

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WILMAPCO Hybrid-format Meeting, December 16, 2024

Minutes prepared by Elizabeth Espinal.

Mr. Mike Kaszyski, PAC Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

1. ROLL CALL

Members Present: 4

Richard Janney, Southern New Castle County
Mike Kaszyski, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce and PAC Chair
Sarah Lester, Cornerstone West
Bill Lower, Committee of 100

Absent: 14

Serene Abiy, University of Delaware
Mark Blake, Greater Hockessin Area Development
Robin Bullock, Holloway Terrace
Cecil County Board of Realtors
Tracy Chamblee, Southern New Castle County Alliance
Carlos de los Ramos, AARP
Bill Dunn, Civic League for New Castle County
Patricia Folk, Cecil County
Glenn Pusey, Bear Glasgow Council
Anna Quisel, League of Women Voters of New Castle County
Barry Shotwell, 7/40 Alliance
Josh Solge, City of Newark
Dave Tancredi, Milltown-Limestone Civic Alliance
Vic Singer, Civic League for New Castle County

Staff Members: 5

Heather Dunigan, Principal Planner
Elizabeth Espinal, Administrative Assistant
Dave Gula, Principal Planner
Dawn Voss, Outreach Coordinator
Tigist Zegeye, Executive Director

Guests: 3

Robert Hicks, Public
Marco Boyce, NCC
Mike Campbell, Consultant

2. Approval of the October 21st, 2024 Meeting Minutes

ACTION: Approval of the PAC Meeting Minutes was postponed until the next meeting due to no quorum.

3. Public Comment Period:

None.

4. Executive Director's Report:

Ms. Tigist Zegeye shared the following public outreach information:

- The Council met on November 14th, and two TIP amendments were approved: one for the Elkton MARC Station project and another for DelDOT adjustments to ensure financial constraint with CTP. The Council also approved project prioritization technical scoring for the Delaware Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Program application. They viewed two presentations including the Rocky Run Underpass Study and the MD Route 272 Corridor Study.
- On October 24th staff attended Title VI training in Dover.
- On October 27th, staff toured frequently flooded routes along Route 9, in Wilmington with DelDOT.
- On October 28th, the Claymont Area Master Plan held a public Workshop and a follow-up meeting with Claymont business leaders and the fire department is scheduled for January 9th.
- On November 14th, Kirkwood Highway held a draft recommendations workshop, and a Final Recommendations Workshop is scheduled for February 24th.
- On November 18th, a meeting was held for the Concord Pike Corridor Master Plan Monitoring Committee, conducted jointly with the Rocky Run Underpass Feasibility Study Advisory Committee. A workshop is upcoming for Rocky Run Underpass Study mid-winter.
- On November 19th, a public workshop for the Maryland 272 Corridor Plan was held, and the Streeting Committee met December 11th.
- On November 20th, Staff participated in a career day development activity with University of Delaware public health students.
- On November 21st, the Route 9 Corridor Master Plan Monitoring Committee met.
- On November 26th, a presentation on Transportation Justice (TJ) work will be given to the University of Washington Health and Sustainability Transportation class.
- On December 2nd, a site visit for the Augustine Cutoff Reconfiguration Study took place, with DTC providing a bus for safe corridor transportation. The Advisory Committee met on this date.
- On December 4th, staff presented at the APA Delaware Conference.
- On December 10th, the next Churchman's Crossing Plan Monitoring Committee meeting was held.
- On December 11th, staff participated in the Delaware Winter Freight Summit in Dover.
- On December 12th, staff participated in the Brandywine River Flood Study Workshop
- On December 13th, staff participated in the Maryland East Coast Greenway meeting.
- On January 6th, the Ardens Transportation Plan Monitoring Committee will meet.
- Staff continue to work with DVRPC on the Regional Climate Action Plan for Philadelphia MSA.

