

The Planning Commission Workshop on the Issues Report convened at approximately 6:40 p.m. on Monday, November 22, 2010. Present were Commission members Alan Ritterband, Brian O’Leary, Tony Vale, Charlie Howland, and Laura Shell. Township staff present included Bob Duncan, Director of Building and Planning, Chris Leswing, Assistant Director of Building and Planning, Colleen Hall, Planner and GIS Technician, and Carissa Koll-Hazelton, Planning Technician.

**Planning Commission Public Workshop**

Mr. Ritterband opened the meeting and thanked members of the public for coming. Mr. Ritterband asked Mr. Leswing to provide an overview of the evening.

Mr. Leswing stated that at each of the workshops the initial recommendations from each of the elements are discussed. When the workshops were started an explanation of the structural part of the plan was provided. Mr. Leswing stated that the question was raised regarding whether these initial recommendations should be action items or something more.

Mr. Leswing stated that at the last meeting there was a lot of talk about the vision for the community. Mr. Leswing stated that everything hangs from the vision. Mr. Leswing stated that the vision statement from the 1937 Comprehensive Plan, which is provided in the first two pages of the Issues Report, largely holds true and defines the vision that has guided the Township’s decisions. Mr. Leswing stated that the vision basically says that Lower Merion Township is a good place to live. Mr. Leswing stated that while the intention is not to recreate the wheel that he wanted to bring the vision forward for discussion. Mr. Leswing asked if the Planning Commission would like to update the vision statement or if they would rather come up with a whole new one. Mr. Leswing stated that the existing vision statement boils down to the following statement “Lower Merion Township has long been recognized as one of the most attractive suburban residential sections of the country. With extraordinary accessibility to a great city, it combines the charms of beautiful open country, fine houses, good roads quiet woods and valleys. Its services, public and private, are well and efficiently managed. It is a good place to live in.” Mr. Leswing stated that he felt that he feels that it is a strong vision statement.

Mr. Leswing stated that he has scripted out the key words that will help to add context to the statement. Mr. Leswing stated that the work “Most” means that Lower Merion Township has a pride of place, high standards and it is unique and distinctive. Mr. Leswing stated that Lower Merion Township is “Attractive” and there are a lot of Codes trying to incorporate the design standards and not just the use. Mr. Leswing stated that the form of new construction is very important. Mr. Leswing stated that the community is “Suburban” which leads one to ask the question “How much development will occur?” Mr. Leswing stated that if the community says that it is suburban it is saying that it is not urban. Mr. Leswing stated that Lower Merion Township is leafy and green. If development doesn’t occur in the right way it doesn’t look like it’s nestled into the landscape. Mr. Leswing stated that another thing about suburban communities is that they are different from the city, yet connected. Mr. Leswing stated that residents understand that they have to travel to get to work. Mr. Leswing stated that the community is “Residential” and many residents want to keep it that way. Other land uses should complement the residential uses. Institutions also have a lot of the leafy greenness, but when an institution becomes overly commercialized it conflicts with the residential areas. Mr. Leswing stated that commercial uses

should relate back to and support the residential community. Mr. Leswing stated that they are not trying to attract people from somewhere else. Mr. Leswing stated that he would like to open the discussion up to the Planning Commission and the members of the public for their thoughts on the vision statement.

Teri Simon, a resident of Wynnewood, stated that Mr. Leswing has used the phrase that “Lower Merion Township is a First Class Township” and asked what he means by that statement.

Mr. Leswing stated that to him the term “First Class Township” provides him with pride in how he works. Mr. Leswing stated that to him it means that things work well and function well, and that the Township has high standards and is a well designed community.

Ms. Simon stated that the term “First Class Township” is actually a definition in the statute that states that Lower Merion Township is a Township of the First Class. Alternatively Lower Merion School District is a second class. Ms. Simon stated that we must be careful in using the term First Class. Ms. Simon stated that it is surprising that the community vision piece wasn’t the first order of business. These meetings are a series of events that will lead to a Comprehensive Plan in the next few years. Meanwhile the greatest rezoning in 50 years is occurring along City Avenue. Ms. Simon stated that it seems that all of these projects are on parallel tracks. Ms. Simon asked if there will be an intersection between these big projects and the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Shell stated that the vision statement is being provided at this time at the request of the Planning Commission. Ms. Shell explained that the Planning Commission asked for a list of the goals and the policies, which is why the vision statement is being discussed now.

