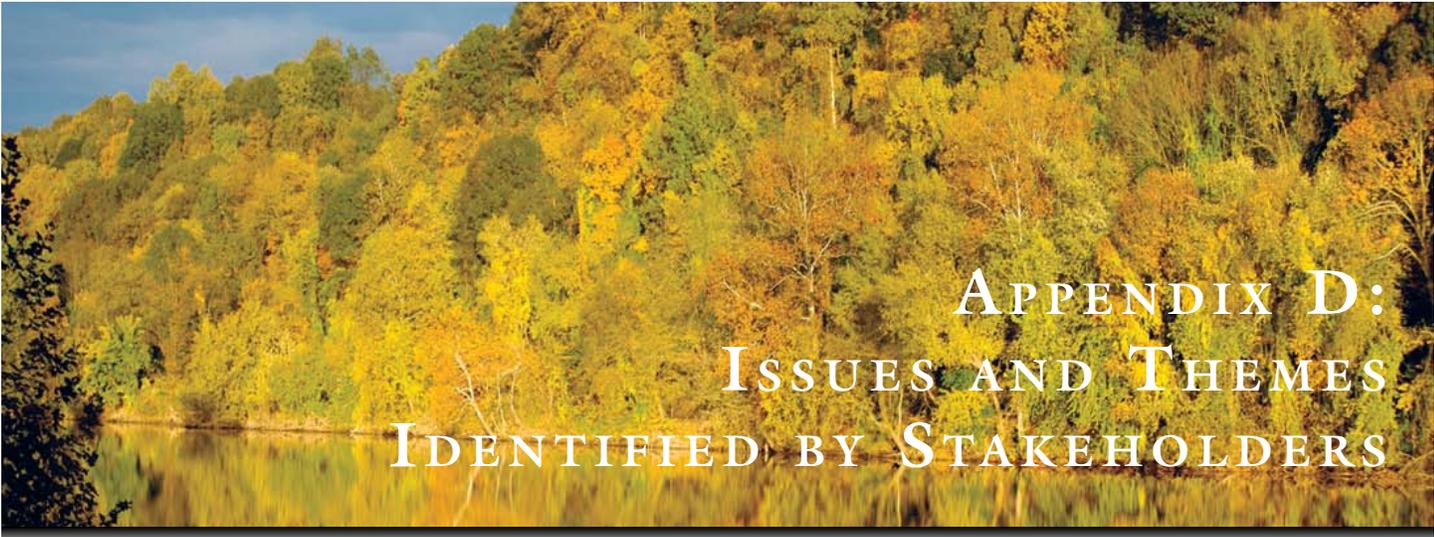


ISSUES REPORT

APPENDIX D: ISSUES AND THEMES IDENTIFIED BY STAKEHOLDERS

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APPENDIX D: ISSUES AND THEMES IDENTIFIED BY STAKEHOLDERS

Public input is crucial to the development of a Comprehensive Plan. This Appendix sets forth the issues and themes identified by residents and stakeholders. The issues and themes contained herein provided the basis for the section of the Issues Report titled “Issues and Themes Analyzed by Staff”. This Appendix includes three sections: Input of Advisory Boards and Commissions; Community Workshops and Regional Civic Association Meetings; and Stakeholder Interviews.

The Planning Commission hosted the Community Workshops and the list of issues and themes provided consists of the main items discussed at the Workshops. Staff also met with the Zoning Hearing Board and summarized the meeting notes to convey the main topics of discussion. The following advisory bodies provided staff with lists of prevalent issues facing the Township and in many instances provided possible solutions to address these issues: the Historical Commission, the Board of Historical Architectural Review (HARB), the Environmental Advisory Committee and the Shade Tree Commission. Additionally, the Lower Merion Conservancy, a local non-profit organization that strives to preserve the natural and historic resources of the community, participated in the planning process by providing a list of issues and possible solutions. They also prepared a *Historic Preservation Best Practices White Paper* which is included in this report as Appendix C.

Meeting notes were taken and summarized at each of the Community Workshops and Regional Civic Association meetings. The actual meeting notes are available on the Township website at www.lowermerion.org.

Over 30 stakeholder interviews were held in 2007. The notes from the interviews were summarized and organized into three categories: Stakeholder Interviews with Business Owners, Stakeholder Interviews with Institutions, and Stakeholder Interviews with Residents. The analysis of the identified issues would not have been possible without such broad based community involvement and support.



“The Lower Merion Township Planning Commission was established by an ordinance of the Board of Township Commissioners on March 21, 1934. This action of the Township Commissioners was the outgrowth of citizen interest in the subject of town planning. Without citizen interest and municipal action, the plan for Lower Merion Township would not have been prepared. The fulfillment of this plan, or any plan, is dependent upon continuation of the same civic interest and official action.”

– 1937 Comprehensive Plan

INPUT OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

PLANNING COMMISSION

At the Community Workshops hosted by the Planning Commission in 2007 the following list of themes were identified.

Historic Preservation: Protecting the historic development pattern and the form of the community.

Generally, the Township's historic preservation efforts have focused on the facades of individual buildings and have only included structures within a historic district or that are listed on the historic resource inventory. However the underlying pattern and fabric of what makes neighborhoods work is being lost over time and the majority of buildings in the Township are not listed on the Historic Resource Inventory. The subtle relationship of various elements such as trees and architectural features are vital to maintaining the character of the community and should be considered in land development within older neighborhoods.

The Form and Scale of New Construction: Architecture and Streetscape Design and Tear Down-Rebuilds

There has been a great concern about the Township's inability to regulate the form of new residential, commercial or institutional construction. Because the Township is built out new construction is often visible from the public right of way and from adjacent properties. How can new construction be compatible with existing development and the massing mitigated? The goal is to make new construction look like it belongs, but also be mindful how codes can limit modest expansions in older neighborhoods.

Affordable, Elderly, Workforce Housing

The median housing price in Lower Merion Township in 2006 was \$520,000 and based on 2000 census data the median household income was \$86,373; therefore, much of the housing stock is presently well out of reach for many of the Township residents, especially the workforce (i.e., school teachers, policemen, etc.) which serves the population and makes Lower Merion Township a desirable place to live. The challenge is to preserve existing affordable neighborhoods and also to appropriately incorporate inclusionary standards into new development.

Circulation: Traffic and the Challenges of Developing Multi-Modal Transportation Network

While Lower Merion was originally developed as a railroad suburb it has now developed into an automobile suburb. Automobile traffic and congestion are often cited as the most significant problems associated with new development. Traffic is something that people can see and experience. The road infrastructure of the Township is generally maxed out on major roads, often to the detriment of pedestrians and bicyclists. The automobile also has a significant impact on the form of the built environment. Public transportation is limited by parking availability. The Township is also promoting a township-wide pedestrian and bicycle network. Traffic congestion is a major impediment to many motorists traveling local roadways; however there are many obstacles to improving multi-modal transportation which should be identified and examined.

Institutional Expansion

Lower Merion contains a large number of institutional uses located within or adjacent to residential neighborhoods. Over the past decade the Township has seen many of these institutions including Bryn Mawr Hospital, Lower Merion High School, and Waverly Heights undertake significant expansion plans. These have been some of the most controversial land development applications facing the Township. The low density character of the institutional uses complements the residential character of the neighborhoods. Several institutions which cannot expand are relocating such as Episcopal Academy, Akiba Academy, and the Barnes Foundation. Providing room for these institutions to grow without negatively impacting surrounding neighborhoods is a significant planning issue.

Stormwater Management, Impervious Surface and Erosion Control

Stormwater management and water quality have become one of the most significant issues associated with land development. Stormwater management requirements often serve as a density control in some areas of the Township.

Economic Development and revitalization of Commercial Areas

Economic revitalization of the Township's commercial areas remains an on-going planning challenge.

Density: The positive and negative impact of new development

Parking

Energy Conservation/Green Development

Open Space Preservation and Recreational Opportunities

Maintenance of Community Infrastructure and Existing Levels of Community Services

Balancing Private Property Rights and Values versus Preserving Community Character and the Impact of Potential Code Changes

Routine Code Maintenance to Adapt to changing Federal and State Regulations and to Address Changing Conditions: Split Zoned Parcels, Telecommunications Facilities, Developments in Floodplains, Boundary Tolerances

Regional Cooperation and Multi-Municipal Planning Opportunities

ZONING HEARING BOARD

The summary below is a list of issues and recommended solutions identified by Zoning Hearing Board (ZHB) members at an informal meeting on Thursday, December 13, 2007¹:

Issue: Traffic mobility is a problem in Lower Merion Township

Improperly Used Traffic Calming Measures

- Placing traffic calming measures on the major roadways has the unintended impact of diverting people onto the residential side streets to get through town. Merion Road is an example of such an unnecessary traffic calming measure that serves one residence on that street, but negatively impacts everyone else who has to use that roadway and diverts people through otherwise quiet residential streets that were not meant to be through streets.
- Reduced speed signs and traffic calming measures should be installed as a part of an overall plan. Ad hoc decisions regarding roadway signage may result in signs that are difficult to enforce and speeds that do not allow safe traffic flow.

Short trips within the Township

- Residents are driving around town to run their errands and drop their children off at school which adds to the congestion created by motorists driving through the Township to get elsewhere.

Trips through the Township

- A study prepared approximately 10 years ago of City Avenue found that most of the people traveling on City Avenue were from Delaware County traveling to their jobs in the City.
- The study suggested that the speeds along City Avenue could be increased to improve traffic flow and safety, but unfortunately that goal was never accomplished.

Solutions:

- The main roads should be clear of impediments and the traffic lights should correspond with rush hour traffic.
- The traffic signage should be reviewed as a part of an overall plan and the limits of the roadways should meet the 80th percentile. The existing signage should be inventoried and the signs that are unenforceable or do not meet the 80th percentile should be removed.
- The roadway signage through the Township should be consistent.
- A couple of years ago there was talk of having a trolley that went from one end of the Township to the other end on an internal loop so that the residents would not have to drive to run all of their errands. Such an internal loop should be investigated as it would reduce traffic congestion.
- “Smart Lights” should be installed on the major roadways which would cost some money upfront but would greatly improve traffic mobility. With the technology available today there is no reason that the traffic lights cannot better correspond to the needs of motorists during rush hour, particularly along City Avenue.

Issue: The Zoning Code has become too complex

Zoning requirements do not provide for the existing built-out neighborhoods

- A variance or a waiver is required or a problem is created for absolutely anything one does or proposes to do.
- There are places in the Township right now that do not have a single conforming lot, such as Belmont Hills.

¹ The meeting notes are available on the Townships website at www.lowermerion.org.

