



# Regional Civic Association Meeting Notes

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

**February 25, 2019 – 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.**

Board Room, Township Building

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*Approximately 40 members of the public were present, including Commissioners George Manos, Elizabeth Rogan, Anna Durbin, and Anthony Stevenson, and Planning Commissioner Scott France. Township Staff Present included: Chris Leswing, Director, Building & Planning, and Carissa Hazelton, Planner.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mr. Leswing called the meeting to order at approximately 7:05 PM. He explained that the Regional Civic Association meetings are informal meetings to discuss questions that everyone has. The Township has undertaken a comprehensive update to the Land Development Codes. The new code will address the goals of the Comprehensive Plan and also be calibrated to better meet the built environment. Most of the zoning is being translated into the new code, and provided a brief overview of the zoning code adoption process. Mr. Leswing welcomed everyone to ask questions or to share their comments.

## **QUESTIONS & COMMENTS**

Barbara Cicalese, Ardmore, stated that she lives adjacent to the Suburban Square parking lot and she called last year about the trash trucks emptying dumpsters at 7 AM. Now they're doing that at 6 AM. She stated that she was wondering how that came about and expressed concern with the noise.

Mr. Leswing responded that staff will take her number and talk to her about that offline.

Simon, Greythorne Road, asked if there is a general goal from what existed to what the zoning is going toward and if there are specific goals. He asked what the goals are and stated that it will help to know where you're going and how to get there.

Mr. Leswing responded that the Zoning Code update is a rational process. The goals are outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is an outline of what the Township wants to be. The Township is diverse and has a conglomeration of different needs. The overall vision of the Comprehensive is that Lower Merion is a great place to live and we want to keep it that way. There are elements that outline different goals.

A resident of Ardmore stated that one of the things that is underestimated is the noise pollution. The resident stated that noise pollution is very annoying and it's one reason she opposes retail on Sibley Avenue.

Mr. Leswing responded that the Township has a body of regulatory codes, including a Noise and Lighting ordinance. Once we get through the Zoning Code process the Township may review the additional codes.

Deborah Peter-Rosen, Ardmore, stated that there are developers putting requests forward to develop now to not have to develop under the new Zoning Code starting in July and asked Mr. Leswing to speak to that a bit.

Mr. Leswing responded that it's a natural occurrence when regulations are going to be changed, particularly with commercial and large residential properties. The owners look at their land as an investment. Many of them know and understand the current development potential, but they're not as sure about the new Code requirements. What the Township has seen is different property owners submitting plans to protect their property rights under the existing Zoning Code. It is their right to do that. This also occurred with the City Avenue District amendments earlier this fall. A lot of development plans were submitted to vest the owners' property rights, but they are not necessarily likely to go forward. The elephant in the room is what is happening on Lancaster Avenue and the proposed Piazza development from Ardmore to Greenfield Avenues.

Alex McDonnell asked how long the placeholder development can remain in place.

Mr. Leswing responded that they're generally protected for five years. It's not protected forever.

Teri Simon, Wynnewood, stated that some of her neighbors have asked about concentrating density around transit stations. How is it thought that the areas around the train stations that are already dense could become more dense organically, because they're already developed?

Mr. Leswing responded that promoting transit and transit infrastructure is a good planning principle. The current Code has the MUST overlay, which did encourage additional density in proximity to the Ardmore Train Station. That is not included in the new Zoning Code. These areas are already developed with apartment buildings close to transit. There aren't a lot of properties that have not been developed.

Anne Mezey, Haverford, the Township has encouraged "transit oriented" development, but City Avenue doesn't have a train that goes there. She stated that she doesn't consider that area as "transit-oriented".

Mr. Leswing responded that the SEPTA's Cynwyd Line is located along Bala Avenue where there are train stations. He stated that he's worked on the planning and development of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail. It is a regional trail connection to train stations and to City Avenue. This is a last mile connection. Last year the Township submitted a grant to complete the trail from the Cynwyd Station to the Bala Station. The Township will be working with Philadelphia to extend the trail to the Mann Center. The Cynwyd Line rail service is coordinating with staff and they're looking at extending the hours and adding a car because of the recently proposed development on Bala Avenue. SEPTA needs a certain density to support the regional rail line.

