

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WILMAPCO Zoom Virtual Meeting, October 18, 2021

Minutes prepared by Dawn Voss from recording.

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

1. ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Mark Blake, GHADA
Bill Dunn, Civic League for New Castle County
Carlos de los Ramos, AARP
Patricia Folk, Cecil County
Tom Fruehstorfer, City of Newark and PAC Chair
Mike Kaszyski, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce
Bill Lower, Committee of 100
Tiffany Geyer Lydon, League of Woman Voters
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:

Kevin Caneco, SNCC
Katherine Caudle, Pike Creek Civic League
Kathryn Economou, University of Delaware
Ken Grant, AAA Mid-Atlantic
Dick Janney, Southern New Castle County
Givvel Marrero, Delaware Hispanic Commission
Deanna Murphy, Cecil Board of Realtors
Glenn Pusey, Bear Glasgow Council
Jawann Saunders, Simonds Gardens Civic Association

Guests:

Councilman Dave Carter
Robert Hicks
Pam Steinbach, DelDOT

Staff Members:

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

2. Approval of the August 16, 2021 Meeting Minutes

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Mark Blake and seconded by Mr. Mike Kaszyski the PAC approved the August 16, 2021 meeting minutes.

3. Public Comment Period:

None.

4. Executive Director's Report:

Ms. Zegeye shared the following public outreach information:

- The Council meeting was held on September the 9th. There were four action items on the agenda. Council approved the use of federal funds for FY 22. They endorsed the Route 9 Paths Plan, the Delaware Statewide Truck Parking Study, and the First and Final Mile Freight Network Development Study. The two presentations on the agenda were the Regional Progress Report and the WILMAPCO video, "What is an MPO?"
- Staff continue to support the development of the New Castle County Comp Plan.
- A final draft of the Southbridge Neighborhood Plan was completed, and it should be presented at the next PAC meeting.
- Staff participated in the Transportation Performance Measure Workshop on September 28th and 30th with DeIDOT and FHWA.
- Staff will be presenting our Equity Initiatives at the American Planning Association Delaware Lunch and Learn, which is tentatively scheduled for October 28th.
- The Churchman's Crossing Plan Update project team has assembled a draft plan. The draft was presented to the advisory committee on September 27th and will be presented to the public on October 25th.
- Staff conducted a Walkable Community Workshop in Middletown on September 29th.
- The advisory committee for Union Street Reconfiguration and Streetscape Improvement met on October 13th. A virtual public workshop is scheduled for October 27th.
- The I-95 Cap Feasibility Study advisory committee met on September 30th. This meeting included a walking tour of the I-95 corridor. A follow up virtual meeting will be held on November 2nd for advisory committee members who were unable to attend the first meeting.
- The Townsend Walkable Community Workshop was held on July 12th and staff presented the workshop results to the Townsend Town Council on September 1st.
- The City of New Castle Transportation Plan online public workshop was held on September 13th. The advisory committee will meet on October 26th. An in-person New Castle City Council workshop is scheduled for November 9th.
- On November 3rd at 4:00 p.m. Wilmington Transit Corridors will have a workshop. It is a DeIDOT meeting about shelters with real-time signs, and sidewalks and crosswalks on Orange and King Streets between MLK and 10th Street and then 8th through 9th. The link will be provided through the chat.

ACTION ITEMS:

None.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

5. City of New Castle Transportation Plan – Presented by Ms. Heather Dunigan.

The City of New Castle asked WILMAPCO to do this plan to improve their overall transportation network, including connectivity for walking and biking; address issues with truck cut-through traffic in town; improve safety, and parking. The community would like to see areas where there is flooding concerns addressed, as well as improved gateways to the historic center.

A community visioning workshop was held in September. Draft recommendations were released for public feedback. The team is refining those recommendations to create the report. Century Engineering was selected as the consultant team. Two online workshops have been held on February 10th and September 13th. In addition, a Wikimap is on the project website, where people may mark comments on a map and view comments added by other participants. There was an in-person kiosk in the park over the summer, and an in-person workshop will be held on November 9th. The in-person event over the summer was in conjunction with a concert in Battery Park and had good turnout

The February 10th workshop used breakout rooms on Zoom. This allowed for small group conversations after which the moderators reported to the larger group. The team heard there are gaps in the walking and biking system that need improvement and better connections are needed to cross streets. Other issues include traffic, through-traffic directed to local streets, cut-through traffic, congestion, and parking..

