

# TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

February 18, 2021

A meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was held on Thursday, January 21, 2021, via video conference/conference call.

**1. CALL TO ORDER:** Mr. Michael Fortner, City of Newark and TAC Chair, brought the TAC meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

**2. TAC Members present:**

Ben Allen, Maryland State Highway Administration  
Tricia Arndt, Delaware Office of State Planning  
Ian Beam, Maryland Department of Transportation  
Cooper Bowers, Delaware Department of Transportation  
Alexandra Brun, Maryland Department of the Environment  
Jennifer Callaghan, Cecil County Department of Public Works  
Nicholas Cannistraci, Town of Elkton  
Marvina Cephas, DNREC  
David Dahlstrom, Maryland Department of Planning  
Stacey Dahlstrom, New Castle County Department of Land Use  
Michael Fortner, City of Newark  
Gwinneth Kaminsky, City of Wilmington Planning  
Catherine Smith, Delaware Transit Corporation

**TAC Ex-Officio Members present:**

**TAC Members absent:**

City of Wilmington Department of Public Works  
Delaware Division of Small Business, Development, and Tourism  
Delaware River and Bay Authority  
Maryland Transit Administration

**TAC Ex-Officio Members absent:**

Amtrak  
Diamond State Port Corporation  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
U.S. Federal Highway Administration  
U.S. Federal Transit Administration

**Guests and Invitees:**

Tyson Byrne, MDOT  
Jolyon Shelton, DNREC  
Josh Thomas, DeIDOT

**Staff:**

Dan Blevins, Principal Planner  
Heather Dunigan, Principal Planner  
Sharen Elcock, Executive Assistant

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

Minutes prepared by: Dawn Voss

### **3. MINUTES**

The January 21, 2021 TAC Minutes were approved.

**ACTION:** On motion by Mr. Ian Beam and seconded by Ms. Tricia Arndt the TAC approved the January 21, 2021 TAC minutes.

Motion passed.

**(02-18-21 - 01)**

### **4. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES**

#### **a. Nonmotorized Transportation Working Group**

Ms. Heather Dunigan said the Nonmotorized Transportation Working Group met on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ms. Julie Kwedar from MDOT presented on bicycle and pedestrian safety outreach in Maryland. She is part of the Maryland Highway Safety Office. Ms. Dunigan recommends following them on social media. Ms. Dunigan and Mr. Paul Moser presented an update of the New Castle County Bicycle Plan priority projects that had been submitted to DeIDOT for analysis. There was also discussion of the Transportation Alternatives Program prioritization, which they recommended for TAC and Council approval with one modification.

### **5. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

None.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### **6. To Recommend Approving the New Castle County Prioritization of Transportation Alternatives Projects for 2021**

Ms. Dunigan said that WILMAPCO accepted applications for TAP funding in New Castle County through January 15<sup>th</sup> and we received six. Prioritization criteria is used to score them in a manner similar to TIP projects. The criteria were modified this year based on the recently adopted Transportation Justice Report. The criteria are divided into categories. Destinations served in terms of trip generators is a category that has not changed and includes community centers, libraries, schools, and parks. Proximity to transportation facilities such as bike routes, greenways and bus stops is part of the criteria which was unchanged, but this year the most recent New Castle County Bicycle Plan was used for the scoring of the bike routes and greenways. Other demographic information is considered such as locations within hometown overlays and municipalities; density of population and employment; and transportation equity and access. This criterium was updated based on the recent Transportation Justice Report to add scoring criteria for areas with concentrations of black population, because these areas have historically been underfunded in the TAP program. Then some other transportation measures are considered such as safety, locations along the railroad corridor, filling in gaps, and historic elements.

The six admissions included three in the City of Wilmington, one from the City of Newark, and two from within New Castle County. Based on scoring, the Brandywine Village project in Wilmington received the most points, followed by the South College Avenue project in Newark. That was closely followed by the Lovering Avenue and Dupont Street project in Wilmington, then Southbridge Phase III. At the Nonmotorized Committee there were some questions about scoring for the Millcreek project. Originally it was ranked fifth, but there were some crashes that were one block outside of the study area, so the committee recommended giving credit for those crashes in the scoring. Based on that, the Millcreek project would tie with the Southbridge project for 4<sup>th</sup> place. A small section of sidewalk is being requested for Grubb Road which is not very close to anything so that project did not score well.