Ms. Tigist Zegeye announced that Heather Dunigan, a long-time member of WILMAPCO, will be retiring in January. However, she noted that Ms. Dunigan will continue contributing to WILMAPCO in a part-time capacity. Ms. Zegeye expressed gratitude for Ms. Dunigan's years of service and ongoing dedication, emphasizing that she will be greatly missed. She also reminded attendees that a celebration in Ms. Dunigan's honor will take place on December 19th following the TAC meeting and encouraged those interested to attend. She then opened the floor for any additional comments.

ACTION ITEMS:

None.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

5. Newport River Trail

Mr. Marco Boyce from New Castle County introduced the Newport River Trail project, emphasizing its significance and progress. Joining him in the presentation was Mr. Mike Campbell of Whitman, Requardt & Associates (WRA), the project manager for this endeavor. Mr. Boyce highlighted that the county has secured substantial funding from the federal RAISE grant program for the project's construction and noted that it is nearing the completion of the design and permitting phases. He then handed over the presentation to Mr. Campbell.

Mr. Campbell, a landscape architect and head of active transportation planning at WRA, provided a comprehensive overview of the Newport River Trail project. He outlined the scope and concept of the Newport River Trail is a proposed two-mile shared-use path designed to connect the town of Newport at S. James Street to downtown Wilmington via the James A. Markell Trail (commonly known as the JAM Trail). This trail aims to provide a safe, low-stress route for pedestrians and bicyclists, addressing the high-stress conditions currently experienced along Maryland Avenue, the main corridor linking Newport to Wilmington.

Mr. Campbell shared historical background as he emphasized that discussions about a pedestrian and bicycle connection between Newport and Wilmington began over a decade ago. In 2014, during Mr. Boyce's tenure at DelDOT, alternatives were explored, and the Newport River Trail was identified as the most direct and impactful route, albeit with significant challenges. In 2018, DelDOT's Blueprint for a Bicycle-Friendly Delaware and New Castle County's Connecting Communities Initiative reinforced the importance of this project as a key component of the regional trail network. The trail's alignment crosses sensitive environmental areas, including tidal and non-tidal wetlands, migratory fish habitats, and the Christina River. It must also navigate around critical infrastructure, such as New Castle County's primary sewer line and the Amtrak Northeast Corridor. Coordination with property owners, including Harvey Hanna & Associates, has been pivotal. The design includes narrowing Water Street's travel lanes to accommodate a shared-use path, elevated boardwalk structures to address floodplain challenges, and simplified railings to simplify future maintenance for the county. In addition, Mr. Campbell explained that a public meeting held in May 2023 gathered valuable input. While there were concerns about environmental impacts, attendees expressed support for amenities such as wayfinding signage, interpretive displays, and gateway treatments.

The project's final design is fully funded through state bond bill allocations. Additionally, New Castle County secured \$23 million in construction funding via a RAISE grant, marking a unique achievement as the funds flow directly to the county rather than DelDOT. Construction is expected to commence in 2025, with a duration of 18 to 24 months due to the project's complexity. Future steps include continuing to coordinate with environmental agencies, securing easements, and addressing utility relocations. Updates will be posted on the project website, including recordings of public meetings.

Mr. Bill Lower expressed appreciation for the efforts of Marco Boyce and Mike Campbell in advancing the Newport River Trail project. Acknowledging their repeated presentations over the past months, he thanked them for their time, particularly during the holiday season. Wearing dual roles, he noted that Harvey Hannah & Associates owns a significant portion of the land in question for needed easements. He confirmed that he and Harvey Hannah representatives would engage with Marco Boyce and the incoming Marcus Henry administration in early 2024 to discuss key issues and ensure the project remains on track.

Mr. Lower inquired about the permitting process, recognizing the involvement of multiple state and federal agencies. Mr. Campbell explained that permitting is progressing alongside the legal process, with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review being the primary hurdle. NEPA approval is required before formal agreements can be made, including right-of-way negotiations and easement finalization. He highlighted ongoing consultations with federal agencies, including the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), particularly concerning fish migration protections. The Coast Guard's review is also underway, given the project's interaction with open water. Mr. Campbell reassured that while permitting may influence environmental mitigation strategies, it is unlikely to significantly alter the project's alignment or structure type.

