

**New Britain Borough Steering Committee
Land Use and Transportation Project**

**Minutes
April 9, 2015**

The New Britain Borough Steering Committee, facilitated by Ms. Lynn Bush, began at 7:39 PM. The following were present: Mr. Steve Barth, Mr. Matt Walters, Ms. Marie Esher Coia, Ms. Lorraine Moxey, Mr. Dick Moxey, Ms. Jackie D'Agostino, Mr. Peter LaMontagne, Ms. Margaret Remmey, Dr. Michael Parke, Ms. Cathy Gauthier, Mr. Tom Price, Mr. David Joss, Mr. Steven Gieseler, Mr. Karl Dieterichs, Ms. Andrea Antell, Mr. David Fermier, and Ms. Loren Frasco.

OVERVIEW:

Ms. Lynn Bush presented an overview of work to date and goals for the meeting. Feedback from the kickoff meeting on February 12, 2015 and new ideas were incorporated into concepts for consideration. Since the last meeting, Ms. Bush's staff studied land use surveys, the transportation system, measured the width of road at various locations, collected information regarding traffic patterns (waiting for additional information on turning movements which would assist with determining how to create efficient intersections), developed some ordinance language for the mixed use, and conducted some preliminary research on tax abatement ideas.

CORRIDOR ANALYSIS:

Mr. Matt Walters presented the overall corridor analysis which, for purposes of study, has been divided into three segments. Segment One is the western end of the Borough from Bristol Road to Lenape, just past Town Center. In this area, a mix of uses exist, including higher density residential and just off the corridor are some heavier commercial use properties. Measurements were done along this stretch of the corridor to determine what is in the right of way and what type of improvements are possible. Segment Two contains more established, mostly residential, neighborhoods. In addition, it contains the new Gilmore building, the historical core of the Borough, and some rural setting. Segment Three stretches from Beulah Road to the Borough boundary at New Britain Road. This section has been identified as "University Village" and is the focus of this meeting. The University Village section includes Delaware Valley University, American Heritage Credit Union, and some commercial buildings including an insurance company, 7-11, Gieseler Insurance, Vandegrift Appliance, Byrne Sewing, the Knoell property, and Castle Valley Consultants. Mr. Walters explained this was a good starting point for the commercial district.

Concept slides focusing on the characteristics of main streets were presented with discussion of urban street trees, lighting with municipal banners, connections to University and trail network, sidewalks, on-street parking (parallel or angle in), standardized street signs, gateway feature to identify area, and street furniture. These characteristics, including a way finding system, would show this area to be a place of interest, a vibrant area that attracts investment contributing to the success of the area. Gateway features introduce you to the area and alerts people that something is happening here. There was some discussion about the lawn area on the corner of Iron Hill and Butler Avenue as being a possible gateway to indicate the entrance to University Village. Mr. Walters explained they studied road frontage, building setbacks, zoning district, types of existing business, signage, road width, and utility poles so they were able to make sure what is proposed is actually possible.

The existing trail system starts at Foundations to past American Heritage and onto Delaware Valley University property along Butler Avenue (10 foot wide trail). Another existing trail is along the railroad tracks between Beulah and Shady Retreat Road. The Tri-Municipal Master Trail and Greenway Plan indicate the trail along the tracks and on concept trails show connections to anyplace within University Village.

Areas of opportunity were identified including the Knoell property, Smith Marine, and Duck Deli (now vacant). Additional opportunities exist with the road going behind Duck Deli, the vacant lot at the corner of Shady Retreat and Butler Avenue. This property is owned by the University and is in Doylestown Township.

Another concept explored was shared parking among neighboring businesses in the rear of buildings along Butler Avenue.

Slowing down traffic would be a natural feature of creating a gateway. Intersection improvements would need study, including roundabout at Shady Retreat. The Knoell property developer would necessitate that intersection. Streetscape would also encourage slower traffic through the Village area. A map was shown of potential building sites along Butler Avenue in the Knoell property/Duck Deli area through Byrne Sewing area. Potential open public spaces at intersections were shown along with street trees, sidewalks, and some on-street parking. An example in front of Vandergrift's business was shown with a 32 foot parking space cart way, leaving more than 20 feet to the building. If parking was put in the rear of the building, it would allow for streetscape improvements. Goodnoes Corner was used as an example concept with 50 feet from curb to curb and parallel parking. A 62 foot right of way and 38 foot cart way is possible, with 4 foot sidewalks and possible outside dining. Utility poles were taken into account which may stay if they are not able to be buried. Currently, a 50 foot right of way exists and all set backs are enough to allow these types of improvements.