The Brandywine Village project is a continuation of some pedestrian connections and streetscaping elements in Brandywine Village. This is last phase of ongoing project.

The South College Avenue project was jointly submitted by the University of Delaware and the City of Newark. The University of Delaware anticipates using incoming resources for some of the design support as well as providing right-of-way. It is still to be determined through conversations with DeIDOT what cash match would be required. The application did not specify any cash support.

The Lovering Avenue and Dupont Street project fills a critical gap in an area where there are no pedestrian connections. It is also confusing for auto and bicycle traffic so, if funded, it will improve all modes of travel in that area and provide a connection between the planned Augustine Cut Off pathway project and the City of Wilmington and Brandywine Park.

Southbridge phase three is a continuation of streetscaping and sidewalk improvements in that neighborhood.

The Millcreek–Hercules Road project is part of a large network of projects that have been proposed by the Friends of the Millcreek Pathways, who plan an entire network of connections in that area. The Millcreek–Hercules Road intersection itself is funded by DeIDOT Traffic. Funding for this application only includes funding to match design support using community transportation funds.

The section of Grubb Road sidewalk is one block to connect two sides of the neighborhood and a crosswalk at the northern end of the study area. This is also suggested to be funded with community transportation funds.

Ms. Stacey Dahlstrom asked how ranking works with prioritization process for funding. Ms. Dunigan replied this is advisory to DeIDOT and Council. The scoring, as with TIP projects, will be part of DeIDOT's decision making process when they prioritize things statewide. They look at the technical feasibility of the study, but we look at factors that demonstrate a need for a project, which ties criteria to the process that aligns with goals in the long-range plan. That is why it is focused on demographic, safety, and transportation connection needs. Ms. Dahlstrom asked if the lower ranked projects have a hope of being funded. Ms. Dunigan said yes. In the past the TAP program was on a first-come first-serve basis for projects so DeIDOT continued to suggest funding for everything that came into the queue. This led to the stop of calls for new projects because everything was tied up in this ongoing queue of projects from old submissions. One of the changes to the TAP program recommended by staff is the discussion with DeIDOT about what can be funded this year then informing applicants if they are approved or not. Ms.

Dahlstrom asked to clarify that anyone who was not approved can resubmit next year. Ms. Dunigan said yes, for example the Grubb Road project could be resubmitted with different alignment or different elements, which may do better in the process next year.

**ACTION:** On motion by Ms. Gwinneth Kaminsky and seconded by Mr. Cooper Bowers the TAC recommended approval of the New Castle County Prioritization of the Transportation Alternatives Projects for 2021.

Motion passed.

**(02-18-21 - 02)**

## **7. To Recommend Certifying the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process for FY 2022**

Ms. Heather Dunigan said this is normally part of the TIP approval, but we are not doing a TIP this year, so the Self-Certification is being handled independently. This resolution is signed by WILMAPCO and both State DOTs to certify that WILMAPCO is fulfilling all of the federal requirements. As part of the packet items there is a brief report that is also normally included in the TIP which describes each item and where in WILMAPCO's documents it can be found.

**ACTION:** On motion by Ms. Gwinneth Kaminsky and seconded by Ms. Tricia Arndt the TAC recommended certifying the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process for FY 2022.

Motion passed.

**(02-18-21 - 03)**

### **PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

#### **8. New Castle County Comprehensive Plan**

Ms. Stacey Dahlstrom said the New Castle County 2050 Comprehensive Plan was kicked off in June of 2020. It will provide a thirty-year time horizon consistent with WILMAPCO Regional 2050 Transportation Plan. It will provide our community's vision for the future, focusing on how and where we develop. This is a full new comprehensive plan, which is required by State law to be updated every ten years.

There has been a robust public engagement process that has involved surveys, photo submittals of favorite places and spaces, and workshops. There is an online Planning 101 course provided with assistance from the University of Delaware, which helps with the educational process of what a plan is and what planning and zoning are. Through the years, community area master planning has been completed in partnership with WILMAPCO. Recently the Route 9, Claymont, Concord Pike, and Southern New Castle County Master Plans were completed. The County is in the process of amending the 2012 Plan and hoping Council introduces an ordinance to create a new chapter which summarizes the important pieces of community area master plans that need to be in a comp plan, and the parts that will bring them into law. There is a lot of data analysis and research behind NCC@2050 from the Population Consortium's population and employment projections, as well as coordination with municipalities, State agencies and community partners. An interagency working group including Newark, Wilmington, Elsmere, Middletown, and a variety of municipal partners is part of the coordination process.