Mr. Duncan stated that in regards to the City Avenue rezoning question the Board of Commissioners has stated that they were going to continue to plan for changes that were deemed appropriate while the Comprehensive Plan is being prepared. Mr. Duncan stated that if the Board felt that the proposed City Avenue District didn’t meet with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan then it may not be approved.

Commissioner Gordon asked those present what the community’s vision is. Commissioner Gordon requested that everyone present come sit up at the table to join in the conversation.

Mr. Vale stated that he shares and agrees with much of what Mr. Leswing said. Mr. Vale stated that it may be important to ask what is different today from 1937. Mr. Vale stated that there about 20, 000 more people living here and there is a lot less open space and more traffic. Mr. Vale stated that while most of the institutions that are in the Township today were probably there in 1937 they are probably more important than they were in 1937. Mr. Vale stated that the type of housing has also changed and there are probably a lot more condominiums today. There are also elderly housing developments today that probably did not exist in 1937.

Mr. Vale stated that there may also be more commercial activity now although he’s not sure how the use has changed in the different villages. Certainly there is more commercial activity on City Avenue now than there was in 1937. Mr. Vale stated that while the vision does reflect where we want the community to be in part it does need to be updated. Mr. Vale stated that the vision statement should reflect the high quality institutions that the community has. Mr. Vale stated that a couple of years ago the community decided that they wanted to keep Bryn Mawr Hospital in Lower Merion and the zoning was revised to enable them to stay. Mr. Vale stated that the institutions are enormously important to the Township and

warrant a mention in the vision statement. Mr. Vale stated that the township also has transit oriented development and housing. Some of it is historic, and looking forward this type of development is important to maintain and encourage. Mr. Vale stated that in regards to the commercial uses, his concept is that commercial activity is important but perhaps it should stay limited.

Ms. Shell stated that the commercial activity should be community serving.

Mr. Vale stated that those were a few thoughts that he had that he'd like to throw out.

Allison Graham, a resident of Ardmore stated that the population in Lower Merion Township has been almost stable for 40 years with between 58,000 and 60,000 people, but the makeup is different. Ms. Graham stated that the families are smaller, and the condos are filling in the commercial areas. Ms. Graham stated that in recent years the Township has been using the commercial areas for residential development. Sibley Avenue is an example of recent condominium developments constructed in a commercial area along the tracks by Suburban Square. Ms. Graham stated that it is important to remember that the tax money from the commercial areas help to offset the residents' taxes. Ms. Graham stated concern that a lot of the recently approved condos and apartments have been put into the commercial areas, including Rock Hill Road.

Hugh Gordon, a resident of Ardmore, stated that the recent housing developments have been a reflection of the market. The past couple of years there has been a market for residential, but not much of a market for commercial developments. That was in spite of the fact that so much has already been put into the commercial areas. The resident stated that he was diametrically opposed to Ms. Graham's statement. The resident explained that in order for the commercial areas to survive residential development will have to occur otherwise the commercial spaces will just sit vacant.

Ms. Shell stated that a mix of uses is needed.

Ms. Simon asked if others present think that Sibley Avenue is a benefit. Ms. Simon stated that this development follows the tradition that Lower Merion Township is a garden suburb built around transit.

Ms. Graham stated that people who live in that development love being able to walk to the train.

Barry Polis, a resident of Bala Cynwyd, stated that when planning for the future of the Township the tax issue and commercial development shouldn't come into the vision. There are issues beyond taxes. Mr. Polis stated that the Township could bring in commercial uses everywhere that it can, but there would still be a shortage of funds, because the expenditure of the revenue is the problem. Mr. Polis stated that changing the character of the Township by expanding the commercial areas for the purpose of lowering taxes will compromise neighborhoods.

Kate Galer, a resident of Ardmore, stated that the excerpts from page two of the Issues Report address some of the items Mr. Vale talked about. Ms. Galer stated that she would like to see the focus on neighborhoods and keeping them intact. Ms. Galer stated that there should be more of an overarching vision.

Commissioner Gordon stated that he is attending the meeting as a commissioner and as a citizen. Commissioner Gordon stated that he thinks that the thing that people love most about the Township is

their neighborhoods. Commissioner Gordon stated that in Merion Station he has seen that home by home people have bought worn out houses and they have meticulously restored the homes built in 1880s. Commissioner Gordon stated that as these neighborhoods age people fall more deeply in love with what they have. Commissioner Gordon stated that in terms of planning, people want to preserve the character of their neighborhood; they love how the neighborhood has changed over time.

