

LOWER PAXTON TOWNSHIP  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
WORKSHOP MEETING

April 21, 2008

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Fredrick Lighty  
Roy Newsome  
Dennis Guise  
Ernest Gingrich  
William Neff  
Douglas Grove

**ALSO PRESENT**

Lori Wissler, Planning & Zoning Officer  
Dianne Moran, Planning & Zoning Officer

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Lighty called the workshop meeting of the Lower Paxton Township Planning Commission to order at 5:40 pm, on April 21, 2008 in Room 174 of the Lower Paxton Township Municipal Center, 425 Prince Street, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG**

Mr. Grove led the recitation of the Pledge.

**IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS**

Mr. Neff asked about the objective or goal the Township is trying to accomplish. Mr. Lighty stated that a general goal of any business improvement district is to create an entity that will improve the businesses in that district. There is no set limit on what can be done, but an initial goal can be to make it a better place with things like street beautification, traffic management, or advertising. Mr. Neff asked if a goal is to attract people to the area. Mr. Lighty agreed that could be part of it.

Mr. Lighty stated that neighboring townships are starting to grow their retail areas, and retail has been a tax cash cow for Lower Paxton Township. The retail in the other municipalities may put our retail areas in jeopardy.

Mr. Neff suggested looking at an area that has the potential, has adequate parking and may have potential for shared or common parking areas.

Mr. Grove agreed parking and pedestrian access was important, and that it is essential to be able to move pedestrians safely from the parking to the businesses in the district. He stated that in Europe there are areas in major metropolitan cities that are for pedestrians only. Lower Paxton Township couldn't be pedestrian only, but there could be areas that could be pedestrian scale to get around to the businesses.

Mr. Newsome stated there is lineal development here, and is not pedestrian friendly. The Township as a whole was not put together to be pedestrian friendly. There are some pockets that are, such as Linglestown, which is set up that way and seems to be turning into a commercial center. He didn't think the task should be to create a downtown area, but rather to get some resources to correct some mistakes that have been made in the past, like parking, access to parking, reducing the number of curb cuts on collector roadways and making larger areas for parking. Then pedestrian ways would be needed out of the parking areas. He stated that any meaningful results might imply use of eminent domain to do those things. There are a lot of things that can be done with the money, but Mr. Newsome felt that it should start with fixing the problems in the commercial areas. The area on Locust Lane is well defined, but is a real mess, with no place for students to walk. He noted that the improvements that were done on Dartmouth Street with the curb cuts and sidewalks are a good example of something that could be done. That should happen from Turkey Hill to the dance school.

Mr. Newsome stated that the ideas of center-city areas are fine, but there are more things that need corrected first.

Mr. Guise agreed there is no downtown area in Lower Paxton Township. The malls do provide a lot of parking. Focusing on Linglestown or Paxtonia might be a good place to start. Route 22 seems like a more difficult project. It is important that the first one be a success and be an example for the others. He asked if there were any other municipalities similar to Lower Paxton Township that may have done a project like this. He noted that it doesn't have to be *business* improvement, it could be mixed use improvement district, which could address both. Mr. Guise suggested starting with Linglestown since it has the most village characteristics of the neighborhoods in Lower Paxton Township. There is potential to put parking by Koons Park. Lower Paxton Township lacks the basic infrastructure to get to the next step of putting street furniture and planters around.

Mr. Newsome asked what the laws are regarding abutting property responsibilities, for things such as sidewalks. He suggested a 1/3 owner to 2/3 Township ratio to do some improvements. He thought the municipality could mandate that, but wanted to check the legislature to see for sure.

Mr. Neff stated that the TND accomplishes the business district aspect.

Mr. Neff stated that there is still a very strong demand for good places to eat in the area. On a weekend night, you can wait an hour or more to get into any restaurant. With gas prices what they are, people are going to be less inclined to drive a long distance to get to a good restaurant.

Mr. Lighty stated there are three areas, two of which are very small, and one that is huge. Linglestown is self defined, small and easily manageable. However, there would be not enough margin to do anything with any impact. You couldn't build parking, couldn't do much with the streetscape other than decorative lamps or planters, and maybe a little advertising. Linglestown or Paxtonia both lack infrastructure, but the money generated would not be able to do anything to fix any of that.

Mr. Lighty stated the money for Route 22 would be substantial. PennDOT already has designs for Route 22 that include center planted medians, decorative street lights with planters. Without changing where the lanes are or taking much land, you could beautify that street. Street beautification

and advertising could draw people to Route 22 instead of the newer malls in Susquehanna Township or Swatara Township. There is cable already in place (because of Amp/Tyco) to make a network operations center with that money that would control the traffic on 22. If you ask someone what they like about the area, they say they like the selection of shopping, but if you ask them what they don't like, it's the traffic. If you improve that, more people would come here to shop. It is up to the businesses if they want to pay the assessment, it can't be mandated. There needs to be a basic plan, then the Township can invite the business people in for their ideas, then eventually there is a vote and if 40% of those in the district actively vote against it, it fails but otherwise things can proceed.