The timeline began in June of 2020 with an initial survey. Many groups were sent a stakeholder challenge including a series of dedicated questions and asking for volunteers to serve on the

Stakeholder Advisory Committee. This committee has met twice and will convene twice more on the process. There were a series of Let's Talk meetings on specific topics through the fall that culminated in a Fall Forum where everything that was heard was brought together. That led to the collaborative development and publication of the Community Vision and Principles. Throughout spring of 2021, web-based Deep Dive topic meetings are being held to look at proposed goals, objectives, strategies, and some major issues around each of the themes. The Recreation Open Space meeting was held two weeks ago. The next one will be Housing and Economic Development, followed by Infrastructure dealing with transportation sewer and water. Then the fourth one will be Community Places and Spaces. All of this leads to the next Web Forum where we hope to have draft goals, objectives, and strategies, as well as preliminary land use scenarios to share with the public. The third stakeholder meeting will help inform what goes to that forum. Finally, all of that leads to the draft framework and recommendations, which are the draft plan. That will be brought to the public at the final forum in late 2021 leading to final adoption by July 2022.

The key issues heard from the public include connectivity, thanking again our partners for the connectivity in the environmental justice analysis and our DeIDOT partners for the low-stress transportation analysis that Paul Moser created. There is an identified need for safe infrastructure for walking and biking, especially to daily activities. Environmental issues such as flooding, pollution, and climate change are on the minds of our residents and stakeholders. New Castle County recently convened a land preservation task force, and there is a series of recommendations that will be included in the comprehensive plan regarding preservation of agricultural areas, natural areas, and historic properties. There is a very active historic board (HRB) and a newly elected councilperson who is a very active advocate for historic preservation. Work with public works partners will continue for a better maintained parks and recreation system. Equity issues related to access to parks were mentioned such as the location of parks being not only appropriate but also accessible by means other than by car. Another issue that was heard from the public is infrastructure and physical/social redevelopment. This includes redevelopment of industrial land, strip malls, and office parks. Inequities such as social justice and environmental justice; affordable housing, crime/safe spaces/places, schools/improved education, high quality jobs that pay a fair wage, and proximity of heavy industry to residential neighborhoods are also important to the community. One of our elected councilpersons recently sponsored an ordinance that was approved mandating that social/environmental justice hazard mitigation is addressed in the comprehensive plan. This would have been addressed anyway, but the ordinance calls more prominent attention to it and preserves the requirement for future comp plans.

The fall forum led to the NCC@2050 Vision: In 2050, New Castle County is a thriving healthy community that has a clean environment and a has a strong economy. New Castle County champions and leads preservation of clean water and the natural environment, and adaptation to climate change while fostering a prosperous and strong agricultural industry largely in the areas south of the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal. It is a model for social justice and climate resiliency. Residents have equitable access to parks and recreation, a multimodal transportation network, and a robust economy with living wage jobs. The housing stock is diverse in both form and price. Important historic and cultural resources are respected and preserved.

As part of that vision document the following key themes emerged:

- A livable built environment for all – Ensure that all elements of the built environment (e.g. land use, transportation, housing, energy, and infrastructure work together providing a high quality of life for all our residents.

Conservation and preservation – Ensure the environment (air, water, land, natural resources, and climate), essential to the well-being of our community, is protected as part of our thriving county.

Robust economy – Achieve a diverse, strong, and resilient economy that adapts to change with innovation and collaboration while ensuring access to local, living wage jobs.

Sustainable growth – We will guide and coordinate sustainable investment to support a thriving, healthy county. This includes balancing our capacity and needs for built space, infrastructure, and services, in line with growth/decline demands.

Thriving places and community character – The places in which we live, work, and play are alive with activity, attractive, and safe. Our communities are places we are proud of.

Diverse engagement – Our communities are central to our future and the county's diverse residents are represented in civic life, engagement, and leadership in our community.

