



STRATEGIC REVITALIZATION PLAN FOR WEST MAPLE NEIGHBORHOOD

MINUTES

Task Force Meeting #7

June 16, 2011, 10am

Camden City Hall

Attendees:

Denise Brouse, Merchantville Clerk
Bill Watson, Merchantville Zoning Officer
Terry Carr, Pennsauken Econ Dev.
Ed Williams, Camden Planning & Zoning Dir.
Charles MacAdams, Merchantville property owner
Mara Wuebker, Ragan Design Group
James Gilligan, NJ Transit
Rae Hutton, NJ Transit

Jeanne Collins, Merchantville resident
Bernie Kofoet, Pennsauken Public Works
Agnes Madden, Merchantville Borough Council
Marvin Gaskill, Merchantville resident
Joe Garbarino, Masonry Preservation Group
Rick Ragan, Ragan Design Group
Dan Sandiford, NJ Transit
Vincent Basara, Camden UEZ

1. Stakeholder Outreach

- a. RDG discussed recent stakeholder outreach to NJ Transit, Sprint, County Engineer. NJ Transit is in attendance today. County Engineer, Kevin Becica, received minutes of task force meetings and summary of pedestrian and vehicular circulation issues that impact State/County. We have final contact info for Sprint Real Estate Department. Adam Feldman indicated that there are no plans in the works to improve the Sprint site, but recommends that we compile a list of recommendations with associated schematics and forward it to him so that it will be circulated internally. We should assume that the Sprint (former gun shop) building is staying. There are no plans to demolish at this time. RDG also sent an e-mail update to all stakeholders on our list inviting them to meeting.

2. Neighborhood Planning

- a. Survey Results – 43 respondents. 28 in Merchantville. 14 in Pennsauken and 1 in Camden. RDG provided an overview of survey highlights. Appearance of the neighborhood and gateway are big concerns. Street cleaning, trash/litter, rental properties, park patrols, drug-related concerns, alleyways are prevalent concerns in survey comments. Adding park amenities, such as basketball court, was

suggested several times. Desired goods/services in the neighborhood are a bakery, café/restaurant, and police sub-station. For responses to conditions and services questions, it is necessary to look at individual municipality summaries b/c they vary depending on what municipality respondents are located in, with the exception of street cleaning, which is a complaint across the board in all 3 communities. Group discussed that municipal websites, newsletters, and postings should be utilized to provide survey results to residents. Since surveys were anonymous cannot send directly to people who responded. RDG will finalize document and provide to municipalities for distribution.

b. Visioning Session (cont.) –

- i. The Task Force conducted a brainstorming session last month. This month RDG is trying to gain consensus on preferred alternatives discussed. RDG provided overview of options discussed at last meeting.
- ii. Route 130/Gateway Area - RDG presented a proposed schematic for Welcome Area and Bus Stop at former Kawasaki site. Jim Gilligan explained that DOT will have to approve change in bus shelter/stop locations. This process should take less than a year. Bus stops cannot be located in a deceleration lane. Jim explained that time is always a factor with buses so NJTransit would not want to pull off of Route 130 on to Maple Avenue and then get back on to 130. A bus shelter would bring more utilization of the bus stop. NJ Transit reviewed the proposed bus stop location (north of footbridge) and finds it acceptable. Jim suggests incorporating a drop off/pick up area on Maple Avenue, which could fit into the curve area that already exists there. The 414 Express Bus that runs b/w Philly and Moorestown stops at that location. Riders could utilize Poplar bus stop instead. The 409 travels to Trenton. While task force members discussed the possibility of a mid-block bus stop in front of the Kanis property, DOT will not permit mid-block bus stops. Also, there is also a bus stop nearby on Myrtle Ave/130.

Ed Williams stated that it would be unlikely for Camden to support any type of redevelopment plans that would involve eminent domain proceedings-particularly for residences, as cost of litigation is prohibitive and bad publicity for the City. Additionally, the loss of ratables would be a tough sell to Council. Camden wants to keep all of the ratables it can, especially commercial ratables that are more reliable than residential ratables. This section of Camden is in a UEZ zone, but not in a designated Redevelopment Area. Terry Carr also said that Pennsauken would not likely support redevelopment plans that involve eminent domain either.

There was Task Force member consensus that the former Kawasaki site should be utilized as a green space ‘welcome to the neighborhood area’ with landmark signage and a bus shelter. There was also Task Force member consensus that a

deceleration lane should be incorporated on the corner Liquor Storage site if it could be accommodated on it without the loss of a ratable. A deceleration lane would require the existing building to be demolished with a new commercial building being located in the southern area of the parcel. Removing the building would provide better site visibility for vehicles turning on to Maple Avenue for increased pedestrian safety.

A Task Force member suggested that there are opportunities to offset any loss in ratables at the Liquor Storage site by increasing ratables in other areas of the Camden block, such as subdividing the Kanis property to allow for additional residential parcels on Roosevelt Ave. Another Task Force member noted, however, that there is a better chance for a commercial user on Route 130 if the parcel was not subdivided.

