

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

September 16, 2021

A meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was held on Thursday, September 16, 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 10:04 a.m.

2. TAC Members present:

Trisha Arndt, Delaware Office of State Planning
Ian Beam, Maryland Department of Transportation
Cooper Bowers, Delaware Department of Transportation
Nicholas Cannistraci, Town of Elkton
Marvina Cephas, DNREC
David Dahlstrom, Maryland Department of Planning
Michael Fortner, City of Newark
Matthew Littlejohn, Cecil County Division of Planning and Zoning
Lisa Nissley, Maryland Department of the Environment
Matt Rogers, New Castle County Department of Land Use
Derrick Sexton, Maryland State Highway Administration
Catherine Smith, Delaware Transit Corporation

TAC Ex-Officio Members present:

Lindsay Donnellon, U.S. Federal Highway Administration

TAC Members absent:

City of Wilmington Department of Public Works
City of Wilmington Planning
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 Transit Administration

Guests and Invitees:

Ben Allen, Maryland State Highway Administration
Jennifer Beyer
James Coverdale, DNREC
Jolyon Shelton, DNREC

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

Approval of the August 19, 2021 TAC Minutes.

ACTION: On motion by Ms. Tricia Arndt and seconded by Ms. Cathy Smith the TAC approved the August 19, 2021 TAC minutes.

Motion passed.

(09-16-21-01)

4. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

None

5. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

None

ACTION ITEMS

None

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

6. City of New Castle Transportation Plan

Ms. Heather Dunigan said preliminary recommendations were presented at a public workshop on September 13. Follow the September 30 close of the public comment period, the project team will revise these recommendations based on feedback from public and an upcoming Advisory Committee meeting. The City of New Castle has a mix of the historic downtown area, which is largely residential, surrounded by newer residential areas, abundant open space, and some industrial and commercial uses on the periphery. A set of goals and objectives are being drawn from the scope of work, which looks to enhance the multimodal transportation network and connectivity, reduce illegal truck traffic, improve safety, enhance the gateways, and do parking analysis. These goals are largely confirmed by other goals in the New Castle County Comprehensive Plan that will soon be completed. That also includes recommended bicycle connections, clarifying regional and local traffic patterns, reducing cut-through traffic and speeding, and optimizing parking supply. At the public workshop in January, there were many comments about the challenges of crossing many of the intersections along Route 9 through town, connections between Markell Trail and Battery Park, and general connectivity for walking and biking. There were a few transit comments, mostly focused on extending bus connections out of New Castle to other places as opposed to transit changes within the city itself. The

intersections mentioned for pedestrian travel also have challenges for vehicular travel, particularly, many of them direct traffic into the historical downtown area rather than around the downtown. This is true also for trucks, some of whom unintentionally end up in local streets where it is difficult to maneuver. The team heard little about parking, as people are fairly satisfied with the new lots. There is an interest in adding electric vehicle charging stations and expanding some of the lots. Flooding needs to be addressed in the plan as well as beautification of the community.

Over summer, an informal public workshop was held during one of the concerts in Battery Park, and it was well attended. Many of the same issues were mentioned such as too much truck traffic, vehicular traffic cutting through town to avoid backups on US 13 and other major roads, uneven sidewalks, and disconnected trails. One the ideas that was brought to the workshop was lowering speed limits in town from twenty-five to fifteen on local streets to promote shared use for bicycles, pedestrians and vehicles in a traffic calmed environment. This was well-received at the meeting.

There are also concerns about backups on SR 273, and the US 13 and SR 273 intersection. The DelDOT safety program has identified US 13 and SR 273 as a concern, so the team recommends DelDOT do a feasibility study at this location to look at the options. There is some interest in widening SR 273, but the traffic volumes do not justify going from two lanes to four lanes. The team believes fixing the intersection at US 13 will make SR 273 flow better.