Initial recommendations were presented at the September 13th workshop, with a presentation that was broken up by poll questions throughout and then Q and A at the end. Reducing the speed limits throughout the city was recommended. This was supported by 67% of attendees. Some were concerned that all the streets were not appropriate for lower speed limits, so that will be discussed with the advisory committee. There are also concerns about traffic backing up on SR 273 and at the US 13/273 intersection.

Alternative concepts were presented for the SR 273/SR 141, Ferry Cut Off/Delaware Street, Ferry Cut Off/6th Street, W. 7th Street/Washington Street intersections. These focused on improving traffic slow on main roads, reducing cut through traffic, and improving nonmotorized access. Concepts for SR 273/SR 141 all had only light support so planners will be looking at other options. At Ferry Cut Off/Delaware Street, participants favored the Gateway concept that would create a landscaped right turn lane to access the historic district. For the Ferry Cut Off/6th Street intersection, participants favored the Dutch Left option, which would allow uninterrupted traffic flow on SR 9 while cars would turn around an island to access the historic district. At W. 7th Street/Washington Street, the Washington Sweep was preferred, creating a smoother movement for turning traffic.

Expanding the bicycle and pedestrian network was supported by 93% of attendees. Ms. Dunigan reviewed specific proposals which include a mix of multiuse pathway and elevated bikeways.

Expanding parking on Chestnut was unpopular with 39% of people supporting this concept and 39% not. All options try to reduce the amount of pavement to help with flooding. A DeIDOT project in the TIP addresses flood mitigation on the south side of the City of New Castle. This is funded for construction in FY 2028. A number of gateway locations can be enhanced. A matrix was created to show areas that are improved by each recommendation.

On October 26th the advisory committee will meet and discuss refinements to the recommendations. An in-person City Council Workshop, where the refinements will be presented will be held November 9th.

Mr. Dave Tancredi asked if the locations in the plan were cross referenced with pedestrian accidents. Ms. Dunigan replied that SR 273/SR 141 is a key intersection for pedestrian connections.

Mr. Mike Kaszyski asked if the team considered a traffic circle at Delaware Street and SR 273. He said that Ms. Dunigan mentioned bumping out the island and making a little harder turn coming into the historic district, but he asked if a traffic circle was considered. Ms. Dunigan replied that the team did originally consider a roundabout, but because of the proximity to the railroad tracks the team did not think that was a great location to pursue that. So, that was scrapped before the team went to the public with it. It is not a bad idea. On paper it works, but the railroad tracks make it a really tricky location.

Ms. Gail Seitz asked how the numbers of participants and quality of input compare to doing workshops in person since most of the public workshops for this study have been virtual. Ms. Dunigan replied that the quality of the input has been great, and there have been good discussions during the meetings, particularly the first one with the breakout rooms. The team was able to get one-on-one discussion with people. At the second one, they did not use breakout rooms, but used the chat feature so the comments were a little less in depth. The team relied on the polls, which do not give a sense why people are responding a certain way. People were responding to the polls, but you miss that more personal interaction. The event at Battery Park was awesome. The team had at least as much attendance as they did at the online workshops and had good, in-depth conversations with people because it was a more leisurely and informal atmosphere.

Mr. Bill Dunn asked the present capacity of the parking in Battery Park and what increase was proposed, because it is pretty small. Ms. Dunigan replied that it would have probably doubled the size with the new facility. Sixty-eight spaces were proposed. The existing lot was a very controversial project for the city so the idea of putting twice as many spaces there is probably twice as controversial.

Mr. Carlos de los Ramos asked if this is going to be a free parking project or if there would be a charge. Ms. Dunigan said it is currently free and probably would continue to be in the future due to the large cost of enforcing paid parking. Anywhere there is parking, you could put a parking meter kiosk in or have the pay to park app in place, but without somebody actually physically going out to enforce it, it is kind of meaningless, and it is costly to have personnel to do that.

