

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

**Minutes
February 12, 2015**

The New Britain Borough Steering Committee meeting, facilitated by Ms. Lynn Bush of the Bucks County Planning Commission, began at 7:30 PM. The Steering Committee consists of members from the Borough Planning Commission and members of the Borough's Community and Business Committee. New Britain Borough Planning Commission members were present with the exception of Mr. Rick Eggleston and Mr. Michael Stanislaw. New Britain Borough Community and Business Committee were present with the exception of Ms. Robyne Kelemen and Mr. Bill Vandegrift. Also present were Mr. Matt Waters, Mr. Tom Yatsky, Mr. Steve Barth, Mr. Bill Macklem, Mr. John Remmey, Mr. Peter LaMontagne, Mr. Doug Fisher, and Ms. Kathy Gauthier.

This meeting served as the official kick off of the TCDI Project – New Britain Borough Main Street. The TCDI initiative via Penn Dot and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission grant is to spark local re-development in conjunction with transportation resources making New Britain Borough a desirable grant recipient. The Borough has received a grant of \$80,000 to conduct this project. There is a required match which will be provided by the Borough (\$10,000) and the County (\$10,000). The purpose of the grant is to take a comprehensive look at the Butler Avenue corridor to develop planning, zoning, and design guidance that will enable this corridor to develop and redevelop in a way that reflects community goals and that takes into account the many assets of the Borough. The Steering Committee's objective is to oversee the implementation of the TCDI grant, completion required by March 2016.

PROJECT PRESENTATION:

Ms. Lynn Bush presented a Power Point outlining project scope, common themes, the study area and its characteristics and land use, market analysis, gap analysis, project schedule, outcomes, deliverables and future steps.

The challenge lies in the dramatic traffic count change post Route 202 parkway as businesses were dependent on the high level of traffic. Traffic studies from 2014 will be provided for the next meeting.

The County initiated its economic development project in 2013 at which time a town hall meeting took place; results were recorded and memorialized. Through town hall feedback, the County and New Britain Borough Planning Commission, common themes were developed, such as Butler Avenue to be developed as a main street including sidewalks, intersection improvement, streetscape, gateway designations, protection of historic resources, need for water/wastewater infrastructure, SEPTA service as an asset, connections of college and community, and to ensure new development does not adversely impact neighborhoods. The need for more business input is warranted.

The study area will include Butler Avenue from Delaware Valley University through Carousel Point. The characteristics of the area include 2010 population of 44,176 which has increased approximately 8% to about 50,000 in 2014. The area is substantially stable with growth potential indicated by the 15-minute drive time 2014 population being approximately 171,915; 5-minute drive time population being approximately 11,101. There was discussion regarding whether to include the college population within

these numbers and would that number be seasonal. At the conclusion of the project, a comprehensive plan for the area including a zoning screen will be produced.

The land use pie chart indicates a good balance of residential, non-residential and industrial. New Britain Borough is unique in that it has a strong industrial base predominately Mangar Industries providing 300+ jobs; the business is sought after to relocate to other municipalities. The gap analysis is an important tool as this commercial program identifies gaps in business locations within a 5, 10 and 15 mile radius. Investors find this information extremely useful.

The outcome will be a land use plan recognizing all residences, property and businesses along the corridor, implementation of ordinances, transportation improvements, financial incentives and/or tax incentives. Presentation ended.

Ms. Bush distributed a document outlining three strategic themes developed by the New Britain Borough Planning Commission approximately eight months ago which acts as one of the building blocks to this project. The document also shows the beginning stages of developing vision statements.

OPEN DISCUSSION:

Public Meetings - Ms. Marie Coia referred to the two proposed public meetings, suggesting one meeting to be early in the process for community input as she had heard a lot of people were upset that they were not part of the earlier part of the process of a previous DVRPC (Butler Revitalization Plan). Ms. Coia also requested the Power Point presented at this meeting be distributed to all members present. Mr. Steve Barth spoke of the University relationship. Delaware Valley University (DVU) has offered their new auditorium (seats 450 people) as a venue for the town hall meetings. DVU has requested one of the meetings be geared toward DVU students and staff.

Lighting/Sidewalks - Mr. Barth expressed in his discussion with Dr. Bronson (DVU President), they would like to implement the sidewalks and street lighting immediately while working with the Borough. This would be limited to the campus side only and to include decorative lighting and banners. They believe developing the area as a "university town" is to everyone's benefit.