Mr. Lower then asked about environmental assessments related to the Christina River, particularly concerning potential contaminants in the riverbed or water quality. Mr. Boyce confirmed that no negative findings had been identified.

The discussion shifted to specific infrastructure elements, including a sewer line running along the Amtrak corridor near the Markell Bridge. Mr. Campbell clarified the location of the line and how it affects trail design. Mr. Lower further inquired about the project's budget, acknowledging that the initial \$23 million grant may not fully cover rising construction costs. Mr. Boyce confirmed that securing additional funding through future grants would be part of ongoing discussions.

Ms. Sarah Lester raised concerns about the trail's width, referencing past projects where inadequate width caused issues. Mr. Campbell stated that the boardwalk portion would be 14 feet wide, matching the Markell Trail, while the on-road section would be 10 feet wide due to right-of-way constraints. He noted that new FHWA guidelines suggest a 12-foot width for future projects, but flexibility remains in the current design. Mr. Boyce added that, if the budget allows, small seating areas may be incorporated into the boardwalk section.

Other discussions covered roadway adjustments, including narrowing lanes on adjacent roads to slow traffic and incorporating raised driveway crossings to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety. Ms. Dunigan acknowledged that, while 12-foot paths are now recommended, design flexibility remains a consideration. She commended the team on the project's progress, emphasizing that, despite its lengthy development, it is advancing at a relatively fast pace for a major infrastructure project.

Additional inquiries from Mr. Kaszyski and Mr. Gula addressed pedestrian safety at key intersections, particularly at James Street near the railroad bridge. Mr. Boyce noted that a future phase of development might include pedestrian signals or flashing beacons. He also mentioned a related county proposal for a federally funded design project (the Newport to Newark Trail) that would extend from James and Water Streets to the Churchman's Crossing train station.

6. Claymont Area Master Plan

Ms. Heather Dunigan provided an update on the recent public workshop related to the Claymont Area Master Plan. She noted that the last update to the PAC occurred just before the third public workshop and highlighted key community feedback received during that session. The discussion also addressed public controversy that emerged following the workshops and strategies to improve communication and clarity in addressing community concerns.

The study area for the master plan includes the Hometown Overlay District and surrounding areas, which were proposed by the county to ensure broader and more logical boundaries. The

primary goals, confirmed through community engagement, focus on creating walkable nodes, identifying future land use and zoning to support redevelopment, and ensuring consistent streetscape and design to foster a pedestrian-friendly environment. Residents expressed a strong desire for improved walkability, pedestrian connections, and better access to transit and community partnerships.

The planning process, initiated a year ago, included existing conditions and market analysis to identify deficiencies and real estate demands. A visioning workshop gathered community input on key concerns and aspirations, leading to the development of various land-use scenarios. These scenarios were refined based on feedback from a public workshop in May, followed by an impact assessment using performance measurements aligned with community priorities. The results were presented at a subsequent workshop in October, with additional outreach planned for January due to emerging controversies requiring further discussion before adoption.

Key land-use concerns raised by the public include limited business access, insufficient shopping and recreational options, affordability of housing, and lack of open spaces and parks. Proposed strategies to address these issues include mixed-use development, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, affordable housing programs, and enhanced utilization of open spaces.

The plan identifies underused parcels for redevelopment, emphasizing increased density to support housing needs and economic activity while integrating improved streetscape and roadway design. Three land-use scenarios were presented:

1. Minor policy changes to update the 2004 Claymont plan with modernized design guidelines.
2. Increased density at selected underused commercial properties, allowing for buildings up to three floors.
3. Further increased density, permitting structures up to four floors.

The committee recommended Scenario 3 based on community support from workshop attendees and an online survey. Additionally, property owners indicated that economic feasibility required sufficient density to justify redevelopment.

