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FUTURE LAND USE ACTIVITY RESULTS

PENN TOWNSHIP, BUTLER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Comprehensive Plan - Steering Committee #2 Results from Meeting Activity

November 29, 2023

INTRODUCTION

The following is a summary of the Future Land Use Activity held during the second Steering Committee Meeting on October 10, 2023. During this activity, members of the Steering Committee worked with HRG staff to discuss and map relevant information, trends, and opinions related to producing the Future Land Use Map. Notes from the activity have been summarized below. The comments have also been mapped and the maps will be shared at the next Steering Committee meeting on December 6, 2023.

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (PA MPC), the law that enables municipalities in Pennsylvania to enact comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances, spells out the elements that should be included in a comprehensive plan and one of those elements is a plan for land use, "which may include provisions for the amount, intensity, character and timing of land use proposed for residence, industry, business, agriculture, major traffic and transit facilities, utilities, community facilities, public grounds, parks and recreation, preservation of prime agricultural lands, flood plains and other areas of special hazards and other similar uses," (§301.2.a). This land use plan includes the creation of a Future Land Use Map (FLUM), which serves as a policy guide, and provides a vision and general guidance for the future density, character, and location of land uses in the Township. A FLUM is not the same as the Zoning Map but can help to guide future decisions related to zoning requests. This makes the FLUM an important tool for directing how the Township will look moving forward.

SUMMARY OF FUTURE LAND USE ACTIVITY

The comments provided by the Steering Committee have been grouped based on relevant topic. During the exercise, the Committee members were divided into two groups, but the comments have been combined and summarized for the purpose of this report.

Route 8 Corridor:

State Route 8 runs through the center of the Township. Existing land uses are primarily commercial or retail. Both groups identified the Route 8 Corridor as an area to **focus additional development**, especially development that may be at a higher density than the surrounding low density single-family residential and agricultural uses. This would include retail and commercial uses, as well as being a potential target area to allow multi-family residential. Achieving this goal could be done a few ways; the creation of a zoning overlay that allows for additional uses and density in this area is one option that was discussed during the activity.

Comments and Notes:

- Route 8 Corridor – Could an overlay work? Something along just a portion of the roadway to promote higher density residential (apartments, quads, patio homes) but closer to Route 8, i.e., 1,000 feet to the west and east of the road. Or, instead of a 1,000 radius, does the overlay just note certain parcels?
- Existing development along the northern portion of the corridor could use some improvement to generally “spruce it up.” This may include façade improvements and the addition of gateway signage.

Farmland, Preservation, and Open Space:

The preservation of farmland and greenspace arose as a clear priority. The Committee members identified several existing agricultural areas to prioritize for preservation, and would like to see the formation of additional agricultural security areas (ASAs). Most were also interested in placing limits on development to ensure that greenspace and natural lands are maintained. There was also interest in seeing increased park land, to create more walking trails, and to allow for additional recreational uses.

Comments and Notes:

- Need to take into account floodplain areas, there are several (we need to map this, good resource is the online FEMA maps)
- Need to conserve the Thorn Creek Valley
- ASA properties – given the amount of farmland and ag land that the Township has, there are not a lot of properties in the ASA
 - ASA should be revamped and renewed, and additional properties added
- Expansion of parking areas to make walkable parks
- Additional recreation to allow for additional recreational uses, including a trail by the municipal building. The trail should be “easy” and accessible for those with limited mobility.

Airport:

The Pittsburgh-Butler Regional Airport is a noteworthy employer and landowner in the Township. However, airports can also pose unique land use challenges because their operation can be a burden on surrounding residential and agricultural land uses. For these reasons, it’s important to consider the airport, its future operation, and its interconnections with the Township and surrounding land uses as part of the FLUM.

Comments and Notes:

- Airport has purchased houses and demolished them near the Airport property; But then they have also sold some properties so that new houses could be built
- Larger airport – does it belong here?
- Flight schools – you can often hear the touch and go of the training trips; very noisy
- Consider creating a zoning overlay for the airport that would guarantee no new residential development occurs and creates more issues for the airport and the residents but allows the airport to complete its desired commercial development.

Expanding Utilities:

The expansion of utilities, such as water and sewer, can enable future development by removing barriers and costs for developing on a lot. The expansion of utilities in the Township was discussed as it relates to potential future development. Additional discussion may be needed to target specific areas, with the understanding that the expansion of utilities may attract developers.

Comments and Notes:

- Expand water north along the Route 8 Corridor, to the existing available properties, and to the east of the corridor.

Transportation, Trails, and Connectivity:

Some concerns about existing traffic were expressed, especially related to how it might increase as a result of anticipated and potential future development.

There is an interest in having additional walkable space, in the form of accessible trails in recreational areas and improved connectivity where possible.

Comments and Notes:

- A trail was proposed connecting Succop Nature Park to the Airport and Harcrest Park.
- Concerns were expressed about Dinnerbell Road, which already experiences a lot of traffic and is concerning associated with accessing the school.

Housing:

While there is concern about higher-density housing being a potential mismatch for the character of the community, Committee members generally realize that there is a need for additional housing types to meet the needs of the population and to attract additional younger residents. They voiced an interest in seeing higher-density housing allowed in appropriate areas, like along the Route 8 Corridor and in other commercial areas, and that it be allowed at a density that is consistent with the Township's existing character.

Comments and Notes:

- Township does not currently allow quadruplexes or patio homes
- Multi-family housing ok in commercial district
- Someone trying to do "industrial condos" in Penn Township near the industrial park area
- Do the existing planned residential development (PRD) zoning requirements allow for higher density housing that would enable patio home style senior housing?

Retail and Commercial:

In addition to the Route 8 Corridor, there are commercial and retail land uses sprinkled throughout the Township. There is interest in seeing additional development, in appropriate areas and that is appropriate to the character of the community- small development in restricted areas.

Comments and Notes:

- Possible to envision a little commercial and higher density in some areas, but not much
- Residents can drive anywhere they need to get groceries, lots of options that are close enough
- Mixed Use – where can/should this be promoted? There are some areas designated as Neighborhood Commercial in the Township already. Are these working?
- What about Village Center? Seen this in other areas

Industrial:

Comments generally indicated that industrial uses should stay where they currently are in the northwest corner of the Township.

Additional Comments:

Additional comments provided by Committee members generally focused on the current status of specific properties in the Township as they relate to potential future development or a general disinterest in additional development in the Township.

Comments and Notes:

- Why do we want to change? Why can't we be unique and different and not be as open to development as our neighbors have been? Don't want to be Middlesex, Cranberry, etc.
- We have enough development, can't take on any more traffic
- Penn Township is 32% developed but need to take into account the non-developable areas; transmission and power lines too
- The Mansion property is owned by Concordia – also need to figure out their plans for the future use of this property
- Conley Resort – owned by St. Barnabas – need to figure out what their plans are

CONCLUSIONS

Based on this initial activity, additional discussions will be held at the next Steering Committee meeting to dive deeper into how some of these initial findings may be addressed by the FLUM and the Comprehensive Plan as a whole.