A resident stated that one of the things that distinguishes Lower Merion is the trees and the green. You know that you've left the city. She asked what this Code is doing to preserve that.

Mr. Leswing responded that Lower Merion is a green country town. Under the City Avenue District there is a six-foot landscaped verge that is required with a multi-use trail, a two foot green strip, a sidewalk and then the building. You have the trees, the multi-use trail and the connections to trails and transit. Another big part of redevelopment is that stormwater management will be controlled. Most of the buildings in the Township were built prior to stormwater management controls.

Bruce Millman, Ardmore, asked how the Piazza property differs between the existing and proposed zoning.

Mr. Leswing responded that the property falls within the MUST overlay district. MUST was adopted roughly 10 years ago and allows additional density but it includes design requirements. While there has been a lot of discussion about MUST, the simple design standards have been instrumental in creating a better place. About 10 years ago there were a lot of vacancies and not a lot of investment in Ardmore, so it was thought that additional density would help to encourage investment.

Adrian Seltzer, Wynnewood, asked if a "story" has been defined yet. She stated that if the first story is allowed to be 24 feet high that is a really tall building.

Mr. Leswing responded that in the initial draft the Code included height requirements based on stories. There will be a new revision to establish a cap on the overall permitted height.

Ms. Seltzer stated that Piazza is saying that the height of their building is six stories but she thought they were limited to five stories.

Ms. Hazelton responded that if the existing height limit is 65 feet, they can have as many stories in the building as will fit. The existing Code does not have any limit on the number of stories allowed.

A resident asked if the Township has any plans on placing a moratorium on new construction while the new Code is figured out.

Mr. Leswing responded that the Township Solicitor has advised staff that a moratorium in the Commonwealth of PA is not legal.

A resident asked if there has been any thought of the Police and Fire protection in the communities with large plans coming forward.

Mr. Leswing responded that the Township has a Land Development Committee, which includes planners, and personnel from the Fire Department, Public Works and Police to look at all land development plans from an infrastructure standpoint.

Anne Leavitt-Gruberger, Penn Wynne, asked Mr. Leswing to address some of the differences between the current and proposed zoning, such as the affordable housing density bonuses that don't exist in the proposed Code.

Mr. Leswing responded that there are subtle provisions that were in the old code that aren't in the new code. The consultant thought that instead of providing density bonuses that they could provide for gentle density with smaller lot sizes to provide for the missing middle income housing. The idea of increased density were pretty soundly rejected by the neighbors of those areas, primarily in Ardmore. The goal is to get the Code adopted as quickly as we can and address affordability globally and come back to that afterwards. Mr. Leswing stated that he suggests moving forward with the new Code and bringing affordable housing forward as a policy discussion with the Board once the new Code is adopted.

Sharon Weinstein, Penn Wynne, stated that there was talk about having uniform zoning for all schools and asked where that stands right now.

Mr. Leswing responded there will be four types of institutions: Institutional Nature Preserve, Institutional Civic, Institutional Housing and Institutional Education. Private schools should be treated like public schools with one exception. Public Schools should be allowed anywhere in the Township.

Judy Luther, Ardmore, stated that she is trying to get a clearer picture of what the intersection of Woodside and Lancaster Avenue will look like under the proposed zoning and she also wonders what will happen along Montgomery Avenue.

Mr. Leswing stated that staff is suggesting the area between Woodside Road and Church Road be zoned MDR2 to encourage the adaptive reuse of the older homes. The current draft shows a direct translation from R7 to MDR3. Ardmore West (Woodside Road and Lancaster Avenue) is shown as a Town Center zoning.

