

Swarthmore Planning Commission

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: April 19, 2023

Commission Attendees	James Levine -- Chair Doug Harnsberger -- Vice Chair Rex Brien -- Secretary Don Jones Nancy Templeton Chris DeBruyn	Steve Minton Douglas Perry John MacCallum Chris Kenney David Virgil
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Also in Attendance

Meeting Location

Borough Hall

- James Levine called the meeting to order at approximately 7:36 PM
- **Agenda Item 1:** Approval of March 15, 2023, meeting minutes, with two abstaining.
- **Agenda Item 2:** Rezoning Technical Advisory Committee Report
 - **Presentation**
 - Nancy Templeton reported on the recent public presentation by the Committee, which was well attended. The topics of discussion included, *inter alia*, building heights in Town Center and how to address historic structures. The next Committee meeting is scheduled for April 24, 2023.
 - **Discussion**
 - Chris Kenney questioned the quality of the data being generated, for example, whether the right questions are being asked. He also noted that the Committee's presentation was dense and overwhelming, and he recommended that presenters use layperson language when communicating with the public.
- **Agenda Item 3:** Development and Affordability Task Force
 - James Levine reported that a final report by the Task Force was delivered to BC, and that BC voted to ask PC to respond to the report, with recommendations. BC Member David Boonin expressed that BC wants information regarding PC's process, priorities, timelines, and additional issues to review with respect to the final report.
 - **Discussion**
 - David Virgil noted that with all of the various task force initiatives, including the Historic Preservation TF, The Affordability TF, various town organizations such

as the Centennial Foundation, the recent approval of 110 Park and the discussed interest in reviewing and revising the Zoning Code with the presentation of the findings of the Town Center Zoning Review it appears we should be looking towards having a comprehensive Swat. Borough Master Plan considered. There are too many moving parts that need to come together and be looked at holistically. This will not be a cheap endeavor but necessary.

- James Levine said discussion of the final report will likely require multiple PC meetings and that there likely will be more information to gather and develop. Initial questions include how we define affordability; how many dwellings in the Borough are considered affordable; and how does that compare with other municipalities in the region. James noted that the final report includes two principal recommendations: legalizing ADUs and modernizing the zoning code, to include a new comprehensive plan aligned with the report. Regarding establishing a subcommittee to address the final report and any proposed changes to the ordinance, James stated that a subcommittee of 4 PC members or less would be allowed under the Sunshine Law.

With respect to diversity of housing in the Borough, James suggested that market economics will dictate the prices of Swarthmore homes, and that single-family homes likely will not be available for \$300K. With regard to updating a comprehensive plan, James believes the first step would be to develop a scoping document, rather than proceeding on a piecemeal basis. James proposed a subcommittee to prepare the scoping document, Nancy Templeton, David Virgil, Don Jones, and Chris Kenney volunteered to serve on that subcommittee. James believed the scoping document likely would take two months to prepare and should include a request for proposal and a request for funding.

- Chris Kenney said that the current zoning code does not fully reflect the Borough's vision with respect to retail development and historic preservation, noting that the recent condo application has led to residents' interest in many zoning-related issues. He agreed with the importance of developing the scope of an updated comprehensive plan.
- Chris DeBruyn asked whether a multi-municipality comprehensive plan was still under discussion. He stated that demographic data and a concrete list of goals would assist the process. Chris believes that public input is essential before revising the intent and effect zoning ordinances, and that the FHI is a great model for soliciting public input and is providing good information for future code updates. With respect to the Task Force's recommendations regarding ADUs, he is not convinced that ADUs are good for the Borough. He also noted that PA law requires that comprehensive plans be updated every 10 years. He opined that the likely expensive comprehensive plan process that we are considering was probably not considered by the legislature when they formulated the planning process and its requirements. Chris stated that affordability could be included as a goal in an updated comprehensive plan.
- David Virgil stated that the goal should be to achieve a document that is durable, and that the process could be expensive, perhaps requiring a consultant. He agreed that the public must understand and be engaged in determining the goals of a comprehensive plan. With respect to affordability, David asked how you address taxes, noting that the Borough likely would not be willing to reduce local taxes, particularly the school tax.
- Nancy Templeton noted that HUD has a definition of affordability. With respect to a multi-municipality comprehensive plan, Nancy stated that neighboring municipalities do not appear too interested. She noted that the State may have

money to assist in the preparation of an updated comprehensive plan, but there is a process for applying for such funds. Nancy queried whether earned income tax credits may be a viable option for addressing affordability. She believes that the process of developing an updated comprehensive plan requires good public engagement, which does not come cheap. She proposed a steering committee with representatives from the various interest groups including the College, Septa, etc.

