

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
March 13, 2018

The following are the minutes of the Growth & Redevelopment Committee meeting, which was held on Tuesday, March 13, 2018 at 6:36 p.m. in the Lawrence Township Municipal Building, Lower Level Conference Room.

Statement of Adequate Notice:

Adequate notice of the regular meeting of the Lawrence Township Growth & Redevelopment Committee has been provided by filing an annual meeting schedule with the Municipal Clerk and by filing the agenda with the Municipal Clerk, posting prominently in the Municipal Building and mailing to the Trenton Times and the Trentonian.

Roll Call:

Present: Charles Lavine
John Conroy
Robert Pluta
Joan Brame
Maria Connolly
Teresita Bastides-Heron
Peter Ferrone
Brian Vaughn
Nina Reeder
Melissa Clark
Andrew Frank

Absent: None

Excused Absence: Tushar Patel
Frank Comstock
Lovette Love-Stevens
Christopher Bobbitt, Council Liaison

Also Present: Andrew Link, Liaison
Susan Snook, Secretary

Welcome of New Member:

The Committee members introduced themselves to our new member, Brian Vaughn.

Minutes:

The February 13, 2018 minutes were unanimously approved.

Public Comment:

None

Lawrence Shopping Center – Visioning:

Chairperson Conroy stated the owners have hired an architectural firm to do a face lift. He showed an overview showing the creek, surrounding neighborhoods and how to bring them together. Cooper Pest Control is located in the old fitness center. This is not anywhere finished and ideas can fluctuate but this is something to start the conversation of maybe where the shopping center could go.

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

March 13, 2018

Page 2

The Committee members started conversations regarding the Lawrence Shopping Center. Mr. Vaughn wanted to know if Rite Aid was going in where the CVS was and no one knew and wondered why when a CVS was up the road. The conversation continued with the expansion of Acme into where CVS was located and Mr. Lavine stated that Acme has no interest in expanding.

Chairperson Conroy stated he wanted mend fabric around the neighborhood that surrounded it; to break down the walls of it; breaking two swaths through to the shopping center to allow the neighborhoods to actually have a pedestrian way of getting in to it; continuing streets that dead end right now and extending the neighborhoods over in the residential fabric. Pastor Reeder commented if that was floodplain in the back and there is a little patch of it in the back and the rest is not.

The shopping center owns the parcel by the jug handle so Chairperson Conroy's idea is to replace the jug handle with another round-about. It seems like that anybody that comes by bus seems like a second class citizen, they do not have an appropriate place to land and where buses can take off. If a transportation center was installed with a news stand or a coffee shop, then you actually have some place to wait for the bus. It would encourage people to travel by bus. The old furniture store and put a hole in the middle of it and this could be the new hotel, which would be in a better location. The old building will be a new restaurant to service the hotel and neighborhood. This is one thing with the fabric that sits behind the shopping center, extending streets down and creating moderate income housing there of side by side units with an alley in the back with garages.

Mr. Frank asked if he is looking at a vision being discussed by this Committee and looking at something that the owner has expressed interest in. Chairperson Conroy stated it is him generating an idea. Mr. Frank continued if there has been any marketing ideas to see what kind of businesses might work in that area. Chairperson Conroy stated you have to ask the owners.

Chairperson Conroy continued with a round-about on Route 1 with a pedestrian bridge over the Shabakunk Creek like the one at the end of Colonial Lake. The land around the lake can be designated, which is predominantly wetlands, the park land. Mr. Conroy explained where the round-about would go. Pastor Reeder asked a pedestrian being above to cross at that location. The opposite side of the main part of the Shopping Center could be redeveloped into a mixed use; maybe some retail or office with housing above. Also some low and moderate housing behind the Burlington Coat Factory. In the field to extend more housing with side by side units on tighter lots and have back alley ways with garages in the back of them. By making them attached they could be more affordable for a purchaser who can't afford a standalone single family home.

Chairperson Conroy thought showing some visuals could start a conversation of what we may like to see. Pastor Reeder asked if the owner has showed any interest in this and the owners of it took the owners five years to fix the holes in the parking lot and they allowed those stores to be empty for such a long time but cutting a hole in the shopping center. Ms. Brame stated this is a new owner for only two years and there has been more activity in the last two years with them then the previous owners because we have four new tenants.

Mr. Lavine stated they had to spent 2 million dollars to secure the roof for major leaks and a million dollars to secure the integrity of the parking lot and there was some place sinking so they were there in the past week to fix it. They put a lot of money in to it but not with great tangible results. He did talk to the owner or son about a year ago and mentioned about this Committee and Council and no response.

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

March 13, 2018

Page 3

There will be walking/bicycle paths for the neighborhood for easier access which would be a link with the neighborhood so it would give them more of an incentive to use the Shopping Center. Pastor Reeder mentioned the loading dock area that people use for walking and would it be possible to add some kind of walking path back through there because sidewalks become non-existent. She also stated about pedestrians getting around a round-about.