- The current provisions tie the hands of the residents and of the ZHB. Residents are not allowed to modernize their houses because it would not fit Zoning Code requirements. Families are faced with the prospect of moving because they cannot build the additions necessary for modern day living and unfortunately such a variance doesn't meet the criteria necessary for a zoning variance to be granted, so the ZHB is stuck in a difficult position.
- The ZHB has tried to provide some leniency to the residents that are burdened by the existing Code, but then the next week attorneys will come in and try to apply the leniency granted to the small homeowner to some large mansion.

Contradictory requirements created inadvertently through numerous amendments

- Certain sections of the code have been amended so many times that the code has become contradictory to itself and the problem is worsening.
- Every time a section of the code changes, it has an unintended consequence.

Lack of Consistency

- There are an inherent problems and inconsistencies with the definitions of the Zoning Code that need to be addressed and resolved quickly.
- Oftentimes the ZHB will end up in a definition war with applicants' attorneys and then when the ZHB goes back to the Code to review the definition, a definition is not even there. Superior courts found the term "blending" to be something different than the ZHB because the definition was not clearly defined in the code.

Solutions:

- A review of the Zoning Code cannot wait three years for the Comprehensive Plan.
- The inconsistencies of the Zoning Code should be identified through a thorough review and promptly addressed.
- The Zoning Code should take the built environment into account and should be less burdensome on traditional communities such as Belmont Hills so as to allow families to update their homes and stay in the community.

Issue: Contentious Relationships between Non-Residential and Residential Neighbors

Lack of consistent zoning standards leads to confusion and mistrust

- Nothing in the current Code appropriately addresses buffer zones against residential properties with regards to special exceptions. The ZHB is currently in the situation of approving special exceptions with no clear provision that mandates the inclusion of a buffer area where one may clearly be needed.
- Presently there is no consistency in the zoning code and is not easy to understand, which leads to extremely contentious applications.
- The one thing that separates Lower Merion Township from all the other plain, old, run of the mill suburbs is the unique character of the township wherein the institutions and commercial centers are engrained into the residential neighborhoods, but if there is not a clear understanding of the relationship between the residents and the adjacent uses, then the Township is going to continue to see institutions pack up and leave.

Expansion of institutions

- Institutions always have money, always have a use and always have a bias in favor of them. They are able to exploit their resources and buy up all of the adjacent residential properties for the purpose of razing them and expanding. They end up forcing residents out of the neighborhood.
- The institutions utilize the Township's resources and they do not pay for them.
- The most contentious (ZHB) applications over the past several years have involved the expansion of institutions such as: The Barnes, Akiba, Lankenau Hospital, Waverly Heights, etc. Such applications create the most friction in the Township, which is why it is so important that this relationship be evaluated and addressed in the Plan and in the Code.

Solutions:

- The most important thing to resolve is the relationship between the commercial and institutional uses with their adjacent residential neighbors.
- The required buffers and relationships should be clearly and consistently defined and understood throughout the Code.
- A buffer requirement should be clearly defined and enforced for special exception uses, because the ZHB is currently in the situation of approving special

exceptions with no clear provision that mandates the inclusion of a buffer area where one may clearly be needed.

Issue: Lack of Cohesive, Township-Wide, Long Range Vision

Emphasis on individual property owners' needs as opposed to Township-wide goals

- There is too much emphasis on the individual property owners' needs and no cohesive sense of a larger place.
- Without a larger community vision it is possible for one or two individuals to derail a project that would have benefited the entire Township.
- In order to have a Comprehensive Plan that can actually be implemented a coherent community vision is needed that is presently lacking.

Issue: Lack of Cooperative Planning Efforts with Adjacent Municipalities

Lower Merion Township is surrounded by built-out communities

- Lower Merion Township is not like most residential suburbs which are surrounded by rural settings; Lower Merion Township is surrounded by other built-out townships.

Inconsistent zoning requirements between Lower Merion and adjacent municipalities

- There are areas of the Township that are adjacent to Villanova University, so some residents' neighborhoods include the dormitories of the college, but because Villanova University is located in a different Township, there are no separation requirements.

Solution:

- The boundaries of the Township should be investigated for consistent zoning and uses.

Issue: Enforcement of Township Codes

Lack of property maintenance is forcing good tenants out of the Township

- A part of the problem with the Township is that we do not currently enforce our own laws. There was an antique dealer down on Bala Avenue that had a wonderful shop, but she left because the landlord refused to fix a hole in the roof.

Property owners take advantage of the lax enforcement

- The property owners know that the Township does not enforce the ordinance which is why the Township has developers like the guy from St. Asaph's Road come in and tear down the existing house and build a 12,000 square foot office building in its place.

Solution:

- If the Township were to enforce the ordinance and require the landlords to maintain their properties, the Township would be in a position to attract desirable tenants.
- It is important for the Planning Commission to continue to maintain its independence from the Board of Commissioners so that it can come to completely objective decisions.

Issue: Divide between the Eastern and Western Portions of the Township

There was such an outcry from the public that the Township spent all of its money in the western part of the township, on Rolling Hill Park that the project was almost abandoned. The Township was able to obtain the 103-acre park for \$3M and a large portion of the money was contributed by the County. Today, the 5-acres of buildable land alone would probably go for \$15M. However residents have such a strong tie to their local village that people will object to projects getting accomplished in other areas throughout the Township with no regard for the larger community. It only takes about 10 minutes to drive from Merion Station to Rolling Hill Park and the park is a great amenity to the entire community that was almost lost.

Solution:

- There is a huge divide between the east and the west that must be addressed.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION

In the fall of 2007 the Historical Commission compiled a list of recommendations to address areas where historic preservation initiatives could be improved upon with the development of a new comprehensive plan.

Revise Ordinance:

- Class I versus Class II Issue;
- 90-Day delay;
- Incentives (additional, tax-based);

- “Demo by Neglect”/Property maintenance;
- Township enforcement;
- HC rules & regulations; and
- Process.

Improve Historic Resource Inventory (HRI):

- Update and correct;
- Sort/add & subtract (see Class I versus Class II Issue);
- Expand definition (Interconnectivity): objects, objects in a landscape; and
- Ongoing maintenance of the HRI.

Implement educational programs (with HARB);

- Cable TV programming;
- Workshops (“Old House Fair”);
- House tours (of HC/HARB award winning projects);
- Joint preservation briefs (revise from “HARB ONLY”);
- Joint programs with community advocacy groups; and
- Information available at libraries.

Enhance HC as a public “resource”:

- Revised/improved webpage;
- Preliminary reviews;
- Education (see programs above); and
- Staff.

Combating “Tear-downs”/preserving community character:

- Class I versus Class II;
- Incentives;
- Design guidelines;
- Zoning solutions (“down-zoning”); and
- Traditional Neighborhood Developments (TND).

Improving Enforcement:

- Ordinance requirements;
- Demo-by-neglect; and
- Process.

Add full-time staff member;

Further integrate requirements for recycling; and

Improve communication (with the Board of Commissioners).

Accomplishments:

The HC also provided a list of recent historic preservation accomplishments for the Township to continue to build upon.

- Ordinance/Incentives;
- Historic Resource Inventory (HRI)/Districts – and additions thereto;
- HC/HARB;
- Staff support/consultant;
- HARB/HC Annual awards program;
- Education/community advocacy groups, etc (Lower Merion Conservancy/Lower Merion High School); and
- Township webpage.

BOARD OF HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

The Board of Historical Architectural Review (HARB) provided the following observations and comments relative to developing a new comprehensive plan in November of 2007:

Build on existing plans

Use the Pennsylvania Preservation Plan as a foundation for the historic preservation aspects of this plan, especially the effort of educational outreach to Lower Merion residents and school aged children.

Consider some new Ordinances

Consider the creation of ordinances that allow the identification and classification of ‘historic neighborhoods’. Plenty of these neighborhoods exist in Lower Merion Township, but few have been acknowledged outside of those contained in historic districts and by common knowledge within the Township. By way of example, the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) offers such a designation through the use of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. Once these areas are identified and documented the characteristics of appropriate form, scale, and density of new construction and additions to existing structures could more easily be articulated. Likewise, issues of access, circulation and parking could more easily be dealt with as are issues of private versus the preservation of community character represented by the built and natural environments. We are not talking about creating historic districts, but merely about identifying unique and distinctive neighborhoods.

Complete the research and documentation of the scattered historic properties

There still remains the existing list of scattered historic properties, a list that in need of significant research and refinement. Coupled with the additional research for these properties should be a process of linking all historic property data with the growing use of the Township's GIS database. As a part of the enrichment of this geographic database system, historic property data should be continually added. Incorporation of this data would greatly aid in the process of code enforcement in instances where data related to historic properties are needed. There is also considerable resource of properties constructed during the 1950's, properties 'aging' into consideration of historic status.

Support the 'Green and Sustainable' Agenda

The preservation and reuse of existing facilities and structures, a basic premise of historic preservation, is also one of the key principles of energy and 'green'-sustainable development.

Preserve Environmental Character of Lower Merion Township

Other aspects of historic preservation and community character, aspects that received little recognition, but are important features that also need more appreciation and protection are: view sheds, streams and stream fords, narrow roads, stream valleys, and the remains of uninhabitable historic structures.

Improve the appearance of our public environment

The public infrastructure is a growing offense to all occupants of the Township, but perhaps more so in historic districts because of the seemingly constant growth in the number of utility poles, boxes, towers and overhead lines and their juxtaposition in areas where their previous existence was more restrained. We need a plan to get more of this utility infrastructure underground and out of sight, to reduce its visual intrusion in all of our neighborhoods. There is also the condition of the roads with potholes, poor drainage, and the need for new asphalt and pavements. For example, the center of Gladwyne has been patched and repatched for years to cover sewer and water pipes. Some of these roads not only look bad, but drivers must be very watchful as they try to navigate the bumps and depressions.

Open space

Lower Merion Township has a rich and varied history of industrial and residential development over the last 300

years. Little open and undeveloped land exists. What there is, is most difficult to develop or to use for more than passive open space, natural trails and pathways and the remains of the original industrially developed streams and valleys within the Township. Efforts should continue to prohibit development of these areas and encourage their use as valuable parts of the Township's open space system.

Historic Preservation and Economic Development

The most recent research into the economic benefits of historic preservation reveals that well maintained historic properties show more stable property values and community character than properties and areas lying outside of historic districts. It also follows that these areas require lower government operating expenses while yielding the higher property values, making historic preservation a good investment for the community.

Dedicated Staff support for Historic Preservation

The Township needs to add staff dedicated to the support of historic preservation, available to inspect properties, meet with and counsel property owners, and support the Township's Board of Historical Architectural Review and Historical Commission in the administration of their responsibilities.

