

LOWER PAXTON TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT
WORKSHOP MEETING

July 27, 2009

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Fredrick Lighty Douglas Grove	Dennis Guise Robin Lindsey	Roy Newsome
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STAFF PRESENT

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

GUESTS PRESENT

Watson Fisher, SWAN Representative	Moose Essis, Essis & Sons Inc.	Hal March, PA Central FCU
Bob Swartz, Swartz Supply Co. Inc.	Rory Rineer, Case-O-Beer	Frank Fischer, Members 1 st FCU
Regis & Laurie Doyle, Aston's TV	Earl Hoffman, Hoffman Ford	Ryan Hoffman, Hoffman Ford
John P. Booth, Applebee's	Donald Smith, Preit (Paxton Towne Centre)	

CALL TO ORDER & INTRODUCTION

Mr. Lighty called the meeting of the Lower Paxton Township Planning Commission to order at 6:44 pm, on July 27, 2009 in Room 171 of the Lower Paxton Township Municipal Center, 425 Prince Street, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Planning Commission members and guests introduced themselves to the group.

ROUTE 22 BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

Ms. Moran distributed information from the Harrisburg Downtown Improvement District (HDID) and Philadelphia Center City Improvement District (CCID). Mr. Lighty explained that neither is exactly like the Route 22 Corridor in Lower Paxton Township but they demonstrate what can be accomplished through an improvement district.

Mr. Lighty presented a PowerPoint Presentation about the background, goals (Copy Attached.)

Mr. Lighty asked for opinions and questions from the guests. He noted that the Commission thought the BID could use a small assessment to draw business to the area rather than another area, or, it could be a bad economic time to consider an assessment at all.

Mr. Newsome stated that there is a large number of improvement districts across the country, and it is a rapidly evolving technique to bring businesses together towards common improvements. He stated that the corridor is our "main street" but is still not a typical main street. There are not many suburban lineal areas. This would be a unique undertaking, which may indicate some positive benefits.

John Booth asked the length of the area targeted. Ms. Wissler stated it is approximately 5 miles. Mr. Booth stated that the other areas studied are condensed areas, and have a lot of foot traffic. This is

not a pedestrian area; it is very much a vehicular area. He asked how beautification could be applied to this type of area. Mr. Lighty agreed this corridor is very unique and not similar to a center-city environment, however, they have been successful in other suburban areas. He distributed a copy of an article written by Goktug Morcol, whom the Commission has met with and sought advice from. He noted that it would be tailored to fit the needs of the area making the streetscape more appealing for the drivers. If they enjoy the road they are sitting along while waiting to get through a traffic signal, they will have a better feel for the area than just a row of traffic lights.

Mr. Newsome stated there are areas along this corridor where pedestrian access needs to be created or improved. Another very important attribute is the interface between foot traffic and busses. Talking about pedestrian access does not necessarily mean walking from one end to the other, but rather pedestrian nodes.

Mr. Doyle asked if the BID would strive for cohesiveness using something other than just signage. Mr. Lighty stated it could, but the details are certainly not worked out. At this point in the process, the Commission needs to find out the general feelings of some land owners before working on the details. He suggested that cohesion could be as simple as hanging banners, print and/or media advertising. Deciding how and what to do, will be up to the stakeholders once the District is established. He noted that this system is different than local government, it is bottom-up, not top-down. This is not imposed by the government, it is voted on and decisions are made by stakeholders. It is a stand-alone entity. The government does play a role in getting the district started, but after it is started, it will have its own board, its own employee(s), who will work out its own contracts, accounting, et cetera.

Mr. Guise stated the State College BID has a very nice map of its district highlighting the businesses and some others have brochures with coupons and featured businesses. Some sponsor special events during low-traffic times. The people who benefit from it, really do control it.

