

Marshall Township Implementable Comprehensive Plan

Steering Committee No. 5 – October 12, 2021, 6:00 to 7:30pm, Municipal Building

WELCOME AND OVERVIEW

Jenni Easton thanked all for attending and provided a project update. She introduced Nick Sisco, a Pashek+MTR planner, and Sidney Kaikai and Kyle Spargur from TranSystems.

Project Status:

Since the summer public meeting, the consulting team has been working on Phase II of the project, *Drilling Down for Solutions*. We anticipate delivering a plan that can be considered for adoption in late winter/early spring of next year. During Phase II, the team has been working on research to better understand the history, context and possibilities for each issue and developing potential concepts for the Steering Committee's review and comment.

The purpose of this evening's meeting is to collect feedback on ideas that have developed so far. We need to learn which approaches would most effectively address identified Key Issues and how options rate in terms of practicality and implementation potential. No ideas are finished recommendations at this point. Based on feedback, some concepts may advance and be further developed; others may be adjusted or abandoned.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Jenni briefly reviewed the project's approach for recommendations, which are forming in response to the Key Issues based on public and stakeholder feedback gathered extensively in Phase I. Rooting the plan firmly in the issues the community identified as being most important gives the plan relevance and greater potential buy-in for implementation. The Steering Committee drove selection and refinement of the Key Issues with priority and feasibility in mind.

Route 910 Traffic and Land Use

Jenni summarized public and stakeholder input on this issue, which suggested that addressing hazards, congestion and land use along Route 910 will be incredibly important to safety, economic development and the experience of living in the Township as it continues to grow. The Township's control over this issue is limited primarily by Route 910's status as a state route. Topography and natural features also present challenges.

The vision for this issue from Phase I is multimodal, with intention for the plan to address speeding and traffic calming to the extent possible, connectivity for active transportation and land use/access management. Given the directive for improvements to this stretch of road to complement the existing natural character of the area, widening the road would not necessarily be an optimal solution, as doing

so would have the effect of speeding up traffic and increasing volume along the thoroughfare. This could degrade pedestrian conditions and the perception of the area as natural/rural.

Sidney provided context on the transportation planning issues at hand, including TranSystems' design work with the Township on sections of the Commodore Perry Trail, a network that spans five neighboring communities. (Details attached.) Marshall Township has five sections that vary in type and width, including sidewalks, dirt path or trail. Given the Township's progress in implementing the trail plan and continued interest in creating multimodal connections, Sidney recommended that the Township consider an active transportation plan to formalize a framework for future improvements.

PennDOT has hired a consultant to develop and analyze alternatives to reconfigure the I-79 interchange at Route 910. Per the [2021 SPC TIP](#), the project will "widen and improve traffic flow at on/off ramps." Construction on this \$33.8M project would not begin until at least 2024. The project team does not have any information at this point on the preferred alternative, though TranSystems expects that it may impact an extent from Nicholson Road to Mingo Road, possibly including a realignment of Brandt School Road.

Kyle presented TranSystems' recommendations for accommodating pedestrian and cyclists traveling along the stretch of Route 910 between Mingo Road and Wexford Run Road, where trail connections are being developed.

- *Alternative 1*: southern alignment from Brandt School Road – Willow Oak Drive – Wexford Run Road
- *Alternative 2*: northern alignment from Brandt School Road – Mingo Road – Hillcrest – Shenot Farms – Wexford Run Road
- *Alternative 3A*: Wexford Bayne Road, which would involve short-term improvements such as shared lane markings, signing and other pavement markings
- *Alternative 3B*: long-term capital improvement project to widen the road to accommodate a shared use path.

This missing trail link will tie into the I-79 Interchange upgrade improvements to the west, and the Commodore Perry Regional Trail System to the east, terminating at Altmyer Park (future expansion to be coordinated with Pine Township). TranSystems recommends a feasibility study to assess the above three alternatives evaluating various engineering parameters and construction costs to arrive at a preferred alternative for this missing trail link.

Comments from committee members included:

- Alternatives 1 and 2 seem like better options than routing pedestrians or cyclists along Route 910.
- At least part of Alternative 1 is in Franklin Township. This alternative would depend on the design for the interchange improvement project. Connecting Alternatives 1 and 2 could be useful to increase the practicality of routes.
- Is a pedestrian bridge across Route 910 an option?

- Pedestrian accommodations need to connect people to the businesses (Starbucks, T-Bones, etc.). The interchange improvement project will need to address this – Township can advocate for identified needs.
- Bike trails are lacking within the Township. A 5' sidewalk is not a bike trail; to be truly multi-modal a path would have to be closer to 14'.
- Staff provided additional information about the Commodore Perry Regional Trail System, its origin and extent.
- This plan needs to determine where the residential/commercial land use transition line is drawn along Route 910. There are now competing concerns, including access management challenges and the perception of some homeowners that their property would be valued higher as commercial use.

Sense of Place and Identity

Jenni explained the context of this issue. The category addresses multiple aspects of strengthening local pride and connections between residents – in one way, it concerns the way in which local government presents itself and facilitates communication. In another way, it seeks to eliminate barriers to the realization of Warrendale as an anchor, recognizing its potential to land additional destination attractions and become known as a gathering place.

The plan will memorialize and include specific recommendations regarding general communications and marketing, topics that staff has previously considered.

The plan will also provide insight and direction on the highest and best form and function for Warrendale, including analysis of what barriers to continue to inhibit the area's realization of a long-held vision as a walkable town center.