The intersection at SR 273 and SR 141 was recently improved, but traffic still backs up and it does not work well for pedestrians nor bikes. It is a five-legged intersection with a lot of pavement. A trail runs east-west along the north side. The simple approach involves improving the islands and the multimodal connections to the south; and ending 14th Street with a cul-de-sac to simplify the traffic operations. Another option to alleviate conflicts between pedestrians, bikes, and turning vehicles is to convert the intersection turns to no turn on red. At the workshop people said they want to see better crosswalks here, particularly for the trail. The property owner at the end of 14th Street had concerns about the impact of the cul-de-sac there.

Delaware Street and Ferry Cut Off is an important intersection for accessing the historic district as well as for pedestrians accessing a nearby shopping center. From SR 273 it is a straight route into the historic district. People who want to go around town end up in the historic district unintentionally, because a turn is required to stay on the through road. The team recommends the extension of a multi-use path along Route 9 through town as well as short section connecting to the crosswalk. Another suggestion is to enhance this as a gateway by forcing a physical turn to go to the historic district and adding a landscaped island. This option was favored by most people at the workshop.

Ferry Cut Off at 6th Street also directs traffic into the town center as vehicles must physically turn to stay on the through road. There are major flooding concerns at this location. From the northeast side of town, it is challenging for pedestrians to cross the street to access the historic district. One option presented at the workshop separates the roads to make a smooth connection along Ferry Cut Off/Route 9. This would add a multi-use path as well. With this scenario, vehicular traffic would go to the next street and turn to get into town. Another option from the Dutch subconsultants is called a Dutch left, which works like a mini roundabout. Through traffic would have a smooth movement with no deflection. To get into town travelling

eastbound requires making a turn. Westbound vehicles enter an oval and do a small U-turn to access the local streets. To leave town, vehicles either make a right turn or enter the circle and make a similar U-turn. This option adds the advantage of a crossing so people coming from the neighborhoods on Route 9 have better access to the city center. It promotes lower speeds and better conditions for traffic flow through the intersection, eliminates the need for a traffic light, decreases the amount of asphalt, increases safety, and creates a gateway in the area.

Washington Street at Route 9 also requires a turn to remain on the through road as going straight leads into the historic district. One option is to make signs very clear to direct traffic to Route 13, Route 9 and I-95. The other option is to create a sweep through the area. This would allow turns off of Washington Street to 7th Street, but it makes a more fluid movement to stay on the main road. This option enhances bike lanes and walkways in the area.

Battery Park Trail and the Markell Trail bring many bicyclists into the area and promote interest in bicycling from residents. The team looked at bike lanes and pedestrian connections and identified areas where the bike network would be expanded, particularly connecting Battery Park to the Markell Trail. New multi-use pathways are suggested. DelDOT has started planning the section of the School Lane Path Project as suggested by the New Castle County Bicycle Plan. Washington Street would be a key connector through town. An elevated bi-directional bikeway along this corridor is recommended. There is no space for a protected bikeway, so elevating it eliminates the need for buffer space. Extending the connection to Dobbinsville is important because walking from there to town currently requires going all the way around through Battery Park. A feasibility study is exploring making a connection on South Street between Markell Trail and Battery Park. Battery Park has done a Master Plan recently that looked at expanding the trails. The team looked at a bi-directional bikeway that allows the retention of some of the parking and both lanes of traffic. Residents complained that in the Cherry Street section people park on the sidewalks. The team suggests reconstructing the sidewalk and adding some curbs to eliminate that. It was also suggested that parking be expanded in the park, but there was mixed support for that at the workshop.

Flooding is a major concern. The consultants went out after hurricane Ida to see the flooding, which was bad through the area along Washington Street toward Route 9. Addressing some of the growth of vegetation along the route would help temporarily, but this needs a long-term solution. There is a project in the TIP to do flood remediation along 7th Street, which should be starting preliminary engineering in FY 2023. The team is focusing on gateways to enhance access to the town and historic district. Various locations that could be enhanced were identified, including areas close to the historic district and more peripheral locations in the community. A chart was created to show what each recommendation accomplishes in terms of the goals of the project. Each of the recommendations address multiple goals of the project. Comments are being accepted through September 30th. An Advisory Committee meeting is being planned for October. An in-person workshop with New Castle City Council will be held in late October.