Mr. Essis stated that Harrisburg and State College are so different than this area. He stated that drivers use the shoulder as passing lanes. He stated that some of the ideas could be good for the area, but the ideas need to be ironed out. Route 22 will not transform into Second Street. He was concerned about drivers going 40 mph and looking away from traffic to see the nice signs. The roads themselves are going to need altered. Mr. Booth agreed and stated that the road does not need more medians blocking entrances to the businesses, but if they were more user-friendly, people wouldn't be stuck going three blocks out of their way to make a u-turn to get to their destination.

Mr. Booth asked if PennDOT is still planning improvements to the I-83 interchange. Mr. Lighty stated it is a long term project, and did not get federal stimulus money. Mr. Booth suggested the access issues should be addressed.

Mr. Lighty stated that a BID is not going to have enough money to redesign the road, or rebuild it. Because Route 22 is a State road, PennDOT has most of the say in what gets done. The BID could help things work better. He noted that there is already fiber optic in the roadway that used to connect the two AMP buildings. A network operations center was talked about to control traffic flow during

peak times. The BID could help make it more efficient, and increase the volume and make it more attractive.

Mr. March suggested the BID could be a mechanism to push PennDOT to reorganize its priorities. Mr. Newsome agreed.

Mr. Essis asked about the ownership of the alleys. He stated that the pipes beneath the alley (Edwin Alley) behind his store are broken. The Township responds by patching it, but it will cave in like it did before and a truck driver will get hurt. He stated he paved it once, and isn't doing it again. Ms. Wissler stated that alleys are private. Mr. Essis stated it might be private, but everyone uses them and they function as a shortcut around the traffic on Route 22. Mr. Lighty stated these are things a BID could help with.

Earl Hoffman asked about the assessment amounts. Mr. Lighty stated the most it could be by law is 1.5 mils. This amounts to about \$372,239.

Mr. March asked what would constitute a majority vote. Mr. Grove stated that the goal for this meeting is to get an idea of what the invited guests want or see as important issues. The Commission is looking for ambassadors for the project, if the group thought it was a good idea. Mr. Lighty stated there are 233 parcels, and Ms. Lindsey stated that the Commission invited 15 property owners to this meeting. Mr. March stated that if the group supports the idea, what the buy-in would be to get the project off the ground. Mr. Lighty stated that the invited group is representative of the whole group at this point. The statute spells out specific rules how it must be done. Mr. Booth stated that 40% of the district must vote against it for it to fail, so he surmised that 60% have to vote yes. Mr. Lighty stated that 40% must object in writing for it to fail. Mr. Guise stated there is a public hearing and then a period of time when stakeholders have an opportunity to object. He noted that it is important to know that that is several steps away, and there is a deliberately lengthy process to each step. Mr. Newsome stated that this is not something that can be pushed through; it must be a process full of thought. Mr. Lighty emphasized that if it goes through, it would not be an entity of the Township, it would become its own entity. All money raised by the assessment goes to that entity and are used by it as decided by the entity's board. This is for particular purposes in that area.

Earl Hoffman asked who drafts the plan. Mr. Lighty stated the Township will do that. Mr. Hoffman asked if then you go back to step #3. Mr. Lighty stated that the preliminary plan is a lot of work. The Commission did not want to begin such an undertaking until it had an idea of the feelings in the neighborhood first.

Mr. Doyle asked who conducts the hearing. Mr. Lighty stated the Township Board of Supervisors will do that; it will be publicly advertised; open to the entire district, as well as the general public. Mr. Doyle asked about voting rights. Mr. Lighty stated that the property owners within the district only get a vote. The general public does not. It can however voice its opinions, and if there is a very strong public opposition, the Board of Supervisors of the Township would take that into consideration.

Mr. Newsome explained that government is used to put something together and basically turn it over to operate on its own without the government.

