Lower Saucon Township
Citizens Committee

Date: September 30, 2015
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Location: Council Meeting Room

Attendees:
Charles Moretz
Sandra Miller
Dave Spirk
Joel Katz
Lou Mahlman
Mark Ironside
Stephanie Weitzman
Amanda Buss-Sivak
Andrew Lauden
Phil Roeder
Ron Horiszny

Dave Willard
Judy Stern Goldstein
Jack Cahalan
Chris Garges

1. **Welcome –** Dave welcomed everyone back after the summer hiatus.

2. **On-line Survey Results**
   - Dave said Chris put the survey together and compiled the responses. We weren't sure what we would get but got 52 responses back. Dave asked everyone to look at the table that has been distributed. Chris said that it is broken down by columns for each of the questions and you can read across the page what the responses were. Chris said what stood out to him from the responses were the ones describing the process of getting a building permit and while it seems to staff that it's pretty simple it appears that there is still some confusion out there about this process. We are going to have to look at that next year and we talked about doing some things like putting a video on-line, etc... Charlie asked what the confusion was? Chris said that it gets complicated when you get into needing to meet building code requirements and going to a third part building inspector. We have two outside agencies we use in the Township for this. Charlie related what happened when he needed a permit for his addition several years ago and asked why the Township could not have referred him to a professional to prepare the plans he needed for approval. Chris said that we do not have a list of architects or engineers that we hand out but we can tell you who did work on projects in the Township and the applicant can choose from them. There was a discussion whether this was something the Township should be doing. Charlie felt that since applicants were looking to the Township for guidance, there should be some recommendation made of would they should go to make the process more streamlined and easier. Chris said that he can provide a list of the professionals who have done work on projects in the Township. Dave said that the recommendation would then be to provide the list of these individuals but not make a recommendation on any one of them. Dave said that as we go along tonight these recommendations will fall under three categories: communications, marketing, and policy & procedures. This is one that will go under communications. Dave asked the group to look at page 10, Question 3 in the survey. It indicates that 11 respondents said they got their information off the Township website; so we need to put more information on the website. On the next page 5, 22 out of 30 respondents said they were satisfied with the pre-application information. Dave said we should note the response that Chris is "one of

the most helpful Township employees in the County". Dave said that we need to pay attention here that 30% of them were not satisfied. The same ratio is also true for the turn-around processing time responses. Dave said and the same for responses on the fees on page 7. Dave said that the responses on pages 8 and 9 were so few that it's hard to reach any conclusions. On page 10 Chris said that we put that question in to see the responses of people who had experienced the process in another municipality. Dave noted the three positive comments about Chris in these responses. Mark said that what stood out to him were the comments about the consultants. He asked what was the Township process for selecting and reviewing the performance of its consultants? Chris said that under the UCC, a municipality can do the building inspections in-house, like the City of Bethlehem does, or farm it out to 3rd party inspectors like the Township does or, have Labor & Industry do it. Chris said that the Department of Labor & Industry does field audits every few years to ensure that everyone is following the code. Originally when we started with the 3rd party inspectors we had upwards of ten (10) of them and Labor and Industry recommended that we have just one (1) for commercial inspections and two (2) for residential inspections. Charlie asked why Hanover Engineering has been the Township engineer so long and what's the benefit to the Township? Jack said that the consultants are appointed every year by the Council. One benefit in having them for a long period is their history of what has taken place in the Township and their familiarity with the Township. Charlie asked if our consultant fees are competitive? Jack said that to do that we would have to go through an RFP process and ask other consulting firms to submit proposals with this information. Jack said that Chris is the point person for any resident or developer who has a complaint about the consultant's fees or maybe the time that something has taken and he will discuss those with the consultants and get it resolved. We also implemented a performance review process for the consultants where we ask the various boards and committees that they appear before to submit their comments and then the Council sits down with them for an annual evaluation session. Judy said that her firm represents multiple municipalities and Lower Saucon is one of the few who conduct these types of performance evaluations. Dave said that the idea of RFPs came up in the Task Force discussions. He has participated in the performance reviews and is aware that the consultants have made changes where need as a result of those discussions. Sandra asked if there was a time frame for the building inspections? Chris said that currently we do not, but he has never gotten a complaint about any delays in conducting these inspections. Judy said that many municipalities have time frames for these inspections. Joel asked if this really was a problem in Lower Saucon that required a change? Dave said that from the beginning we said that we need to identify whether it is a perception or a reality? If it's a perception, is it a fair perception or not? One of the goals was to look for some simple things we could do, whether it was actually changing some policies or procedures or, communicating that in a different or better way.(2849)

3. Recommendations from Committee Members and Staff

- Dave said that the list on this document is a combination of what the group sent us back in July and some of our thinking. The first portion deals with policy and procedures and the second part covers possible zoning amendments which are Planning Commission and Council matters.
- Dave said that two of the recommendations referred to an ongoing body such as ambassadors or ombudsmen and there are a couple of different structures recommended.
- Chris said that the first recommendations would commit to having a committee formed that would meet with potential developers in advance of their submissions. It would anticipate creating more buy-in from the Township Council, Planning Commission and staff so that the developer had some feeling upfront about their project, and if it moved forward through the process, there would be members from Planning, Council and staff who would be familiar with the project.
- Chris said that the second recommendation for the ombudsman is more of a staff level position that residents or developers could come into the Township to meet with and discuss their projects and the process that they would be following.
- Joel said that it is very difficult to get a consensus from a committee. Dave said that he thought that the ambassador referred to the Zoning Officer who, from the comments, is doing a pretty good job.