Mr. Gordon stated that type of goal is captured in this document.

Mr. Leswing stated that he is glad that the resident picked that up. Mr. Leswing stated that sustainability and the community vision work well together. However, in some ways residential suburbs aren't sustainable. A challenge of this plan is finding that balance.

Chad Graham, a resident of Ardmore, stated that he would like to return to Mr. Gordon's point. Mr. Graham stated that the Township's population is relatively stable, yet the residents have been drawn to the big suburban malls and now something like 30% of all shopping occurs on the internet. Mr. Graham stated that the Township has a lot of empty stores, which should be taken into account. Mr. Graham stated that it is possible that the Township doesn't need more retail space.

Mr. Ritterband asked why the Township's commercial areas don't look more like Manayunk or Chestnut Hill. Mr. Ritterband stated that there is a need to update the existing stores.

Ms. Simon stated that there were already many of these types of discussions when the use of eminent domain in Ardmore was considered and when the MUST and ROHO overlay zoning districts were created. Ms. Simon stated that the Township is lucky to have such lovely housing stock. Ms. Simon stated that Lower Merion is really a bedroom community for Philadelphia and the western suburbs and the community doesn't have transit to support transit out to the suburbs. Ms. Simon asked how the Township can continue to grow and yet at the same time keep the things that we love about Lower Merion Township. Ms. Simon stated that she feels that the current growth is eating around the edges of what makes Lower Merion Township special. Ms. Simon stated that Lower Merion Township isn't beautiful because of anything anyone in this room has done. The Township was already well laid out. Ms. Simon stated that the Township should be in preservation mode. Ms. Simon stated that the current activity that is occurring in an incomprehensive way may gobble up those parts of Lower Merion Township that we love.

Mr. Leswing stated that there is a communal intelligence that guides what the Township is doing. Mr. Leswing stated that there is a plan in place for revitalizing the commercial areas.

Ms. Simon asked if Mr. Leswing has seen a development in the Township that matches exactly what he just said.

Mr. Leswing stated that the newly created zoning districts including MUST, ROHO and the Bryn Mawr Village District encourage redevelopment of the commercial areas with architectural design standards and a mix of uses with commercial on the first floor and residential uses above. Mr. Leswing stated that the ordinances are designed for the free market to change these areas into vibrant, attractive commercial centers.

Ms. Simon asked if the fact that nothing has been done to develop to the MUST standards is reflection of the down market.

Mr. Duncan stated that he didn't think there would be a lot of development in the MUST district. Mr. Duncan explained that there are many small parcels under separate ownership which makes large scale redevelopment unlikely. Mr. Duncan stated that due to the issue of separate ownership combined with the current market conditions it was not expected that a lot would've been done.

Ms. Simon asked Mr. Duncan if he thought that something could be done to Ardmore West if it was included in the area designated as "Blight" (in the Redevelopment Area).

Mr. Duncan stated that redevelopment of that site is not likely to happen unless the property owner bought out the leases it currently has in place.

Mr. Gordon stated that Ardmore West is not located in the MUST district.

Mr. Duncan stated that it is in the outer ring.

Commissioner Gordon stated that he would like to discuss Cambridge Square which is a good example of a smaller, transit oriented, residential development. Commissioner Gordon stated that it may be beneficial to look at converting commercial districts into residential areas and encourage the conversion of commercial sites to residential uses. Commissioner Gordon stated that Wayne is a model for all of the community's commercial development along Lancaster Avenue. The Township doesn't have all the attributes that Wayne has but in many ways that is a model. Commissioner Gordon stated that he would like to see the Merion commercial district to look like Chestnut Hill and for Wynnewood to look more like Wayne. Commissioner Gordon stated that it is possible that the Township may not need any more commercial development.

Mr. Leswing stated that in Ardmore there was no great consensus on the community vision; everyone had a different vision. Mr. Leswing stated that it would be possible to draft codes that would create a "Narberth". Mr. Leswing stated that it sounds like residents are interested in form based zoning as opposed to codes that would encourage additional development. Mr. Leswing stated that the codes going forward will likely be oriented to the form.

Ms. Simon asked if the Township could use Form Based Zoning if they're not doing a Traditional Neighborhood Development.

Mr. Leswing explained that under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code the Traditional Neighborhood Development would allow the Township to essentially create Form Based Zoning. Mr. Leswing stated that this type of provision would ensure that new development would be consistent with the existing neighborhood.

