

**WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES**

Minutes of the first January meeting

January 4, 2021

Members Present

Mark Gordon, Chair
Dan Cote
Jeff Glisson
MaryFrances McGarrity
Ray McKeeman
Andy Wright

Township Personnel Present

John Weller, Planning Director
Justin Smiley, Township Planner
Pam Gural-Bear, Interim Township Manager

Rajesh Kumbhardare, Board of Supervisor

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Mark Gordon called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

The Commission observed a moment of silence to honor our Veterans.

John Weller said that the annual report required by Act 247 detailing the Commission's prior year activity will be ready to present to the Planning Commission at the February 1 meeting.

II. REORGANIZATION

MOTION: To elect Mark Gordon as Chairman.
(McKeeman/Glisson)

ACTION: Passed, 6-0

MOTION: To elect Ray McKeeman as Vice-Chairman.
(Glisson/Gordon)

ACTION: Passed, 6-0

III. REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: To approve the minutes for the meeting of December 7, 2021. (McKeeman/Cote)

ACTION: Passed, 6-0

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment on items not on the agenda.

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. Comprehensive Plan Amendment: Future Land Use Text and Map Review

Mr. Weller provided an overview of proposed amendments to the Future Land Use section of the Comprehensive Plan, including both the text and the Future Land Use map. The Township adopted the Comprehensive Plan in 1995 and approved major updates in 2015 and 2019. Mr. Weller noted that while the data has changed since 1995, the basic policies have remained consistent.

Mr. Weller noted that the new text provides new census data and describes the major trends that have influenced the development of the Township since 1995:

- In 1995 Exton Square had only one anchor store. Three more anchors were added as part of a major expansion around 2000, but the introduction and growing popularity of on-line shopping has left Exton Square - along with nearly all our retail areas - struggling and searching for ways to remain viable.
- The term “quality of life” came into popular use to describe the balance of access to jobs, housing, shopping, good public schools, open space, and entertainment desired by many - and available in suburban communities like West Whiteland.
- The Township has an increasing variety of transit options. In addition to the highways, railways, and bus service we have long enjoyed, we now have trails dedicated to bicycle and pedestrian use that are useful for travel and not just recreation. Electric vehicles and ride-share services are changing how we use roads and parking lots.
- Residents are looking for more variety in housing. The single-family homes that have long characterized this area are being joined by increasing numbers of townhouses, carriage homes, and apartments. These types of units are often similar in cost to our single-family homes but are preferred by some for their greater convenience and lack of maintenance responsibility.
- The continuing COVID pandemic spurred changes that may prove permanent. If people work from home more, this will affect the demand for office space and housing design. Restaurants may need to accommodate more take-out service, and retail may be affected not only by on-line shopping, but by BOPIS options (“Buy On-line, Pick-up In Store”) which may result in smaller retail stores but larger warehouses.

Mr. Weller asked members for any other trends that could affect future land use. Ms. McGarrity suggested adding climate change and its potential impact on stormwater, watersheds, and riparian buffers. She noted that “100-year” flood events are occurring more frequently, suggesting the need to provide multiple means of access and egress for neighborhood. Weather-related power outages are also more frequent, and Mr. Gordon noted the impact on maintenance of street trees and other features that can threaten power lines.

Mr. Glisson recommended that the Township work to anticipate pending technological changes, such as passenger-carrying aerial drones, that would mark us as a forward-thinking community that welcomed and supported new ideas. There followed discussion about the utilities and infrastructure needed to attract such industries.

The discussion moved to the population projections, specifically the 33% increase projected for the Township by 2030 and the observation that this appears to be beyond the Township’s capacity. Justin Smiley explained that these projections are a bit suspect since they do not consider such practical matters, nor are they done scientifically. He suggested that we do our own projections using methodology similar to what was used for the Lincoln Highway and Whitford Road Corridors Plan.

Mr. Weller noted that the text referring to fiscal impact has been deleted. Since the great majority of Township revenue is from the earned income tax and not any property tax, this chapter is not the most suitable place for an analysis of municipal finance; Mr. Gordon agreed.

Mr. Smiley presented the revised Future Land Use map, blending the map from the 1995 plan with the revisions implemented by the adoption of the 2015 Corridors Plan and the changes discussed at recent Planning Commission meetings. The Commission agreed that the term “environmentally constrained lands” could be mis-interpreted as reference to pollution or contamination and should be revised to “naturally constrained lands.”

Mr. Smiley suggested a separate map showing permanent open space that would include open spaces within residential areas. Such a map would give a more accurate depiction of open space since these lands are shown as developed for residential use on the Future Land Use map; the Commission agreed.

With members in agreement with the proposed map categories, Staff will add detail to the text portion to describe the categories more clearly. Mr. Glisson suggested including not only what is allowed in each category, but also what is excluded.

Staff will make revisions to the text and map for presentation at a future meeting.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mr. Gordon announced that Mimi Gleason was not reappointed by the Board of Supervisors as Township Manager. Mr. Gordon said Ms. Gleason is the most experienced municipal leader he has ever worked with, and she has guided West Whiteland through many challenges. Ms. Gleason will be missed!

Staff is planning a "Community Conversation" with the Exton-area business community to get input on the desired future of the Exton Crossroads. Similar to the event for Township residents held back in October 2021, this event is scheduled for February 17 at 10:00 a.m.

There are no plans on the agenda for the next meeting on January 18, but Columbia Cottage has re-submitted their conditional use application and has been placed on the February 1 agenda.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:25 p.m.

Recording Secretary,



John B. Weller, AICP
Director of Planning