Mr. Neff asked what is in Paxtonia. There is the strip with Goodwill, Paxtonia Plaza strip, The Learning Source, Post Office, Feed Store, Nyes Nursery, various doctors' offices, some small offices, an art gallery and numerous beauty salons.

Mr. Gingrich asked if this came about because of the Walnut Street Corridor study. Mr. Lighty answered no, stating that PennDOT did design work for Route 22 in East and West Hanover Townships. They did not include Lower Paxton Township. PennDOT has already done the engineering.

Mr. Lighty asked if it would be appealing enough to offer beautifying the street, advertising and putting some work into the traffic, to get them to want to contribute. The idea is to attract and maintain the customer base. He noted his concern over the empty stores in Colonial Commons.

Mr. Neff asked who would contribute. Mr. Lighty stated it is the business owner, not the management company. The owner may pay the assessment and pass it on to the management company to collect from the various stores on the property, but the owner is still the one responsible.

Mr. Newsome suggested the Route 22 corridor, with Paxtonia as a section of that corridor. Mr. Lighty agreed that makes sense. Mr. Newsome stated you can't work on a piece of Route 22, it has to be the whole thing, but maybe broken into wards or sections or CPUs.

Mr. Gingrich asked if the large shopping centers would be included, and if the levies were proportionate. Mr. Lighty stated that would have to be investigated. The large places would probably not be difficult, but the small places may not be as willing to participate.

Mr. Guise suggested that the Linglestown Road area could be expanded to not only include the square, but as far as Forest Hills Drive. To make Linglestown Road successful, parking is needed.

Mr. Neff asked if there have been problems with getting permits from PennDOT for things like banners. Mr. Gingrich stated it is not hard to meet their standards.

Mr. Newsome stated that a plan is needed, but part of that is the study, and that is not funded by the district, it will be an up front cost to the Township. The information gathered would be useful even if the attempt at a district fails. There is an area around Washington DC which has highways with 2-4 more lanes than Route 22, but the shopping there is not bigger than what is in Lower Paxton Township. It is very similar to Lower Paxton Township's strip development. In Montgomery County they are dealing with how to get from one shopping center to another without driving. Getting across the

corridor could be addressed in our area, in addition to along the corridor. Mr. Lighty stated that he would never walk over or under the roadway to get from one shopping center to the other. Mr. Newsome stated the idea is to get the vehicles across, not pedestrians. Mr. Lighty stated that intersection is not failing, and really works fairly well. It may be a little confusing with the multitude of dotted lines, but it moves well. Mr. Neff noted the idea was to ease the travel from one to the other. Mr. Lighty didn't see a need to spend millions of dollars on something that is not real bad. Mr. Guise stated that if the Planning Commission selects Route 22 to be the initial endeavor, the next step is to get a professional study to show what an improvement district could bring to the corridor, and what vision of the future would make it sellable to those that will bear the cost.

Mr. Lighty understood that the Planning Commission is the party selected to do that work, not an outside consultant.

Ms. Wissler suggested that the Walnut Street Corridor Study's suggestions may be a good place to start. Mr. Lighty stated that was about transportation only. Ms. Wissler stated there were ideas about beautification, sidewalks and signage. Mr. Gingrich agreed it isn't a study of improvement districts, but it is a good place to start.

Mr. Neff asked if there is a similar community to use as a model.

Mr. Lighty stated that a small model like Linglestown would generate small money which will provide small improvements. Mr. Grove stated the money there wouldn't be enough to install sidewalks. Mr. Guise suggested extending the area along Linglestown Road to include St. Thomas Commons.

Ms. Wissler stated that the Linglestown Square Project is trying to install public water, so many of the streetscaping and improvements will be done with that Project.

Mr. Lighty suggested that a village improvement district for Linglestown could be other than physical improvements, such as having a festival or parade to draw people into Linglestown to shop in the stores there.

Mr. Neff stated that New Market, Maryland, along Route 40, has seen the homes recycle into shops. He questioned if that will take place in Linglestown. Mr. Lighty agreed that is very possible.

Mr. Newsome stated that area is on the cusp of redevelopment right now.

Mr. Newsome asked about the alley behind the businesses that front Linglestown Road. There is a sign at the entrance to the alley that says no through traffic, yet those businesses' parking lots empty onto that alley. He asked if that is a public way or not. Mr. Guise suggested that the sign is just a means to deter people from using it as a shortcut around the Square. Mr. Newsome stated that it could be paved. Mr. Guise didn't mean that it be paved necessarily, but maybe just make it less terrible to drive on. Ms. Wissler stated that they are used by the public, but the Township doesn't own them or maintain them. The Township does do some basic maintenance. She noted that the Township is installing a

parking lot on the north side of the Square, so the businesses near that will be able to utilize that. There are some places that might be suitable for a parking lot.

