

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
June 12, 2018

The following are the minutes of the Growth & Redevelopment Committee meeting, which was held on Tuesday, June 12, 2018 at 6:37 p.m. in the Lawrence Township Municipal Building, Lower Level Conference Room.

**Statement of Adequate Notice:**

Adequate notice of the regular meeting of the Lawrence Township Growth & Redevelopment Committee has been provided by filing an annual meeting schedule with the Municipal Clerk and by filing the agenda with the Municipal Clerk, posting prominently in the Municipal Building and mailing to the Trenton Times and the Trentonian.

**Roll Call:**

Present: Frank Comstock  
Tushar Patel  
Charles Lavine (6:49 p.m.)  
John Conroy, Chairperson  
Robert Pluta  
Joan Brame  
Peter Ferrone  
Brian Vaughn  
Andrew Frank  
Christopher LaFlamme

Absent: Teresita Bastides-Heron

Excused Absence: Lovette Love-Stevens  
Maria Connolly  
Nina Reeder  
Melissa Clark  
Ryan Kennedy

Also Present: Christopher Bobbitt, Council Liaison  
Andrew Link, Liaison  
Susan Snook, Secretary  
Lea Kahn, Lawrence Ledger

**Minutes:**

The May 8, 2018 minutes were unanimously approved with minor changes.

**Public Comment:**

None

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**Securing Awards Program Sponsors and A Speaker:**

Chairperson Conroy confirmed that the Awards Ceremony will be held at Cobblestone per MidJersey Chamber of Commerce being held on October 10, 2018. The Committee members were asked who they reached out to: Frank Comstock reached out to Community News Service and acknowledged they received it; Robert Pluta asked if the award sponsorship fee can be split between two businesses; Peter Ferrone reached out to the Chevy Dealership and did not follow-up; Joan Brame reached out to the Manager of Wells Fargo and will participate; John Conroy reached out to the Quaker Bridge Mall but e-mails keep bouncing back, so Mr. Link will get him a new one and to Chris Vernon of Valet Car Wash but did not get a response; Tushar Patel reached out to PNC Bank; Chairperson Conroy did not hear back from Mercedes or Ryan Kennedy on Bristol-Myers Squibb; Chris LaFlamme reached out to Paychex and sent out the web site information on a speaker on Ms. Gardello; Charles Lavine reached out to Stark & Stark and will do something and will need to select an award.

Mr. Link has an updated list of sponsors, copy attached. Joan Brame and Robert Pluta decided to split the sponsorship award fee and will do the new building/renovation award.

Chairperson Conroy stated that everyone should look at Mr. LaFlamme's e-mail regarding Jennifer Gardello bio. Mr. LaFlamme stated she is always on point on social media or women in the workplace. She has worked with local Women's small business. Mr. LaFlamme stated he discussed it with her and she should speak about social media trends or women in the workplace.

**Lawrence Shopping Center – Visioning:**

Ms. Brame stated the Bakery will be opening July 1, 2018 per the owner. Chairperson Conroy stated he updated the overlay the FEMA maps that show where the floodplain is and the floodplain actually runs a little past Burlington Coat Factory. That area should not be developed on what we are proposing and be left as open space. The Committee has some pro-bono legal person working on it, Daniel Haggerty, lives in Lawrence and is retired from Stark & Stark. He is happy to help out with any kind of legal issues with the Planning Board.

Chairperson Conroy received an e-mail from the Shopping Center and they are not interested right now, they are interested in going ahead with their new plan, which is rehashing what they have and giving it a fresh coat of paint. It makes no connections to the neighborhoods so not sure how much business it will bring in. Mayor Bobbitt had a meeting with Cooper Pest Control and will be having a public open house on June 21, 2018 from 4:00 to 8:00 which will include tours to the public.

Chairperson Conroy stated we are trying to still open up the doors of communications with the Shopping Center and we are not giving up communication with the owners and we are going to try some our next set of avenues to do that. The Attorney and Chairperson Conroy have been meeting to figure out how to proceed with that. Mayor Bobbitt stated before he was elected he was at the State of Township Address in Hamilton and that Mayor Yaede spoke about how excited the Jemal's were there and they have done good work in the past.

Public Comment: Something has to be done and it is only at 50% occupancy. He saw the sign for the bakery but it is just a sign, everything is empty on that end. South Lawrence is forgotten about and he has been to a couple of meetings and the hope is that the group that purchased it is the same group that redeveloped the strip mall in Independence Mall. He is hoping that there are things to come and don't know if the Township needs to help and if we are in communication with them. The façade is rotting away, there are puddles in the middle of the parking lot and there needs to be a store that will be a draw.