Mr. Duncan stated that Traditional Neighborhood Development is the means by which Form Based Zoning provisions would be created.

Mr. Polis stated that the car dealerships are one of the biggest problems. Mr. Polis asked if the car dealerships put anything back on the street. Mr. Polis asked if there is a requirement that they provide some sort of community benefit.

Mr. Leswing stated that car dealerships didn't use to be parking lots. The cars were showcased in large windows on the main floor of the building.

Mr. Polis stated that the BMW dealership in Lower Merion Township is the highest grossing dealership on East Coast, yet there is nothing in the existing Code to require them to put something back into the community. Mr. Polis stated that the street looks like strip mining.

Ms. Simon stated that Mr. Leswing had a vision years ago that the auto dealerships be required to be located in a building.

Mr. Duncan stated that many car dealerships in the Township have opted not to go through land development process to avoid having to come into conformance with the newer regulations.

Ms. Simon asked if the unsightly aspects of car dealerships could be modified through targeted changes to the Zoning Code.

Ms. Shell stated that a vision statement isn't about how things are now; it is about how we want things to be. Ms. Shell that a vision statement would not state that Lower Merion Township is perfection, rather it would state that these are the things that are important and through each of the elements we can get a handle on the policies directed to areas that are not functioning properly. Ms. Shell stated that she agrees with Mr. Vale. The statement from the 1937 Comprehensive Plan is not current with the Township as it exists today. Ms. Shell agreed that the vision statement could be updated and it should include something about the quality of the institutions.

Mr. Ritterband stated that the words like "quiet woods and valleys" and "Open country" aren't as reflective of the Township today and agreed that the vision statement needs to be updated.

Mr. Howland stated that the vision statement does reflect the residential side of the Township but is silent to the commercial areas. Mr. Howland stated that it might make sense to separate those aspects. Mr. Howland stated that on the residential side we want to keep it feeling the same as a practical matter. Mr. Howland stated that developers have recently been able to cannibalize different residential neighborhoods because there is a tendency on residential developments to give property owners a wide swath of rights. Mr. Howland stated that he would not be in favor of codes that locked into place how the house sits on the property, but he would be in favor of more restrictions to protect the form of the overall neighborhood. Mr. Howland stated that on the commercial side there seems to be a slide to a bad place. Mr. Howland stated that the vision statement could capture two different aspects; one that fits the residential areas and one that is different for the commercial side.

Mr. Leswing stated that in many ways Lower Merion Township doesn't have a "there there".

Mr. Watson stated that there are places that provide community gathering areas in the different neighborhoods.

Mr. Leswing stated that the commercial areas in many ways serve as the community gathering area where neighbors bump into each other and reinforce the idea that we're all in this together.

Ms. Graham stated that the "First Friday" events provide an opportunity for residents to get out to the commercial areas and bump into neighbors.

Mr. Gordon stated that Ardmore is a village.

Commissioner Manos stated that there is a tradeoff in Lower Merion Township for the car. Commissioner Manos stated that it seems as if the general population has decided that they want to use the car to get to the commercial areas. Commissioner Manos asked those present if they want to continue in the direction of the automobile or if they want to change that. Commissioner Manos asked if this Township can fit into a one size fits all. Commissioner Manos asked if there should be one comprehensive vision statement or if it should be different for the neighborhoods, which are each unique. Commissioner Manos asked what can be done to support the neighborhood, yet accommodate necessary changes that have to take place.

Mr. Leswing stated that the present de facto comprehensive strategy the Township has promotes a mix of uses with retail on the first floor and residential uses above. Mr. Leswing stated that there are currently different standards for each neighborhood and the execution in each area is different. Mr. Leswing stated that the Comprehensive Plan will tie together all of the existing plans and planning initiatives.

Mr. Duncan stated that the Traditional Neighborhood Development that Ms. Simon brought up earlier would allow for different types of development in different neighborhoods.

Karla Moras, a resident of Bala Cynwyd, stated that all across Lower Merion Township residents like the character of their neighborhood. Ms. Moras stated that the preservation aspect is really important and that she would not want to see certain parts of the Township carved out for the purpose of creating additional commercial areas. Ms. Moras stated that such efforts could undermine the desirability of places in the Township. Ms. Moras stated that she agrees with the statement that the Township is eating around the edges of certain areas and once one area falls, other neighborhoods will become susceptible.

Mr. Polis stated that he agrees with Mr. Leswing's comment that anything that changes should complement and not conflict with the existing neighborhood. Mr. Polis stated that another important aspect of new development is the landscaping and the planting of trees.