6. Townsend Walkable Community Workshop – Presented by Ms. Heather Dunigan
A Walkable Community Workshop was held in Townsend on July 12th. Eleven people participated, including members of the Town Council and residents. Participants met in the municipal park and walked toward Townsend Village 2 along Wiggins Mill Road. Participants then put ideas on a map of the town. There were ideas for new pedestrian and bike connections focusing on connecting different developments to other parts of town. The park where the workshop was held is somewhat disconnected. There are already goat paths through an empty lot next to the park. The community recommends the town acquire that lot and add a pathway connecting Chestnut Street to the park. The use of rest of the lot could be determined through a public outreach process.

Wiggins Mill Road has no pedestrian facilities. People complained of speeding traffic. The group had a police escort and yellow safety vests, but that should not be necessary to walk safely on

this road. The community recommended a pathway be built next to or more remotely parallel to the road. There is a narrow culvert along Wiggins Mill Road where it narrows down to one lane, so building a separate bridge next to that was suggested. There are plans to improve the Wiggins Mill Park so that will eventually be a pedestrian destination for the community. The participants identified a number of traffic calming measures, including replacing most of the four-way stop signs with mini circles. Participants suggested improving some other intersections on Main Street and installing better pedestrian lighting. There is some pedestrian-scale lighting from an earlier streetscaping project, but the community wants it extended further down the street.

The next steps include working on getting funding for phase three of the Main Street improvements, and seeking funding for the other recommendations from a variety of funding programs available. A section in the report describes what these funding opportunities might be.

Mr. Carter asked if there was any discussion of extending Wiggins Mill Road. If there is a way to make that connection, the two towns could be connected. Ms. Dunigan said she agrees, the community did mention an interest in connecting up to Middletown. That is also part of the New Castle County Bicycle Plan. Mr. Carter said we are talking about a mile or so, and we are now talking about probably going to have to go over onto the east side of that section of road. He thinks we have lost that opportunity with the new subdivision on the west side to get up to that connection, but if somebody does not move something pretty quick, it is going to be too late.

7. Union Street Reconfiguration and Streetscape Improvement – Presented by Mr. Dave Gula

The Union Street Reconfiguration and Streetscape Improvements Study had a public workshop in May and an Advisory Committee meeting in April. The second Advisory Committee meeting was on October 13th. About half of the committee was able to attend including State Representative Dorsey-Walker and City Council members. There will be a legislative briefing on October 20th for elected officials who were unable to attend.

In the visioning process, people were asked their relationship to Union Street. 67% live near Union Street. 48% go to businesses on Union Street, 26%, do both. 18% use Union Street to commute. 7% live on Union Street. 3% worked at a business on Union Street. When asked how they usually get there, 58% drive, 27% walk, 10% bike, and 3% drive and walk. 67% say they would prefer to walk. 42% said they would like to ride a bike. Sixty-one responses to the public engagement were received from both the workshop and the website.

Many of the people who attended the workshop are most interested in going to restaurants. There are a lot of restaurants and activity north of 4th Street, which indicates where the most improvements are needed. The intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and Union Street was a difficult and unsignalized intersection. However, since the conclusion of this survey, the City and DeIDOT completed intersection improvements including signals, pedestrian islands, and crosswalks. Transit service is good. People love outdoor dining. Better signage is needed, especially for parking. Many people say to get rid of the angle parking, and many people say they love the angle parking. The bike lane needs improvement because it is not comfortable, can be dangerous, and impedes parking. Some commented better pedestrian lighting is needed. People really want to slow traffic to make it feel more comfortable for pedestrians.

When asked about their experience driving, walking, biking, riding the bus, and parking. Many people complained about back-in parking and speeding. Bus riders complained of the lack of

shelters. People say they would accept fewer bus stops to get better amenities. Some people do not parallel park and some people do not understand back-in diagonal parking. There were comments about aggressive drivers who do not respect pedestrians in crosswalks, narrow sidewalks, no tree cover, and not being able to cross the street safely. Comments related to biking range from nobody uses the bike lane, remove it; to it is better than nothing.

When asked what components are most important for Union Street, 19% said trees, 17% said outdoor dining, 15% said wider sidewalks, 11% said better crosswalks, 9% said improve lighting. When asked what is least important, 14% said tree planters, 12% said wider sidewalks are not needed, 10% want bike parking, 9% want more parking, and 9% said drop off and delivery solutions. When asked about the vision, Union Street is a place to stroll and watch people and have a drink. It is walkable, and comfortable, and attractive, and has things to do. They are looking to take these positives and accentuate them in the future. The wish list prioritizes pedestrians, not just safety, but also art, shade, and seating. People want slower traffic. People want more outdoor dining space, consistent aesthetics, convenient and comfortable transit, safe and protected bike lanes, management of the parking, and loading times and zones.

