

SOUTH STRABANE TOWNSHIP
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

May 8, 2017

APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

The May 8, 2017 Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee (Committee) of South Strabane Township came to order at 6:04 p.m. in the Mae C. Reynolds Meeting Room of the Municipal Building (550 Washington Road).

The following were present:

Steering Committee: David Fisher (Resident)
Jack Keisling (Supervisor)
Cynthia Rossi (Resident)
Michael Sherrieb (Township Engineer with KLH)
Thomas Steele (Planning Commission)
James Stewart (Zoning Hearing Board)
William Ursic (Resident)
Robert Weber (Supervisor)

Absent: Joseph Kopko, (Planning Commission)
Dan Reitz (Resident)

Also Present: Robert Brady (PA Dept. of Community & Economic Development)
Michael Forman (PA Dept. of Community & Economic Development)
Scott Reese, Fire Chief
Brandon Stanick (Township Manager)
Carolyn Yagle (Planning Consultant with EPD)

There were four residents in attendance.

Mr. Weber opened the meeting and introduced Michael Forman, Planner with the DCED, who is in attendance to discuss public services, as well as Robert Brady, Planner with the DCED, to talk about trends in fire/EMS services in Pennsylvania.

It was the desire of the Committee to consider the April 24, 2017 meeting minutes last on the agenda.

Ms. Yagle provided a brief background on Mr. Forman and Mr. Brady.

Mr. Forman thanked the Committee for inviting him to attend meeting. Mr. Forman stated in his introduction he will review the history of where communities are in their development and the cycles they go through in relation to planning, municipal services, tax base issues and overall ability to put in policies and procedures that make use of best practices that help communities meet the demands of its residents.

Mr. Forman remarked the Township appears to have low taxes with a good deal of growth and development allowing it to evolve its tax base with residential, commercial and light industrial development. This phase supports low taxes with prosperity and opportunities to garner fees from developers and build out the infrastructure systems of the community. Typically, other taxes are fixed and the property tax millage provides the greatest flexibility for the community.

Mr. Forman stated a second phase of development which includes the fiscal pressures that infrastructure costs and the demand for public services by a growing tax base place on a community. In response, a community's tax millage will continue to increase. Although communities will continue to experience an increase in demand for services, the basis of development will slow. Budgets will shift focus to maintaining infrastructure. Additionally, taxes and fees will start to increase gradually where fees may be used more to shift the burden of taxation to those using the service, e.g. refuse collection and recreation activities.

Mr. Forman stated the next phase may include a plateau of the tax base, which may require reductions in non-core services, e.g. recreation and certain luxury items within public works and public safety. In this phase, growth begins to slow and taxes may become inefficient and require reductions in essential services, as well as a focus on reducing staff levels, wages, health benefits and pension benefits.

He stated the last phase involves a community that is falling into financial distress. This scenario is more commonly found with communities where industry has disinvested and population has decreased causing an inflow of a low to moderate income demographic.

Mr. Forman reviewed the planning context for the continued growth, development and need for core services in communities. He stated residential development correlates with the demand for municipal services. Single-family homes require more level of municipal service than business districts and industrial areas. Multifamily residential developments in a dense area creates a greater demand on services, which are not normally as high priced as single-family homes. High-rise and senior citizen housing will create even higher costs. Mr. Forman noted the importance of using demographic data, such as income and age when planning for the future. He stated different types of residential development correlate directly with the demand for services.

Mr. Forman stated his research has found that residential development does not pay for the cost to provided services. People are living in their homes on a constant basis creating more demand for public safety services, refuse collection, property maintenance services among others. The service costs associated with commercial development is less than the tax revenue communities receive from these businesses. He reviewed the various taxes and fees typically associated with commercial development. He stated commercial development usually pays for itself because they have finite hours of operation. Industrial development is even better and agricultural land has the least impact on municipal services.

Mr. Forman noted this information will help communities understand the opportunities and implications of using different land uses.

In response to a question from Mr. Weber, Mr. Forman stated communities are typically land locked when there is no room to grow. As this is the case redevelopment and reinvestment will happen. He noted boroughs and cities are more characteristic of being land locked than townships.

Mr. Weber inquired if there is a percentage of how much land within a community should be developed. Mr. Forman stated the community should seek balance with a complimentary of land uses that offer variety to its residents. Communities will seek to be self-sufficient and self-containing, which allows people to do as much as possible within the community.

Mr. Sherrieb expressed his understanding that looking to the future there is a need for a balance of commercial and industrial that can off-set the costs experienced with residential development. Mr. Forman confirmed that residential development does not always pay for the level of service it demands. A discussion followed in regard to declining retail businesses and the decline in tax revenues.

Mr. Forman stated the Township will need to focus on developing gathering places to attract people. Online shopping only goes so far, but is incumbent on the Township to attract people to physical locations for specialty items and create niche shopping demands.