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Chairperson Conroy stated we reached out to them to see if they wanted to talk to us and one difficult obstacle is they are in New York.

Mayor Bobbitt gave the background of the shopping center. The current owners have been in conversations with the Township Manager on a monthly basis. They have done a wonderful job with getting Cooper Pest and looking at doing façade renovations, they have made it clear to the Township Manager that they are in this for the long haul. They are looking to do something with the Mall that can't be made public yet because it is in negotiations. They are shooting for something like the Independence Mall. It is going to take time. The pet store is a good one, the camera store, barber shop and now the bakery, if you take out the outline buildings, it is above 50% now and have been keeping track of that.

He (public) heard rumor if business does not pick up for the pet shop, they won't be there. Mayor Bobbitt stated that goes to the community and we have to shop there. We can complain about it but it does not have the great old things of the library and Dunham's, it is not going to come back like that.

Chairperson Conroy stated to have it more pedestrian friendly and more bike friendly because once you get into car, you would go to the Mercer Mall or beyond; so try to make it convenient to walk or bike there. We have been trying to encourage a dialogue with the Shopping Center and create some diagrams on that and that was shared with them and still hopeful they will want to talk to us. Also to bring some uses to the land that is not being utilized. Also talked to Open Space and Open Trail Committee and they are excited about making it more of a neighborhood friendly pedestrian friendly place to go shop. A suggestion for a mini transportation hub because a lot of people take the bus to go to Acme because it has a food selection that no one else has.

Mayor Bobbitt stated that the different committees are talking to one another because in the past so many people had ideas and they were silent and then a development happens and people get upset because their voice was not heard. He appreciates that this Committee is talking to Trails and Open Space and Environmental Resources Committee. His feeling is even if the owners don't talk to the Committee right now, if this Committee and others can get enough community support behind it and present it to the Planning Board they will be aware if it comes before Planning Board and then the Township Planner would be aware of what is going on underneath.

Chairperson Conroy stated we are trying to be pro-active instead of re-active and trying to start a discussion starting with the other committees in Town and getting a lot horsepower behind that and hopefully take it the community and get them behind it as well.

Mr. Pluta asked about tax abatements and mentioned all the stores that are empty from Texas Avenue to the Circle and until it is profitable for someone to go in there and make money it is not going to happen. The shopping center is paying taxes as a whole and then it should be passed onto the tenants. Mayor Bobbitt stated we have not given them any tax abatement and they have a development plan without any help from the Township right now and until they ask that question and increase the taxes to residents. The Board discussed the pros and cons of tax abatements and had suggestions on how it might work.

**Communication Issues and Strategies to Engage Town Business with Growth and Redevelopment Committee**

Chairperson Conroy stated why businesses are going to the Shopping Center and who is going to the Shopping Center to shop. Mr. Comstock wanted to know why you go to that Shopping Center and the only store he goes to is Staples. Ms. Brame stated people come to the Shopping Center for direct local and do a spillover such as Hallmark and Burlington Coat Factory as well as ample parking. Mr. Lavine commented that south Lawrence needs the businesses and it is because the lack of traffic on Route 1.

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The Board members had a conversation with shopping generators have changed; there are new trends like people walking to the stores and people are doing a lot more shopping on-line. The gentleman that attended the meeting stated we are putting the cart before the horse because there is nothing to walk there for and the area needs to get developed first. Mr. LaFlamme stated his generation does not shop retail like coffee places and places you can bring your children, this is where it starts and then bring in the other anchors.

**Other Business:**

Ms. Brame stated she is banned from her sidewalk sign and she will pursue it. Chairperson Conroy could not be here so next meeting we will discuss the signage. The sign we are trying to work on are small A-frame signs. Mayor Bobbitt stated that Lawrence has been a low signage town as opposed to Hamilton or other places that have lots and lots of signs. Chairperson Conroy stated Main Street can do A-frame signs but the Lawrence Shopping Center can't, so we are trying to get A-frames signs allowed at the Shopping Center but our former Manager said no. So we are hoping to rejuvenate that with the new Township Manager and see if we can get that revived for the Shopping Center.

Ms. Brame suggested e-mailing the March 2016 minutes.

Digital audio file of this meeting is available upon request.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Susan J. Snook  
Recording Secretary

Minutes approved: July 10, 2018