

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
April 9, 2019

The following are the minutes of the Growth & Redevelopment Committee meeting, which was held on Tuesday, April 9, 2019 at 6:38 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: Lovette Love-Stevens  
Charles Lavine  
Robert Pluta  
Joan Brame  
Maria Connolly  
Peter Ferrone  
Melissa Clark  
Andrew Frank

Absent: Brian Vaughn  
Ryan Kennedy  
Cathy LeCompte, School Board Liaison

Excused Absence: Tushar Patel  
Teresita Bastides-Heron  
Chris LaFlamme  
Hannah Rhoades

Also Present: Andrew Link, Liaison  
Christopher Bobbitt, Council Liaison  
Susan Snook, Secretary

The attendance started at 7:29 p.m.

**Business Outreach:**

Chairperson Pluta thanked the owners of the bakeries to be here and commented that the Committee wanted to reach out to business and find out how we can serve them and what are the issues that concern you and how can be better the Township to be a business friendly Town.

Ms. Connolly stated that three bakeries that was discussed at the last meeting "The Gingered Peach", Wildflour Cafe" and " Cafe Du Pain" and invited the owners to come and talk to the Committee about how it was opening their business here and what this Committee could do to assist them in the future. Questions were sent to the owners to discuss at tonight's meeting.

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Marilyn, owner of Wildfour Cafe stated one concern is about parking because there is not a lot of free parking available. She has employees that park in the Lawrenceville Fuel lot and has a contract with Mr. Hullfish to use his lot and for overflow of customers. Based on the Township's requirements, they have to have a parking spot for every three customers that they can accommodate in the business, which requires extra parking spaces in order to have a full cafe. However, she does not know how long she will have the contract with Mr. Hullfish. She would like her customers to know they have a place to park and would bring more customers and more traffic to the area.

Her cafe has been there for six years; she has parking in the back of her location and there is parking in the Hullfish property and where she recommends people to go park; she has seven spots behind her cafe and the main entrance is in the front.

Marie, owner of Café Du Pain has been in the Lawrence Shopping Center for eight months and the process for going through the permits and construction was not difficult; the turnaround was quick. It was a normal process, it was easy to talk to the staff especially because there was a lot of issues with fire, which was explained by the Fire Marshal. One of the concerns is for advertising along Route 1 or even Princeton Pike. Marie wanted to know what the policy was for lawn signs or advertising along the road.

Ms. Connolly stated the Ordinance does not allow lawn signs only grand openings for 30-days, but once the 30-days is over, the Township does not allow lawn signs. It is actually one of the items this committee has looked at in the past and possible look at it again in the future.

John Ryan stated plans will be submitted by the Lawrence Shopping Center to look for signage on Route 1 and Princeton Pike; however, that is down the road and has to come before the Planning Board to ask for a variance to allow extra tenants, but has not been submitted yet. The current sign they have there was from a variance years ago which is not allowed by the current ordinance but that variance carries forward and allowed to put a similar sign up to allow more tenants.

Marilyn stated signage is problematic especially for parking issues to direct people where to go for additional parking to make it helpful for customers. She was limited for the size of signage.

Nick Sferra was in the audience stated that there is an ordinance that the Lawrence Shopping Center is not allowed sidewalk signs and wanted to know if that is something being considered because we need to get foot traffic there. Ms. Connolly stated that Lawrenceville Main Street does allow A-frame sidewalk signs; however, the Lawrence Shopping Center does not have permission. It is a recommendation of this Committee to the Township Council because they have to change the ordinance. It has to go to the Planning Board to make sure it is consistent with the Master Plan and goes back to Council to make the adoption. The recommendation is to allow shopping centers have A-frame signs; but they cannot be put out onto a highway or roadway, it is going to have to be adjacent to your store front and only during business hours.

Mr. Frank asked the owners on what drew them to Lawrenceville that might be helpful for this Committee to understand on what we can do. Marilyn responded that an opportunity arose and she lives in Princeton and Lawrenceville is very close. It is a beautiful building and accessible and has been happy being in Lawrenceville. It is not a high risk compared to Princeton where parking is a problem, there are a lot of chain stores that come and go, and it is very high rent, so this is a great place to have a business, it has a lot of advantages without being a high high price in rent. The culture is more real, it is a more neighborhood feel and the business owners who are connected to the community.

Marie responded stated cost effective wise is a great location and for the price at that time because the owner was really ready to entice more business to come to the Shopping Center. But the vision and planning that the owner of the Shopping Center has showed Marie, she thought this could be the place.

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This is her first retail location. Lawrence is a diverse community and being here for a short time, the community has been really supportive and could not get this elsewhere. She mentioned the Ladies of Lawrenceville and how they are her greatest support, really helping her support the business to the community. It is not over commercialized like other places and have a lot of small local businesses in the area, so how can this Committee help small business especially the Lawrence Shopping Center because it has been dead for so long. People do not know the new changes in the shopping center. She does a lot of social media with the community and public, but where and how can we partner together as a business to help the business grow. We are not like big chains that have the finances to back the advertising and marketing. She felt it was great to keep this going and to meet with other businesses to see what challenges they are having that we can share and grow from. Her business comes from Princeton, Hamilton and North Jersey but majority is Lawrenceville.

Marilyn stated her business is with locals, she advertises in Edible Jersey, which is advertising to the whole state; she gets people from Brooklyn, Philadelphia, mail orders to Florida and Denver. She feels there is a lot of room for new businesses to establish themselves here. Main Street has a lot of food, but if they had other types of stores that would be bring more people to the area; however, making sure there is enough parking and it is convenient would be essential.