Ms. Simon asked if there is the political will to do everything that everyone is talking about. Ms. Simon stated that there was a vision for Rock Hill Road and it was supposed to be a mixed-use area and a gateway into the Township, yet when there was push back from the developer that the mixed-use component wouldn't work the Township gave in. Now the ordinance allows for 600,000 square feet of single use residential buildings before mixed use even comes into play.

Mr. Leswing stated that with the economy tanking the way it has put a sort of moratorium on the developments that were proposed in that area.

Mr. Polis stated that redevelopment efforts should be done in smaller increments instead of taking on massive redevelopment initiatives that are unlikely to be put into place.

Mr. Leswing stated that the development of a Comprehensive Plan provides an unusual opportunity for the community to come together to decide which direction the community wants to go. Mr. Leswing stated that this conversation is a textbook example about all of these contradictions. Mr. Leswing stated that this plan should be from the community to the elected officials.

Ms. Graham stated that she hopes that everyone reads the Issues Report from cover to cover because it contains all the information needed to come up with a community vision.

Ms. Shell stated that the commercial areas on Lancaster Avenue, such as Ardmore and Bryn Mawr don't have community gathering places. Ms. Shell stated that the Township owns a lot of the property in these areas that are currently used for parking lots. Ms. Shell stated that these areas could be used to create gathering spaces for the community. Additionally the historic buildings give them a tremendous sense of place.

Mr. Polis stated that he would again like to encourage the smaller incremental changes.

Ms. Shell stated that she found it interesting in going through the process with regard to the Bryn Mawr Farmers Market that the existing parking lot was a park at one time.

Mr. Polis stated that if the Township starts with smaller changes it may have a large impact on the community as a whole. For example if Bala Avenue was landscaped and if flags were put up to give it a gateway it would improve that street greatly. Mr. Polis stated that putting together the big plans without modest investments will keep anything from happening.

Commissioner Gordon stated that it sounds as if Mr. Polis is against the preparation of a Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Polis stated that he would just like to see it broken down into manageable plans.

Mr. Leswing stated that is a good gateway into the next section.

Mr. Ritterband asked what was decided with regard to the vision statement.

Mr. Leswing stated that staff would compile the ideas from this workshop and come back next month with a revised vision statement.

Mr. Vale stated that if the Planning Commission chooses to adopt the vision statement with edits then they should ask themselves what, if any, choices have just been made.

Mr. Leswing stated that is where the principles begin to be refined. Mr. Leswing stated that there is a hierarchy to this. Mr. Leswing stated that we'll start with the vision statement, then work out the principles and finally come to the goals in each Element.

Mr. Vale stated that even at the high level the Planning Commission needs to understand the choices they're making. Mr. Vale stated that he would like to see the vision statement include the institutions. The institutions are incredibly important to the Township; they're close to our residential communities and they should be supported. Mr. Vale stated that transit oriented development is also very important and should be encouraged.

Ms. Moras stated that institutions should be encouraged but they can also seriously change the character of the neighborhood. Ms. Moras stated that another important aspect is to preserve the character of the neighborhood. Ms. Moras stated that institutional expansions are desirable in some ways, but they should not compromise the residential neighborhoods. Ms. Moras stated that commercial or institutional



development should only be allowed when it doesn't compromise or erode the residential character of the neighborhoods.

Leigh Anne Smith, a resident of Bryn Mawr, stated that the vision statement that was provided described a much more genteel Lower Merion and as a community we've moved beyond that. Ms. Smith stated that this vision statement doesn't reflect the tensions that already exist and the statement needs to be spunked up a little bit.

Ms. Simon asked what the Montgomery County Planning Commission's ("MCPC") statement is in their current Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. O'Leary stated that the vision statement is very broad so that it can be applied to the 62 municipalities in the county and that it boils down to smart growth. Mr. O'Leary stated that Lower Merion Township is more fully developed so it could be more focused.

Mr. Polis stated that without planning real estate has a way of evolving on its own to develop niche markets. Mr. Polis stated that he doesn't feel that the Township should interfere with that. Mr. Polis stated that there will be a natural evolution of a market place without planning.

Mr. Duncan stated that he disagrees with that statement. Mr. Duncan asked if those present would like to see the commercial areas become used primarily for nail salons and beauty salons. Mr. Duncan stated that with proper planning and the implementation of the Zoning Code the Township can regulate where certain uses go.