RDG presented a schematic for the 130 area that is consistent with the proposed zoning map for Camden (that bifurcates the block into residential and commercial zones). It provides a commercial opportunity on the Route 130 portion of the Kanis property while incorporates 3 residential house lots on the Roosevelt Ave portion of the block, thereby allowing a viable commercial ratable on the side overlooking 130, while protecting the residential character of Roosevelt Boulevard and filling in the gap between the houses on the block.

Camden recommended using code enforcement, the UEZ program, and meeting with property owners as a first approach to this block. The UEZ program provides façade improvement assistance, energy efficiency programs, as well as weeding, litter pick-up, and graffiti removal through the UEZ Clean Team. This would be a good short-term approach, particularly if the 3 communities work together to do similar type of work and clean-up at the same time, several times a year. Denise, Bernie, and Vince will coordinate.

- iii. Maple Avenue – RDG provided an overview of streetscape ideas for Maple Avenue. It is recommended that street trees be incorporated along both sides of Maple Avenue. This would require a low zone tree or placement that is not directly underneath the utility lines.

RDG recommends painting the Sprint Building and incorporating evergreen bushes extensively on the site to provide a vegetative buffer to screen the faceless building, as well as to screen outdoor storage from public view. The driveway width should be reduced from 36' feet to 24.' RDG provided a proposed rendering for the accessory Sprint Building (former gun shop) that contains the following recommendations: façade upgrades to the building, including paint, removal of the roll-up window security grates and replacement with storefront framing and opaque aluminum/fiberglass panels, removal of the concrete pavement in front of the building and replacing with grass, shrubs,

and a narrower sidewalk, curb replacement, and ADA curb cut. It also depicts street trees lining the driveway, while maintaining the access easement for Comcast. Task Force members suggested that Sprint should consider acquiring the former Kawasaki site.

The adjacent Comcast building should be screened from view with evergreens, such as Leland Cypress. The evergreens should be located a few feet from the front of the building façade in order to prevent damage from the AC units. The front yard area would incorporate grass and perennial plantings.

On the south side of Maple Avenue, RDG recommends that street trees be planted and evergreens also be incorporated along the inside of Angelo's fence line to provide a greener entrance to the neighborhood.

- iv. Federal Street Overpass Intersection: RDG provided a proposed redesign of the Federal Street Overpass/ Maple Avenue intersection. The proposal significantly reduces the width of the travel lanes at the intersection. It also creates additional parking spaces, as well as opportunities for attractive landscape features at this gateway. It creates a more pedestrian scale for the intersection, making it easier for pedestrians to cross. It would also have the effect of slowing vehicular traffic entering on to Maple Avenue.
- v. Other items discussed:
 1. Traffic calming techniques along Maple Avenue were also discussed, such as bulb-outs, painted travel/parking lanes.
 2. A Task Force member asked about the placement of benches outside of businesses on the sidewalk. Benches and other features that encourage exterior public space experiences that are inviting to pedestrians are ideal, provided that they are done tastefully. A Task Force Member will provide photographs of benches that have advertising on them to show as an example. HPC would need to give approval in Merchantville.
 3. Member of public suggested a renter education campaign to educate renters of obligation to maintain properties.
 4. Police enforcement of speeders is needed on Myrtle Avenue, particularly this time of year- many kids on the street.
 5. A mural was suggested to improve the aesthetics of the footbridge, as well as lights during holiday season. The Mural could incorporate the maple leaf symbol. It is unknown whether that would require DOT approval. The footbridge is owned by DOT, but maintained by Pennsauken. Structural issues with the footbridge fall under DOT jurisdiction. Crash data was recently received from DOT Bike/Ped Department. RDG will review it.
 6. There is a business organization in Pennsauken, known as the Business In Government (BIG), and there is a Merchantville Business and Professional

Association (MBPA). However, it is unknown whether it is still functioning.

7. Task Force member asked what will happen next. We will continue to meet. RDG will work on a report that will include an action plan. We will hold a second public workshop and present ideas to public. It is anticipated that some form of this Task Force will continue via a Resident Organization/Multi-jurisdictional Task Force after report is done to implement items over the long haul. A lot of items are dependent on money, but others are a matter of being persistent (squeaky wheel gets the oil).
8. Task Force member suggested that the DOT signage at the gateway be smaller so that it is more in scale with signage for a community, rather than a highway.

c. Immediate Needs List/ Preliminary Tasks List

- i. RDG is looking for Task Force Feedback on the Immediate needs list. RDG will resend it to Task Force members.

3. Next Meeting and Upcoming Deadlines

- a. Next Meeting: RDG will circulate e-mail about next meeting date. It will likely be during the week of July 21st. Several members will not be able to make it on the 21st so we will try for another day that week.
- b. 2nd Public Workshop: The Task Force will be hosting another public workshop soliciting Community Feedback once drafts of the report and concepts are complete. It will likely be in September, given difficulty of getting people out to meetings during the summer. RDG will provide flyers to Merchantville Observer and other groups to publicize the workshop.