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## **STRATEGIC REVITALIZATION PLAN FOR WEST MAPLE NEIGHBORHOOD MINUTES**

Task Force Meeting #15, Kick-off meeting for Second Phase of Study  
September 20, 2012, 1PM  
Merchantville Borough Hall

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### **ATTENDEES:**

Charles MacAdams, property owner	Jeanne Collins, resident
Betsy McBride, council woman	Vince Basara, UEZ Coordinator/Ombudsman
Agnes Madden, council woman	Wayne Bauer, Police Chief
Fred Koehler, community affairs	Bill Watson, Zoning Officer
Dan Sperazza, resident	Mike Wisnosky, RDG
Mara Wuebker, RDG	Gary Meyer, resident

### **1. Welcome to New Task Force Members**

The Task Force welcomed two new members, Dan Sperrazza, a Merchantville neighborhood resident, and Betsy McBride, Pennsauken resident and council woman. Betsy worked with Denise Brouse on the West Maple Neighborhood Preservation Program in the past. Dan assisted the Task Force with legislative support letters for our DOT grant applications.

### **2. A Recap of Phase I and A Look Forward to the Future**

As we are kicking off a new grant round, it's a good opportunity to look back at what we've accomplished, discuss where we are going and how to make our Task Force work even better. There was a quick recap of phase one study, including study of exiting conditions, monthly task force meetings, public workshops, neighborhood survey, visioning sessions, and development of concepts. Everything is contained in the Final Report that is available electronically.

Over the summer, there was a Task Force presentation to Pennsauken Township Committee, Task Force had a table at Merchantville Birthday Celebration, RDG worked with Pennsauken and Merchantville to apply for two DOT Transportation Enhancement grants for Maple Avenue and the Kawasaki site, and we finalized the DVRPC grant documents and contracts for second phase of study.

The second phase of study will involve pursuing planning initiatives that arose out of the first phase of study, including pursuing landscaping at Sprint, Maple Avenue street trees, preliminary assessment and acquisition of Kawasaki site, filing of DOT Problem Statement, and a focus on resident recruitment.

Mara asks Task Force members to sign up to work on a particular subcommittee that interests them, such as (1) resident and business outreach/ Task Force publicity, (2) street trees, (3) traffic calming/pedestrian safety (neighborhood watch?), (4) graffiti and public safety, (5) gateway improvements (Kawasaki, mural, clean-up, welcome sign), (6) Wellwood Park. A member of the public suggested adding an Economic Development committee as well. Task Force members can suggest other subcommittees, as well.

Denise and Agnes volunteered for the Street Tree committee. Betsy McBride volunteered for the Gateway committee, which would dovetail nicely into her 'Route 130 Clean and Green Committee,' which has about 8 members now and is growing. They recently planted forsythia and trees along Route 130 and has been involved with trying to clean up the 130 corridor, even in areas that are not technically in Pennsauken because of the misperception that they are located in Pennsauken and the poor image that it reflects upon all bordering communities. Task force members will let Mara know their subcommittee sign-up.

### **3. Neighborhood Happenings**

Melo Market is open and doing well. The Car & Bike Show will be held at Wellwood Park on October 20<sup>th</sup>. The publicity subcommittee should consider handing out Task Force flyers at the event to target neighborhood residents. Merchantville is having a town-wide yard sale on Saturday, September 29, 2012.

### **4. Neighborhood Planning**

a. Route 130 - The group discussed several problem properties along Route 130, including property adjacent to the Save -A-Lot in Camden, as well as the Kanis and Roly Poly properties. Vince Basara will be pursuing these matters with Camden Code Enforcement and hopes that Doris Arch will be able to join the Task Force at the next meeting to provide a status update. He suggests that the Task Force also do a letter to property owners.

