILMAPCO website and the survey is open until October 21st.

Ms. Dunigan reviewed the five alternatives. Currently, Governor Printz is four lanes without much traffic. There is a median and there are bike lanes on the shoulders. Alternative 1a keeps four lanes of traffic; places a shared-use path on the east (river) side; and a sidewalk on the west (neighborhood) side. This alternative provides direct access to Claymont Transportation Center and Edgemoor but requires bicycle/pedestrian crossings to access the pathway, for which the median could be used to make a refuge island at the crosswalks. Alternative 1b is the mirror image with the shared-use path on the west side, which eliminates the need to cross the street, but is interrupted by many driveways and side streets. The recommendation would be for side streets to have setbacks from the road to allow cars to clear the crosswalk before merging onto the corridor. Alternative 2a shifts the corridor to two lanes of traffic on the west side of the road and puts a promenade on the east side. Alternative 2b is the mirror image with two lanes of traffic on the east side and the promenade on the west side. Alternative 3 is the true road diet option, with one lane of traffic on each side of the median and pathway on both sides. This option maintains existing center turn lanes and is the easiest to implement as the road lanes remain where they are.

As part of the workshop, per the poll questions, people preferred alternative 3 with two lanes of traffic and keeping the median or alternative 2 with the promenade. Having a path on both sides was preferred with an even split between having the path on the east or west side as a second choice. The information from the workshop, survey, and technical evaluations like cost, private property impacts, and the drainage impacts will be used to see how each alternative serves the needs of the community. A test run implementation is possible for alternatives 2a and 3, because the lanes stay where they are. The community could see if they like the alternative before committing to the full build. Traffic impacts were analyzed from Edgemoor Road to Princeton Avenue. None of the alternatives add much time to the AM or PM travel times. Survey comments so far are related to concern about traffic speed, prioritizing sidewalks and lighting, bus service,

and general fatigue about construction along the corridor. Once the survey is complete, work will be done for the preferred alternative and connection zones to tie into surrounding areas. We are also looking for a connection to Fox Point State Park. We looked at a culvert that goes under the railroad tracks, but it floods with the tide. We are coordinating with the Gulftainer Port development and hope to have bike/ped access tied into that. From there we will complete the report.

Mr. Potts said there was a train station at Edgemoor until it was abandoned in 1982. He asked if anyone requested a new train stop in the area in the course of this discussion, because it is almost eight miles from the Wilmington Train Station to the Claymont Train Station. Ms. Dunigan replied that she does not recall anyone mentioning that, but she needs to review the surveys and comments to confirm that. WILMAPCO has the analysis of the Merchant's Square area for suitability for transit-oriented development. It may be worth referring to that analysis in the final report of this study.

Mr. Singer asked if there was any indication of how much this will cost. Ms. Dunigan said no. Mr. Singer asked if there was any exploration of how many minds might have been changed if there was a Transportation Improvement District so the local folks could pay for the improvement. Ms. Dunigan replied that there has been no conversation about having a TID for the corridor. It is already built up, so the hope would be that roadway improvements would help some of the commercial spaces get to full occupancy. However, it is more residential along the corridor, so we have not talked about a TID. Ms. Dunigan recommended that the improvements should be timed for when the road gets repayed anyway to minimize the disruption and cost. Mr. Singer responded that a lot of the alternatives presented are a lot more expensive than just repaying. Ms. Dunigan replied that is usually the case when you are upgrading a road. Mr. Singer replied that upgrading is a misnomer for changes that reduce rather than increase throughput capacity. Ms. Dunigan said that they found there was no need to increase capacity. The level of service was C or better with the exception of Edgemoor Road, where there were some cycles that were level D during peak times, but overall, the level of service and capacity along the corridor are not an issue. Mr. Singer said the point of his question was whether the folks who gave opinions on how things might be done might have been influenced if the money to pay for the changes were locally raised rather than from far away. Ms. Dunigan said she cannot answer that because they did not have that conversation.