Develop new educational programs

Educational programs to encourage preservation, explain its economic and cultural values to the owners and the community. Perhaps the Township might consider issuing homeowners of historic properties an attractive certificate (suitable for framing) that indicates that their house in an important part of the historic façade of the Township. On the reverse side of the certificate could be printed the history and specific documentation gathered by the Township to justify the inclusion of that particular property on the 'List'. A little pride in the recognition of their property may go a long way to help insure that properties so certified are kept in good and appropriate repair.

Create Incentives for Preservation

The Township and other government entities need to create incentives to support preservation through tax abatements or credits and through others financial incentives. We need to find a better balance of the 'stick and carrot approach' to encourage and reward preservation. We currently have too much 'stick' and not enough 'carrot'.

Supporting diversity and choice

A diversified mix of architecture in the Township has always existed, providing housing for all economic classes, races and ethnicities, and this must be retained and preserved, with appropriate provisions for affordable housing. Gentrification and obliteration of individual properties for large-scale condominiums must be carefully monitored through an appropriate review of zoning across the Township and particularly in relationship to preservation of our existing neighborhoods.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COUNCIL (EAC)

The Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) serves a vital function to the municipality in providing valuable advice and recommendations for the promotion and conservation of the natural resources of the Township and for the protection and improvement of the quality of the environment within the Township. The Lower Merion Township EAC set forth a list of environmental issues in 2007, updated in 2009, and listed below for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan:

Stormwater quality

Begin to construct stormwater retrofit projects, where possible, on an annual basis. Examples are modifications to existing surface stormwater basins, streambank restoration projects, tree planting programs, rain barrel programs and curbside infiltration systems, etc.

Stormwater quantity

Stormwater runoff has been and will continue to be an issue, particularly in the more densely populated areas. Investigate creating a stormwater authority as a means to comprehensively address this issue and raise funds to implement improvements and meet requirements under state and federal regulations such as the MS4 program. Closely follow bills in the state legislature that would assist in the creation of a stormwater authority on either a county or municipal level. The Township could also create additional stormwater management controls or work with private property owners to do the same.

Encourage green building practices and sustainable development

Lead by example and incorporate green and sustainable design into all future municipal projects. Initially encourage developers to do the same on a voluntary basis and eventually consider requiring this on commercial and multi-family developments.

Energy efficiency and conservation

Lead by example in this area, to upgrade municipal facilities. As building components reach the end of their life, they should be replaced with high efficiency components which reduce energy consumption. Continue the process of undergoing an energy audit of all Township facilities which will provide a benchmark to measure the benefits of high efficiency components. Encourage and educate homeowners to make individual energy efficiency improvements with the assistance of the EAC.

Water conservation

In new construction projects undertaken, consider recycling grey water and using only low flow fixtures. Also, as fixtures require replacement, they should be upgraded with low flow fixtures.

Public recycling containers

Consider placing recycling containers on public sidewalks throughout all of the business districts to make it easier for pedestrians and others frequenting the business districts to recycle.

Work to achieve greater participation in commercial recycling

This may perhaps be accomplished at the planning stage of a project. Engage in an outreach effort to achieve greater recycling compliance from commercial businesses. Additional efforts could include educating developers of commercial land development projects of the recycling requirements to ensure that adequate space is included in all new developments for recycling facilities.

Strengthen landscape requirements for new development

Promote a comprehensive reassessment of the Natural Features Code to focus more on sustainability issues and greening of sites that are redeveloped. Focus on mitigating heat island effects and managing stormwater runoff.

Investigate use of green streets

Consider capturing stormwater in planters or bio-retention areas adjacent to streets. This should also be included in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) on an annual basis as a method to retroactively reduce stormwater runoff from streets. These practices also function well as traffic calming measures.

Minimize light pollution and light trespass

Consider adopting a lighting ordinance to regulate the amount of light on new developments and major renovations which include changes to existing exterior lighting to minimize glare onto adjacent properties and to reduce sky glow.

Encourage/Expand Township Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program

Consider going completely organic and not using any chemicals or pesticides on Township properties including athletic fields and parks. Also give consideration to what is planted on Township property to minimize pest issues.

Encourage private/local involvement in stewardship of natural resources

Consider encouraging the creation of Friends groups to assist with day to day stewardship of parks and other natural areas owned by the Township.

Facilitate a pedestrian/bicycle friendly Township

Consider expanding existing sidewalk and pedestrian networks as well as creating bike lanes on main thoroughfares throughout the Township. Work to implement the recommendations of the Township-wide Pedestrian and Bicycle network

Coordinate streambank restoration and maintenance

The EAC should coordinate with the Lower Merion Conservancy to educate residents on a watershed wide basis about this issue in an attempt to reduce overall stormwater runoff rather than implementing streambank restoration projects on individual properties.

This may also have water quality implications in that restored or revegetated streambanks help to filter pollutants from stormwater runoff.

Encourage use of bio-retention basins in all new subdivision and land development projects

The use of bio-retention basins should also be included in Township projects. Bio-retention basins help to slow stormwater runoff, enhance water quality and provide habitat areas.

Coordination with neighboring municipalities

Environmental issues such as watershed management, greenhouse gas reduction and stormwater runoff do not stop at municipal boundaries. Make an effort to coordinate with adjacent municipalities on these issues. The EAC should identify specific environmental projects which would benefit from inter-municipal coordination.

Create a list of open space/natural areas the Township would like to preserve

Maintain a list of properties that it would like to purchase should funding become available. Although we do have a recently updated Open Space Plan, additional property

could become available or desirable that was not identified in the Plan.

Dedicated Open Space Funding Source

Consider creating a dedicated source of funding to permanently preserve, protect and enhance open space resources including but not limited to those identified in the Township's 2006 Open Space Plan.

Schuylkill River and the Township's open space areas which adjoin its stream valleys

Support the recommendations of the Montgomery County Natural Areas Inventory 2008, as it pertains to the Lower Schuylkill River Conservation Landscape. Particular attention should be given to deer management, including proactive efforts to reduce deer density, management and control of invasive plants, long term protection of large institutional tracts which contain vulnerable lands that are adjacent to the Schuylkill River.

Conserve and restore the Township's Urban Forests & protect public trees in the right-of-way

Implement recommendations from the Davy Tree Study to aid in funding the replacement of aging street trees as well as restoring forests on public lands owned by the Township.

Conservation and management of Preservation Areas

Continue to monitor preservation areas and educate property owners on the importance of these areas to the entire open space network in the Township. Continue to enforce the requirements of each Maintenance and Operation Plan. The EAC should continue to assist with these efforts.

THE SHADE TREE COMMISSION

The Lower Merion Shade Tree Commission has exclusive custody and control of all trees on Township property and is authorized to plant, remove, maintain and protect all trees on public streets and highways. The following list of issues was compiled by the Shade Tree Commission during the spring of 2009:

- Implement the findings of the Township's 2008 *Comprehensive Shade Tree Inventory and Maintenance Plan*. Prepare public information program to educate public about the plan.
- Strengthen landscape requirements for new development and teardown/rebuilds to protect existing trees and to address losses.

- Better planning and management of Township's green infrastructure, including parks, riparian strips, commercial areas, greenways, institutional land, cemeteries, etc. Link tree preservation to stormwater management requirements. Provide stormwater incentives for preservation of existing trees and planting of new trees. Require replacements to provide an inch caliper of new tree for every inch caliper of lost tree. Provide for tree replacements within watershed if replacements cannot be provided for on site.
- Improve greening requirements for commercial/institutional parking lots. Link parking lot trees to stormwater to ensure that they are not removed and properly replaced.
- Suburban Square and other commercial property tree maintenance, education/awareness
- Implement recommendations of the Township's 2006 Open Space Plan to establish a greening coordinator and tree inspector to strengthen enforcement and provide for volunteer greening projects.
- Require replacement of Norway Maples and other trees identified for removal by the Davy Tree Study and Management Plan during sidewalk repair.
- Coordinate utility and railway right-of-way planting and maintenance planning to ensure sustainable planting/management plan.
- Prioritize budgeting for tree maintenance in operating item.
- Explore ways to plant new trees in the Township including 2% for trees and landscapes in the Capital Improvement Plan and funding \$10,000 per year for the Shade Tree Commission to coordinate volunteer tree plantings.
- Initiate a "Complete Streets" best practices plan. Explore demonstration projects.
- Implement Township Entryway Beautification Plans as recommended in the Open Space Plan.
- Utility bundling requirements to limit utility footprints.
- Review Township sidewalk network for connectivity and safety for students and residents.
- Limit sidewalks to one side of streets combined with overhead utilities to maximize space for trees on other side of street.
- Targeted tree planting for energy conservation (cool community); energy demand-side management program.
- Restrict cutting of trees for billboard viewsheds.

THE LOWER MERION CONSERVANCY

The Conservancy was asked by Lower Merion Township's planning department staff to draft a memo illustrating concerns and issues relating to historic preservation in November of 2007. This memo is meant to represent the opinions of the Lower Merion Conservancy, its staff, board members, and advisors.

Issues

Historic designation and the ordinance

- The separation of buildings as Class 1 and Class 2 is unique in Pennsylvania and unusual nationally.
- As the criteria is currently defined, designation as a Class 1 or Class 2 building is based more on national than local significance. As a result, many locally significant buildings, some of which are hundreds of years old, are on the Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) as Class 2 buildings and would not qualify to be elevated to Class 1. These buildings can be demolished at will with a short delay, even if every Commissioner and staff member agrees that it would be against the public interest to lose them.
- When the township originally created the historic preservation ordinance, several Class 2 buildings were removed from the HRI at the request of their owners. This "opt out" was offered to owners who objected at this initial time, so as to not jeopardize the broader goal of creation of the HRI. The intention was to re-evaluate these properties under the listing criteria at a later date, using a public process to add them back to the HRI as appropriate. This list still exists, but the re-evaluation never happened.
- The properties listed individually on the HRI were included predominantly as a result of three different inventories that were created using different techniques. There are whole neighborhoods that were excluded after initial surveys because they have too many historic resources and were considered better candidates for district listing. The apparent intention was for these to be added later, but this has not happened in a systematic way. The recently created Haverford Station Historic District was initiated more as a result of neighborhood advocacy than a systematic evaluation.
- The surveys that created the HRI set 1913 as an upper bound date—the middle of the township's development heyday—so many historic buildings are not listed. The 50-year rule would suggest considering buildings built before 1957, a gap of 44 years!