Mr. Lighty stated that Linglestown has several influences, including the Village of Linglestown Committee.

Mr. Guise asked about a governing body over an improvement district. Mr. Lighty stated it would get its own director, similar to an authority. The Board of Supervisors would appoint a board, the board would hire an executive director. Mr. Neff asked if that is a paid position. Mr. Lighty stated it could be.

Mr. Lighty advised that each district gets its own board, so having a board and a director for Linglestown, may result in a volunteer position. But a board and director over the Route 22 area would certainly have a larger area of responsibility.

Mr. Guise was concerned that the businesses that contribute more should have greater influence or control over the board. They should be able to influence and design the improvements.

Mr. Grove noted that Linglestown would be a great place to do something like this since it is compact and relatively easy to do. In the long run, it may be better to start with the Route 22 corridor. It will be the only area that could generate enough funds to do the kind of improvements that the Township and the businesses will want to see. It would be the best for the general public's use as well. The small neighborhood would not be substantial enough. Mr. Grove felt it would be important to keep the people involved.

Mr. Neff suggested having a representative from the four major malls attend one of these workshops. Mr. Lighty agreed that at some point they need to be brought in, but not until some basics have been worked out. The Planning Commission needs to first select a location, and then lay out a vision for that location. Then after that is established, the Planning Commission can ask them what they think would be best for their area. He did not feel a consultant would be needed yet. As the process goes forward, that need may change. The Board of Supervisors has charged the Planning Commission with the task of doing as much as possible.

Mr. Neff noted that the big malls utilize management firms, who may be a good resource in the development process. He noted that the basic idea is to generate more business and more sales.

Mr. Grove suggested making them aware of what the Township is interested in, and let them know that they will be invited in for discussion, but it will be individually or maybe in small geographic groups. Mr. Lighty agreed subsections would make such a large undertaking very manageable.

Mr. Lighty stated the next step is to decide the boundaries of the district. The Commission will need to decide how deep the boundary should be. After the boundaries are decided, the next step is to divide the district into sections. Then the Planning Commission can invite business people from one section in at a time.

Mr. Gingrich read that the Board of Supervisors requested that the Planning Commission investigate the applicability of improvement districts, and if it finds it to be potentially viable, the Commission should convene public hearings to introduce it to the affected businesses.

Mr. Lighty suggested small meetings initially, then a big hearing when they have all the information ironed out.

Mr. Neff asked if the Township has a chamber of commerce or an economic development department. Mr. Lighty stated the County has those, but Lower Paxton does not.

Mr. Newsome stated it will be important that the district coincide with the future land use map from the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Guise suggested it may be logical to start with the CG zone.

Mr. Lighty stated there are some residential uses along Route 22, and you wouldn't want to assess them.

Mr. Neff asked if it would be objectionable if he and Mr. Newsome would go visit the large malls' management companies. Mr. Newsome did not think it would be appropriate to talk to them until the ideas are laid out. Mr. Lighty cautioned against speaking to them outside of a public forum. Mr. Guise agreed that it should be done in a structured way. They should be introduced to the concept at a public meeting, because it would be counter-productive to get their guard up over the idea before the information can be presented properly. Mr. Neff was concerned that the Commission cannot answer the question of what their needs are without their input. Mr. Lighty stated the Commission has to lay out its vision, showing it is a good thing, then let them add to that.

At the next meeting, the Commission will need a large map of the area showing the parcels. They can utilize the overhead to show the future land use map and the aerial map.

In past discussions, Mr. Lighty indicated he would have someone from Harrisburg City come to a meeting, but that person is not interested in doing so.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Ted Robertson suggested using the work that has already been put into the study for the 83-81 interchange, or the Route 22 study.

### **COMMISSIONER & STAFF COMMENT**

Mr. Lighty stated that the Planning Commission recommended sidewalks be installed around DCTS. He asked if that was acted on by the Supervisors. Ms. Moran stated that they are required to install sidewalks, but they are waiting for PPL to relocate the poles.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Planning Commission agreed to conduct another workshop session regarding improvement districts on Tuesday, May 20, 2008, from 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm. (The third Monday is not available in May.) There will be a light dinner available starting at 5:00 pm. The meeting will be held in Room 171.

The next regular Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for May 14, 2008, at 7:00 pm at the Lower Paxton Township Municipal Center, Room 171.

Being no further business, Mr. Grove made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Beverly seconded the motion, and the meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michelle Hiner  
Recording Secretary