Mr. Booth stated that the BID might decide to do something, but it will still have to come to the Township for its approval for things such as altering the medians, hanging signs, hanging planters, et cetera. Mr. Lighty stated the State would have to approve physical changes to the roadway itself, and the pole owner, most likely PP&L, would be involved in attaching anything to their poles. Mr. Booth stated that nothing will get done without the government anyway. Mr. Lighty stated that a BID is more persuasive than any single business owner, and noted that the Township would be generally supportive of the things the BID would want to accomplish. Mr. Lighty added that the BID can accomplish things that the Township cannot do, such as advertise. Mr. Booth stated that the only real goal being presented is marketing.

Mr. Lighty stated that the BID, when combined with the Township, could be more influential in negotiating with PennDOT. Mr. Newsome stated the Township clearly understands the value of the investment, and that the economic well-being rests here in this corridor.

Mr. Doyle asked if the BID could only spend a certain amount of money. Mr. Lighty stated they can only spend the money that is assessed. Mr. Guise stated they can raise additional money, by applying for grants and by taking voluntary donations. One of the major functions of a BID is to apply for and receive grants. The BID must spend all of the money raised from the assessments for its purposes. The budget will show the money raised and spent. There are exciting opportunities, but they do require a lot of thought and significant work.

Mr. Rineer asked about the assessment amounts. Mr. Lighty explained that a mil is \$1 per \$1,000, so a property with an assessed value of \$1 million would pay about \$1,500. Mr. Rineer suggested the larger contributors should be invited to a meeting as well since they will put in the majority of the money. Don Smith was present on behalf of Paxton Towne Centre (PTC). Mr. Lighty stated that PTC has more influence because it has many parcels whereas Colonial Commons is one large parcel.

Bob Swartz stated that the Commission is not ready to move to the next step. He felt that more input is needed. Mr. Newsome stated that several meetings can be held between steps 3 and 4. Mr. Guise stated that this is the very first meeting like this, even though the Commission has talked about the BID for over a year.

Frank Fisher asked how success is defined. Mr. Lighty stated that he thought success can be seen when the time comes for renewal and it is reauthorized, and in the case of HDID, outside businesses wanted in. Success would be the property owners telling the BID or the Township that they saw a measurable benefit during this time. If you do not see a difference, the BID does sunset, so it does not automatically renew. Mr. Guise added that the BID can be terminated before the sunset time if 40% of the property owners file a request for termination.

Mr. Essis stated that if the BID cannot push PennDOT to make some changes, there will not be any success. The medians need to be opened up to make way for a turning lane. Customers have to go a block past the business they want to get to and turn around and come back. Since there is no foot traffic, the vehicular traffic needs to be helped out.

Mr. Fisher stated that success is measured by increased traffic. Financially, the revenue has to go up. \$372,000 is worth \$10 million in revenue, so there has to be a return of \$10 million for it to be worth it, and that equates to a lot of cars. If the area becomes a destination, and the area is successful, then the traffic will increase significantly, creating a traffic nightmare, creating frustrated customers who will not come back because they hate the traffic. The BID and the area is doomed if the traffic is not fixed. Mr. Essis stated it will not be successful until the traffic is fixed.

Mr. Grove stated that an idea to help traffic congestion is a trolley like they have in Harrisburg. Customers could park in one of the larger centers, and takes riders to certain stops along the corridor. The BID money generated can be used for just about anything.

Mr. Essis stated that the big shopping centers were given traffic signals, and the little businesses that have been in the area for many years were barricaded from the other lane of traffic with a median, and are basically trapped. The bus or trolley will only help the restaurants, nobody gets on a bus to go to the carpet store or the car dealership. He has been on that street since 1958. He felt the idea has merit, but needs some questions resolved.

Mr. Newsome stated that this will create a mechanism for the area businesses to get together as a unified voice to speak to PennDOT. The Township would not go to PennDOT, but the businesses will, through the BID. The Township could go to PennDOT and take the BID along for reinforcement.

Mr. Booth stated that the ideas presented will not improve infrastructure, it will only do marketing and packaging. He thought it would have more to do with real physical improvements.