- Listing on the HRI defines what is historic for regulatory purposes, although the HRI is widely acknowledged to not be comprehensive. As a result, historic buildings that are not yet listed are sometimes dismissed by owners and decision makers as unimportant and not historic—so defined by their absence from the inventory. This disconnect will continue until issues with the inventory are remedied.
 - The ordinance does not allow for the protection of historic objects such as stone walls, mile markers, entrance gateways, street signs, roadways, statues, cemetery headstones, etc. These are important threads in the historic fabric of Lower Merion.
 - Owners wishing to demolish a Class 2 building may do so after a 90-day delay without having to demonstrate such factors as economic hardship or rehabilitation, significant physical deterioration, or loss of historical integrity. The intent had been to use that time to work with property owners to find alternatives to demolition. However, it has come to be considered a minor inconvenience rather than an opportunity, a delay that can be accounted for in a developer's strategy by simply adjusting a timetable.
 - There are too few protections for Class 2 buildings in general.
 - There is no requirement for property owners to take pre-demolition photographs. Instead, when the final demolition-related permits are issued a notice is sent to a group of preservationists who have volunteered to photograph. These volunteers are not able to photograph interiors, and are basically doing this as a favor. Many municipalities require that property owners submit archival-quality photographs prior to demolition as part of their application.
 - “Economic hardship” and “significant deterioration” are not sufficiently defined in the ordinance to aid owners and decision makers. These definitions are essential to ensure uniform and fair application of rules and to encourage preservation.
 - As described by PHMC, the creation of National Register Districts is hampered by there being no approved “Context Statement” for the railroad suburbs that comprise Lower Merion. Once approved by PHMC, this context statement would allow individual neighborhoods, the township, and advocacy organizations to pursue National Register listing of neighborhoods, a required precursor to accessing federal historic preservation tax credits.
 - Different, sometimes contradictory, ordinances apply to certain projects, often without a clear guide as to which predominates. This is the case with signage regulations, the topic of a recent memo from HARB to the Board of Commissioners.
- Incentives**
- The township offers setback and use incentives to HRI-listed properties, but these have not proven to be attractive. In some cases, neighbors have opposed a property being listed because of concern about uses these incentives might encourage.
 - The Township's covenant should be analyzed to ensure it dovetails with best practices for preservation façade easements. Also, it is not clear whether the same incentives apply if someone signs a covenant with a qualifying organization other than the township.
 - The township must retain a mixture of residential housing opportunities for all economic levels as well as affordable housing. However there is no accommodation for or definition of economic hardship in the ordinance. Furthermore, CDBG funding has not yet been earmarked to specifically assist with preservation of historic properties of lower-income homeowners.
 - Federal financial incentives for appropriate rehabilitation are available for commercial properties listed on the National Register, and state incentives may soon be available for locally listed commercial and residential properties. Better education and advocacy around these opportunities would provide preservation incentives at no cost to the township. Good financial incentives have proven to encourage property owners to seek historic designation in other communities.
- Historical Commission and HARB**
- Projects that depend on approvals from multiple agencies sometimes receive contradictory rulings. In one such case, it was not clear whether the Historical Commission was required to follow a prior Zoning decision or whether that decision would be trumped by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards where the two did not align. Where there are multi-agency reviews, the process seems confusing for everyone involved including property owners, township staff, the Historical Commission/HARB and even the Board of Commissioners.

- The public process of the Historical Commission and HARB is at times uneven, as the community is not always asked to speak at an effective point in deliberations. In addition, plans and drawings are not available or visible to the public during deliberations, so it is not always clear what is being discussed.
- Neither the township's preservation consultant nor Historical Commission/HARB members are typically present at the decision-making meetings of the Board of Commissioners. This requires planning staff to then represent the often nuanced recommendations of these bodies, and eliminates the opportunity for Commissioners to ask questions of the township's preservation professionals.
- The historic preservation consultant is very talented, but the lack of dedicated historic preservation staff hinders the township's preservation efforts. This eliminates one opportunity to make the review process simpler through in-house reviews of simpler projects.
- Also in the LMT 2008 Proposed Budget (page 188) is the statement: "Township policy decision will establish the extent of future maintenance requirements for [township-owned] historic properties." When and how will that policy decision be made?
- General design principles have not been developed to foster rehabilitation, infill and new construction that are compatible with existing buildings and neighborhoods.
- The teardown trend currently challenging Lower Merion not only eliminates individual historic buildings, but also can rob older neighborhoods of their unique character. Each teardown diminishes its neighborhood's ability to qualify for preservation protections such as historic district listing at a later time.
- The success of Lower Merion as a built-out community is also a challenge to its growth, especially for the area's institutions.

Education

- The Township's HARB and Historic Preservation awards do a great job of highlighting good preservation practices, but these are not as widely attended as they might be, missing an opportunity to celebrate the benefits of preservation and our collective sense of community.
- HRI property owners would benefit from workshops, such as those currently being offered in Philadelphia by the Preservation Alliance, that detail good maintenance practices, offer free advice, describe acceptable replacement materials, funding opportunities, etc. Several property owners have mentioned wanting such workshops, which could be "sold" as an incentive to listing.
- The Board of Commissioners would benefit from hearing regular, interesting stories about the history and architecture of the township.
- Realtors and other "first line" contacts with new property owners should be helped to better describe the expectations and benefits of historic preservation and HRI listing.
- Many of the township's historic religious and cultural locations have growing capital improvement and maintenance needs, but significantly smaller numbers of members.
- Historic viewsheds, settings and landscapes are not typically protected.

White Paper Update

In December 2009, the Lower Merion Conservancy drafted a white paper titled *Historic Preservation Best Practices* to seek to identify preservation issues in Lower Merion Township. The paper presents an assessment of relevant preservation practices in other municipalities, and offers possible actions to best preserve the historic resources of Lower Merion Township. The white paper was established as a tool to provide a basis for further discussion and action. The paper is essentially an updated and refined document to supplement the issues presented above and is included as Appendix C.

Miscellaneous

- 2008 LMT draft goals and budget make no mention of updating/improving/adding to the Historic Resources Inventory or increasing preservation staffing, stating the very general goal: "Preserving community character through open space and historic preservation efforts" (LMT 2008 Proposed Budget, page 82).



COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Four community workshops were hosted by the Planning Commission during the fall of 2007 to solicit input and feedback from Township stakeholders. At the Community Workshops the following issues and solutions were discussed by the participants:²

Issue: Improve Upon the Historic Preservation Provisions

Solutions:

Update the Historic Resource Inventory and Historic Preservation Ordinance

The Inventory should be updated and expanded to include all historic properties. The current Ordinance could also be updated to further promote the preservation of historic properties.

Review the Class I and Class II designation classifications

A building should either be designated as historic or not. The ability of individual property owners to remove their property from the Inventory should be reviewed. The removal of prominent buildings from the list has negative implications and such removals should not be permitted.

Consider adding 1950's housing stock to the Historic Resource Inventory

Housing stock from that era is becoming increasingly endangered as such houses are commonly demolished and the lot rebuilt upon.

Evaluate how new construction impacts historic viewsheds

Historic viewsheds are at risk and as properties are being developed around historic structures, the historic character of the area is being destroyed necessitating action.

Review historic preservation ordinances of other municipalities to use as models

One successful method the Lower Merion Conservancy reviewed was the Conservation & Preservation Light zoning designation wherein the mass, size and setback of new structures are required to conform to the existing neighborhoods. Nearby municipalities have also adopted successful historic preservation ordinances by linking historic preservation with other elements such as Green Design, Economic Development, Financial Incentives, or Open Space.

Look to the State for examples

Review ways that other communities deal with historic preservation.

Provide greater flexibility to historic properties

The Codes should be reviewed and possibly revised to grant greater flexibility to historic properties.

Promote funding opportunities available to businesses in historic districts

Grants and funding are out there which should be made available to the property and business owners.

Preserve the remaining estates

The sheer beauty of the remaining estates contributes to the Township's character and steps should be taken to ensure that the estates are not further broken up and divided into smaller parcels.

Promote changes to the MPC that would strengthen the historic preservation

The Township is constrained by the MPC.

Issue: Negative perception of HARB amongst business community

Solutions:

Monitor the actions of the HARB

While the HARB is a necessary tool and could be an effective means to preserve historic properties, there is presently a fear of HARB interference.

Review the HARB process

The HARB process is preventing property owners from renovating their buildings, whereas the intent of the HARB was to promote redevelopment.

Issue: Need for affordable and elderly housing in the Township

Solutions:

Preservation of older housing stock

Utilize historic preservation to subdivide the existing, older housing stock into smaller units for the low income and elderly.

Apply the term "Inclusionary Housing"

The terms "affordable and workforce housing" raise negative images and that the term "inclusionary housing" is more appealing and appropriate.

Protect the community diversity

There is a need in the Township to protect and promote the diversity of the area before the diversity that makes this area special is lost.

² The notes from each Community Workshop are available on the Township's website at www.lowermerion.org.

Preserve the existing housing stock

Preserving the existing housing stock will also preserve the existing diversity. Residents want socio-economic diversity; it is the way the town was developed.

Require developers to provide affordable housing

The Township should require developers to provide affordable housing as well as recreational facilities.

Utilize New Urbanism strategies to help residents age in place

A New Urbanism community in this area may allow residents downsize from larger homes and reduce auto dependency. Many residents would like to remain in the Township as they continue to age and have choices in the cost and type of housing that Ardmore and Lower Merion will provide.

Issue: Aging Infrastructure

The current rate of construction will force the Township to spend millions or billions of dollars updating the existing stormwater and sewer infrastructure.

Solutions:**Increase tax revenue**

Encourage new development and increased density in appropriate areas where the infrastructure is in place. Increased density will lead to greater tax revenue.

Consider the impact new development will have on the existing infrastructure

The Township needs to be worried about the density of new developments in the Township; whether it be infill development, or redevelopment, as the density that these projects will bring into the Township will also increase the demand on the local infrastructure which is already easily overwhelmed. Increased density could overwhelm the existing roadways or the antiquated sewer systems.

Issue: Balance between property rights and community character**Solutions:**

Create standards that are plain and easy to understand

The current balance between property rights and community character unfairly burdens property owners, particularly those in historic districts. A clear set of standards should be in place so that property owners understand the implications of being designated as a historic property.

Consider sidewalk alternatives in less dense areas

Sidewalks provide linkages that allow people to walk from place to place thereby reducing the dependency on cars; however, the installation of sidewalks where none exist create additional impervious surface and increased

stormwater runoff. While sidewalks are appropriate in some neighborhoods, sidewalks cutting through the scenic, rural portions on the western side of the Township may not be appropriate. A rural hiking path or a grass bench might be a more appropriate alternative.

Issue: Traffic**Solutions:****Encourage multi-modal transportation**

The Township should be providing bike racks so that biking is a feasible option. The Township should prepare a campaign or provide incentives to encourage people to utilize mass transit and encourage residents to have fewer cars.

Improve public transit

SEPTA has scaled back their services over the past several years and the trains and buses do not look very nice because of a lack of funding; however, improving the public transit facilities may increase ridership.