There was a series of virtual workshops, and surveys to gather multiple public opinions. To date, over 98,000 people have viewed advertisements at least once and around 3,000 have clicked through to be redirected to website. A series of virtual roadshow presentations were hosted. The team participated in Middletown and Odessa Rotary and presented to the Committee of 100 and the Sierra Club Delaware Chapter. There is a video on the webpage with key stakeholders talking about the County and what NCC@2050 means to them. The “Growing Better Places” online survey and game provides people the opportunity to build their own growth scenarios, provide input on the future of New Castle County, and how they might accommodate population and jobs. There is an interagency work group and stakeholder advisory committee. A youth planning board began last spring and meets monthly or bi-monthly to discuss related topics.

Now that there is a vision document, the next steps are to work through draft goals, objectives, and strategies for each of the key topic areas, and work toward development scenarios that will be shared during the second Web Forum. That forum will lead to a draft plan and future land use map with final web input to be provided at the final web forum.

The next Deep Dive meeting on Housing and Economy will be February 24<sup>th</sup>. Registration is available on the County website or the NCC@2050 website.

On March 17<sup>th</sup>, the Deep Dive meeting will be on Infrastructure, Transportation, Water and Sewer Service.

On April 7<sup>th</sup>, the Deep Dive meeting will be on Thriving Places: Community Design, Historic Preservation and Bringing It All Together. At this session there will be a design activity related to the Churchmans Crossing area.

Everyone is encouraged to go through Planning 101. It is online and self-paced about why we plan, what the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Land Use is, the role of the State of Delaware in the planning process, and how to participate in the process. The goal is to have 101 graduates by December 31, 2021.

Questions and comments can be directed to: [NCC2050.newcastlede.gov](http://NCC2050.newcastlede.gov) or email [NCC2050@newcastlede.gov](mailto:NCC2050@newcastlede.gov).

Ms. Dunigan congratulated Ms. Dahlstrom and the team as she participated in some of the workshops and the County has done a great job with the online process.

## **9. City of New Castle Transportation Plan Update**

Ms. Heather Dunigan said last Wednesday was the first public workshop for the City of New Castle Transportation Plan. The Plan is looking at the entirety of City of New Castle. The goals and purposes of the Plan are to improve multimodal network, connect communities, enhance healthy and livable communities, reduce illegal truck traffic, and improve safety. The team is also looking to address the flooding and sea level rise concerns of the community as well as improve gateways to the historic center and develop a shared parking analysis.

With the existing land use and zoning, there is a lot of open space in the area, which are the treasures in the community with the river views and parks, followed by a lot of residential space. Then there are some small pockets of commercial, institutional, industrial, and warehouse space. The City of New Castle is in the process of completing their Comprehensive Plan. It has gone through the PLUS process and is waiting for final approval, so the team is drawing from that as well. Demographics show that it is a very diverse community with a mix of ethnicities as well as ages. Public transit is well served through the area, particularly along the edge of the city along US13. DART Routes 15, 25, and 51 go into the downtown, and Route 14 services the northern end of the area. The heaviest transit use is on US13. Regarding roadways, the bulk of the traffic is on US13 where there is high volume and a lot of congestion. While the Level of Service is generally good in the city itself, there are issues with traffic backing up on US13 and people cutting through town. There are a number of freight bottlenecks in the City of New Castle area as well. Just as personal vehicles cut through town, so do trucks which causes a conflict between the communities and the trucks. The crashes are also mostly concentrated on US13 although there have been some along US9, SR273, and in town. Existing sidewalks and bike routes were evaluated. The area draws people using the Jack Markell Trail and Battery Park walkway. There are issues with people from the more suburban outlying neighborhoods outside the City of New Castle getting into the historic district in town. The bicycle level of traffic stress within the neighborhoods is comfortable for most bicyclists and people walking, but the major roads including Routes 13, 141, 273, and 9 and some difficult intersections create barriers.

There are currently a few planned transportation projects, including some that are unfunded. The River Road project to address some of the flooding is in the TIP. It has been deferred a number of times because it is expensive. On the north side of town there are some improvements from the Route 9 Study that WILMACPO did. There is a project by the railroad tracks along Ferry Cut Off, along Route 273, that is a safety project. The team also looked at the location of existing destinations, including historic properties concentrated in the historic district. There are also commercial areas that are important to access. Flooding is a major concern in the community. Many areas are impacted by wetlands, future sea level rise, and flood hazard areas. Route 9 floods quite a bit during storms. Other parts of Route 273 and Route 9 also flood and create issues in the community.