- Don Jones questioned whether developing an updated comprehensive plan necessarily must be an expensive process. He raised the issue of Sunshine Law implications and noted that the PC only has a few hours each month to address issues. Regarding the meaning of “affordability”, Don stated that it is generally accepted that affordability means not costing more than 30% of the resident’s income. He agreed that addressing all issues regarding affordability including dividing houses into multiple units, etc., should be addressed in an updated comprehensive plan. He also suggested that the plan should include physical plans addressing building dimensions, etc.
- Doug Harnsberger stated that development of an updated comprehensive plan should be accomplished within a specific time frame, particularly if there will be a recommendation to refrain from changes to the zoning code until the updated plan is completed.
- BC member, David Boonin addressed many questions from the PC, noting that BC has considered earned income tax credits, as reflected in BC minutes, concluding that there was no traction at this time and little evidence that the current tax system was inequitable. Regarding updating the comprehensive plan, David mentioned that he would advocate for funding an outside consultant to assist. Regarding timing, David suggested that BC may insist that PC move ahead with recommendations regarding ADUs, before addressing an updated comprehensive plan. When he noted that the PC should advise BC about a proposal to start with a scoping document relating to updating the comprehensive plan, the motion noted below was advanced.
- Affordability and Development Task Force Chair Rachel Pastan also responded to questions from the PC. She mentioned that the term “affordability” was intentionally left vague in the Task Force final report. Rachel stated that the Task Force was looking closely at diversity of housing costs, noting that the Borough was losing rental units. She stated that ADUs addressed two important groups in the Borough: homeowners and renters. She stated that the Task Force ran some numbers regarding the cost of ADUs, noting that a thousand square foot ADU would cost at least \$300K and result in a significant tax increase for the homeowner.

Motion

- With respect to BC’s request for PC’s recommendations addressing the Task Force final report, James moved and David Virgil seconded to establish a subcommittee consisting of Don, Nancy, David, and Chris K. to develop a scope for a consultant to assist with the development of a comprehensive plan, with the intent that the scoping document the subcommittee prepares will form the basis for a later RFP.
- Chris DeBruyn moved to include in the PC minutes the following statement:

In response to the Development and Affordability Task Force final report, the PC recommends that the first task to be undertaken is updating the comprehensive plan, to be initiated by a scoping document, and that

other changes in the zoning code should not be piecemeal in advance of the updated comprehensive plan.

The motion was seconded and passed, with one no vote.

- **Agenda Item 4: - Committee Notes**

Committee	Meeting info (time is PM unless noted.)	Planning Commission Liaison
Borough Council		Liaison not present.
Environmental Advisory Council (EAC)	4 th Tuesday @ 7:30	Chris DeBruyn volunteered to serve as liaison.
Traffic Advisory Committee	Meetings as needed.	No meeting to report.
Tree Committee	David Page – Meets as needed.	Chris Kenney volunteered to serve as liaison.
UCC Board of Appeals	Meets as needed.	No meeting to report.
Zoning Hearing Board	Meets as needed, 4 th Tuesday.	No meeting to report.
Borough Council – Environment	4 th Wednesday 7:30	Reported that plastics ordinance is being circulated for review.
Borough Council – General Government & Hum. Services (Library, town center)	Sarah Graden – 3 rd Monday @ 7:30	No meeting to report.
Borough Council - Planning & Zoning	Kristen Seymore – 2 nd Wednesday 7:30	No meeting to report.
Borough Council - Public Safety	Jill Gaieski – 3 rd Tuesday	No meeting to report.
Borough Council - Public Works/Parks & Rec.	Francie Halderman – 3 rd Thursday 8:30 AM	Liaison not present.
Development and Affordability Task Force	1 st Thursday 7:00	Reported on Task Force’s recent public presentation, which was well attended. Presentation address, <i>inter alia</i> , building heights in TC and addressing historic structures.
Borough Council – Finance	TBD – 4 th Monday @ 7:30	Reported on discussion regarding earned income tax, and report by Borough Manager regarding new leaf truck and live stream cameras.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 PM.

NEXT MEETING:

The next PC meeting is scheduled for May 17, 2023 at Swarthmore Borough Hall.

End of Meeting Minutes