Provide bike lanes

Simple solutions such as providing bike lanes could encourage the use of various modes of transportation and alleviate congestion.

Partner with large institutions to reduce congestion

Both hospitals in the Township are building parking facilities because they are expecting a larger market share. The Township is already faced with traffic, parking and congestion problems. The institutions could help ease the congestion by working together to offer multiple modes of transportation such as busing services.

Issue: Institutional expansions**Solutions:****Provide adequate facilities, especially parking**

One of the most precious resources in the Township is land because it is a built out community and parking requires a lot of land. Everyone has to work together to share their facilities.

Prevent demolition of residential neighborhoods for the purpose of institutional expansion

The demolition of existing residential neighborhoods as institutions expand alters the residential character of the Township.

Establish community outreach groups

A feeling of disparity of power within the land development process between institutions and residents could be resolved if institutions were required to establish community outreach groups prior to submitting land development applications.

Balance needs of the institutions and impacts to adjacent residential community

The physical constraints that institutions find themselves in are very difficult and a balance must be met between the needs of the institutions and the impacts on the residential communities and the residents presently feel that the balance is out of whack. The physical characteristics of the buildings that the institutions now need are out of scale with the existing residential communities where they do exist and the uses that go with those larger facilities have changed dramatically over the past twenty years. The balance needs to be found between the institutions and the adjacent residences so that institutions are not faced with the prospect of leaving.

Address evolution of institutions

Many institutions now provide a broad range and depth of services such as daycare and services to homeless people as well as other services that are necessary in the area.

Explore ways to help aging institutions perform maintenance on aging facilities

Many of the institutions that are located in the Township are in aging buildings in need of maintenance and preservation. Buildings such as the St. Matthias Church of Bala Cynwyd which is over 100 years old are physical plants that require costly maintenance that shrinking parishes struggle to provide.

Collaborate with institutions facing site constraints

The National Association of Independent Schools reported five years ago that for schools to remain viable they should be located on at least 125 acres or they should start acquiring the properties around them or begin looking for larger properties in other areas. The Township and residents have to find a way to work with local institutions because they are facing serious constraints and the residents want to be a part of the solution; not the problem.

Issue: Density**Solutions:****Focus on underutilized portions of the Township, such as second stories above the shops along Lancaster Avenue**

It is important that the second stories along Lancaster Avenue be utilized to create a critical mass to support further economic development of the existing commercial centers.

Provide incentives/funds to renovate and utilize existing structures

The second stories of the buildings along Lancaster Avenue are largely vacant because of the cost of getting the historic properties up to current codes.

Address infill development and build-out scenarios

The trend towards demolishing existing residences constructed during the 1950's and 1960's and subdividing the lots is changing the character and density of various neighborhoods. The Township should take an inventory of how much open space should be provided for each developed acre and determine how much more development Lower Merion can handle.

Maintain garden suburb character of community by regulating new construction

Residents do not want Lower Merion to be over-urbanized. Most of the residents enjoy the proximity to the City, but chose to live in Lower Merion because they did not want to live in a big city. The size and scale of new construction is especially of concern. There is a real balancing act in keeping most of the community suburban while making our urban places better without overwhelming the community. One of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan could be to balance the growth that comes in to fit both the urban places and suburban places of the community.

Issue: Routine Code Maintenance**Solutions:****Encourage appropriate uses in the MUST overlay**

Ardmore has an overabundance of nail salons. There should be a way to encourage appropriate uses or restrict other uses that detract from the village centers.

Review existing zoning provisions in relation to the built environment

Over zoning is a problem. Current provisions allow developers to build higher than the surrounding buildings in the community. Property owners do not maintain existing 2 story buildings because the property can be sold and redeveloped at 6 stories in height.

Update the Zoning Code to reflect the goals of the community

The ordinance as it was adopted in the 1950's is not necessarily appropriate today. The existing Zoning Code and priorities of the Township are out of synch as the current provisions allow for more incentives to build new than to renovate and preserve existing buildings.

Issue: Maintaining the "village" feel and community character**Solutions:****Maintain the existing diversity and walkability of the neighborhoods**

The desirable characteristics of a village are that they are pedestrian friendly and safe. It creates a positive sense of place and a sense of community.

Preserve the trees and amount of green space

The Township should continue to preserve and plant trees. Old growth, large caliper trees should be protected as these older trees contribute greatly to the streetscape and enhance the community character. Something should be done to save these big trees as they seem to have a habit of disappearing.

Prevent the construction of “garage-mahals” and “McMansions”

There has been a trend recently to build “garage-mahals”, where there are 3, 4, 5 bay garages, which may be addressed through zoning. Streets which had little colonials and split levels, now look like giant McMansions have eaten the neighborhood that are being lived in by only two people. The character that residents like and want to preserve may be saved by restraining the types of development and sizes of homes in the future; if not, everything residents like about the Township will disappear.

Evaluate the future direction of the Township

The Main Line is the original transit oriented community and it has been wildly successful. It has been completely built up and now the Township has to ask itself if it is to further layer on top of the existing community or whether that increased development would make the Township lose the very things that make it a desirable place to live.

Maintain and improve aesthetics of commercial areas

Despite the small percentage of land dedicated to commercial uses in the Township, commercial areas are extremely important as they function as the front porch of the community as people will gain an impression of the Township based on how commercial areas look and function. The quality and character of the neighborhood needs to interface properly with the tenants. Many national and regional retailers come to the neighborhood because of the name recognition of the Main Line and are sadly disappointed by the state of the main street. The Township should focus on streetscape improvements and enhancing the existing facades and architecture.

Commercial areas should capitalize on the “Main Street” feel

There is presently an extremely high demand for downtown and main street types of development. Malls are no longer being built and the larger, cookie cutter chains have gotten to the point where there is no disparity between what they will pay and what the smaller, mom and pop, and more interesting tenants can pay in rent. As a result smaller retail spaces are no longer being built and the smaller, more interesting stores have nowhere to go. Almost through attrition, the smaller stores are coming

back into these types of communities (such as Lower Merion Township), which is a good thing. One thing the Township should concentrate on avoiding is becoming like a mall. The Township should embrace the origins of how the town grew up on the Main Street along the railroad.

Adaptively reuse existing buildings to maintain the community character

The Township should look at the number of high end condo units that are being constructed on Lancaster Avenue. The size and scale of new developments are very important and should be consistent with the existing neighborhoods. Wayne is a good example of an area that has undergone a lot of development, but has maintained the scale and character of the area. The Township should encourage the adaptive reuse of existing buildings similar to the adaptive reuse of the Armory in Media into a Trader Joes.

Review loss of single-family homes for condo developments

The number of homes that are being demolished and rebuilt as condos is affecting the character of the neighborhood.

Issue: Lack of cohesion

Solutions:

Address areas between village centers

Millions of dollars are poured into the development of plans for specific neighborhoods and virtually no money is spent on the remainder of the Township. The Township spends a lot of time and money working towards rehabilitating business districts that worked in the past, but the areas between the villages, for example between Ardmore and Bryn Mawr, are virtually forgotten. The areas between the village centers are oftentimes sawtoothed developments and these areas should also be addressed and appropriated funding.

Focus on all villages along the Lancaster Avenue corridor

While discussions in the past have focused on Ardmore and Bryn Mawr a planning process can be started in Haverford because it is a neighborhood along the Lancaster Avenue corridor that has been largely forgotten. Haverford is also a small village that needs help going back to its village roots.

Improve the pedestrian environments between villages

The areas between the village centers do not have many sidewalks and are not pedestrian friendly.

Issue: Sustainability**Solutions:****Address global warming**

The Township should be considering environmental concerns above everything else in light of global warming.

Provide tax incentives to encourage sustainable development

Tax incentives should be provided to encourage shared parking and reduce impervious cover. The Township should investigate tax incentives for homeowners who plant trees or have one car instead of two.

Partner with institutions to undertake positive projects

Bryn Mawr College partnered with the Lower Merion Conservancy to improve and stabilize the waterway through Ashbridge Park. They also designed and built a very large stormwater retention pond as an educational demonstration project that improved the area. Such projects and partnerships should be encouraged throughout the Township.

Mandate the use of 'green' building materials

The Township should begin insisting that all new construction use environmentally sound materials, especially institutions because of their size and scale.

Encourage historic preservation

The greenest building is the one that already exists.

Issue: Parking**Solutions:****Pool resources**

The price of parking should not be raised but pooling resources and sharing parking is a great idea.

Construct a parking garage or create additional parking to address needs in Ardmore

The two main concerns in Ardmore are traffic along Lancaster Avenue and parking; problems which were further exacerbated by the expansion of Suburban Square, Station Avenue and Anderson Avenue. Residents living in the apartments on the second stories of the commercial storefronts do take the train into the City during the week, but there is still a need for parking during the evenings and on weekends. There is a need for structured parking so that a town center and additional open spaces may be provided.

Require new developments to provide below-grade parking

New developments should be required to provide additional below ground parking so that they are not

adding to an existing problem, but helping to fix it.

Clearly identify the location of parking

One of the largest problems with the parking is that it is not clearly identified so many people are unaware that it exists. Additional directional signage should be provided.

Issue: Open Space Preservation and Recreation**Solutions:****Preserve existing institutional open spaces**

Institutions subdividing their land and selling it to developers comes at the price of a loss of open space for the residents of the Township.

Partner with institutions

The institutions increase the number of community facilities available to residents throughout the Township. The Township should continue to partner with private schools to maximize the use of playing fields available.

Adopt transfer development rights to preserve open spaces

The Township should adopt transfer of development rights so that instead of developing large properties, the owners would obtain tax credits and the development would then be targeted towards areas that are more appropriate for development.

Provide additional playing fields

The existing playing fields do not meet the needs of the residents. When one high school playing field goes under construction all of the leagues go scrambling.

Issue: Spur economic development**Solutions:****Provide an appropriate mix of uses**

A mix of merchandise is important and the stores must complement each other to draw people to the area. It did not make sense to recruit high end accessory retail stores to the area without recruiting clothing stores as well. The high end stores are not catering to the needs of the existing community as not every resident is extremely wealthy.

Create pedestrian linkages between residential neighborhoods and commercial areas

The demographics suggest that there is a large amount of disposable money in the community; however people will not come up to the street if the village is not opened up to pedestrian traffic. Bryn Mawr looks beautiful on Sunday and the streets are filled with pedestrians. The commercial areas are not currently playing to their strengths.

Create anchors in the business districts

The restaurants in Ardmore are lacking symmetry and do not create an environment where people linger and talk. There used to be art galleries and cheese and wine nights in Ardmore as well as the Ardmore Theater. Getting the Ardmore Theater back may be a lost cause, but Ardmore needs some sort of destination so that people start going to the area and businesses start taking notice. One thing that Ardmore has never had is a nice restaurant. Anchors are needed to bring people back to the area such as quaint bistros with wonderful menus.