Mr. Barth also introduced the topic of Knoell property recently being sold to County Builders in Warminster. They are enthused and want to collaborate with the community on their vision of a mixed-use project. They will also do curbing and lighting. Ms. Lorraine Moxey stated the Steering Committee needs to develop a lighting design that is consistent prior to DVU or County Builders installing lighting. Ms. Bush agreed and suggested one of the first tasks of the Steering Committee would be to create a street profile to include sidewalks, setbacks, and lighting. Mr. Barth will send a link to a lighting catalogue to all members. He suggested staying within the arts and crafts style from the 1920's as this seems to be a theme throughout New Britain Borough. It also sets the area apart from the Victorian style cast iron lamps that Doylestown Borough displays.

Traffic Roundabouts - Mr. Barth continued stating DVU endorses the idea of traffic roundabouts at New Britain Road, Shady Retreat Road and Iron Hill Road as a means of traffic calming as it is aesthetically pleasing. Ms. Bush and Mr. Holewinski stated that you never hear of a head-on collision in a traffic roundabout and for businesses it is desirable as it slows traffic down reducing the speed limit from 40 to about 25-30 mph.

Demographics Studies – Mr. Barth would like to re-look at the ordinance on student housing considering the student demographics and the contribution they make to New Britain Borough's economy each year. Demographics include students being 1/3 of the population, 50% is over 50 years old, and 12% living off of retirement income. Shortly there will be a demographic shift in the Borough with a lot of housing turnover. Additionally, new earned income tax will also contribute to the Borough treasury. The median age is 27 which is skewed by the 900 student population of ages 18-22.

Ms. Bush stated the aging population, smaller households and children of baby boomers has led to Bucks County, as a whole, seeing a sharp decline in new single family dwellings. This has resulted in a stronger market for multi-family homes and townhouses. This needs to be considered as the project progresses. Ms. Bush suggested establishing guiding principles early in the process which will allow the Committee and Planning to react to opportunities that will be arising in the near future. Consideration of street design and kinds of activities the Borough wants to see in mixed use needs to be discussed.

Mr. Robert Binkley stressed the importance of being careful when looking at the demographics regarding the student population and perhaps two sets of statistics should be maintained. Ms. Bush stated the median age is probably closer to 37 than the previously mentioned 27. Mr. Gilmore asked if there was a way to forecast the population. Ms. Bush stated the 65+ age group is continuing to grow the fastest. In the last 20 years, the area has lost the 18-35 year old group to other areas. The County has done projections countywide and had concluded stable neighborhoods will turn over. Mr. Gilmore expressed the Borough should not plan for now but what will be in the future.

Tax Abatement – Mr. Holewinski stated the design focus should bring business facades and residential homes to a consistent style. As an incentive to do this a tax incentive, not a discount, should be considered where increased taxes for improvements would be abated for a 5-10 year period. Currently, if improvements are made, the property is assessed immediately and taxes may be increased from 30-40%. Other municipalities and the County are in favor of such a program; the school district would be cooperative. Ms. Coia stated including the school tax would be very desirable. Ms. Bush said Quakertown, Council Rock and Pennridge currently approve of tax abatements and the County is in favor. She further stated New Britain Borough would be the first in Central Bucks to institute a tax abatement program. It is an easy program to implement with the first step being to designate an area, followed by an actual program with rules for the abatement. She outlined several choices including a phased 10 year plan or start taxes year 10. Northampton just adopted a program for the Richboro Spring Mill area. Qualifying would be necessary as there is a set standard that improvements must contribute to the community. Mr. Tom Yatsky asked if it can be set up in three or four categories geographically. Ms. Bush suggested it apply to all properties bordering Butler Avenue, however, it can be set up any way

the Borough chooses. Mr. Steve Gilmore asked if it applied to existing or new buildings. Ms. Bush said the program can be designed with a lot of flexibility and it is up to the Borough what to encompass in the program. Mr. Holewinski suggested a 5-year abatement for residential and a 10-year abatement for commercial.

Mr. Peter LaMontagne suggested tax “abatement” has a loaded context, however, talking in terms of “equalization” sounds much better; starting out with your tax rate equal to others and then ramping up eventually. Naming the program would be a topic for future discussion.

Mr. Barth stated Perkasio Borough defined a period of time for activity spurring development. They cut all fees and permits by 50% which created more activity. They extended it a second year and attracted big developers. Ms. Bush stated Quakertown targeted vacant properties.

Joint Planning Meeting – The agenda for the Joint Planning meeting is not clear at this time other than to be a means of communication. There is some property in Doylestown Township that would be discussed; however, the Steering Committee is operating independently as it relates to this grant project.

NEXT STEPS:

Two priorities - Tax Abatement Program and Streetscape.

Town Hall Survey Results - Ms. Bush will distribute, via e-mail. A new study is not needed at this time.

Spring City Foundry & Lighting Catalog – Mr. Barth will distribute, via e-mail.

Next meeting – April 9, 2015, 7:30 PM, Gilmore Building, Suite 100. Agenda to focus on streetscape.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise Spence
Administrative Assistant