Ms. Brame stated the owners of the Shopping Center are spending a lot of money redoing the façade with the intent of attracting occupancy. The owners before the current owner hired a marketing firm and spent a lot of money and they were going to make a walking area, sitting area and so forth; but not sure about the current owners.

Pastor Reeder commented that if you do something like this, it is more attractive in the picture than in real life. She stated that the people from her parish do not go to the Shopping Center anymore because they don't feel safe and they feel that the parking lot, even repaved, is in such poor condition and there is not much to do there. The bus stop was actually in front of Acme and they asked them to move it to Route 1. Ms. Brame stated access to the Shopping Center is great and agrees because the accessibility now is very difficult.

Chairperson Conroy stated if you extend the neighborhood over in that area and then you still have green space back there that could be a neighborhood park. Mr. Vaughn stated there is a lot of parking there and extend where the creek is and turn it into a park land and would like to see a multi-use building such as an upscale dinner, on weekends show movies and something for teens. This would cost some dollars so what would it do to the rents for the tenants that are already there when time to renew their leases.

Pastor Reeder asked why the parking lot was put out there in the first place. The response was that the Shopping Center was built in the early 50's/60's, where Acme is and Burlington Coat Factory was in the 70's. Dunham's was the Macy's of Mercer County, it was the regional shopping center so parking was needed and when built you need so many spaces for retail space. Chairperson Conroy stated this was the place to go and now it can never be a regional destination, it can't compete with the Malls. So how do you make it more neighborhood friendly and also shedding some land, some tax space of the shopping center and making it for the community mending some of the neighborhoods. The idea of taking away some retail space you are also taking away a tax space so it balances it out. The only way they are going to get higher rents if they get higher traffic and consistent traffic.

Chairperson Conroy stated this gives us a welcoming center at the bus area and again trying to bring the neighborhood in as well as, and a lot of people who go there take public transportation. If we can give them a better place to congregate for public transportation, they may come here more often. Pastor Reeder stated for the shopping center to more upscale, cleaner and nicer place to shop. She also stated about the schooling and busing them. Chairperson Conroy stated this is to bring income based housing.

Ms. Brame stated a lot of people living in the area do not like to travel on Route 1 and this a huge incentive on doing something to make the shopping center more attractive so people would want to go. Pastor Reeder asked how to encourage the new owner to think about the idea of additional access. Ms. Brame does not think it is in their business plan; so why don't we call the new owners and ask them to come to a Planning Board meeting to increase the dialogue. Chairperson Conroy stated he will send images to everybody and have comments and do another image. Maybe we can sign a petition to start a buzz.

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

March 13, 2018

Page 4

Mr. Lavine stated someone is going to have to pay and stated the first step to do is to get some contact with the new owner and get them in and hear what they have to say and listen to them to see what they are planning to do. Ms. Brame stated since they are investing so much money into the façade, that says something. Mr. Lavine stated we need to get them in here and let them give us a vision for the shopping center. Mr. Ferrone stated how can we work together to build your customer base to ease some of your tax burden by farming this out.

Pastor Reeder asked what the time line to fulfill Affordable Housing is. Ms. Connolly stated the obligation is for ten years to 2025. She continued that you do not have to build it you have to zone for it so the Township will be zoning properties for affordable housing. They have a settlement agreement on Princeton and this will go forward because they have an agreement. Mr. Link stated our number is 1,110 is the big number; and 696 is the realistic number. Chairperson Conroy will send everyone some images via e-mail and we can start to gather comments. Ms. Brame stated can we suggest to Chris Bobbitt, who is the liaison that he reach out to the new owners.

A copy of the Lawrence Shopping Center Visioning Plan is attached

Securing Awards Program Sponsors and A Speakers:

Chairperson Conroy stated he still have to put together some wording and we can send that out to get sponsors for the awards. If anybody has some thoughts about a speaker.

Communication Issues and Strategies to Engage Town Business with Growth and Redevelopment Committee:

Chairperson Conroy stated trying different ways to communicate with the Township and how it does not communicate amongst itself and how we can make that better. Ms. Connolly stated she put together a list of ideas, copy attached, and we should reach out to the Kevin Nerwinski, Manager to see if we can do such an app.

Ms. Clark asked how much it costs and who put it together and suggested a central place for communication.

Signage:

Ms. Connolly stated she spoke with James Parvesse, Township Engineer about the sign ordinance and they have not made any changes to the sign ordinance. He is happy to work with us and the Committee for ideas. Chairperson Conroy stated we were going to the change some language. Ms. Connolly stated for A-frame signs because it was confusing, which it allowed temporary lawn signs; however, Mr. Parvesse stated we do not allow lawn signs for businesses. Ms. Connolly suggested having another meeting with Kevin Nerwinski.

Other Business:

None


LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
March 13, 2018
Page 5

Adjournment:

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

Digital audio file of this meeting is available upon request.

Respectfully submitted,


Susan J. Snook
Recording Secretary

Minutes approved: April 10, 2018