Mr. Lighty stated the Planning Commission's #1 concern was traffic. The problem is that a BID will never have the funds needed to redesign and rebuild a roadway-a \$1,500 assessment just doesn't buy those types of improvements. It will however, raise money that will provide leverage and a means to improve the road in other ways.

Mr. Swartz asked at what time PennDOT is involved. Mr. Guise stated that they would be approached after the BID is formed and there is a concrete list of improvements to present to them.

Mr. Essis stated the median provides more than enough room for another lane or a center turn lane, the median is where the police car sits looking for expired registrations.

Ms. Lindsey asked if PennDOT was addressed when the medians were put in. Mr. Essis stated they talked till they were blue in the face and got nowhere. The big shopping centers did get turning lanes and red lights and everything they needed. He thought that flags and flower pots were a great idea, but the traffic has got to be addressed. He stated that a person gets off the bus and nearly gets run over,

because there is nowhere for the bus to stop, they must stop right in the travel lane. Mr. Newsome noted this is the kind of ideas needed. Mr. Essis stated the elderly need to have a safe way to get to the restaurants and shopping, and there is no sidewalk or even a bus shelter to protect them getting on or off the bus. Mr. Newsome stated that some decent bus shelters with a map of the location of certain businesses would be a worthwhile improvement.

Mr. Newsome asked the guests to consider the things discussed, but not to form a vote just yet.

Mr. Guise suggested that BID money could be spent to design a traffic improvement plan to show PennDOT what is needed from them to improve the situation.

Mr. Doyle asked where the money came from to install the turning lane by Dunkin Donuts. That was not done by an improvement district, it was done by PennDOT. He suggested the situation puts the horse before the cart because the road needs fixed before any of the other improvements will amount to anything. He stated that this is making PennDOT's problem become a problem for the BID to resolve. He noted that everyone in the Township and beyond uses the corridor, not just the business owners. Mr. Lighty asked if it would benefit the businesses to do something that the State will not do. Mr. Doyle stated that any improvement would help the businesses, but it may not be their responsibility.

Mr. Lighty asked if the group wants to see more detail and more information. Mr. Booth agreed more information would help. His only experience with a BID is a snowman contest in Lancaster that he did not win. He noted there are some good things about the BID there, but he was not sure if there was a significant increase in his business there because of the BID.

Mr. March stated the returns are relative, and should at least match the investment. If you spend \$100,000 on billboard advertising, measuring returns on that is difficult. He was sure that the businesses would get that. He felt this was a very worthwhile investment. He stated that a business owner cannot expect to rebuild the road on its \$1,500 contribution. There is a possibility that a collective voice will have a significant impact on the powers-that-be. Changing the physical nature of the road or the traffic issues may not be an attainable goal, but the single aspect that drew PA Central FCU to the area was simply the traffic. The potential sites that are pedestrian friendly are not any more desirable because people are not using the sidewalks to get to the bank. The safe travel up and down the road is the real goal.

Mr. Lighty stated the Commission felt that the BID would be the advocacy group for the businesses here. This is the mechanism that takes the group to PennDOT or to the Township on the alley issue.

Mr. Lighty stated he heard proceed, get more information and bring the details back to the group.

Mr. Rineer felt that another group of business owners need to be met with in the same way as this group has been; he suggested the bigger parcel owners. Ms. Lindsey stated that many of them are not local, and that this group was selected because they are local and the owner of the land is the same

person as the owner of the business. Some of the larger parcels are owned by management companies and not by the businesses situated on the land.

Mr. Swartz stated that he was not ready to agree to the project, and he would need to see more information and details about the plans and the benefits.

Mr. Hoffman stated that his business thrives on lots of traffic driving by very slowly sitting through multiple light cycles.

The group did want to be invited back when the additional information and planning is available.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no comment from the audience.

ADJOURNMENT

The next regular Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 12, 2009, at 7:00 pm at the Lower Paxton Township Municipal Center, Room 171.

Being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michelle Hiner
Recording Secretary