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Loren Frasco asked about who develops the property. She further noted the existing businesses, Alligator and Smith Marine are in place. Ms. Bush explained this is an aspirational vision of what should happen. If Smith Marine wants to stay for one hundred years, no plan or ordinance can force them to leave. She pointed out the opportunity areas, i.e. Knoell, where the Borough is working with a developer in the hopes that it become the cornerstone for other properties to want to change. Certain incentives could be offered from the Borough to encourage change. Mr. Steve Barth stated his position is to pro-actively court developers to design and build fitting the vision. He has spoken with various property owners already. Mr. Mike Stanislaw explained the intent of the current grant is to create a vision that would lead to actionable items of zoning ordinances, streetscapes, etc. When a developer is interested, the Borough can dictate what is allowable. Ms. Bush said zoning and sub dividing land development ordinance is anticipated.

Ms. Frasco inquired about reducing the speed limit. Mr. Walters stated the speed limit would need to be considered as they progressed. However, putting in streetscape including sidewalks, trees, and on-street parking, would create a perceived area when driving and drivers would naturally slow down. Ms. Bush

stated having the speed limit reduced is subject to Penn Dot approval.

Ms. Marie Coia inquired about the other two segments in the Borough. Mr. Walters responded with a handout of the Preliminary Streetscape Recommendations for all three segments. He explained these other segments will be presented in detail in future meetings. There was a brief discussion of the historic village segment and how the historic sites are very close to the road, creating sensitivity to any proposed improvements. A macadam trail has been explored through this area to connect the two parts of the Borough from Town Center to University Village, although there may be an alternative route through Borough property to allow for this. Ms. Coia suggested the two islands in the historic district from Lenape to Tamenend can be used for lighting, street banners, etc. The train station needs to be part of the planning going forward.

Mr. Barth explained, during discussions with the University they have inquired about creating a roundabout at the Iron Hill intersection. He stated Vassar College has a beautiful one that creates a natural traffic calming. Mr. Barth suggested the gateway be at New Britain Road, not Iron Hill Road. The University would like to continue the trail and place lighting right away. Ms. Gauthier said they need more information from the University. Mr. Barth said they are waiting for the Borough's recommendation. Ms. Bush said they would contact the University. Mr. Stanislaw said the University needs to work with New Britain Borough and Doylestown Township. Ms. Bush said we can have something specific to show them. Mr. Stanislaw agreed that would create a better chance for moving forward. Mr. Barth was specific with the area under discussion to be New Britain Road to Iron Hill Road. The University owns the property from New Britain Road backside of the Science Building and the frontage on Butler Avenue is not in New Britain Borough. Mr. Stanislaw stated there were some technical issues to work out, Doylestown Township owns one side and New Britain Borough owns the other side. Ms. Bush stated the two municipalities are optimistic they will work well together; there is a good track record on coordinating efforts. Ms. Gauthier pointed out there would be more grant opportunities with shared improvements. Mr. Barth inquired about straightening the boundary line of the Borough and Township map. Ms. Bush said she could look into that idea, however, it is complicated.

Mr. Peter LaMontagne liked the shared parking idea, however, suggested the utility poles be moved to behind the buildings. He further stated, voltage wires are expensive to bury, however, the electrical and communication cables are easy to bury. He suggested putting in an underground conduit where space would be rented to Verizon. Mr. LaMontagne continued, if there is a line of utility poles along both sides of Butler Avenue, the look will not be so charming. Ms. Bush said she had a discussion with PECO about the possibilities and was told that PECO owns these lines and will not bury them.

Ms. Frasco stated there were some elevation issues regarding streetscape from Shady Retreat to New Britain Road. Mr. Stanislaw agreed, however stated there were not insurmountable. Mr. Barth said one big pine tree would need to be taken down. Ms. Frasco asked who would be responsible for the streetscape maintenance, watering of plants, tree trimming, etc. Ms. Bush stated there is no clear

answer yet. She said it is possible for the Borough to require property owners to install sidewalks, although it is not invoked very often. Sidewalks would most likely be viewed as part of the new development process and there may be grants to assist in the process.