The group discussed Mr. Ziskind's desire to move the bus stop from the Roly Poly site as it is affecting the site conditions (litter, shelter, etc). The Task Force and NJ Transit discussed moving the bus stop to the Kawasaki site at our Camden Task Force meeting. However, NJ Transit recently indicated that it is undesirable to move it there, as they believe it would not be safe for the buses, given the angle of the roadway. The gateway subcommittee should research whether this bus stop is needed, or whether the one at Myrtle Ave is sufficient for this area. Currently, it appears to have a lot of transit users at this stop.

b. Street Trees - The Task Force discussed the plan for street tree planting in the right of way along Maple Avenue in the Spring of 2013. The New Jersey Tree Foundation recently

received a federal grant to plant trees in underserved areas that have less than 25% tree canopy. Pennsauken qualifies so we are entering into a partnership with the NJTF to plant street trees along Maple Avenue. Merchantville is not eligible as it exceeds the tree canopy. Mara and Mike met with Pennsauken Administrator and Staff members who are on board. They are going to work on getting equipment to cut into the sidewalk for the tree pits and are reactivating their Shade Tree Commission. It is anticipated that the Pennsauken STC will be able to help with watering the trees after they are planted. Mara also sent an e-mail recently to Merchantville's STC to see if they can assist with tree watering/ maintenance on Maple Ave in Pennsauken, as this is a project that will benefit the whole neighborhood. If Merchantville gets the DOT TE streetscape improvement grant for Maple Avenue, we anticipate amending the scope of work to add additional streetscape improvements (to make up for changes) in order to make the most out of our grant opportunities.

Mr. Meyers, a member of the public, stated that he was against using tax dollars for street tree planting and that he had trees planted on his property twice without his permission. Mara and Denise discussed that greening up Maple Avenue was a recommendation that came out of the first phase of the Task Force's study (to soften urban image, improve property values, beneficial for environment, etc) and that the tree planting, like the Task Force, will be primarily supported by grants. The West Maple Neighborhood Task Force was not involved with planting any trees on his property. If it was conducted by the Merchantville Shade Tree Commission, they are volunteers.

Mr. Meyers stated that the Task Force should get property owner approval prior to planting. As Ms. Simms indicated at her visit with the Task Force, the NJ Tree Foundation will not plant in front of someone's property if they do not want it as they have limited resources, and would rather plant in another location or community where trees are desired. Typically, street trees are located in the public right of way, not on private property, but the Task Force believed that getting property owner input is a good idea, as we want the trees to survive and so we are cognizant of any concerns about blocking commercial signage, etc.

The next steps for the street trees project will be to finalize Pennsauken's plans for assistance, communicate with affected property owners, bring together a 'tree brigade' who will water the trees (perhaps use this as a public workshop opportunity) for the first few growing seasons, work with NJ Tree Foundation on tree selection and potential tree locations. There will be a utility mark out that will determine final planting locations. The planting must be done within 30 days of the mark-out. Project is anticipated for the spring.

The Task Force discussed tree-maintenance related ideas (potential tree brigade recruitment flyers, reaching out to residents, groups such as boy scouts, girl scouts, eagle scouts, teenagers that need community service hours (Sister Filamina), notes tied to trees that state that tree needs watering and who to contact if interested). The Task Force would not want children distributing flyers on their own door-to-door, without an adult nearby.

c. Kawasaki site -Part of this second grant is doing a preliminary assessment of the property. The owner is currently in federal court with the Bank. Mara spoke to Cummins' attorney and he is aware that Pennsauken is interested in acquiring the property if it can get

the DOT TE grant. We are told that the municipalities will not hear about DOT TE grant application results until sometime in 2013.

d. Graffiti status –Bridge. Bob Romano, a property owner on 43<sup>rd</sup> street asked that we look into the status of the clean-up of the graffiti on the bridge. He complained to Pennsauken who sent a notice to DOT. Betsy stated that she has contacted Rae Hutton at NJ Transit about the graffiti. She believes that it falls under NJ Transit jurisdiction, not DOT.

e. Miscellaneous- Jeanne raised concerns about a disconnect between neighborhood businesses and Merchantville's regulations. She feels that regulations need to be amended to be more business friendly and less concerned about Borough's desired image. Denise and Agnes stated that Merchantville has been working on amending the sign ordinance for this purpose for some time.

## **5. Next Meetings and Upcoming Deadlines**

a. Next Meeting: October 18, 2012 at 1pm in Merchantville Borough Hall

b. Evening Public Workshop: We will need to discuss future date, location. The Task Force discussed possibility of refreshments and/or doing a raffle ticket on flyers for a gift basket to get people out to the workshop. Resident involvement in Neighborhood improvement is extremely important to long term success of this project.