



SIMONE COLLINS
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
119 EAST LAFAYETTE STREET NORRISTOWN, PA 19401
PHONE: 610.239.7601 FAX: 610.239.7606
WWW. SIMONECOLLINS.COM

MEETING NOTES

Project:	Towamencin Township Comprehensive Plan Update	Project No.:	22064.10
Location:	Towamencin Township Building	Meeting Date/ Time:	1.18.24 4:00 – 6:00pm 7:00 – 9:00pm
Re:	Public Meeting 1 / Open House Afternoon & Evening Session	Issue Date:	February 5, 2024

ATTENDEE LIST:

See attached sign-in sheet (emails redacted).

Simone Collins: Peter Simone (PS), Pankaj Jobanputra (PJ), Tim Adams (TA)

GENERAL NOTES:

Presentation

The format for each 2-hour session began with 30 minutes of open house, followed by 45 minutes of presentation, and ended with 45 minutes of discussion. The same presentation was given at both sessions.

PS reviewed the meeting agenda for the presentation as follows:

- introductions of project team and experience
- purpose of the Comprehensive Plan
- project schedule and scope
- public participation process
- planning approach
- demographics review
- land use and zoning map discussion
- questions to consider - followed by general discussion and next steps.

PS introduced the Simone Collins team and gave a brief overview of the firm's philosophy and past experience.

PJ reviewed the purpose of comprehensive planning and discussed its role as a guide for the long-term vision of a community. The components of a comprehensive plan as required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Code were presented, including the planning context,

implementation strategy, and recommendations for future land use, housing, transportation, community facilities, economic development, open space and recreation, natural and historic resources, and energy conservation.

PJ gave a basic overview of Zoning and its purpose of providing for all land uses within a municipality, and regulating size, height, and bulk of structures, and the intensity of uses. PJ briefly discussed how changes to zoning occur, including text amendments, new ordinances, and special exceptions and variances.

PJ gave a basic overview of a Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) and how it creates standards for dividing or combining parcels, and improvements of those parcels including minimum design standards.

PJ gave an overview of the Official Map, a planning tool under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) that shows the locations of possible future public lands and facilities such as transportation, parks and trails, and open space. PJ explained how the Official Map allows a municipality to express its interest in possibly acquiring lands in the future for public purposes. It can be used to be a negotiation tool for municipal land acquisitions or for grant funding.

PJ reviewed existing planning documents and explained how they would inform this comprehensive planning process, including the last Towamencin Comprehensive Plan, Strategic Plan, Parks and Trails Evaluation, and Sidewalk Connectivity Study, as well as adjacent municipal comprehensive plans and Montgomery County planning documents.

PJ reviewed the project scope, including data collection and review, trends analysis, investigation of areas that could be catalysts for change.

PJ presented the scope of public participation, including 4 Board of Supervisors meetings, 6 Planning Commission meetings, 3 public meetings, 4 Township committee meetings, 4 focus groups, staff meetings as needed, 6 Key Person Interviews, an online public opinion survey, and a meeting with the County Planning Commission.

PJ presented several questions from the public opinion survey as an example, and stated that the survey will open from January 18, until August 15.

PJ presented some potential options for Key Person Interviews, such as Police/Fire/EMS, School District, and local businesses/organizations.

PJ reviewed a planning approach of anticipating on-going and future changes, including retail trends, remote work, office building conversions, aging in place, demographic changes, climate, and zoning ordinance modernizations.

TA presented some demographic data, including a historical regional population comparison, racial composition, DVRPC population and employment estimates, educational attainment, median household income growth, commuting method, and US Census "OnTheMap" commuting analysis.

PS discussed questions for consideration that will be important in determining plan priorities, including transportation network needs and connectivity opportunities, housing types and demand, need for land use changes or opportunities for infill development, community facility upgrades, business development and future village shopping center plans, and possible improvements to existing parks and open space.

4ward Planning is an economic planning firm that will be conducting a market study of the Towamencin Area as a part of the Comprehensive Plan. They will be completing this part of the study in the next few months.

PS open the presentation to the discussion portion of each session.

Discussion

Afternoon Session 4pm – 6pm

Attendee asked about residential development and whether the Comprehensive Plan is meant to be a broad vision.

PS stated that it is meant to give the Supervisors useful information to make decisions that are in the best interest of their constituency. Economic diversity is vital to the health of a community and the plan gives an opportunity to explore how to provide for housing for residents of variable financial means, such as workforce housing.

Attendee stated that they think it is important to have affordable housing for the people who work in the Township, so that they have a stake in the betterment of the community.

Supervisor Osei stated the importance of Township ordinances to be flexible enough for private developers to respond to external market pressures and allow the Township to absorb growth. (Resident's desire to fill the existing shopping center (Forty Foot & Allentown) with businesses was mentioned.)

PS mentioned that zoning is often thought to be Inflexible, and when discussing zoning changes, unintended circumstances need to be considered. Best practices in zoning are to maintain flexibility.

Attendee stated that they think sharing resources between adjacent municipalities is great.

PS provided a possible example of working with Upper Gwynedd Township to share parks and recreation staff and facilities.

Attendee shared an idea about establishing a regional library.

Evening Session 7pm – 9pm

Attendee asked about the public input and opinion survey process.

PS stated that generally, trends established in the first ~100 survey responses remain unchanged after future responses.

Attendee asked about transparency and how data can be accessed.