Mr. Barth explained further the University plan as they had architects looking at doing an expansion behind the University including Duck Deli. This idea was borne from the train station on their property and the idea of opening it up to the community. They intend to develop the land on the other side of the football field and link a trail which would be a short walk to the retail area.

The old Detwieler property is available and suggested the proposed map change that property to reflect it as an opportunity. Ms. Bush said the property along Cooks Run on the other side of the street from Knoell is mostly floodplain, which limits its development potential. Ms. Coia asked about the zoning at the cabinetry business. Mr. Walters explained it was C3. Mr. Stanislaw said this was a good example of how we need to reunify zoning. Ms. Coia inquired about the University master plan. Mr. Barth stated the plan has not been approved yet by the Board of Trustees. However, he is aware that they intend quite a bit of improvement on the campus bordering New Britain Road and on the campus itself. They currently own three of four properties from Iron Hill to Shady Retreat.

At the last Steering Committee meeting, Ms. Coia was tasked with polling the committee regarding what light fixtures and lamp posts they preferred after emailing them the Spring City Lighting website. Only six members responded. Five members chose the William and Mary lighting fixtures, while one chose the Edgewater lighting fixture. In addition, five chose the Edgewater lamp post and one chose the Hancock lamp post. Ms. Coia told the Committee that several of them had met with Spring City Lighting. Mr. Barth said the University would use whatever we picked. Ms. Coia suggested the option be presented at the public meeting in June. Mr. Barth suggested showing the samples and indicated it would start the process of change creating momentum. Mr. Stanislaw objected to moving forward without presenting to the Planning Commission first. He further stated that he did not want to rush the process. Ms. Bush stated that putting lighting in would require trenching and this would have to be coordinated with the entire streetscape. Ms. Moxey said she wanted to make sure the design continues throughout the corridor and did not want to mimic Doylestown or Chalfont. She further stated they were aware of the architectural diversity throughout the corridor and kept this in mind when selecting a style. The lighting is expensive and decorative and would not happen overnight. Mr. LaMontagne suggested it would be a good idea to poll members of this Committee and include Borough Council. There is currently a big disconnect of what Council is aware of in terms of the progress of this Committee. Ms. Coia said she plans on providing Council with the options available and the Steering Committee's recommendation.

Ms. Antell stated it was a great concept and asked if other Boroughs with similar challenges (i.e. utility poles) were able to overcome the obstacles. Ms. Bush stated New Britain Borough has many more assets vs challenges. Mr. Walters gave Newtown Borough, Sycamore Street as an example, as further down their corridor they have utility poles. The streetscape wraps around them and it looks great. Mr. Barth stated that 20 years ago, Sycamore Street looked like Shady Retreat. Ms. Antell asked if there were a conversation with Chalfont Borough as they border the far end of New Britain Borough. Mr. Barth said

they are doing their own developing, however, the corner property at the Borough line stopped development due to lack of funds.

Ms. Frasco added she was a Delaware Valley graduate and has lived on Iron Hill Road since graduating. Revitalizing the area would create a huge boom for the University. She asked how they can be leveraged to help. Ms. Gauthier said voluntary donation is common way to help for improvements. Mr. Stanislaw said they have not seen much from the University, as they are separate entities. It's a beautiful town, it's a beautiful University; they have not been integrated yet. The University has opened up the campus and the library for residents' use. Up to now, it has been an isolated relationship; however, now both are now looking at what benefits everybody. The University is asking for guidance. Mr. Stanislaw stated it is an open dialogue and was pleased to see that.

Ms. Coia requested some changes to the minutes of February 12, 2015 to include page 2, Public Meeting, Ms. Coia statement to reflect a previous public meeting that was held much earlier in the process; and page 3 Demographics Study, remove \$99 million reference as this is not an accurate depiction.

Ms. Bush explained the next steps include detailed views of the remaining two segments. There is a public meeting of the Steering Committee which will be held on June 11, 2015 at Burkhart Hall at which time the "big picture" will be presented. Planning Commission buy in must be obtained and then present the concept to Borough Council. After that, the ideas would be legislated. Mr. Barth requested copies of the drawings presented. Due to time constraints, Ms. Gauthier wasn't able to present information regarding tax abatements and instead distributed a handout on preliminary research on the use of tax abatement/LERTA programs for members to review.

Meeting adjourned at 9:19 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise Spence
Administrative Assistant