In terms of transportation, community concerns centered on speeding, unsafe traffic maneuvers, difficulties in crossing streets, and inadequate pedestrian infrastructure. Performance measures evaluated crash data, pedestrian and bicycle safety, transit amenities, and implementation feasibility. Three transportation scenarios were considered:

1. Technical improvements, enhancing existing infrastructure without lane reconfigurations.
2. Extending the road diets, expanding a previously implemented traffic-calming measure further north and south.
3. Adding a roundabout at Governor Printz Boulevard and Philadelphia Pike aimed at improving traffic flow and safety.

Feedback from in-person workshops showed support for the roundabout option, whereas online responses were more divided. Concerns included safety, pedestrian and bicycle accessibility, and impacts on local businesses.

The workshop provided visual aids to help the public better understand design components such as refuge islands and curb line adjustments. The roundabout option was found to perform best in terms of pedestrian safety and traffic calming, though some community members remained uncertain about its feasibility and impact on business access.

Regarding level of service (LOS) evaluations, Ms. Dunigan and other committee members noted that LOS grades (A to F) are often misunderstood by the public. While D is considered an optimal balance of efficiency and traffic flow, many people perceive it negatively. Efforts will be made to adjust graphical representations to better convey the efficiency and safety implications of different traffic conditions.

Further discussions are planned to address community concerns, particularly regarding the roundabout's impact on access to key businesses like the Waterfall Event Center and a funeral home. These concerns will be carefully evaluated during the design phase, with alternative scenarios considered if necessary. The committee emphasized the safety benefits of the roundabout and its potential to improve the corridor's overall traffic efficiency.

Mr. Marco Boyce highlighted the roundabout's potential for placemaking, improving the aesthetic appeal and reinforcing a slower, safer driving environment upon entering Claymont.

Mr. Dave Gula noted that many existing parking areas along the corridor are underutilized due to concerns about high-speed traffic, further emphasizing the need for traffic-calming measures.

Following the third workshop, a news article titled "Claymont Master Plan Thinks Tall and Welcoming" inaccurately suggested that there was overwhelming support for the roundabout and the Scenario 3 development option. She clarified that while many participants expressed favor for the roundabout and land use scenario, there was both strong support and opposition.

Ms. Dunigan noted that the article contained misinformation about the project, leading to confusion and frustration. Social media further amplified inaccuracies about the project and a lack of understanding for how the scenarios work.

Ms. Dunigan highlighted the challenges of public engagement in the era of social media, emphasizing the importance of addressing myths with facts. Addressing concerns about the former Philadelphia Pike road diet, she stated that although it did not fully achieve its potential due to its minor changes, it still resulted in a 13% reduction in crashes over a three-year period. The two fatal crashes that occurred were outside the designated road diet area. While speeding remained an issue, compliance with speed limits improved within the road diet zone, and traffic volumes increased by 10%, contradicting fears of negative traffic impacts. Moreover, the level of service in key areas remained stable or even improved.

Regarding roundabouts, Ms. Dunigan addressed prevalent misconceptions. She explained that roundabouts are often confused with traffic circles, but they are distinct in both function and safety benefits. Unlike large traffic circles, which require weaving movements, modern roundabouts require only simple yielding and have been proven to enhance traffic efficiency. She refuted the myth that roundabouts worsen traffic congestion, explaining that they eliminate unnecessary stops at red lights, thereby improving traffic flow. Additionally, concerns about large vehicles navigating roundabouts were addressed, with Ms. Dunigan noting that modern designs include features to accommodate fire trucks and oversized vehicles.

Mr. Gula reinforced this point, stating that oversized farm equipment presents challenges in any intersection type, not just roundabouts. Since downtown areas do not typically accommodate such vehicles, their impact on local road design considerations is minimal.

Ms. Dunigan emphasized the well-documented safety benefits of roundabouts, noting that they reduce serious and fatal crashes by approximately 80% due to fewer conflict points and lower

impact speeds. She cited a survey of 323 first responders across the U.S. and Canada, in which the majority reported that roundabouts decreased congestion, reduced delays, and improved safety.

