

**WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP
Planning Commission
Agenda
Tuesday, May 5, 2020
7:00 P.M.**

This Meeting will be held by teleconference via Zoom.

CALL TO ORDER

REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes: April 14, 2020

PUBLIC COMMENT/CONCERNS/QUESTIONS

PLANS

OLD BUSINESS

1. ULI TAP Application Status Report and Discussion

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

Next Meeting: May 19, 2020

Directions to access the Zoom Meeting

Option 1:

Click on this hyperlink:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/738512496?pwd=Z2YwK2pTSnd3cVFZekpUcWhqbK9VQT09>

Meeting ID: 738 512 496

Password: 278503

Option 2:

Use your phone and call +1-646-558-8656. When asked, enter the meeting ID number: 738 512 496
& Password: 278503

MEMORANDUM



DATE: May 1, 2020

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: John R. Weller, AICP
Director of Planning and Zoning

SUBJECT: Application to ULI Technical Assistance
Panel
Exton Crossroads discussion

Background

The Commission has been discussing a vision for the Exton Crossroads area intermittently for nearly a year. While we recognize that the Crossroads is the most prominent intersection in the Township - and maybe in all of Chester County - and is rightly the place where we allow the greatest density of development, we do not want it overrun with traffic and thoughtless construction. We are also concerned about the future of the shopping centers that have long dominated the Crossroads given the changing nature of retail.

Our discussion began in May 2019; more recently, we had a public work session on March 3, 2020 followed by an on-line work session on March 31, 2020 at which time Staff advised that we were exploring an application to the Philadelphia chapter of the Urban Land Institute (“ULI”) for their Technical Assistance Panel (“TAP”) program.

The TAP program assists public and non-profit agencies with development-related issues, policy, and planning. Applying agencies are asked to define a problem in the form of a one-page scope of work and to provide three or four specific questions for the Panel to address. Applicants are also responsible for providing background information on the community, pertinent history, and for identifying local stakeholders for the Panel to interview. If ULI determines that the scope of work and questions are appropriate for a TAP project, they will then select between eight and fifteen of their members with expertise on the topics pertinent to the questions to serve as the Panel for the project. The Panel members will familiarize themselves with the information provided by the applicant and schedule a two-day intensive workshop in the community. Workshop activities include a tour of the study area, interviews with the stakeholders, discussion among the Panel members, and a final presentation to the applicant. This presentation may be open to the public if the applicant so chooses. Finally, about two months after the workshop and presentation, the Panel provides a written report with detailed recommendations.

Applications are accepted at any time and are not competitive. The cost is \$15,000, plus incidental expenses such as food and refreshments for the workshop.

On April 9, Township staff members Mimi Gleason, Justin Smiley, and John Weller had a virtual meeting with Kevin Moran of ULI and Rachel Griffith of the Chester County Planning Commission; Ms Griffith is also a member of ULI’s TAPS committee. At the end of the meeting, all agreed that the Exton Crossroads project was a promising subject for a TAP project. Staff informed the Commission of this opportunity at their meeting on April 14 at which time the Commission members agreed that this was an excellent opportunity for the

Township and worth pursuing. Mimi Gleason, Justin Smiley, and John Weller met again on April 17 to discuss the application and appropriate topics for the questions we would ask.

Staff Comment

Our most recent memorandum on this topic (for the March 31 meeting) included thoughts from our earlier meetings. Additional discussion points on March 31 included the following:

- How can we create a more viable community identity within the Exton Crossroads / Town Center area using existing assets, such as historic resources, parks, trails, roads and businesses in a suburban setting?
- Where are the best locations in the Exton Crossroads for placemaking and amenities like pocket parks, public art, green spaces, and historic features that celebrate our heritage?
- We need to build upon our assets to connect both locally and regionally: all roads lead to Exton. Can we make traffic an asset?
- What type of incentives would be appropriate to encourage suitable redevelopment in the Crossroads / Town Center area?
- What can/should the Township do to market the Crossroads / Town Center area?
- What effects will redevelopment of the Crossroads have upon the Township as a whole (i.e., traffic, residents, taxes, utilities, etc.)?
- How can we better use underutilized parking areas: placemaking features, open space, something else?
- How can people access points of interest in the Crossroads area safely? How do we encourage pedestrian and bicycle circulation? What opportunities are there to implement and build upon the Bike and Ped Plan?
- What types on streetscape enhancements should be installed along Pottstown Pk. and Lincoln Hwy. to identify and define the Crossroads? Consider: sidewalks, lighting, benches, trees, access to points of interest, wayfinding signage.