Ms. Tricia Arndt asked for more information about the elevated bikeway on Washington Street, such the height and what type of material would be used. Ms. Dunigan replied that they have not gotten into full engineering, but they are usually slightly elevated from the road, not as much as a full curb, but enough that people know not to drive in it. It can be asphalt, concrete, or another material. Instead of separation with flexi-posts or a buffered area, it is elevated to

allow a smaller footprint to the roadway cross section. Ms. Arndt asked if the area where a parking lot is proposed floods. Ms. Dunigan replied that the whole area of Battery Park can flood so to expand that parking lot some sort of permeable pavement like gravel might be used to enhance parking over just grass for overflow parking when there are events but kept open otherwise. Ms. Arndt said the city did a Climate Action Plan around 2015, and before that, they did Resiliency Plan, so they have a lot of information on sea level rise and flooding.

7. Southbridge Neighborhood Plan

Mr. Bill Swiatek said Southbridge is located on the south Wilmington peninsula, just to the east of the Riverfront development and south of downtown and the train station. The task of this project was to update the 2006 Neighborhood Plan. The partners in the project were the South Wilmington Planning Network, for whom WILMAPCO has provided some leadership for the last decade, and the Southbridge Civic Association. This project was funded through a grant from Healthy Communities Delaware. The project consultant was Asakura Robinson. This is their first time working in Delaware, and they have done well.

The study was guided by a diverse Steering Committee consisting of eight paid representatives including a youth rep from the community, WILMAPCO, the city, various non-profits in the area, local business folks, and the University of Delaware. The project itself had three key phases. The first phase was to understand the context of community with the existing conditions report, interviews, and surveys. Phase 2 was looking at envisioning, so a number of working group meetings were held, the mission and vision statements were created, and another survey conducted. The team is in the last phase now where some action items and recommendations have been developed and the last public workshop is being planned. Doing a neighborhood plan in a tech desert in the middle of a pandemic was challenging, but the team managed to do forty interviews both in-person and virtually. There were five Steering Committee meetings (most of them virtual), one community barbecue, three Resident Leader meetings, and four public workshops. Two surveys were taken door to door in the community. The Steering Committee put forth a very strong effort to make this work in a very trying time.

Among things that people love about the community is the strong sense of its identity. It is isolated from the rest of the city and that gives it a sense of self the other neighborhoods may not have. The Wetland Park project, which is the headline project in South Wilmington, is well-thought of and will help with the flooding in the community, while providing a natural park. Neighborhood institutions and a generally low crime rate are also key things that the community values. Some of the challenges in Southbridge are the elevated poverty rates, high rates of unemployment and underemployment. It is a very bus dependent community with about a third of the households being zero-car households. There is a lot of vacant land and industry surrounding the community.

The plan itself is divided into action item categories where the recommendations are sorted based on the community feedback. Categories are related to community empowerment, economic revitalization and trying to strengthen the voice of the community in the development taking place in the area; strengthening the civic associations; strengthening the local CDC; and economic revitalization of the community and the Main Street Affiliate project. One thing residents have said most is there is a need for more youth programming and activities.

Affordable living, which includes housing, better health, resilience to climate change, and improved mobility was another challenge that the community has.