Nick walked through an urban design concept sketch for Warrendale and highlighted some constraints and opportunities. The flood plain represents a significant challenge, as does the area being relatively hemmed in by major roadways. PMTR is considering how to incentivize investment that would capitalize on the history and the area's competitive advantages, chief among which now are local businesses. Creating and activating a civic/public space in the area could help define it as an attraction.

Comments from committee members included:

- The area could use a kickstart. For instance, a local BBQ business recently received recognition as one of the area's best, which has attracted a lot of visitors.
- There's a lot of foot traffic on existing sidewalks as people use the park. Extending the sidewalks could help.
- Realistically, incremental infill among existing uses won't (and hasn't) realize the vision for this area. We need to have a developer to come in to assemble and clear sites for new construction in the desired form.

- What is the limitation – some kind of infrastructure? Or is it not the type of place where this would work? We need to consult developers to learn what it would take.
- Warrendale is not currently viewed as a desirable location, doesn't "look clean." The risk would be high for the "first mover" to the area; there is no real anchor.
- Investing in public amenities is one strategy. This was successful in Brownsville.
- Parking is a problem the Township could solve if there were an influx of need. Could create a municipal lot.
- Would it be possible to continue Northgate Drive under the turnpike?
- If we do nothing else, gateway signage would help establish the area, tap into its history.

Jenni agreed that the team will consult developers/investors to get a sense of Warrendale's potential viability and identify barriers. This will inform whether/how the plan suggests positioning the area and help ground-truth recommendations.

Green Space and Future Development

Jenni reminded the group of how this Key Issue took shape. In the view of the public, this is the most important issue. PMTR proposes that the plan make recommendations for calibrating the CR zoning district in particular to get development right while including provisions and programs throughout the Township to preserve green space and natural resources.

The important aspect of this vision is *balance*. This committee has always recognized the need to respect private development rights while doing what it can to serve the public interest in limiting the impacts of development on green and natural space. We heard loud and clear that people treasure the rural setting, the green landscape and the environmental assets of open space.

Jenni provided a high-level review of some regulatory best practices and alternatives for the Township to consider, which will be vetted with local landowners and developers to gauge their impact. These will include adjustments specific to the Conservation Residential district, such as adjusting base density or buffers, as well as suggestions for preserving green space and environmental features across the township.

For instance, the township could consider doing more with its mapping of environmental resources, one option being to set up a transfer of development rights program in which western-side landowners could sell their development rights to a receiving location in a built-out area – this would focus density in built-up areas, allowing for the preservation of open space without infringing on development rights.

Other ideas include options for conservation financing, establishing an environmental advisory group and establishing LEED performance standards for local government operations.

Comments from committee members included:

- Options such as banking land or development rights need to seriously consider fiscal aspects – could be potentially expensive.

- It seems troubling that the Township would be so directly involved in controlling development rights.
- Staff answered a question about the timing of a potential zoning update. The ordinance has been amended regularly since its enactment to address specific issues. The 2008 update involved a fairly extensive rewrite in response to the sewer extension on the western side. A full update to the ordinance would not occur until after the adoption of this plan, as zoning needs to achieve consistency with a community's comprehensive plan.

Jenni agreed to provide additional information about transfer of development rights and to proceed with outreach to developers and owners who can provide feedback on potential ordinance adjustments.

Jenni asked the group to email her with names of people who should be invited to participate.

Recreation Facilities and Connectivity

Jenni explained the project team's approach so far to this Key Issue:

- One important thing this plan can set up is the comparison of existing provisions to the needs and desires of residents, given the large number of families that have located here since the last plan. We don't anticipate that this plan will prescribe what exactly the facility needs are, but we can compare what's here with what people might expect to be here, and we can take a look at whether the current recreation impact fee is sufficient.
- The township has made great progress on the sidewalk network and multi-municipal trail plan. This plan will work up long-range next steps to connect neighborhoods to the Perry trail and to one another as needed.
- We see a great opportunity at this point to further forge partnerships and will make some specific recommendations on how they could benefit the Township.
- PMTR doesn't anticipate that this plan will include a recommendation to build a recreation center facility, but we think it needs to address the need for "third spaces," or gathering places where people convene and connect outside their homes, schools or jobs.
- We have previously discussed the possibility of Marshall offering new and different types of recreation facilities and programming, destination attractions. One thing that we know some North Hills communities have been interested in but have not really gotten off the ground is nature programming and education.
- Specifically, PMTR suggests that the Township consider creating a linear recreation space / green space corridor along the main branch of Big Sewickley Creek. Given development pressure, now would be the time to establish an intention to carve out and preserve this corridor. It could be assembled either by land acquisition or over a longer span of time, parcel-by-parcel, without a large capital outlay.

Comments from committee members included:

- A passive recreation space in the area indicated would seem to make sense, as it's in a floodplain and involves some steep slopes. There's little opportunity cost of other things that would be able to be built there.
- The Township does not currently have anything like this.
- Space could be used for demonstration/education purposes, interpretive signage, etc.
- Would people be in favor of this because they want to use trails, or because they simply would prefer that nothing else is built?
- People very much want to preserve green space and do want a buffer, but trail use has been very high, especially during the last year.
- The Township's trail plan for walking and running is great, but the Township lacks a bicycle network. Cyclists will not use limestone trails. There's an opportunity for bicycle connectivity in the Township's annual road work – could we build into that program the widening of pavement to add paved bike lanes? Would need to identify paths – those where this would be physically possible and connect destinations that make sense.

NEXT STEPS

1. Continue strategy research and development
2. Outreach to developers/landowners on land use and development strategies
3. Outreach to area developers/investors on reality-checking Warrendale opportunities, barriers and potential

These meeting notes were prepared on October 21, 2021 by Jenni Easton and Nick Sisco.