At the Staff-level discussion on April 17, we added the following observations:

- We should stress to ULI that we are NOT a distressed community. We know that we have a lot of great assets. Our challenge is to take advantage of those assets and not screw things up.
- Also: we're a far more diverse community than what the suburban stereotype suggests.
- We need to create our own identity as a suburban center.
- We like the idea of an exciting urban-ish vibe - BUT with suburban amenities: lots of green, no really tall buildings, mobility options, pedestrian-friendly.
- We need to focus on what can the Township control, what actions do we have authority and ability to implement.

Several issues/observations recur in many of these discussions, the most critical of which may be the question of identifying or establishing a community identity. While the Township has a long history, Exton - or at least the crossroads - is not a historic village: there are a number of

documented historic structures, but there's no historic core to protect or to build upon. Even so, the simple existence of the crossroads has historic significance, highlighting the crucial role that transportation has played in the development of the Township since the earliest days of European settlement, 250 years ago.

There's also been a lot of discussion about what we do NOT want to become. King of Prussia has been the most-cited example of what to avoid: too urban, too congested, the buildings are too tall, etc.

Yet people recognize that Exton cannot be a rural backwater: being "The Crossroads of Chester County" is not just a catchy slogan, it's the literal truth. Staff suggests that our residents' concerns about development could be allayed by assuring four things:

- That they will be able to get around easily: no gridlock on the roads combined with mobility options that facilitate mass transit options and accommodate bicycle and pedestrian travel.
- That there will still be a LOT of green: we're NOT a city, and the green suburban character needs to be preserved.
- That other infrastructure (i.e., other than the roads) will be able to handle the increase in demand. A lot of people have expressed concern about the impact on the public school system, which is an important consideration even though the Township doesn't control WCASD projects or policies. The impact upon sanitary sewage capacity, water supply, stormwater management, and recreation facilities has also been noted.
- That things won't happen all at once. We have heard numerous expressions of concern about the rate of development and the ability of the market to absorb everything that's now under construction. Unfortunately, this is one concern that the Township has little ability to control.

For Discussion

Staff is now in the process of completing the TAP application, including the questions/issues that we would like the Panel to address. While the application form calls for "three to four well-articulated questions," Mr. Moran of ULI advised that multi-part questions are allowed. We also note that a 2012 TAP project for downtown West Chester listed six questions. There appears to be some flexibility here.

For tonight's discussion, we would like Commission comment and feedback on which of the following questions should be provided with our application to ULI ("all of them" is an acceptable answer) as well as any revisions to these questions and other issues that you believe should be included.

- *The Crossroads is already a growing, thriving area with multiple assets. How do we leverage these assets to make a coherent, defined community with a sense-of-place that is more than the sum of its parts? And how do we manage growth in a way that promotes and maintains this character without overwhelming or destroying it?*
- *How do we define and communicate the vision for the Crossroads? Should the vision be articulated as a "master plan" for the Crossroads or is it better to create an "inspiration board" and suggest a kit of parts that developers could combine in different ways as may be suited to their needs?*

- *How will evolving trends in lifestyle, work habits, retail, and transportation affect the Town Center and our retail areas in particular? How do we prepare for these changes?*
- *Do we want the major sites (Exton Square, Whiteland Towne Center, Fairfield Place, Exton Plaza) to be redeveloped with major structures/uses (like a conference center) or more finely detailed “new urbanist” type things? How much do we care? **[This may be more of a question for us than for ULI.]***
- *What are specific things that the Township can execute to promote the sense-of-place/vision? How best do we get the owners/developers of the properties we don’t control to buy into the vision and promote/implement it?*
- *How do we attract/encourage high-quality, creative developers and development?*

Finally, if you want more details about ULI or the TAP program, please visit the ULI website at www.philadelphia.uli.org. The website has copies of the TAP reports completed for other communities, including the West Chester project mentioned above from January 2012. Access the reports from the ULI home page by clicking on the “hamburger” icon in the top right corner; the TAP section is under “Resources.”