A number of transportation efforts from the 2006 plan have been worked on over the years. Foremost is traffic calming and creating healthy streets. Phase three of a Transportation Alternatives Program is active in Southbridge today. It is building off of streetscape work that was done over the years and has been rolled into a Safe Routes to School program that was at a school in Southbridge. It is looking to add lighting, improve sidewalks, and create bulb-outs. Reducing truck traffic is also a key issue. Southbridge is located next to the seaport where many businesses use trucks that roll through the community. A WILMAPCO study that looks at truck access to the port has some ideas on how to reduce truck trips in Southbridge through diversion routes to the south of the community. Connectivity, especially to the Riverfront as it develops, is another key existing effort. There is a pathway being constructed along A Street. There is going to be a trail that is going to cut through Wetland Park. Accessing the new bridge over the Christina River through a new road or some multimodal connections is also important.

A couple of road diets are planned from the Route 9 Study. A road diet is being considered on Route 9 to Terminal Avenue. DeIDOT has been working on a road diet project associated with the bridge at D Street that goes over the rail line and extends south on Heald Street. The recommendations include a road diet analysis in Southbridge. This will evaluate extending those diets into the community to make it safer for people to walk across Heald Street and New Castle Avenue. The streetscape project, while it has added beautification, did not calm traffic as hoped, so perhaps a road diet would help. The traffic impacts on the community from the South Market Street Master Plan, which calls for the buildup of the Riverfront area, is being reviewed. That could be analyzed through a modeling effort through an updated circulation study. The potential removal of the D Street sweep is being considered. This is an area where people speed into the community, so it could potentially be changed to a ninety-degree angle or another option on Heald Street. This is something the analysis could look at, as well as a number of other improvements to transportation. The concept for New Castle Avenue to the south is to take the current two-lane road in either direction down to one lane in either direction with a center turn lane in order to see if it could be extended into Southbridge itself. One potential concept the consultants developed is to remove one of the travel lanes, maintain the parking lane but add space for greenery to do some beautification and traffic calming.

The residents said adding connectivity to the bridge on Heald Street is a priority as well as accessing Eden Park, which has received investment over the years. The focus is not just reaching the Riverfront, but also these other two points with bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Slowing truck traffic is a top mobility concern in the community, so the team is looking to implement some of the truck diversion options from that port access study as well as further localized restrictions. Residents spoke of directing truck traffic to Christiana Avenue which is non-residential. Better bus connections are needed, particularly to jobs and healthy food. DART applied for an Areas of Persistent Poverty Grant, which would meet the community needs with improved access to ShopRite, better access to jobs around the port, and a shuttle connection to the transit hub and train station. Reactivating the Main Street Program in Southbridge has also been discussed. There is a CDC in Southbridge that could be base of operation for this project. This would look at ways to improve gateway treatments, tackle the maintenance of street banners that can be added with the light posts, and green infrastructure.

It is important to have maintenance agreements before the State installs these things with any project.

There were a number of other mobility actions in the draft plan including expanding the public EV charging infrastructure in Southbridge, flood mitigation strategies for at risk roads, and investing in a bike share program. Last summer, a Healthy Street Loop was proposed that is similar to the Healthy Streets Initiative that periodically closes off some of the roads in the community to allow for more physical activity and community events. The Northeast Corridor Future's High Speed Rail Plan will be monitored, as it proposes putting a high-speed rail line directly through Southbridge on the freight rail line that cuts through there.

Five thousand dollars from the grant were set aside this year to do some implementation. It might be invested in the revitalization of Hicks Park, which has been a South Wilmington Planning Network project over the years. The second year of the grant will go to a Community Development Corporation in Southbridge to drive implementation of some of the action items from the plan. The Southbridge Neighborhood Plan and draft action items will be presented to the community to get some final feedback. An in-person option will be at the Neighborhood House on the 21st at 6:00 p.m. and an online option will be on the 23rd at 6:30 p.m.

8. Townsend Walkable Community Workshop

Mr. Jake Thompson said Walkable Community Workshops are opportunities for citizens to become planners as they are experts in their communities and come up with the best possible ideas for improvement. These workshops consist of three parts. First, there is a presentation to go over topics like sidewalk design, crosswalks, traffic calming, and other tools to improve walkability. That gets ideas going for the walking audit where participants survey the area and try to identify issues and opportunities to improve walking. Then, there is a mapping exercise where the group shares their ideas for improving walkability and those ideas go into the report.