Provide incentives to property owners to lease to unique shops

Residents would love to come back to the area to shop but there just isn't enough there to attract residents back. There should be policies or programs in place to give property owners incentives to lease to the unique shops that may be a little more risky.

Implement recommendations of reports and planning studies

The Township should look back to the reports prepared by the ULI which stated that Ardmore has elements that other communities across the country would love to have, but it needs to be refurbished. The Township was purposely built this way; Suburban Square was meant to be a shopping destination and Lancaster Avenue was meant to provide service-oriented businesses. The rents in the buildings that have been vacant for a number of years are very high for the facilities available and furthermore the landlords are not willing to make the upgrades necessary to retain desirable tenants.

Establish a community vision

The biggest obstacle in the commercial areas in the Township is the fragmented ownership and finding a common ground to improve the quality of life, the community, the properties and so on and so forth. A common ground may be found through providing a focus on the community vision.

Enforce Property Maintenance Codes

One of the biggest problems in the commercial areas is that the landlords are not willing to upgrade the existing buildings and services. The renovation of the Primavera Pizza Kitchen was held up for a year because the landlord refused to update the electrical system. Ordinances requiring properties to be maintained should be enforced.

Utilize creative solutions to reduce the parking problem and draw shoppers in

The Township could capitalize on valet parking wherein a trolley is used to transport people to the parking areas.

Raise awareness about the importance of buying locally

In terms of buying locally, the Township should encourage the use of frequent buyer programs, such as the one available in Mapes in Narberth. The new Target store on City Avenue may be affecting local businesses. Some sort of public awareness effort should be made regarding shopping loyalty or shopping locally to ensure the continued vitality of the local commercial centers.

REGIONAL CIVIC ASSOCIATION MEETINGS

The Township is fortunate to have such an active citizenry as evidenced by the work of the Township's seventeen civic associations. In order to tap into the firsthand knowledge residents have in regards to issues affecting the various neighborhoods three regional civic association meetings were held during the fall of 2007. The purpose behind facilitating geographically specific meetings was to foster an in-depth discussion about issues impacting various neighborhoods because different issues are more prevalent in different areas of the Township.

OCTOBER 22, 2007:

Ardmore Progressive, Ard-Wood, North Ardmore, Wynnewood, Shortridge, Penn Wynne and Wynnewood Valley Civic Associations

Issue: Stormwater is causing damage to properties and stream banks

Solution:

Create provisions to standardize stream bank repair

Individual property owners are responsible for fixing the damage done to the stream and every property owner is going about stabilizing the stream banks in their own manner without any kind of formal standardization or oversight by the Township.

Issue: Ardmore commercial area

Solutions:

Bring the two sides of Ardmore together to create a cohesive environment

The redevelopment of the Anderson Avenue Bridge could help the present divide between the two sides of Ardmore but more should be done to bring the two sides together. Connect the two sides of Ardmore by connecting Rittenhouse Place to Suburban Square. The lighting along Lancaster Avenue should be more consistent with the lighting of Suburban Square as the lighting of Suburban Square is more pedestrian oriented. Using similar lighting could make North and South Ardmore feel less divided.

Create a vision for the commercial corridor

The number of buildings continually vacant in Ardmore is scary. There is no real architectural vision in Ardmore to make it a vibrant community and the buildings along Lancaster Avenue are a hodge podge of mismatched buildings.

Provide a community gathering area

Ardmore could be more like Chestnut Hill. Chestnut Hill has a playground which is gated and safe and families can play with their kids and go to dinner and then go to the toy store up the street, which draws families. In Ardmore residents do not have anywhere to go with their kids.

Issue: Tense relationship between public schools and residents

Solution:

Address issues prior to land development

Issues with the schools should be dealt with in a more generalized and formal way instead of having a lot of conditions of approval because the schools will only continue to get larger.

Issue: Hostile bicycle and pedestrian environment

Solutions:

Create a place that is safe to bike, jog and walk

Sidewalks are high on the list of priorities. It is dangerous biking in this community. It is also tough to find a good running route because of all of the hills and steep slopes in the Township. The development of some kind of bike trail; somewhere safe to bike, jog and walk would be an asset to the community.

Maintain existing sidewalks

The problem is not only with the sidewalks that don't exist, but the ones that do are crumbling. Ordinances regulating the maintenance of sidewalks should be more strictly enforced.

Improve pedestrian safety

Some residents moved to Ardmore because they don't have to drive to get to the train and local businesses and restaurants. Families enjoy walking to restaurants but it is not very safe. Safety of pedestrians should be addressed.

Utilize new technologies to enhance pedestrian safety

The comprehensive plan should address the importance of new technologies to maximize the opportunities available to improve safety and walkability. New technologies such as time displays for pedestrians at intersections, control mechanisms and video cameras can be instrumental in providing better traffic management. Motorists have been increasingly running the red lights along Lancaster Avenue; even in front of the Police Department, causing real safety concerns for pedestrians. Increased enforcement and the use of available technologies may help.

Provide incentives to construct front porches

The residential neighborhoods lack vision and the design of many of the homes do not lend to the pedestrian environment. In the South front porches are on almost every home and people speak to each other as they sit on their porches or go for walks which build a sense of community. The Codes should be revised to provide incentives and allow for the construction of front porches because of the benefits they can provide to the neighborhoods.

Mandate wider sidewalks

The ordinance should mandate sidewalks and require wider sidewalks. Walkways should be 12 feet in width and the Township should do whatever it takes to improve the safety and quality of the sidewalks; whether it means building retaining walls or using eminent domain. The sidewalks on Montgomery Avenue are too narrow but if they could be widened they could serve as both walking and biking trails and fulfill recreation-oriented safety goals of the Township.

Require the provision of sidewalks with all new development

Residents move to the Ardmore because the area is walkable. The sidewalks on Montgomery Avenue are very dangerous because they are not all continuous. As we have the opportunity to redevelop sites, sidewalks should be required to further improve pedestrian safety.

Regulate the placement of utility boxes

There should be standards for utilities. The enormous boxes that they are placing on the utility poles are ugly and impinge on the sidewalks. A number of such boxes have red and green lights on them and it can be distracting when a box is located close to an intersection.

Require businesses to open their doors to Lancaster Avenue

Newer businesses which do not orientate their operations towards Lancaster Avenue are disappointments. By turning their back to Lancaster Avenue and facing their entrance to the parking lot in the rear the business killed the pedestrian environment. In the future all businesses located along Lancaster Avenue should be required to open their doors to the streets.

Issue: Signage and graffiti

Solutions:

Strengthen the existing sign ordinance

Lower Merion Township is sign crazy. Every yard has a painter sign, a political sign or a real estate sign in the front yard, which affects the beauty of the Township. The Township could adopt or improve their existing sign ordinance to decrease the number of signs permitted.

Inventory existing government signs and remove redundant signage

There are a lot of signs in the Township and a lot of those excessive signs are government signs. The Township should take an inventory of the existing government signs to determine how many signs are necessary.

Issue: Vulnerability of neighborhood character

Solutions:

Provide incentives to encourage developers to build within context of the neighborhood

The vulnerability of neighborhoods where developers are acquiring multiple lots and razing the existing structures to construct luxury condos is a major concern. Developers should be sensitive to the current neighborhoods and should be encouraged to maintain the existing community character through incentives or ordinances.

Utilize architectural standards

Some of the preservation efforts may be a little off base in Ardmore. Just because a building is old does not mean it is good. For example, some older buildings are not desirable architecturally and other newer commercial buildings are redeveloped with building materials just like the rest of the chain businesses. Architectural standards should be put in place and may prove more effective in preserving the character of the neighborhood than historic preservation efforts.

Sharpen the existing tools in place to implement the vision of the community

The Township needs to sharpen the existing tools in place to implement the vision of the community. The zoning code classifications are presently outdated. A site along Lancaster Avenue which is zoned C2 would permit the site to be utilized as a power substation with 70 percent impervious surface and a front setback of 50 feet which is not what the community wants along Lancaster Avenue. The zoning classifications and the uses permitted in each separate classification should be reviewed and modified to help realize the community vision.

Require developments to fit within limitations of the existing infrastructure

The limitations of the existing infrastructure should be used to gauge new development so that the residents are not burdened with providing infrastructure improvements for new developments that build over the capacity of the existing infrastructure. New developments, especially infill, should be required to fit within the current limitations of the infrastructure and the zoning.

Issue: Traffic congestion and cut through traffic**Solutions:****Keep new developments from stressing the existing roadways**

Traffic congestion is a major issue and there is a concern that increased density creating additional businesses and residences will further increase congestion. Civic associations are concerned with developments that create additional traffic and developments that require large vehicles such as buses. The major challenge is to get developers not to overbuild and to keep new developments from overstressing the existing community and the existing infrastructure and roadways.

Address cut through traffic

The Penn Road traffic counts increased 30-40 percent over just a three to four year period based on the traffic analysis prepared for two separate developments and the increased traffic was due largely to cut through traffic.

Work with PennDOT to improve Lancaster Avenue

The biggest problem with Lancaster Avenue is the fact that it is US Route 30 and is not controlled by the municipality but by state laws and guidelines. It is almost impossible to cross the road and any improvements to the roadway are difficult, costly and time consuming. Because Lancaster Avenue has become more congested, the amount of commercial traffic has increased on Montgomery Avenue.

NOVEMBER 20, 2007:

Haverford, Gladwyne, Bryn Mawr and Rosemont-Villanova

Issue: Transit**Solutions:****Work actively with regional and state entities in the early stages of development**

Multiple entities are involved in one little area of the Haverford Train Station. The train station property is controlled by the State, SEPTA, Amtrak and the Township. Township residents should have more input on the development of the train stations than they did 10-20 years ago. The Township should make SEPTA and Amtrak pay more attention to the voice of the community.

Improve transit facilities

As gas prices continue to rise, we would all be well advised to bring transit up to speed as it will become more and more important. Residents need to pressure the local officials to encourage the State and the Federal Government to pay attention to the community.

Issue: Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety**Solutions:****Improve pedestrian and bicycle linkages**

Some residents put their bicycles in the car and drive somewhere else to bike because there are no safe routes to take to get to a trail.

Implement the Township Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan

A committee has been formed to begin implementing the Plan. The first step of the implementation process will involve installing signs in the areas that are predisposed to bicycle traffic, such as roadways with existing wide shoulders. The creation of bicycle trails has become a priority this past year because the Township has secured Open Space Funding through the County that enables the implementation of the Plan.

Install sidewalks where none exist

The Township should work to provide sidewalks in developments that were built without sidewalks. The installation of a sidewalk may require the removal of trees.