Township Manager Stanick asked where are Pennsylvania municipalities in partnering to provide services. Mr. Forman stated there is greater migration of communities seeking to cooperate using shared personnel, e.g. granting writing. He noted some core services are also shared with road maintenance, which is seasonal and not used much of the time, as well as recreation services between communities and school districts.

Mr. Forman noted the Township should be mindful that various types of housing will impact school enrollment. He noted his research has indicated that 70 to 80 percent of the cost of development is paid for by school districts.

Mr. Robert Brady suggested we are within one generation or less of what the future looks like for retail. He also noted the benefit of having an official map to help the community identify land to designate for future purposes. In addition, neighboring communities prepared joint plans to guide the compatibility of development at its borders.

Ms. Yagle noted municipalities have a specific timeframe in which to make a decision on the land use they have designated on an official map.

Ms. Panasik (resident on Green Crescent Dr.) inquired how certain uses of property can influence the demand for public services. Mr. Forman noted you need to look at the implications of the different type of housing and those individuals living in those structures in regards to income, age

and dependence on public assistance. Transients may cause an increase in more public safety services. He noted it depends on the magnet that the type of housing creates and their status in society. It comes down to the investment that people want to make in the community.

Ms. Panasik inquired about having differing land uses adjacent to one another as the Township in the recent past approved multi-family apartment buildings next to the Old Mill Shopping Center. Mr. Forman stated it is best if adjacent land uses are compatible and complimentary. It is ideal to set aside areas in the community for specific uses to avoid conflict with one another and that are compatible with positive quality of life issues.

A discussion of different residential types followed.

Mr. Brady stated his specialty is public safety services with DCED, specifically with fire, ambulance and emergency management services. He stated that Pennsylvania is dealing with decreases in fire and EMS services state-wide. He stated the system to provide those services, as well as funding mechanisms is dying. He noted it is challenging to have volunteers respond to calls late at night and funding through traditional fund raisers and social clubs are not necessarily supporting operations any longer.

He noted providing fire and EMS services in the 21st Century is based on a model first used where people in the community came together to provide fire protection. He stated this model no longer exists. Pennsylvania leads the country in consolidating fire and ambulance services and we are seeing boroughs consolidating to share services to where ambulance services are provided on a county-wide basis.

Fire Chief Reese reviewed how the Township currently provides fire and EMS services. Including two code enforcement officers that handle residential and commercial inspections, there is a total of nine paid full-time career staff. There are two firemen at each of the two stations. One station is staffed during the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and the other is staffed from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. This is in addition to also having a volunteer service. He noted there is partial coverage from paid staff on the weekends and no coverage provided by paid staff after 11:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Volunteers provide coverage when possible.

Mr. Brady noted this is common throughout the State. He noted that those consolidating services today are looking to hire management staff. Today, fire and ambulance cover all emergency services. Many of the responses provided are for non-emergencies. He stated that planning for apparatus and fire station location and services is based on risk.

He shared the following trends communities should be aware of: the volunteer system has changed, costs for these services have not typically been borne by the municipality, EMS is a critical component in the emergency services system, and in the long-term, communities will be discussing partnering for services using a multi-municipal approach to avoid costs.

A general discussion followed regarding the challenges departments have in partnering to provide services.

Township Manager Stanick noted that the Township relies heavily on the Volunteer Fire Department because it owns the two fire stations, equipment and apparatus.

A discussion concerning EMS service providers and hospitals followed.

Mr. Fisher inquired what can the community do to increase the overall health aspect of quality of life. He inquired what can be done to be proactive as a community. Mr. Brady shared several examples of services that communities provide because of consolidation and partnerships, including: safety seat and mid-wife programs in the Mennonite community. He noted that the partnering communities improved their overall programs by addressing the existing programs that were already being provided and progressed from there.

Mr. Brady concluded in saying that fire and ambulance will look very different in the future and municipalities will have more responsibilities.

In response to a question from Ms. Panasik, Mr. Brady stated that assets owned by volunteer fire companies are considered community assets.

Mr. Weber thanked Mr. Brady and Mr. Forman for their presentation.

Mr. Keisling, in following up from the previous meeting, noted there are already numerous activities and services provided by local organizations surrounding the Township. Many residents take advantage of these existing programs. Because of this the recommendation from the Committee should focus on beautifying our parks and not necessarily increasing recreational services.

Mr. Keisling moved to approve the April 24, 2017 meeting minutes with a correction suggested by Ms. Yagle. Ms. Rossi seconded the motion. The minutes were passed on a unanimous voice vote.

Mr. Weber thanked Chief Reese for his attendance at the meeting.

Mr. Weber asked Ms. Yagle to have an executive summary ready for the next meeting.

Ms. Yagle announced the upcoming open houses for May 25th (4pm to 6pm) and May 30th (6pm to 8pm).

Mr. Luketich inquired about ways to incent volunteers to continue to serve. Mr. Brady noted stipend programs based on calls are used, scholarship programs, length of service programs,

among others. The program would depend on the municipality and what would be enticing to its volunteers.

As no further business came before the Committee, the meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brandon J. Stanick
Township Manager