Mr. Kaszyski asked if there was any consideration of reduction of speed with the reduction of lanes and were any other traffic control devices besides mid-block crossings considered. Ms. Dunigan replied that the speed question has come up. That would be something to bring up with DelDOT before finalizing the recommendations. Many people expressed that speed was a concern, particularly that it is difficult to turn on and off of Governor Printz, due to high-speed traffic. The speed limit ranges from forty-five to fifty miles per hour. It is reasonable to ask for it to be a consistent forty-five miles per hour. It also concerns people who want to keep it a fast road as they consider it a back-up if anything happens on I-495. Some traffic numbers were pulled from one of the times when I-495 was closed because of a crash, and traffic numbers did not go up significantly on Governor Printz. Thanks to Waze and Google Maps, people seemed to be able to find their way onto I-95 in that situation. Mr. Kaszyski said that with the road diets that we are talking about, the ability to get onto Governor Printz from the side streets, especially with the gaps like that, is related to posted speed. Another thing is DelDOT is averse to mid-block crossings when they are unsignalized, but they seem to

put them in some of their other projects. He knows on Route 13 in the Hares Corner area there are some there. The bigger thing seems to be getting across the road and maybe have less traffic. Ms. Dunigan said crossing the road without any signal the way it is now does feel a little dangerous. She has been out walking the corridor and you are nervous that somebody is going to swing out of a side street, and you are not going to see them. There are options beside full signalization, such as HAWK signals or rectangular rapid flashing beacons. A concern with crossings is that we do not want to create a false sense of safety for pedestrians. Mr. Kaszyski said with the road diet and that refuge in the middle, you make your crossings smaller. There is some benefit to having your road on one side, so you do not have to cross twice or get stuck in the middle. Ms. Dunigan said one of the Q&A questions asked if this would slow the speeds by the design alone, but people speed. This is a wide, straight road and there is little to do to slow people down except narrow the road. If we could lower the speed limit and then have protected shoulders rather than full shoulders or some other option, you could begin to slow speeds. As it is now people will do what the road allows. Mr. Kaszyski agreed about separating the shoulder physically with a median, but then putting in bus stops will break the medians. It is definitely a big step forward to tie that whole community to the other side of the road and open up the waterfront.

5. Newport Transportation Plan

Mr. Gula said we started this project on January 27th with a public workshop with thirtynine attendees. A second, virtual workshop on September 30th had 25 attendees. Comments from the first workshop were used to develop preliminary recommendations. The recommendations were presented to the public in September and once the comments from that workshop are reviewed, preliminary recommendations will be refined, and cost estimates will move forward.

At the first workshop there was a short presentation. Then participants were placed in groups of six to eight people to talk about the study area boundary, possible growth and development in the area, transit and bus connections, a SEPTA train station, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, impacts of freight, and parking. From the Advisory Committee and the workshop, it was determined the study area should be extended, Banning Park was added to the eastern side of the study and the western border was extended to Powell Ford Park, including First State Plaza for shopping. Also discussed in that first workshop are things that make the town more livable. Biking and walking are part of that, but also looking at how to add retail and restaurants, and recognition of historical sites in the town. The extension of the Jack Markell Trail is a project running parallel to this project and requires some thought of where that trail will come into the town. Also, there was talk about bus and rail options.

Newport has good ridership on the existing bus routes. Transit recommendations, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, wayfinding signs, a potential future train station connection, parking and freight will be further discussed. Projects are spread throughout the study area. Concerns about buses include connecting from Newport to Boxwood Road, a more direct connection to the University of Delaware Star Campus, bus and bike connections to DelCastle High School, and general amenities. DART Route 5 is the main route and Dart Route 9 passes by the town. Better bus connections are being considered to connect the town not just to Boxwood Road, but also to the Prices Corner Park & Ride, then maybe to Barley Mill Plaza. To connect to the STAR Campus now, people have to take the Route 5 to the Christiana Mall and change buses. If a transfer

hub was created in Newport, it could connect to the Prices Corner Park & Ride, which connects with Route 6 for a direct route into Newark. At the request of the public, the team looked at taking Route 5 directly to DelCastle High School and Powell Ford Park along Kiamensi Road, but the road is narrow, and the area lacks the density to support this change. The streets connecting current bus stops to these locations are suitable for walking and biking. Bus stop amenities are determined by ridership. The stops on bus Route 9 along Boxwood Road do not have enough riders to warrant a shelter. Route 5 along SR 4 carries more people so there are a few places that may warrant shelters.