Mr. Gordon stated that the Township has a wealthy population that has retail habits that don't support the commercial areas. Mr. Gordon stated that he doesn't believe that more commercial spaces are needed.

Mr. Duncan asked those present what makes successful commercial areas, such as Narberth, successful.

Commissioner Gordon stated that Narberth allows for community serving businesses like the dance class and the yarn studio to be located in the commercial area. It's become a place where parents drop their kids off and then go and shop. Commissioner Gordon stated that the zoning in Lower Merion Township actually forbids some good, viable uses from being located on the ground floor.

Ms. Simon stated that Lancaster Avenue is to Ardmore what I-95 is to the waterfront. Ms. Simon stated that the infrastructure is set and there are structural barriers in place that prevent many commercial areas in the Township from reaching their full potential.

Mr. Polis stated that Ardmore was built as a walkable area and the same thing happened in Wayne.

Commissioner Gordon stated that it sounds as if Mr. Polis is stated that the Township should try to improve the commercial areas.

Mr. Polis stated that the reason the commercial areas should work is because you can walk from the residential areas.

Commissioner Gordon stated that the Township has more in place than most people think. The commercial areas could become more vibrant by having higher density development closer to the train tracks.

Ms. Simon stated that historically the Autocar Factory took up great swaths of Ardmore and at one time had 3,000 factory workers. Ardmore grew up organically because the factory and all of the workers supported the commercial areas. Ms. Simon stated that many of the factory workers lived in modest housing along Lancaster Avenue and shopped in Ardmore and the Township doesn't have that anymore. Ms. Simon stated that without an economic engine the commercial area may not have been created.

Commissioner Manos stated that things developed primarily because of the train stations. They established places as commercial or residential and in a sense planned what would happen by allowing commercial development to occur around train stations. Commissioner Manos stated that we don't know what would've happened without the train stations and the zoning. Commissioner Manos stated that the planning that was put in place has lasted 80 years.

Mr. Polis stated that the train line through Bala no longer goes to Manayunk because of the Cynwyd Trail.

Mr. Ritterband asked Mr. Leswing to take another look at the vision statement and then next month get back to this.

Mr. Leswing stated that staff would try to give the vision statement a less genteel and a more dynamic feel.

Mr. Polis stated that one key component that drives Wayne and other areas are the cultural studios. Mr. Polis stated that institutions that are geared towards art promote neighborhood revitalization.

Mr. Leswing stated that the last part of the meeting would be focused on the water conservation element. Mr. Leswing stated that it will not likely be the first element completed but it's one that should be done. Mr. Leswing stated that not much has historically been done in terms of stormwater planning and he would like to take some time to talk about stormwater management. Mr. Leswing stated that through the land development process the Township has been able to capture small little bits that add up. Mr. Leswing stated that on page 174 of the Issues Report we stated that for the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan sustainability refers to the community goal of ensuring that new development is in harmony with its surroundings, by being appropriately scaled, economically realistic and socially beneficial. Mr. Leswing stated that with the new Comprehensive Plan harmony is going to be important. Mr. Leswing stated that most new developments will be infill developments on a smaller scale. Mr. Leswing stated that the current body of Codes doesn't apply as well in a built out community and the Township recognizes the need to update these regulatory Codes.

Mr. Gordon asked why is the current Stormwater Management Plan is off the table. Mr. Gordon stated that the Township has the best stormwater management in the state, although that is not saying much. Mr. Gordon stated that an item of concern is that currently there's only a little more than \$4,000 allocated each year in terms of stormwater management improvements. Mr. Gordon stated that some kind of intervention on a massive scale is required. Mr. Gordon stated that stormwater shows up in little ways, but it seems that the Township is thinking small on something that requires larger scale thinking.

Ms. Moras asked how this fits in with the article written by Mike Weilbacher for the Main Line Times that stormwater management is the Township number one problem.

Mr. Leswing stated that he agrees that stormwater management is an issue and the Township's strategy is not just to provide stormwater management, but also to integrate stormwater management into the land use pattern through smaller, more sustainable methods.

Mr. Gordon stated that stormwater management is the Township's responsibility, but the report doesn't identify what should be done to improve stormwater management.

Mr. Howland stated that the biggest problem with stormwater exists in the commercial areas where the entire lot is paved because the improvements to the site were completed prior to the creation of the current stormwater management regulations. Mr. Howland stated that there are areas where new, affirmative police power could be used to require that the existing businesses comply with these regulations. Mr. Howland asked what could be done to make a substantial difference in regards to the existing stormwater problems.