Pedestrian improvements include making it ADA accessible and having space on the sidewalk for walking and for café dining. Transit concerns include transit delay if the bike lane is moved, and space for transit amenities. For freight, the best use of curbs needs to be determined, setting aside areas for deliveries and pickups. For vehicles, the level of service is always a concern, and there is concern about on-street parking capacity. When people drive in and there are no spaces, people park in the neighborhoods. For bicycles, there needs to be a higher bicycle level of comfort, because it is a connected street for the Wilmington Bicycle Plan.

Alternative 2 is a top scoring alternative. There is seventy feet of public space, the curb would be moved to create twelve-foot sidewalks and narrow the roadway to 46-feet of pavement, which will include the parking areas and the bike lane. This configuration shows parallel parking on both sides of the street and the continuation of two eleven-foot travel lanes. It shows the utilities as buried, which is a concern due to cost. The bike lane remains on the east side with a buffer from the street, so it would be curb level.

Alternative 6 is the second-best performing alternative and does not remove the existing utilities, which is less expensive and less construction time. This alternative moves the curb to narrow the street. There is a little less space on the sidewalk due to the utilities. The bike lane would be moved to the west side of the street, which requires accommodations at the transit stops for the bike lane to pass behind the stop, so it does not interfere with those boarding the bus. A current project in the city of Wilmington costs a million dollars per block to remove the utilities. On Union Street, removing utilities from both sides will cost closer to \$2 million per block. Another consideration is that in the state of Delaware, transportation dollars are not used to underground utilities, so the funds would not come from DelDOT's Capital Transportation Program.

Another alternative that scored very well has street pavement width similar to the other options. The curbs are moved, but not the utilities. Bike lanes are on both sides of the street but at the cost of outdoor seating on the east side where it is most popular. There would be a northbound bike lane even though it is a southbound road, and the southbound travel lane would have a sharrows and would be a shared lane for cyclists and motorists. This is not a popular option as the safety for cyclists is greatly reduced.

The next alternative would move the curb and remove the utilities. This is the only option that was shared with the AC that retains back-in diagonal parking, but it would move it to the right side of the street. The only bike facility would be a sharrow for a shared lane, which scores very poorly because it is not comfortable or safe for bicyclists. This alternative does not have as much room on the sidewalks for café seating and for people to walk comfortably.

This final alternative moves the curb and the utilities and has bike lanes in both directions, but the sidewalks are much narrower. With this alternative, outside dining would probably impede some of the pedestrians. This alternative scores low as it is not important to have a bike lane in both directions.

A Virtual Workshop is planned for October 27th from 6 to 7:30, and the information will be online with a survey from October 28th to November 10th (that date was extended to November 26). Then, the team will score and assess the feasibility of preferred concepts. Next, a management meeting will be held to discuss those results. After another advisory committee meeting, the preferred concept will be selected and a draft final report will be presented at a final public meeting, which will probably be in March. Then the final report will be released.

Mr. Bill Dunn asked how many parking spots are lost by doing away with diagonal parking. Mr. Gula replied about nine spots would be lost bringing it down to about sixty spots. The problem is support is about 50/50 on that parking. Some high-level officials hate the back in diagonal parking. A very strong movement from the public would be needed to maintain it, and it is not happening.

8. Other Business

Mr. Carlos de los Ramos said the closed captioning in Spanish was a great effort, but unfortunately it is not really working. The translations are not really comprehensible.

Mr. Dave Carter said he will continue to cover until a suitable candidate to represent Southern New Castle County on the PAC can be found. He will fill in until they can sort something out, so they still tie things in down there with 90% of the growth coming to southern New Castle County in the next decade or so.

Mr. Bill Dunn asked when the PAC would be going back to in-person meetings. Ms. Randi Novakoff replied that she thinks we are shooting to have the December meeting both in-person and virtual. Mr. Carter said County Council is going back in -person on January 3rd.

9. Adjournment

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

Motion passed

(10-18-21-02)

Attachments: (0)