The focus of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is connecting neighborhoods to amenities and activity centers. The ramps for SR 141 create a challenge downtown as they are located where people walk and where there is bus service. Any future connection to the Jack Markell Trail also will pass these ramps as the James Street underpass is the only way to cross the Amtrak tracks. DelDOT is being consulted because the phases of the lights at the four-corner area of Market and Justice Streets. Marshall and James are not timed well for pedestrians. There is also potential for a new walkway from the Pleasant Hills area to the First State Plaza to avoid walking on West Newport Pike. Similarly, the public asked for paths to Powell Ford Park. There are "goat paths" created by people walking, but improvements can be made. Improvements to Kiamensi Road to make it easier to walk and bike to DelCastle High School can be made. A shared-use path along Boxwood Road would be ideal, but it is challenging because it is easier to put a path on the northern side of the road to the west, and the southern side of the road to the east. A signalized crossing would be needed. Walking paths around Conrad School are being considered for recreation and for students to access the school. The community asked for a pathway to and through Banning Park, as well as safer connections to Richardson Elementary School, along sections of Middleboro Road, and to Delaware Military Academy. Minor changes at Latimers Place would create a connection to the shopping area with signalized crossing on Maryland Avenue.

In 2013, a study concluded that re-opening the train station as a SEPTA stop was feasible and there would be a suitable number of riders. The challenges include providing a covered platform, parking, pedestrian connections, and a 1.5-mile section of track would need to be built. Amtrak has three lines here, but they also have freight interests, so a section of track would need to be added for a train stop. Population, development, and land ownership have not changed much since the 2013 report. There is one additional train in each direction each weekday. We would be looking for ADA improvements between Bus Route 5 and the proposed train station. Updating the ridership concluded it is even more feasible to have more train passengers if a stop is added here, so this information was given to the Delaware Transit Corporation, who is the conduit to getting a SEPTA station through the state.

The team will take the comments received at the last workshop, compile cost estimates, and start working with a list of recommendations for stakeholders and the public to help prioritize them. Then the funding source will be identified. A draft report will be brought to the Management Committee, which is WILMAPCO, New Castle County, DeIDOT and DTC. Then there will be an Advisory Committee meeting and final public workshop.

Mr. Lower commended Mr. Gula and the Century Engineering team. Both workshops have been very successful, especially in the midst of COVID. The turnout has been terrific across both Newport and greater Newport as well. He asked if all the tasks for the contract

with Century will conclude when the study concludes in January. Mr. Gula confirmed that the goal is to conclude in January and yes, the tasks for the contract will be concluded. At that point there will be a final report that will have gone through the WILMAPCO TAC and Council. Since this is also part of the County, not just the Town of Newport, we would ask the Town of Newport to endorse the report but would also like to have New Castle County on board with was is being proposed. There was a conversation with the County Executive who likes this area for a CCED, which is an area that would be focusing on non-vehicular improvements. It is hard to know if the town fits the requirements as a Complete Communities Enterprise District, but the County would like to see it, so we will be working with them as we move forward.

Mr. Dunn said he participated in both meetings and traffic safety for pedestrians is definitely a concern and something that needs follow up. He asked if there will be another workshop before it goes to WILMAPCO Council and the other thing that continually concerns him and others in the area is traffic flow in the area. As he has mentioned many times before, the convergence of Route 4 and Route 7 and the traffic backups that exist jeopardize any change in pedestrian safety and he thinks the community still would like to review whatever the team comes up with before moving forward with approval of Council. Mr. Gula replied that they are still working from the comments received from the last workshop. Those comments will be brought into the mix for the recommendations. Those recommendations will go through the Agency Committee, the Advisory Committee, and a public meeting before going to WILMAPCO's TAC for endorsement then to Council.

Mr. Kaszyski said the county currently has a project on Banning Park in process and he asked if anyone has spoken to them as far as incorporating anything that was seen here into that project. Mr. Gula replied he was not aware of that project. They have been working with contacts in Land Use, but they have to go to the special services to get to the parks. He will follow up on that. Mr. Kaszyski said they are working on that right now with Public Works, and that connection is interesting, because you have a perfect opportunity to look at some of that at this point. He also mentioned that Canby Park has been tossed around quite a bit. He will check and see where they are with that, but he thinks Banning is a spot where quite a few of these little pieces could be incorporated. Mr. Gula said they will follow up with them and thanked Mr. Kaszyski for that recommendation.