Mr. Gordon stated that North Ardmore gets all the runoff from the existing apartment buildings. Additionally the stormwater runoff from the Lower Merion High School gets dumped into the creek and that is the issue. Mr. Gordon stated that the Township needs to build a large retention system.

Mr. Leswing stated that it may be unrealistic to construct another large retention system and that in order to do that the Township would likely have to tear down homes. Mr. Leswing stated that approximately 6% of the Township is covered with pervious roads. Mr. Leswing stated that planting trees along the roadways may help to mitigate the stormwater runoff. Mr. Leswing stated that the bump out at Linwood Park also serves as a rain garden and shows an example of a smaller project that can serve two purposes: a traffic calming measure and a stormwater management tool.

Barry Jeffries, a resident of Ardmore and a member of the Township's Environmental Advisory Council ("EAC"), stated that the EAC Action Plan recommended that the Township consider implementing a stormwater utility fee. Mr. Jeffries stated that he has researched communities who have applied such a fee and almost all of these communities are successfully managing stormwater and creating stormwater management facilities.

Ms. Simon stated that even in the best of situations where new Best Management Practices are applied there are still stormwater management problems. Ms. Simon stated that with the amount of impervious surface in Lower Merion Township it seems like a bigger fix is needed.

Ms. Galer stated that a stormwater management action plan is needed. Ms. Galer stated that doing little things here and there will not help; the Township needs to have a systematic approach to solve the problem.

Mr. Leswing stated Cynwyd Trail provides an example of how a township park was used to manage stormwater runoff. Mr. Leswing stated that as a part of the trail development, water was diverted to Bala Park to create wetlands. Mr. Leswing stated that right now the Township is trying to find right sized ways to determine how to manage the stormwater.

Mr. Jeffries stated that as far as improving the Natural Features Code he feels that there needs to be a more integrated approach between the Stormwater Management Code and the Natural Features Code. Mr. Jeffries stated that the existing Codes don't have contemporary standards for preserving vegetation.

Ms. Galer stated that one could integrate stormwater management with so many issues. For example, planting trees may calm traffic while also reducing runoff.

Ms. Shell stated that Chicago has an innovative plan to reduce stormwater flooding. They use permeable surfaces in basketball courts and parks which help to reduce runoff.

Mr. Gordon suggested making all of the residential streets in the Township one way so that the utilities could be located on one side of the street and the sidewalks and street trees could be planted on the opposite side. That way the Township wouldn't have to worry about the utility wires conflicting with the mature street trees.

Ms. Shell stated that the Codes should be reviewed to determine how to encourage tree plantings on large properties. She has been told that lawns aren't very permeable. If additional trees are planted on expansive lawns such as Lankenau's it may help to reduce the amount of runoff.

Mr. Leswing stated that the Township is exploring those types of provisions now. In addition staff is looking for ways to encourage property owners to provide better riparian buffers.

Ms. Shell asked why there should be an incentive for providing riparian buffers. Ms. Shell stated that riparian buffers should be mandatory.

Mr. Leswing stated that an instance where an incentive may be provided is where a property owner puts a small addition onto the house farther away from the stream. Mr. Leswing stated that if incentives are available, the property owner may provide riparian buffer plantings in conjunction with that minor expansion.

Ms. Graham stated that the Township should start looking at the Mill Creek agreement area to see if the Township has any power to do any stream bank improvements in that area.

Mr. O'Leary stated that the MCPC created a model Riparian Buffer Ordinance that the Township could review.

Ms. Simon stated that it does make sense to discourage development in the floodplain.

Mr. Vale asked if there were any incentives that could be provided to Suburban Square.

Mr. Duncan stated that these requirements have to be tied to something. The Township can't require property owners to reduce the amount of impervious surface just because the code changed. Mr. Duncan stated that the Township can only require property owners to come into compliance with newer regulations when improvements are made to the property. Mr. Duncan stated that the Township tries to find a balance in every case where the developer is unwilling to provide much. The Township asks for a lot and wind up somewhere in between.

Commissioner Gordon asked if it would be possible to use pervious parking spaces similar to that used in Riverbend.

Mr. Duncan stated that one of the problems that the Township has from an engineering side is that it is difficult to quantify the benefits of pervious paving. Presently developers don't get any credit to use pervious paving.

Mr. Watson stated that maybe its time to let developers get credit for using pervious pavement.

Ms. Shell stated that the same thing could be done with trees.