Jane Murray, Ardmore, stated that the new Zoning Code says that houses must front on the street. Is there a way for a developer to get around that by providing a cobblestone driveway?

Mr. Leswing responded that staff is testing that now. We want to avoid cul-de-sac developments. When you walk down the street you see a pattern of homes. Land has become so valuable that developers have tucked townhouse developments behind other homes.

A resident stated that she saw that the Knox Property may come forward with residential development and she is concerned with the preservation of the existing historic resource and the open space in that area.

Mr. Leswing responded that the property was approved for residential development a few years ago. The new residential zoning allows less density than what is permitted under the existing Code. The estate is on the Township's Historic Resource Inventory, so the estate is preserved. The property is in the Open Space Preservation District, so half the land has to be set aside as common open space. The original Knox property was a lot larger than it is now. The Township purchased a part of the property and created a stormwater detention basin.

Ester asked if with the MUST in Ardmore and the apartments going up, the schools and the overcrowding that may occur were taken into consideration.

Mr. Leswing responded that the existing single-family homes that are turning over are developed and designed for families. There are three big factors affecting the school district. The first is the

turnover of the single-family home. The second factor is that fewer children are going to private schools. The third factor is the turnover of the older apartments. Apartments are one of several factors. Apartments should not be demonized. There are the same number of housing units in the Township as there were in the 1970s. The School District sold off nine properties in the 1970-80s when enrollment decreased, despite the fact that the number of housing units remained unchanged. Mr. Leswing stated that Scott France, with the Montgomery County Planning Commission prepared a study for the school district explaining the enrollment growth and invited him to provide a summary.

Mr. France stated that the school district had over 10,000 students in the 1970s. Currently the enrollment is at about 8,800. All of that occurred without a multifamily unit being constructed. The County-wide study of multifamily units showed that on average 0.6 students reside in multifamily units with 0.96 students reside in single family homes.

Mr. Leswing stated that we want to figure out the larger pattern. We don't want to be short-sighted in our analysis. We know apartments serve a purpose. They're transitional for people moving into the community or divorced parents. The Township has an internal report and case studies that have shown that the multifamily developments are subsidizing the cost of single-family homes.

Janice Glowski, Ardmore, stated that she is concerned with the residential properties that abut the VC or TC districts. She doesn't think there is a sufficient buffer and she doesn't agree with all the permitted uses. She asked that the Township pay special attention to the uses permitted in the VC that abut residential properties.

Mr. Leswing stated that staff will bring forward buffer language when residential uses abut commercial properties.

Ms. Glowski stated that a restaurant use is permitted and that may not be a desirable use next door.

Mr. Leswing responded that the commercial areas that are zoned commercial were previously commercial. The best way to protect residences is through the buffering.

Ms. Simon stated that one thing the community cares about is the special exception and conditional use approval processes. Will there be fewer special exception uses or conditional uses under the new Code? Ms. Simon stated that they'd like to eliminate the need for special exceptions.

Mr. Leswing responded that staff has recognized that special exception process doesn't work. It is about qualitative issues that should not be negotiated. Having specific standards and regulations for institutions will eliminate many special exceptions. The Township has also added development design standards and deviations may be sought by conditional use.

Ray Corby, Wynnewood, asked how the timing of the proposed Master Plans will work in conjunction with the adoption of the Zoning Code.

Mr. Leswing responded that the Master Plan make sure that the commercial areas are properly calibrated. The zoning may be refined based on the Master Plan.

Hugh Gordon, Ardmore, stated that a lot of individuals feel that the Master Plan should precede the zoning.

A resident stated that she understands there are numerous developments proposed and that SEPTA is working on their parking lot. The resident expressed concern that those lots will be closed for two years.

Mr. Leswing responded that SEPTA is looking to improve the Ardmore Station.

Mr. Gordon stated that it will likely not occur this summer or this year.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Leswing thanked everyone for coming and sharing their questions and drew the meeting to a close at approximately 9:09 PM.

Meeting notes recorded by Carissa Hazelton, Planner