The Townsend Walkable Community Workshop took place on July 12th at the pavilion in Townsend Municipal Park. There were eleven people in attendance including residents, town officials, and WILMAPCO staff. It began with a presentation going over the elements of a walkable community. Then the group went on a walking audit, which started at the pavilion. We took the park path down to a vacant lot next to the park; then took neighborhood streets to Wiggins Mill Road, which is a major road that bisects the town and followed that up to an open space at the southern end of the Townsend Village II housing development. We then turned around and returned to the pavilion for the mapping exercise.

During the mapping exercise, the group discussed challenges of walking around town and ideas to improve walkability that they discovered during their walk and in their everyday lives. We put together a map of ideas. That map was made into a map of recommendations for the report showing all the ideas the group came up with including several new paths between neighborhoods, to open spaces, and to new developments; several traffic calming measures; a new public open space; filling in sidewalk gaps; and improving crosswalks.

The first idea is a new public open space on Chestnut Street. This would be in a vacant lot adjacent to Townsend Municipal Park. This lot is clean, well maintained, and frequently used as a shortcut to get to the park. The group recommended that the town acquire this property, which would open up many opportunities for this space including a potential path extension from the

existing park path down to Main Street, or things like tables, benches, and recreational facilities. The best use of this space should be determined through public outreach to see what the community would like to see in this space.

The next idea was a path on Wiggins Mill Road. High traffic speeds and the lack of sidewalks for much of this stretch make this very dangerous for walking. During our walking audit we were accompanied by a police escort and wore safety vests, but neither of these should be necessary to feel safe. This path could consist of some combination of sidewalk, walkable shoulder, or pathway. It would require further study. In particular, there is a one-lane bridge over a culvert. At this location the path could consist of a wooden bridge connecting to the existing bridge, or the path could extend further into the woods to avoid the culvert. This path would connect Townsend Village II on the north end to Main Street and present many opportunities for new walking routes.

The group recommended several new path connections which would connect between neighborhoods and to open spaces. These include a path into the woods on the north end of town, a path around the pond in the center of town, paths or nature trails connecting to housing developments from Edgar Road to Wiggins Mill Road, paths into new planned housing developments of which there are several, and paths into open spaces, particularly the open space on the southern end of Townsend Village II. This is a wide-open field that could potentially have a walking track, connecting paths, or recreational amenities.

The group discussed many traffic calming measures. Mini roundabouts were recommended at six intersections in town. Wiggins Mill Road widens further to the north and has shoulders and sidewalks in some parts. There are two entrances to the Townsend Village II neighborhood. These intersections could have mini roundabouts or, alternatively, oval-shaped islands which help to calm traffic and could include crosswalks with pedestrian refuge islands. Advisory shoulders are common in Europe, but not as much in the United States. This is a potential solution for Wiggins Mill Road as it just requires restriping, and the road already narrows to one lane over the culvert. With advisory shoulders there is just one lane. The center is intended for cars and the shoulders are for walking and biking. To enable two-way traffic, drivers only enter the shoulder to allow oncoming traffic to pass once they are sure that the shoulder is clear. DelDOT would have to submit a Request to Experiment to try this. Marked shoulders are just painted white lines. These are recommended on Edgar Road where there are concerns about high traffic speeds. These can help calm traffic by narrowing the perceived width of the road. These could include textured pavement, which is more costly, but more effective as it further delineates the shoulder from the roadway. Curb extensions or bump-outs were also recommended on Edgar Road to calm traffic, reduce crossing distances, and make pedestrians more visible. Pedestrian-scale lighting illuminates sidewalks and paths better than overhead streetlights. It is a great way to improve public safety and personal comfort. These have already been installed on much of Main Street. They were recommended along Helen Drive and Kaitlyn Drive where there were concerns about lack of lighting.