Issue: Hodge Podge Commercial Areas**Solutions:****Improve the vitality of the commercial areas with an appropriate mix of uses**

The commercial areas cause the most consternation for the Haverford Civic Association as most of the density is proposed along the railroad. The first floor of buildings in this vicinity should be used strictly for businesses and the second stories as residences. There is an opportunity to provide a better mix of uses in the buildings that already exist as well as in new developments.

Create a neighborhood plan for Haverford

A part of the residents' concern in Haverford is that they do not have the benefit of a neighborhood plan, like the plans that have been created for Ardmore and Bryn Mawr. Residents do not want to see Haverford fall behind and want to be sure that Haverford is taken into account.

Require car dealerships to provide buffering and quality development

Some recent redevelopments of car dealerships left much to be desired. Residents stated concern with how other potential expansions of dealerships will affect the commercial streetscape.

Build relationships with adjacent municipalities

One of the challenges with Haverford is that a portion of the commercial area along Lancaster Avenue is located within Haverford Township and those properties have a different set of regulations than those within Lower Merion. It is

important to interact with nearby municipalities because the development of a single property could greatly impact the village as a whole.

Issue: Teardown/Rebuilds

Solution:

Require a mixture of housing types consistent with the existing neighborhoods

Ranchers are being replaced with 6,000 to 8,000 square foot homes which may lead to a loss of diversity within the Township. The Code should require a variety of housing as the new construction seems homogeneous. The Township should investigate the possibility of creating a provision requiring a maximum size for new housing and a reduction in the minimum lot sizes to ensure that new housing is consistent with the existing community character while at the same time providing for a more financially attainable housing stock.

Issue: Lack of availability of land development plans prior to approval

Solution:

Require all applicants to submit land development plans in electronic format at the time of formal submission

The Township's hours do not cater to working professionals to allow for an opportunity to review plans prior to a public hearing. The Township should require all applicants to submit their plans in electronic format at the time of formal submission so that the plans can be posted on the web more easily and efficiently and give residents a better opportunity to review the plans prior to the hearing.

DECEMBER 17, 2007 MEETING:

Merion, Merion Park, Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd, Penn Valley, Belmont Hills and Narberth Civic Associations

Issue: Establishment of community goals and implementation of Comprehensive Plan

Solutions:

Prioritize issues and implement elements based on community's vision

Certain issues and elements will become priorities based on the community's vision. For example, if the public decides that they want sidewalks, then sidewalks should be required to be constructed in a place that they do not exist as a matter of policy.

Address major changes that occur during the development of the comprehensive plan

The Comprehensive Plan will be in the process of being developed until 2010; however, there are going to be some major changes in the Township during that period of time. The Comprehensive Plan should dovetail these large Township projects.

Issue: Functionality of commercial districts

Solutions:

Develop a mixed-use district along City Avenue

The existing hodge-podge character of the City Avenue Special Services District should be changed through the development of a mixed use ordinance.

Require new development to fit within context of existing infrastructure

It is important that regulations allow for new construction of an appropriate size and scale and should not further strain the existing infrastructure to the point of overwhelming the nearby neighborhoods, particularly regarding traffic.

Improve tax base by allowing appropriate redevelopment of underutilized commercial areas

Residents have a reasonable tax burden to support the police and fire services as well as the parks and recreational opportunities available in the Township. A strong tax base should be maintained by increasing commercial development along City Avenue and Rock Hill Road.

Issue: Density of new and existing zoning overlays and districts

Solutions:

Review the Zoning Code to ensure that the Code is compatible with the existing neighborhood

The R-6A district allows the use of both residential and commercial development. Over the past couple of years there had been a series of land development applications that involved the demolition of multiple single-family residential properties and the construction of multiple-story condos in their place. The property on Latches Lane was improperly zoned and never should have been R-6A. If the property were not improperly zoned then the single family houses would remain on the site and there would be no discussion of the condos today. The Township needs to review the zoning of each and every property in the Township to ensure that such a mistake is not repeated.

Encourage mixed-use development to ensure that new construction does not exacerbate roadway congestion

Taller buildings along City Avenue would be okay, but the major concern is how people get to and from their destinations. If the larger buildings equate to additional cars on the roads and increased congestion, then it detracts from the quality of life for Lower Merion Township residents. Mixed-use developments in these areas would be appropriate because people then have the opportunity to work and live in the same area. The Township should encourage more quality, mixed use developments in these areas.

Encourage density where it is appropriate

All of the Township's old Comprehensive Plans provide maps that show low, medium and high density areas. Density is not new to Lower Merion so instead of denying increased density, Lower Merion should be looking to and plan for areas where density is most appropriate, such as the area of redevelopment in Ardmore.

Evaluate current density and determine how much it may be increased

The Township has to use Census data to get a grip on density. There are various ways to measure density; planners usually use households per acre. The current density of the Township should be used as a baseline and should be compared with places with more and less density. The question is how much you want to increase density. The Township may want to consider preparing density maps.

Issue: Maintain the attractive community character that contributes to the quality of life

Solutions:

Preserve historic structures as well as the community character

The well maintained, attractive neighborhoods and the mix of housing contribute to the quality of life. To ensure the quality of life is maintained or enhanced in the future, preservation of historic structures as well as the community character should be encouraged, street trees should be maintained and the front lawns should be maximized to enhance the beauty of the residential neighborhoods. Large, circular driveways in front of residences should be prohibited so as to improve stormwater runoff conditions and to enhance the beauty of the front of residential homes.

Provide housing and retail options for the elderly to preserve the diverse socio-economic character of the community

The socio-economic, religious, race and age diversity of residents of the Township as well as the diversity in the type

of housing stock available draw people to the community. New businesses and residents should be welcomed into the Township and signage should be provided to make it easier to navigate through the Township. The Township has an aging population and additional housing choices, health services and recreational opportunities should be planned for the seniors. Lower Merion retail areas should serve as town centers and entertainment, restaurants and retail should be provided in these areas. Multi-family units should be provided near the town centers to provide a mix of housing types needed to maintain a diverse community.

Implement a Traditional Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance

On the issue of zoning and neighborhoods, a Traditional Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance is needed. Most of the current ordinance is written in terms of new development and does not have substance in terms of the preservation of residential neighborhoods. All around the country there are places that are striving to be like Lower Merion and having an ordinance that properly addressed the existing built environment would allow the Township to deal with new developments more effectively in terms of size, scale, conformity and character.

Take the configuration and design of redevelopment into consideration

Density isn't the only issue that contributes to the overall quality of life. In reviewing the proposals for the redevelopment of Ardmore, it is important to take the configuration and design of the development into consideration. The relationship between vehicles and pedestrians should be adequately addressed and appropriate access for both should be provided.

Plan for the future use of private institutions

In the near future the Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd will be looking at numerous institutions leaving the neighborhood including: Episcopal, Akiba and The Barnes. The Comprehensive Plan should look at institutions and plan for what will happen if the institutions leave and identify the properties that could be changed or developed over time.

Issue: Cut through traffic

Solutions:

Improve traffic light signalization and support SEPTA and Amtrak

The proximity to the City, Delaware County and other nearby suburbs attracts residents to move to and stay in Lower Merion; however, such proximity also increases the number of vehicular trips through the Township. The

Township should work to improve the efficiency of the roadways by providing better signalization. The Township should also support SEPTA and Amtrak to maintain and expand the regional rail lines.

Research programs and initiatives underway to reduce automobile use

The Township should research programs and initiatives that are underway throughout the country and determine whether or not they are appropriate for the Township. Connecticut has a ride credit program available to encourage people to provide rides for seniors, because there are so few volunteers.

Enforce the speed limits

Traffic control is ineffective without enforcement of speed limits. Motorists drive so quickly down Bryn Mawr Avenue that it is difficult to turn onto the roadway. People are flying through the residential neighborhoods and no one seems to be enforcing the speed limits.

Work with PennDOT to improve traffic circulation and pedestrian safety on major roadways

There is an inherent conflict between traffic movement and pedestrian safety. The Township has expressed that it is difficult to improve Lancaster Avenue and other state roadways because they fall under PennDOT jurisdiction and there is a certain amount of finger pointing between the two entities. The Township and PennDOT have to work together to find a solution on how to deal with traffic and improve pedestrian safety.

Issue: Need for fields and open space

Solutions:

Create ball fields along the river

With all of the open space that is proposed along the river, it would be nice to see ball fields in that area. Many other communities across the country have successfully placed ball fields and parks along rivers.



STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Throughout the fall of 2007 over 30 stakeholder interviews were held. Stakeholders are broadly defined as specific people or groups who have a stake, or an interest, in the outcome of the project. A series of questions were prepared for the three general categories of stakeholders: residents, institutions, and business owners in Lower Merion.

The following list provides excerpts from the stakeholder interviews highlighting the key recommendations of each category of stakeholders.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS WITH BUSINESS OWNERS

Issue: Traffic circulation

Solutions:

Utilize traffic calming measures along Lancaster Avenue

Lancaster Avenue is a landing strip. It is so wide that it encourages fast traffic and there is nothing to slow motorists down through Wynnewood or other commercial centers along the roadway.

Link sidewalks throughout the Township

By providing a continuous pedestrian path neighborhoods throughout the Township can be reconnected thereby improving the health and safety of residents and enhancing retail opportunities for businesses.

Improve pedestrian safety

The safety of pedestrians should be further improved through uniform signage, reduced speeds and increased enforcement of traffic violations. The pedestrian connections between the retail areas and the adjacent neighborhoods are critical to the success of the commercial areas; particularly Ardmore, and Bryn Mawr.

Issue: Setting Lower Merion apart from other commercial areas

Solutions:

Create a business incubator

The Township should foster the growth of small independent businesses through the creation of a business incubator. In Wynnewood there are a growing number of small home based businesses and professional offices, which are difficult to track because of the red tape involved in operating a home business that could benefit greatly from such an incubator.

Discourage big box developments

Big box retailers do not act as a part of the community and lead to a loss of local retailers that have defined the character of the community for decades.

Maintain “Mom and Pop Shops”

The Main Line needs to maintain the Mom and Pop Shops that make the area unique and special. It is easier for landlords to rent to chain stores because it is a reliable rent and the chains are typically able to offer rents at a price that smaller stores would struggle to meet. The Main Line should recruit smaller, local chains to serve as anchor stores to successfully serve and complement the mom and pop shops. The Township should establish additional grant programs to support existing small business owners and recruit a better mix to the area.

Create new design standards

Architectural standards should be applied to new businesses to improve the aesthetics of the commercial corridors and to preserve and maintain the village-feel that makes Lower Merion a unique community in which to conduct business. The developers should not be determining the scale of the neighborhood; the scale of the neighborhood should be determining which developers can do business here.