Century Engineering was brought on to help with the work. The team is currently in the visioning phase of the project. There was a workshop last week. An online Wikimap and survey will be available soon. From there, the team will assess the feasibility of different recommendations and move forward with a report. The team is working with the City of New Castle, DeIDOT and DART. There is an Advisory Committee, and the public is a very important part of the process. There will be two more public workshops as we move forward. We are taking a very holistic approach. The City of New Castle is a very unique, historic community with issues related to that in the center and surrounded by newer neighborhoods that lack connectivity into town. So, this is also a concern to be considered.

The public workshop was very interactive. The presentation portion was very short. Most of the time was spent going into three different breakout rooms for small, round-table type discussions.

In the breakout rooms, people used Google Maps and the annotation tools in Zoom to actually draw on the maps almost as if it were an in-person workshop. One person commented that they thought it was more inclusive than an in-person workshop, because there were no babysitter or transportation issues in getting to the workshop. After each of the three breakouts everyone reported back. Some of the themes the team heard were connections between Markell Trail and Battery Park were missing; and better wayfinding and bike parking is needed. For pedestrians, there are issues with the condition of sidewalks. Transit is often slow and unreliable to get to Newark or Wilmington. There are good transit stop locations within the downtown, but there are some concerns about some of the routes. There are traffic issues including people cutting through downtown to bypass US13, which can lead to some congestion between Delaware Street and US9. There was discussion about some of the development around the town and how that affects city traffic. Speeding traffic is a concern. People going the wrong way on one-way streets was brought up, as well as flooding impacts on traffic. Looking at freight, trucks cut through town and cause issues. Connections to the Amazon facility is an issue as trucks on River Road cause vibrations in some of the historic communities where the houses are very close to the road. There are parking issues as well. Some of the other issues include the balance between commercial and residential interest as well as tourism vs. residential interests. There are a number of challenging intersections, which are challenging for all modes of transportation and disconnect areas of the town.

Everything from the workshop including the Zoom recordings of each of the breakout rooms as well as the main session, the Wikimaps, the survey, and all the chat comments should be on the website by Monday. Over the winter into the spring alternatives will be evaluated and a workshop will be held in late spring or early summer. Then the team will start working on the draft report and have the third public workshop in the fall.

## **INFORMATION ITEMS**

### **10. Staff Report**

Ms. Dunigan reported the following updates:

- The project team is reviewing the initial modeling results for the Churchmans Crossing Plan and preparing for a public workshop on March 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- For the Union Street Reconfiguration Project, staff have heard that there is interest in looking at two-way traffic on Union Street. So, we will be working with the City and a consultant has been brought in to do that analysis. The first Advisory Committee meeting will be in March followed by a workshop in the spring.
- The Air Quality Partnership will be having a virtual Wilmington Earth Day week April 19<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup>. April 19<sup>th</sup> will be transportation themed with bike and pedestrian safety education in the morning and an interactive activity in the evening. Safe Kids Delaware is working on converting some of their safety education information into a video for Earth Day.
- On January 29<sup>th</sup> staff participated in the Maryland MPO Roundtable.
- Staff continues to participate in the New Castle County NCC@2050 events.
- Freight planning will host a truck parking focus group on March 11<sup>th</sup>. Wikimaps on the WILMAPCO website are available to capture comments on freight issues.
- The Route 9 Paths Plan survey is still live, and it has been translated to Spanish.
- The City of New Castle Transportation Plan information will be on the website soon.
- Staff has been working with Delaware Transit Corporation and the University of Delaware on a National Science Foundation grant application that will look at safety and public perception issues around autonomous vehicle shuttles and other emergent technologies.



- The Southbridge Neighborhood Plan had a virtual public workshop this past Tuesday, which can be viewed on the South Wilmington Planning Network Facebook page.
- Delaware Guidance Services is using our Social Determinants of Health analysis to select outpatient office sites for New Castle County.
- The Route 9 Master Plan Monitoring Committee will meet today at 4:30 p.m.

**OTHER BUSINESS:**

None.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**ACTION:** On motion by Ms. Gwinneth Kaminsky and seconded by Mr. Cooper Bowers the TAC adjourned at 10:52 a.m.

Motion passed.

**(02-18-21 - 04)**

The TAC adjourned at 10:50 a.m.

**Attachments (0)**