6. Urban Technology Deserts

Mr. Swiatek said technology deserts can be seen as a supplemental product of last year's Transportation Justice Plan and are particularly relevant due to the pandemic and the virtual outreach being done. The total self-response to the 2020 Census reflects higher response rates outside of the City of Wilmington with lower response rates in the city. This year, the Census could be competed over the internet and looking at who completed the Census illustrates internet connectivity and the digital divide. In the Highlands area, in the northwest of Wilmington, 94% of the people who filled out the Census did so over the internet. That number is even higher in many suburbs. In the Lower Eastside, only 44% of people who filled out the Census did so online.

A Technology Desert is a place with limited computer or internet access. The traditional reason is lack of infrastructure. The lack of broadband infrastructure is an issue in many rural areas, but in urban areas, the most significant issue appears to be the socioeconomic factors that prevent connectivity. According to national level data, some of the key factors related to ownership of a smartphone or access to broadband service include age, as people over the age of sixty-five are less likely to have a smartphone or broadband. There are also socio-economic factors, like limited education and income. Of households making less than \$30,000, only 56% have home broadband, compared with 92% of the households making over \$75,000.

Using the Census data from the American Community Survey, technology deserts within the WILMAPCO region were identified by flagging Census tracts with double the regional average of households without a computer, which would be 19% or more; or without internet, which would be 32%. In Cecil County there are tech deserts in the North East section of the county and downtown Elkton. Most of the City of Wilmington, with the exception of sections of downtown and the Riverfront would be considered a technology desert, as would the Milltown area near Route 7 and Route 2, and part of the Route 9 corridor. Within these technology deserts as a whole, 40% of the households do not have an internet connection, compared to 16% of the region. Broadband connection is very similar as 40% of households in our technology deserts are without broadband, compared to 17% of the region. In our technology deserts, 26% of households have no computer, compared with 10% of the region. In our technology deserts 16% of households only have a smartphone, compared to 6% of the region. The Census does consider a smartphone a computer so the 26% does include households that do not have a smartphone. For example, in the Lower Eastside, 65% of households (1,000 households) have no internet or broadband, 45% (680 households) have no computer, and 20% (300 households) have a smartphone only.

When we overlay the population of people over age 65 in Wilmington with the technology deserts, you find that with the exception of the Cool Spring area, most of the technology deserts do not have concentrations of senior populations. However, when looking at poverty and sites of affordable housing, those factors appear in our technology deserts. Each of our technology deserts some very high poverty levels or affordable housing within them. In our technology deserts, 23% of the population live in poverty, compared to 7% in the region, but only 12% of the population in our technology deserts is over sixty-five years old, compared with 15% in the region. When we look at equity, 53% of the population in technology deserts is Black, compared to 22% of the population of our technology deserts, while making up 62% of the region's population.

Technology has become very important during the pandemic. The urban technology deserts have influenced participation in the Census. It has greatly influenced education and access to remote learning. It affects job access as well as job training as applications move online. For planners and civic leaders, public engagement becomes a challenge. This analysis is already supporting some education and health work. The Delaware Department of Education was very interested in this work as was United Way, and they are looking for grants to try to connect internet to homes where these low figures are seen. It is also being use in Wilmington and New Castle County to inform COVID-19 outreach as they look at hot spots around the county and do prevention outreach. If a place is a technology desert, they are looking for lower tech methods of outreach there.

A data report is being created to document these findings. We can use some low-tech planning outreach methods within technology deserts. Some of the civic groups along the Route 9 corridor are having telephone only meetings and holding civic meetings outside. These are things we can do to increase outreach and participation with our

studies within our technology deserts. A dashboard at WILMAPCO is used to look at our different transportation justice outreach map layers. When we do a study, we can see technology deserts, which will inform the outreach method technology for that study.

Mr. Dunn commented that part of the problem is business. The Stanton community he lives in was majority blue collar, employed by places like Verizon, Comcast, and DuPont. To this day, the fastest internet Verizon offers in his neighborhood is DSL. There is no high-speed internet. Mr. Swiatek said he has not seen a map of the penetration of either of the two major providers, but that would be very interesting to see and compare.

7. Other Business None

8. Adjournment

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Shotwell and seconded by Mr. Kaszyski the PAC adjourned.

Motion passed

(10-19-20-02)

Attachments: (0)