Mr. Leswing stated that other municipalities have begun using point systems and they're all wrestling with it. Philadelphia has a good point system, but it's hard for engineers to measure the actual benefit some of these measures may have.

Ms. Galer stated that she doesn't want to pick on the Township, but they should really lead by example. Ms. Galer stated that it would be easy to put little rain gardens into the Township parking lot. Ms. Galer stated that the Township should follow its own Codes if other people will be required to comply with the Township's Codes. It's a change of mindset for the Township.

Ms. Shell stated that the Township could use pervious parking on their own lots and see what happens.

Mr. Gordon stated that the Township needs to step back and say what are the issues, where are the issues and how do we address them. Mr. Gordon stated that if we want to reduce the flow to Mill Creek then we need to key in on those areas upstream. Mr. Gordon stated that the Township could go to the commercial areas and tell them that the commercial properties are contributing "x percent" to the runoff and show them what their piece of the puzzle is.

Mr. Vale asked if there was any consensus as to why stormwater management has become such a problem in the Township.

Mr. Duncan stated that he's been with Lower Merion Township 30 years and it has been an issue all 30 years. Mr. Duncan stated that recently there have been a lot more severe storms that occur more frequently, but stormwater has always been a problem.

Ms. Shell stated that the individual storms are stronger too.

Commissioner Manos stated that one cause of the increased runoff is that the Code currently permits residential structures to expand by up to 1,500 square feet without providing any stormwater runoff controls. Commissioner Manos stated that the Township is also starting to see some of the stormwater management systems fail. Commissioner Manos stated that at one point in time this entire area was all farmland and the creek functioned just fine; in the past several years the Township has accumulated millions of square feet of impervious surface. Commissioner Manos stated that at least the Township has taken steps to mitigate the stormwater runoff; this is a humungous issue. Commissioner Manos stated that property owners may say that they're not the cause of the problem and this may not be an appropriate view. Commissioner Manos stated that Toyota did a public gesture by designing rain garden feature and they spent more than they had to.

Ms. Moras asked if the stormwater issues could be managed by starting with a list.

Mr. O'Leary asked what parts of the Township were included in the Act 167.

Ms. Hall stated that Darby-Cobbs was included.

Mr. Leswing stated that Ms. Galer had a point. Mr. Leswing stated that Public Works deals with the existing stormwater infrastructure.

Mr. Watson stated that the State recently tried to push the responsibility for all stormwater management systems along the state roadways onto the Township.

Mr. Gordon stated that the Township does have a role to play. Mr. Gordon stated that a Comprehensive Plan element that includes infrastructure should adequately address the stormwater management.

Mr. Leswing stated that a lot of the comprehensive planning process is about coordinating. It's a part of this exercise. Mr. Leswing stated that staff is recommending that all plans should include a statement regarding the social, economic and ecological consequences of the recommendation.

Mr. Jeffries stated that the proposed title for the "Energy and Water Resource Element" seems to exclude vegetation.

Mr. Leswing stated that it is important to keep in mind that the Township has already adopted an element of the Comprehensive Plan: the Open Space and Environmental Resource Protection Plan.

Mr. Jeffries stated that the Open Space Plan doesn't deal with the Natural Features Code.

Ms. Hall stated that one of the major recommendations of the Issues Report is to revamp the Natural Features Code. Ms. Hall stated that if this is done with the Water Resource Element it would have more teeth.

Ms. Shell stated that water quality needs to be a part of the discussion.

Ms. Smith asked if other communities have looked at the issue of sustainability.

Mr. Leswing stated that Portland has a Green Streets Plan.

Ms. Shell stated that Seattle also addresses the issue of sustainability.

Ms. Galer stated that the Township should do something comparable.

Ms. Shell stated that Seattle required rain barrels on the balconies of all apartment buildings. Ms. Shell stated that all sorts of things are being explored across the nation.

Ms. Galer stated that a challenge is to change the mindset.

Mr. Leswing thanked everyone for attending and stated that next month staff will come back with a revised vision statement and the focus of the discussion will be on energy conservation.

Mr. Ritterband stated that before the meeting closes he would like to make a motion to approve the meeting notes from the October 18, 2010 Planning Commission workshop on the Issues Report.

Ms. Shell seconded the motion.

All in favor voted "aye". None were opposed. The Meeting Notes dated October 18, 2010 were adopted.

Mr. Ritterband drew the meeting to a close at approximately 9:15 p.m.

Meeting notes recorded by Carissa Koll-Hazelton, Planning Technician