Ms. Dunigan provided an update on the project timeline, stating that the initial planning phase was nearing completion. While this development was welcomed by those concerned about specific recommendations, it was disappointing for those eager for rapid implementation. She reassured the community that the process would include continued public engagement and coordination with WILMAPCO. Following the next phase of public outreach in early winter, the plan would be presented to relevant committees for adoption. Subsequent steps would involve prioritization, collaboration with DelDOT for funding, and ongoing public participation throughout project development, preliminary engineering, right-of-way acquisition, and construction.

Mr. Boyce inquired about the design of buffer areas and their potential to accommodate on-street parking. Ms. Dunigan explained that buffer areas were planned in locations where parking demand was low, whereas high-demand areas—such as those near Dunkin' Donuts, the post office, and 21 Steak & Fries—would feature traditional bike lanes. She also acknowledged the necessity of preserving on-street parking in areas like Holy Angels Church, where demand was highest on weekends.

Mr. Campbell proposed using buffer-protected bike lanes in transition areas, while Ms. Lester asked about alternative parking solutions. Ms. Dunigan agreed that strategic bump-outs could be an effective measure to protect on-street parking while enhancing pedestrian safety. She further noted that the corridor lacked street trees and adequate lighting, elements that could be addressed in future planning efforts.

Mr. Kaszyski supported the implementation of bump-outs, highlighting their benefits in shortening pedestrian crossing distances and improving overall safety. He also observed that many four- and six-lane roads in the area functioned inefficiently due to the absence of center turn lanes, which often resulted in unpredictable traffic flow. Ms. Dunigan concurred, emphasizing that a center turn lane could contribute to a more orderly traffic pattern.

Ms. Lester expressed skepticism regarding roundabouts, noting that they could be inconvenient for pedestrians and cyclists. She also pointed out the challenge of shifting public perceptions regarding road design. Ms. Dunigan acknowledged these concerns but reiterated that roundabouts offer significant safety benefits. However, she remained open to considering alternative design solutions that might be more acceptable to the community.

Ms. Lester emphasized the importance of community engagement and questioned the effectiveness of outreach efforts, citing a low survey response rate. She expressed concern about whether the results were representative of the broader community. Ms. Dunigan explained that generating public interest before an issue becomes controversial is often difficult. While one local resident had actively promoted a public workshop through live-streaming and social media, engagement remained minimal until misinformation spread.

Mr. Gula observed that public opposition often originates from individuals who do not attend workshops but prefer to voice dissent from a distance. He noted that public meetings tend to attract those strongly opposed to a project, while supporters may feel less compelled to participate. This, he explained, is a longstanding challenge in public engagement.

Ms. Lester humorously suggested that continued promotion of roundabouts might encourage greater participation and lead to a consensus on an alternative solution. Ms. Dunigan acknowledged that despite the prominence of roundabouts in outreach materials, initial public response had been limited.

Mr. Gula and Ms. Dunigan also discussed the challenges of addressing misinformation on social media. While WILMAPCO responds to specific questions on its official channels, staff members do not engage in debates on private community forums. Their strategy remains focused on disseminating factual information through official platforms while avoiding unproductive discussions. Ms. Dunigan reaffirmed that ongoing opportunities for public input would be available throughout the project's development.

7. Other Business

Ms. Sarah Lester suggested a topic for a future meeting regarding recently passed legislation in Wilmington, proposed by Chris Johnson. While she is still seeking clarity on the details, she explained that the legislation allows residents to request a traffic study for a particular intersection or street by gathering a certain number of petition signatures. Although this legislation currently applies only to Wilmington, she noted that similar policies in other parts of the state could be relevant for discussion, particularly in terms of public involvement in traffic safety improvements.

Mr. Dave Gula provided additional context, explaining that under the new system, petitions can be submitted through City Council meeting minutes to request a traffic study. However, he clarified that while this applies to city-maintained streets, it does not extend to state-maintained roads. The city can request the state's involvement, and cooperation is generally expected, particularly for safety concerns and crash-related issues. He noted that if many petitions were submitted, a prioritization process would likely be needed. Additionally, City Council has established a specific threshold for the number of signatures required on a petition for it to be considered.

8. Adjournment

The PAC adjourned at 7:39 p.m.

Attachments: (0)