The group recommended two improvements to Main Street. There are no sidewalks from Edgar Road to Cannery Lane at the west end of Main Street. The railroad tracks in the center of town need a marked crossing. There is an ongoing streetscape improvement project on Townsend's Main Street, Phase 2 of which was completed last year. That included ADA compliant sidewalks, curb ramps, bump-outs, and pedestrian-scale lighting. Phase 3 of that project is pending funding but would stretch from Commerce Street to Kaitlyn Drive and should include both of these improvements.

The next steps section of the report describes how to bring these ideas into reality. First, the town should seek acquisition of the vacant lot on Chestnut Street. Once that is done, they should perform public outreach to determine the best use of this public space. The town should also ensure that the planned Phase 3 Main Street improvements address the before mentioned concerns. The report ends with a series of funding and implementation resources including information on the Capital Transportation Program (CTP), Community Transportation Fund (CTF), and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). This report has been reviewed by the Townsend Town Council and has been finalized. It is on our website: wilmapco.org/walkable.

INFORMATION ITEMS

9. Staff Report

Ms. Dunigan reported the following updates:

- At the September 9th meeting, Council approved four action items. The Federal Funding Letter as requested by DeIDOT was approved and has been sent to DeIDOT. The Route 9 Paths Plan, the Delaware Statewide Truck Parking Study, and the Delaware First/Final Mile Freight Network Development Study were endorsed by Council. All of these reports can be found on the WILMAPCO website.
- The Draft Churchmans Crossing Plan Update was reviewed by the project partners. An Advisory Committee meeting will be held on September 27th, and a public workshop will be October 25th.
- Following hurricane IDA, WILMAPCO staff met with staff from the City of Wilmington Public Works and Economic Development on the East 7th Street Peninsula to review the impacts of flooding as it relates to the plan for that area.
- Based on comments received, the Union Street Reconfiguration project made some changes which were brought to Wilmington Initiatives on September 16th. An Advisory Committee meeting and workshop will be held in October.
- The I-95 Cap Feasibility Study is getting started. A list of Advisory Committee members was prepared, and a meeting will be scheduled soon. A public workshop is being planned for late October
- The Newport Transportation Study Monitoring Committee had their kickoff with the consultant team on August 24th. A meeting with the project partners and Advisory Committee is being scheduled.
- The Concord Pike Master Plan Monitoring Committee has a meeting with the project team and agency partners scheduled for October 4th.
- Staff is presenting the Transportation Justice Plan to FHWA's EJ Peer Exchange on September 21st.
- APA Delaware is having a Walking Tour networking event on September 22nd in partnership with Westside Grows at 4:30 p.m. A second Walking Tour event will begin at Klondike Kate's in Newark on October 6th at 4:30 p.m.
- September 20th through 24th will be the Air Quality Partnership Car-free Week social media campaign.
- The City of New Castle Transportation Plan had a Public Workshop on September 13th. The next workshop will be in person and scheduled for mid to late October. The details for that will be on the WILMAPCO website.
- Staff participated with DeIDOT in the virtual TIP-CTP Public Meeting on September 15th. The information presented is on DeIDOT's website and will be linked to the WILMAPCO website as well.

- Staff participated in the MDOT Pre-tour meeting on September 7th. The annual Tour meeting will be in-person on September 24th at the Cecil County Administration Building. An online option to view the meeting will be on the Cecil County website.
- Staff presented the results of the Townsend Walkable Community Workshop to their Town Council on September 1st.
- A Walkable Community Workshop is scheduled in Middletown on September 29th.
- On September 15th staff presented to the University of Delaware Academy of Lifelong Learning.

OTHER BUSINESS:

None.

ADJOURNMENT:

ACTION: On motion by Ms. Tricia Arndt and seconded by Mr. Ian Beam the TAC adjourned at 10:56 a.m.

Motion passed.

(09-16-21-02)

The TAC adjourned at 10:56 a.m.

Attachments (0)