- Judy said that one of the positives that could come out of a committee such as this would be the opportunity for the developer to hash out some of these issues all at once rather than having to go to multiple meetings, etc.
- Dave S. said that he already takes advantage of coming in a speaking to staff if he has a question about one of his projects. What he sees with this idea is an opportunity to get some important feedback without having to put down escrow fees to pay consultants.
- Phil said that an opportunity to speak with members of staff, Planning, and Council is unheard of from his experience and would be a great idea.
- Dave said that the keywords he heard from the discussion on this recommendation were: major project, informal, not mandatory, as needed, not regularly scheduled, and use it as a PR tool.
- Next recommendation was to consider using only one consultant for minor subdivision and land development projects. Chris said that this came out of us hearing from small "mom & pop" projects that they were paying a lot of money for consultants. This would be a way to reduce these costs. Judy said that on small projects it's mostly zoning and stormwater management doesn't come into play until they get a building permit. The goal would not be to have one firm do more. Dave said that this one seems to have made the cut for tonight.
- Next was to consider reducing submission deadlines and time frames. Dave said that if this goes in the report we need to be more specific about what we are recommending.
- Next was to form a study committee regarding stormwater regulations. Chris said that Scott Mease brought this up when he was here about how Northampton County differs from Bucks County in this respect.
- Assign a staff member to dedication/acceptance inspections of land developments/subdivisions. Chris said he thinks Andy Warner brought this up. Typically, after a developer completes a subdivision, the Township engineer will go out and inspect it for street trees, lighting, new roads, and will generate a punch list. After the 18-month maintenance period it is inspected again to see if any of these items needs to be replaced. To save some money it was suggested that maybe someone from the Township PW could conduct this second inspection. Dave said okay, let's put it in the draft report.
- Consider a review of the ground source heat pump ordinance. Chris said geo-thermal systems are becoming more and more popular and the technology has improved so that there are fewer concerns about system failures since the ordinance was written. Everyone thought it should be in the report.
- Dave said the next recommendation moves toward preparing a marketing brochure or a video for our website. Dave said that he felt that we should recommend that $8-10K should be put in the Township budget to handle this.
- Consider paying Hanover more for each application in lieu of their per letter response fees. Chris said that this was from someone on the committee and it would change the structure of how the consultants are paid for their reviews. Currently they bill for their time. This would change it to a flat fee for the entire review. Andrew said he felt that this would incentivize the consultants to expedite their review of a plan. Dave said that this might be a good idea for small projects like ground source heat pumps or minor subdivisions. Jack said that the bulleted recommendation on the next page about having the consultant call the applicant who is receiving a letter with comments so the nuances can be communicated and thereby cut down on further review letters, he thought was the answer to address this issue. Chris said that the recommendation should be to consider a per application fee for certain small projects.
- Consider allowing pervious ground coverage to be calculated at less than 100% rate of coverage. Chris said that currently our ordinance says that anything other than a vegetated cover is impervious and he hears from many applicants who questions why they can't use paver stones for a patio that does allow some of the stormwater to infiltrate into the ground. This recommendation is suggesting that for something like that we review the imperious coverage ordinance and consider having them count at something like 50% of the rate of coverage.

- If pervious coverage is added but the run-off must be contained and mitigated, allow it to be sent to a drainage pit. Chris said that should be impervious and that is what the current ordinance allows. Dave said that since this is already covered it doesn't belong in the report.
- Forbid inspectors from adding requirements when re-inspecting deficiencies from a previous inspection. Perhaps have a requirement that the same 3rd party inspectors do any follow-up re-inspections. Phil said that you could not regulate what an inspector does but it is important that you have the same inspector doing all of the inspections.
- Dave said let's turn to the recommendations on the Zoning Map Amendments.
- Explore re-zoning the R-12 area across from the Giant to include it in the adjoining GB-1 district. Judy said this is the large plot of land across the street from the shopping center lends itself to this but the constraints are that there is no water or sewer and it would be expensive to develop.
- Explore re-zoning the two small parcels between Old Philly and Route 378 above Yianni's from existing R-12 to the adjoining Village Center district.
- Explore re-zoning the large R-20 parcel and the two small RA parcels at the corner of Mountain Drive and Seidersville Road/College Drive owned by Lehigh University to possibly O & L.
- Township might need to make some effort to increase the access to water and sewage in areas that could be developed except for the infrastructure issues. Judy said that these would be the non-residential districts essentially.
- The committee agreed to leave these recommendations in the report.
- Next were the Zoning Text Amendments.
- Consider relaxing the environmental protection standards, such as woodland, steep slope and riparian standards, in the General Business districts to encourage infill and commercial development. Judy said that some municipalities who have areas designated for economic development and non-residential uses to support the tax base or to provide goods and services to support the population, these areas have less resource protection. With our current standards restricting the net buildable area, everything shrinks on the site. Judy said that we would not touch the items like floodplain, riparian corridor, hydro-soils. The two that are usually relaxed are woodlands and steep slopes. For example, instead of 80% woodland protection you go to 50%. On the steep slopes you would look at possibly relaxing the 8-15% steep slope provisions in development areas.
- Consider additional or modified uses in the GB-2 district, possibly smaller scaled drive-through uses such as coffee shops, etc...
- Explore the possibility of allowing smaller scale storage facilities in the GB-2 district considering that many of these facilities now include offices in combination with storage units that provide climate controlled environments for specially uses and less larger scaled storage. These facilities have the same outward appearance of an office building already common in the district.

4. Report for Council – Review on Thursday, October 29th (Final Meeting)

- Dave said that we will now take the comments from tonight and put it into a report and will try and get a draft of it to you all by October 27th. We'll go through it again at the meeting on the 29th to make sure that it is what you want to deliver to the Council. Dave said that he will discuss with Jack and Ron what date, either the 4th or 18th of November, that we want to bring it to the Council. Chris said that it would also be good to take it to the Planning Commission after Council receives it.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.