Marie stated that they when Bury the Hatchet came in they did their grand opening and they established a relationship. When a customer signs up for a session, they automatically get a link to their bakery and they can order their food and it gets delivered. This is a great way to connect with other businesses in the shopping center. Maria stated they give 10% to the people who work at the shopping center. Mr. Frank stated in Lawrenceville Main Street there is no interaction with other business owners. Marilyn stated she has been to a couple of meetings but do not have events together to plan. She stated she is not worried about competition and getting more people to do this area is what they want. The more attractive businesses we have the better. Maria felt the same way and everyone should support one another.

Chairperson Pluta commented about shop in Lawrence and have a tax reduction like Voorhees Township. Ms. Connolly stated Brick Township has a program where they hold meetings, serve a brunch and have all the business owners meet one another. There was a discussion regarding an app. where you shop at that business and get a property tax reduction. Chairperson Pluta asked if the ordinance could be a separate zone for parking in the Lawrenceville Main Street and if ordinance changed could it make her have more than the 21 seats in her bakery. So if we are revisiting the sign ordinance, could we revisit the parking ordinance and do something special for Lawrenceville Main Street to make it easier on business owners.

Mayor Bobbitt stated it is in the Neighborhood Commercial which means it would be changed for everyone in the Neighborhood Commercial site in the Township and the tradeoff would be you would start pushing parking into the neighborhoods. If you tweak it for one person, it is not for a single spot zoning, it is for everybody and you have to look at the ramifications throughout the whole Township. Chairperson Pluta asked if it could be for just Lawrenceville Main Street and make it a new designation so that way it is just limited to them. Mayor Bobbitt stated we just changed the parking from the Fire House to Bergen Street where you can park on the street. The Board discussed the parking in Lawrenceville Main Street and the parking behind the shops.

Both Marilyn and Marie were both interested in having A-frame signs allowed on the sidewalk in front of their stores showing specials, etc. Chairperson Pluta and the members thanked both of the owners for attending.

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**Minutes:**

The March 12, 2019 minutes were unanimously approved. (Motion by Ms. Brame and seconded by Ms. Connolly).

**Public Comment:**

Nick Sferra asked what this committee is doing to revitalize south Lawrence. The Lawrence Shopping center is gaining some action but you drive down Route 1 and you see buildings that are not occupied. Is it ordinances or regulations that are driving people from not occupying these areas? What can this committee do to spark some kind of interest to businesses to want to populate this area? It is a small community and there is such a sense of community, what can we do to spark this. There are so many empty stores and give them a tax break or do something.

Chairperson Pluta stated he brought up the idea about a tax abatement program; but it was shot down. How much would it be on the tax payers? Mr. Sferra stated hopefully there will be a supermarket in the shopping center which would attract more people and feels if you put in a designated store, it would draw more people as well as a good anchor grocery store. Ms. Brame feels if LA Fitness is investing this much money then it will be a trigger. Mr. Sferra stated when LA Fitness came before the Board, he mentioned to put in walking paths because there are no walking paths from Texas Avenue into the shopping center and believes people will walk to the shopping center. His end of town, the demographics have changed and the reason no one was shopping at Acme because it stinks. If you get a good anchor grocery store, you will get people to shop there.

Ms. Connolly stated that is why we are bringing businesses to the meetings to get their input and to advise Council and we will continue to do this to get their suggestions. We are moving towards making more recommendations. Mr. Sferra referred to the Eldridge Park study and nothing happening with it.

**Categories for Awards Program:**

The Board's comments were if we do not have an award category then we do not give one out; we do not have to be boxed into these awards; a new category for getting the community involved. Mr. Frank stated that most of the crowd in the attendance was friends/family/people getting award; everyone mingled nicely and an opportunity to meet one another; having a breakfast was incidental but not very costly. Mr. Frank questioned the bowl and what will the owner do with it and mentioned a plaque. The bowls are made by a Township resident.

Chairperson Pluta suggested a faith/service award and it was discussed that it would not be a great idea for a municipality to give out a faith based award. It was discussed about more involvement of the community; there are too many awards and do not have to give an award in each category. It was mentioned about the "new" category and is only a few. The members agreed to not stick to the list and think about it and make suggestions.

**Sign Ordinance:**

Ms. Connolly stated she drafted the letter to Council and was sent to Andy and Kevin, copy attached. At the last Planning Board meeting it was being discussed on to make some changes in the ordinance. One of them was the sign ordinance and allowing A-frame signs and our Planner was looking into this already. Chairperson Pluta also wanted to thank Ms. Connolly for being the hardest working member on the Board.

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Ms. Connolly mentioned the other changes that the Planning Board is looking at which are in-law suites, electronic fuel price signs, adult medical daycare, shed setbacks, garage definition and standards; checklist modification, signage in the HC Zone; alternate energy sources and home occupation signs.

**Other Business:**

Mayor Bobbitt stated in the future thought it would be good to let himself and Mr. Link to understand what the questions going out are. It was suggested the photography shop in the shopping center; Lawrence Gallery, Viva Ballroom Dance Studio and Jerry's art-roma.

**Adjournment:**

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:09 p.m.

Digital audio file of this meeting is available upon request.

Respectfully submitted,



Susan J. Snook  
Recording Secretary

Minutes approved: May 14, 2019