PS stated that SC will provide meeting notes and are fully transparent with all survey questions.

Attendee asked how the final plan will be adopted.

PS stated that the plan will go into a 60-day draft review period and then will go to the Board of Supervisors to be approved.

Attendees voiced displeasure with the Township Supervisors not representing community interests.

Attendee stated that residents want to hear that you will give your unbiased professional opinion and recommendations that haven't been massaged by the Board.

PS responded that as consultants, our job is to give to the Board and community our best professional opinion.

Attendee asked whether focus groups will be open to the public.

PS stated that that can be discussed and that is up to the Township. SC if fine with that.

Attendee stated that they enjoyed participating in the Connectivity Study, and that this comprehensive planning process is similar.

Attendee stated that the "local tax group" can provide data on how many people are working from home.

Attendee expressed desire to hear about success stories from the last comprehensive plan. (what goals were accomplished – SC will review those as part of the process).

Attendee expressed desire to see zoning variance documentation process modernized and made more transparent, and a general focus on technology.

PS stated that SC will look at any chronic zoning issues and explore ways to resolve them.

Attendee recommended expanding focus group demographics and discussed how the Forty Foot Bridge involved a vision for a village type of development. Attendee expressed a desire to see the area developed into a walkable village area. Attendee also mentioned that there was a dog park included in the master plan for Fischer's Park but that it never came to fruition. They would like to see a controlled dog park in the Township, and that it could be an opportunity to generate revenue for the Township.

PS discussed the market conditions that led to Forty Foot Bridge not getting developed and cited the lack of Merck expansion, as well as the unique location of the Township between the employment centers of Philadelphia / Valley Forge and the Lehigh Valley. PS stated that PSDC (company that owns much of the land in the Village area) wants to put something desirable in that space, but larger market conditions continue to make this challenging.

Attendee voiced the desire to have outdoor gym equipment and pavilions and referenced the community park in Souderton. Attendee also voiced their desire for a community center and mentioned that the arts center building is empty and could be a suitable location if it had parking. Attendee said that a First Friday event series could be held on the pedestrian bridge.

Attendee voiced support for building a Veteran's Park, and that the local Veteran's group would be a good partner.

Attendee stated that they would also like to see the shopping center be developed with small shops and possibly mixed-use residential.

Attendee voiced their desire for nice restaurants and mentioned the current lack of restaurants in the Township.

Attendee stated that they do not want more storage units or warehousing.

Attendee asked a question about what percentage of apartments are usually not luxury apartments?

PS stated that because of high building costs, apartments do not have to be luxury to be expensive and that building inexpensively is difficult. PS discussed workforce housing and gave an example of how zoning can require 5%-10% of units to be 60% of the Average Median Income (AMI – which is determined by HUD), which is a way to provide less expensive housing units for professionals who don't have high salaries, such as teachers. PS also mentioned that the reduction of apartment sizes could possibly reduce rental costs.

Attendee asked whether workforce housing would be considered in this plan.

PS stated that the conversation could certainly be had and personally voiced support but mentioned that a housing developer usually has to be given incentives to include a workforce mix in a project.

Attendee voiced the desire for the Township to engage in solar, or other net-zero alternatives, to run the municipal complex and to make it easier for residents to engage with alternative energy options. Attendee explained that they personally pursued solar panels and that the municipal process was difficult.

Attendee stated that there is almost limited non-sport recreation space in the Township and having indoor non-sport recreation space would be great for children.

PS stated that Towamencin is about the size where a community center becomes feasible and mentioned that there are funding sources available to begin exploring those options. PS stated that the Township is in competition with all other neighboring communities to draw new residents, and a community center would help keep the community vibrant and competitive.

Attendee asked if trends emerge early in the survey process, will they inform the plan? How does the community help “get” what they want such as nice restaurants and shops?

PS stated that the importance of remaining realistic about what market conditions will bring to a suburban community. Suburban areas do not always attract “high-end” restaurants or boutique shops. The question is “what is achievable given market conditions?”

Attendee stated that the Township lacks a unifying goal that can convey the Township identity. Attendee stated that this comprehensive planning process is a great opportunity for the community to come together towards a common goal – and that SC should think about how best to facilitate that.

Attendee asked if 4wardPlanning's Market Analysis could explore incentives to bringing businesses into the Township.

PS stated that zoning usually cannot control that, but zoning can create the opportunity for good things to happen. Economic incentives, area demographics and market conditions typically the types of businesses and development that occur in a certain area.

Next Steps

- Begin to schedule key person interviews and focus group meetings.
- Continue data collection, analysis, and mapping.
- Next Public Meeting is scheduled for September 26, 2024.

This report represents the Professional's summation of the proceedings and is not a transcript. Unless written notice of any correction or clarification is received by the Professional within ten days of issue, the report shall be considered factually correct and shall become part of the official project record.

Sincerely,

SIMONE COLLINS, INC.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Peter Simone' and the signature on the right is 'Pankaj Jobanputra'.

Peter Simone, Pankaj Jobanputra, Tim Adams

Towamencin Township Comprehensive Plan Update

Public Meeting #1 - January 18, 2024, 4:00 p.m.

Name	Email
Katie Cleary	
LEW & DEB BARRETT	
Tina Gallagher	
Brad Edentfield	
Will Brusser	
DOUG BOWER	
Mike Hays	
Jacqui Barber - Rollins	
Kristin Warner	
Kofi Osei	