Create a Design Review Board

Radnor has a Design Review Board (DRB) that has been able to get merchants to do the right thing. Signage is one of the biggest items that have to be reviewed and approved. The DRB has to coach a lot of business owners who are pretty willing to work with the DRB and the outcome is a much improved streetscape.

Capitalize on the history of commercial centers

The Township should capitalize on its history. History buffs love to shop, so the commercial centers should take advantage of their unique background. Historical markers should be provided on the façades of buildings. Villages such as Ardmore and Bryn Mawr should coordinate programs with colleges and provide bus trips and tours to really create an active shopping destination.

Provide shuttle service

A shuttle servicing the commercial centers would alleviate parking problems, reduce short trips through the Township and promote the local businesses. A valet could be provided to enhance the Main Line shopping experience and embrace the elegance of a bygone era.

Create incentives for gathering places

Ardmore and Bryn Mawr had movie theaters in the downtown areas that created a sense of place and a sense

of community. The Township should investigate the possibility of giving such businesses tax breaks or other types of incentives for locating in the community.

Encourage the development of a facility that can function as a town center

The Township needs a gathering place such as a boutique hotel or conference center where events can be held and the community can get together. A boutique hotel could serve as the impetus for increased commercial activity. A real need exists for a hotel in the community especially considering the number of colleges and universities in the Township and the surrounding area.

Issue: Vacant storefronts and upper stories

Solutions:

Enforce property maintenance

Penalties should be utilized to prevent property owners from allowing their storefronts to fall into disrepair and to discourage vacancies.

Provide incentives for providing 2nd story residences above retail

The Township should provide incentives for business owners to utilize the second stories of existing commercial buildings along Lancaster Avenue for residential purposes. The apartment housing stock should be maintained and preserved to meet the needs of the workforce and to create a critical mass along the commercial corridors. It is more cost prohibitive to renovate upper stories of older buildings as residences than office or storage space so incentives must be in place to insure that residential units are provided in the commercial areas.

Issue: Perception of a negative business environment

Solutions:

Foster strong relationships with business associations

Radnor Township involves the business associations in all of the big decisions from the start and as a result there is a more positive business environment. Lower Merion should strengthen their relationship with the businesses by creating an ongoing dialogue and involving the business associations in decisions that will impact the commercial areas.

Create a clear and standardized permitting process

Small business owners feel as though the Township applies and enforces its Zoning Code inconsistently giving larger retailers the upper hand when it comes to conducting business in the Township. Creating a standardized permitting process levels the playing field for small business owners.

Multi-municipal planning

The Township should partner with adjacent municipalities to create consistent codes to apply to Main Line commercial centers to make it easier to conduct business.

Issue: Inconsistent parking standards

Solution:

Create consistent parking standards

The Township should apply a consistent set of parking standards. The parking needs of the commercial areas must be taken into account because it has a tremendous impact on the success of the district. The development of a parking garage for Ardmore and Bryn Mawr should be considered as it would be a real shot in the arm for the commercial districts.

Issue: Frustrations with the Board of Historical Architectural Review

Solutions:

Create clear guidelines

The HARB process should be laid out more clearly so that businesses know what they're getting into. The HARB should have clear guidelines and requirements that can be clearly communicated to applicants to avoid any misunderstandings.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS WITH INSTITUTIONS

Issue: Excessive parking requirements

Solutions:

Parking agreements

The majority of the institutions interviewed indicated that they have either formal or informal parking agreements with other institutions or nearby businesses to share parking at alternate times thereby alleviating the need for additional parking to be created. The Township should recognize and encourage shared parking in the Code.

Create an Institutional Overlay District

An Institutional Overlay District providing relaxed parking requirements and/or providing for shared parking arrangements would help reduce the cost of providing so much parking and allow for less impervious surface.

Provide a long-term Township-wide parking plan

The Township should recognize its own responsibility to develop a parking plan to ensure the sustainability of institutions and businesses, particularly in Bryn Mawr.

Issue: Underutilized transit facilities**Solution:****Improve the train stations to increase ridership**

Many schools are in close proximity to train stations and while some staff members and students utilize the SEPTA R-5 line, ridership would likely increase if the services and facilities were improved upon.

Issue: Restrictive Code requirements**Solutions:****Review of Township Codes**

Lower Merion is a beautiful place to be located. There is a lot of charm to the area, but the current zoning regulations are forcing a lot of the institutions out. The institutions are being held hostage by the nonconforming conditions of the site. The impervious cover, water runoff and nonconforming structure regulations should be reviewed as they can be overly restrictive on pre-existing institutions. An institutional zone should be developed to help institutions thrive in the Township.

Create a tree bank

A tree bank should be created so that when all required supplemental plantings can't be provided on-site the remaining trees could be utilized to landscape an affordable housing project or a park for the community to use.

Issue: Lengthy, costly land development process**Solutions:****Review of Land Development Process**

The timing of the land development process can be tough on institutions. The length of time it takes to get through the process increases the costs associated with any construction process and also requires additional professional fees which can be burdensome on the institutions. The process is necessary, but an expedited process would help institutions to remain and thrive in the Township.

Expedite development process

A waiver or conditional use from the Board of Commissioners would expedite the process while still providing the governing body the opportunity to review the application.

Create a 10-Steps form to lay out the process

The Township should create a 10 Steps form for any person to use when preparing a land development application. It would allow the applicant to prepare a more realistic timeframe and reduce the amount of unexpected delays and costs.

Issue: Piecemeal development and reactionary zoning**Solutions:****Long range planning**

Long range, township-wide planning efforts should be inclusionary of all neighborhoods throughout the Township. Redevelopment has occurred on either side of City Avenue. A plan should be developed to address the changing environment along City Avenue to avoid piecemeal development and short-term, reactionary solutions. Merion Station is in a position to undergo dramatic changes within the next five years as Akiba, The Barnes and Episcopal Academy have all recently decided to relocate outside of the Township. St. Charles Borromeo is also considering their possibilities. St. Joe's is buying a lot of properties and in 10-20 years Merion Station could become more like a college campus than a quiet residential neighborhood.

Proactive review of the codes

The Township should proactively review the codes in place and work more closely with institutions to retain those that contribute to the quality of life in the township and the neighborhood.

Issue: Contentious relationship between institutions and residents**Solutions:****Mediation between institutions and residential neighbors**

A mediation process should be in place where institutions and their residential neighbors can find common ground and move forward with the best plan possible as opposed to going through a litigious process. Early communication between the institution and its neighbors is a necessary part of the development process.

Creation of committees

Baldwin has formed a neighborhood committee that includes the ward commissioner to open a dialogue between the school and residents early in the planning process. The success of the neighborhood committee should be monitored to determine whether it may serve as a model for other institutions Township-wide.

Issue: Poor bicycle/pedestrian connections to neighborhoods**Solutions:****Improve bike and pedestrian connections**

Being located within walking distance of residential neighborhoods is very important to many local institutions; however, there are many locations where pedestrian

connections do not exist thereby forcing more cars on the roadways. There are stretches along Montgomery Avenue that are scary to walk on, especially the strip between the high school and Suburban Square.

Create bike trails

Bike trails should be provided to network to other open spaces and institutions.

Preserve and formalize existing trails

The Bridlewild Trail is a tremendous amenity to the community and should be documented and preserved for future generations. There should be a great sensitivity toward property owners who are located along the trail.

Issue: Lack of playing fields

Solutions:

Actively preserve open spaces for the use of parks and athletic fields

Athletic fields are in short supply and high demand. Many of the schools already share their athletic fields and additional fields are needed in the Township.

Utilize turf fields

The use of turf fields has allowed various institutions to maximize the use of their playing fields and should be comprehensively looked into as one possible solution to addressing the need for fields.

Acquire additional open spaces

The Township should look to acquire additional open space as it comes available to further preserve the existing character of the community.

Partner with local institutions

The Township and institutions should partner together to acquire field space to ensure the long term success of schools in the Township, otherwise institutions will have to look to demolish existing structures to provide the necessary field space.

Issue: Retail areas do not cater to existing collegiate population

Solution:

Provide a better retail mix to accommodate the colleges

The Township is rich in colleges and universities which could provide a tremendous benefit to the existing commercial areas, but the majority of students go to Philadelphia for dining and entertainment and to King of Prussia to shop. A better retail mix is needed to attract the student population. Bryn Mawr is a college town without any of the things that attract students.

Issue: Lack of affordable housing is negatively impacting the socio-economic mix

Solutions:

Provide for affordable housing

Additional housing should be provided in the Township to meet the needs of young college graduates and young professionals returning to the community. Various types of housing should be available to entice young families to remain in the community instead of moving out to more affordable areas. Opportunities must be provided to ensure the continued diversity of the community.

Create an affordable housing committee

A committee should be formed to spearhead affordable housing efforts. There should be provisions established to ensure the long term sustainability of not just existing, but any new affordable or elderly housing built.

Issue: Preservation of old buildings is costly and can be burdensome

Solutions:

Improve the historic preservation incentives

Renovating old buildings can be extremely costly and the best way to encourage the preservation of aging structures is to offset the costs through the provision of incentives.

Expedite the approval process

The existing Historic Preservation Ordinance can be very difficult to work with and should be reviewed for ways to expedite the approval process and enhance the incentives provided. A clear list of the incentives should be readily available.

Promote the history of the Township

There are numerous beautiful and historic institutional structures located throughout the Township. Some sort of trolley ride tour should be provided so that the institutions can open their doors to the residents of the community and share the rich history with a larger segment of the population.

Issue: Lack of partnership between the Township and local institutions

Solution:

Partner with local institutions

Institutions serve a vital role in the community and the Township should actively partner with the institutions to maximize the services provided and the quality of life for local residents. Numerous facilities are available at institutions throughout the Township and the Township and the local institutions should work more closely together to share the existing resources and to make the resources more accessible to the public.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS WITH RESIDENTS

Train stations should be improved

The train stations need to be improved and the frequency of the trips increased to make riding the train a more viable option for residents of the Township. New residential facilities should be built near the train stations and commercial opportunities will follow.

Historic preservation efforts should be enhanced

The history of the Township is unique and makes Lower Merion a desirable place to live. The number of teardown-rebuilds should be closely monitored due to the impact such developments have on existing neighborhoods.

Continue to uphold ordinance provisions

The Zoning Code preserves our quality of life. The code is appropriately strict because it preserves the character of the community.

Affordable housing

Diversity should be protected and promoted. Affordable housing needs to be provided. There are presently unused second stories in Ardmore that should be converted into apartments which will be good for the shops and for the community. The Township should create a policy to buy existing affordable housing units as they become available. The older housing stock should be rehabilitated.

