

City of Northfield Planning Board
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Minutes: May 7, 2015

Notice of this meeting had been given in accordance with Chapter 231 Public Law 1975, otherwise known as the Open Public Meetings Act. Notice of this meeting had been given to The Press, posted on the bulletin board in City Hall, filed with the City Clerk, and posted on the City website, stating the date, time and place of the meeting and the agenda to the extent known.

This REGULAR meeting of the Northfield Planning Board, held on Thursday, May 7, 2015 in Council Chambers, City Hall, Northfield, was opened by Vice Chairman Clem Scharff at 7:00 p.m. and the following members were present or absent as noted:

Timothy Anderson
Mark Bruno-absent
Mayor Erland Chau-absent
Jim Leeds
Dr. Richard Levitt-absent
Lou Milone-absent
Chief Paul Newman
Henry Notaro
Councilman Frank Perri
Ron Roegiers-absent
Derek Rowe
Clem Scharff
Jim Shippen-absent

Matthew Doran, Professional Engineer
Norman Zlotnick, Solicitor

The first order of business was memorialization of the resolution for Bandi Property Group, LLC, Block 108, Lots 11, 12, 25, 26 & 27 located at 1202 Tilton Road, the former site of Sugar Pine Gift Shop, and more recently, Finishing Touch. The business was approved for a minor site plan with bulk variances for parking and conditions. The resolution was memorialized by voice vote with Mr. Anderson, Mr. Bruno, Mr. Milone, Mr. Roegiers, and Mr. Rowe abstaining.

There were no applications before the Board this evening. Mr. Jim Rutala, a Professional Planner and owner of Rutala Associates, LLC in Linwood gave a presentation on the draft of the Northfield Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. His firm was retained by the City. They have devised a plan is to serve as a framework to improve pedestrian and bicycle conditions in Northfield and eventually be adopted as the Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan Element of the Master Plan which will help the City attract financial assistance for improvements. Mr. Rutala was joined by Bill Revere,

of the Department of Transportation, Dave Cox, of Urban Engineers, and John Federico, of Urban Engineer and a Planner who will provide a 20-minute presentation. His firm was hired by the city to attract grants and to have a solid plan for funding. He said the first step is to make application to the DOT and they have three Engineers working with these applications. He said that a Steering Committee has been formed to guide the planning effort and consists of local citizens, City officials, Atlantic County officials, NJ DOT staff and Engineers, business leaders and members of the community. They are here tonight because they want the input of the Planning Board since it is the intention that this plan be an element of the Master Plan. They will present a foundation overview this evening and there will be no action taken tonight. They are asking that if the plan is completed, the Planning Board consider adopting it to the Master Plan.

Mr. John Federico addressed the Board and gave his informative PowerPoint presentation. He distributed packets of the presentation to the Board members. He stated that he is employed by Urban Engineers. He presented a draft plan of the Northfield Bike and Pedestrian Plan and stated that eventually the study will contain a full report.

Mr. Federico said the timeline began in the fall with three Steering Committee meetings, two of which were public hearings. He said the key issues discussed were the lack of biking areas in certain sections and the need for improved access to Birch Grove Park along with a city-wide sidewalk network. Mr. Federico analyzed a crash analysis study of safety issues. Over a 10-year period, there were 40 crashes involving 20 bike accidents and 20 pedestrian accidents. He noted that there was a recent pedestrian fatality in front of Ventura's Restaurant.

Mr. Federico started with the pedestrian plan and proposed improvements for walking conditions. He said intersections and crossings are important to consider. There are 10 signalized intersections and they recommend improvements to five of them including complete upgrades to crosswalks, curbs, ramps, and signage. He noted that un-signalized crossings can be improved with beacons and he displayed a map of these locations and noted that full engineering detail is forthcoming. Mr. Federico said that there are many existing sidewalk gaps and many of these areas are on state and county roadways as well as areas on Cedarbridge Road and Northfield Avenue. The DOT has an ongoing sidewalk project on Route 9 near Northfield Avenue.

Mr. Federico continued by saying that the current focus is on prioritization and access to the Northfield Community School is important. Complete sidewalks are needed and a major priority is walking routes to the school. Cedarbridge and Mill Roads are high priority areas.

The strategy for the Route 9 corridor is to create more pedestrian crossings and to reduce the speed limit from 40 mph to 35 mph given the land uses and businesses. They may also improve and modify some of the access areas to the businesses.

The Bicycle Plan priority is to try to accommodate bike access on all or most roads. He noted that the Bike Path is a tremendous asset to the city and surrounding cities. He noted that Burton Avenue has the width to be striped with bike lanes. Jackson Avenue only has width for striping and signage. Route 9 has width and the committee will

need to work with the state for bike safety improvements on that corridor. He would not advocate shared lanes here, but lane widths could be reduced from 12 ft. to 10 ft. Areas like Mill Road and Zion Road would need widening. Mr. Federico said Tilton Road has five lanes and no shoulder and given the traffic volume and a 40 mph speed limit, they would recommend a shared use walking and bike path on both sides of the road, at a width of 8 ft. to 10 ft., north to the city boundary. He noted that the same improvements would be recommended for Shore Road.

Mr. Federico continued by discussing the Bike Path. He said minor modifications would be recommended. They suggest consistent, enhanced, and destination signage improvements. Access improvements are also needed and 14 locations along the path need improvement. He said intersections can be simplified by changing the geometry and bumping out corners which will decrease the amount of time it takes to cross intersections. Mr. Federico mentioned that improvements to Birch Grove are being looked at as well including allowing biking at the park, improving access, and expanding park hours to allow people to enjoy the park before or after work. The areas needing particular focus to bring everything together include the Burton Avenue and Tilton Road sections. He suggested installing islands at Jackson and Tilton Roads, which doesn't restrict movement, but encourages motorists to slow down. Mr. Scharff noted that the state has designated this intersection as the main left hand turn onto Tilton Road and there is a lot of traffic there and islands might not work. Mr. Cox said that motorists that cross Tilton Road onto Jackson Avenue typically make the turn in a fast manner and if biking and walking are encouraged; a more pedestrian friendly environment needs to be created. They would like bicyclists, pedestrians, and motorists to co-exist. Mr. Federico reminded that all of this needs to be engineered.

Mr. Federico continued by discussing Tilton Road near McDonald's eastward. It is essentially a commercial corridor with sporadic sidewalks. He suggested transformation of the area with angled parking, elimination of the middle lane for turns, which really is not needed, and to install a center lane median for protection. Bike markings should be added on the roadway and to improve connections to other roads. A similar situation exists in the area of Shore Road and Oakcrest Avenue. He suggested on-street parking for the business area which would signal to motorists a different environment from the residential sections. Another improvement in certain areas would be traffic calming treatments such as landscape bump-outs which also add aesthetic value. He added that consistent speed limits are also useful.

Mr. Federico discussed the Municipal Code. He said that driveway width requirements are on the high end and what this does is to create a less pedestrian friendly environment. He recommended reducing both the minimum and maximum numbers. The sidewalk width requirement is at 4 ft. and he suggested 5 ft. which is better for walking. He said the City should develop a Complete Streets Policy and set the framework for moving forward with improvements, incorporate roadway projects, and pass a Bicycle Ordinance.

Mr. Rutala addressed the Board and said the Bike Path is a real benefit to the City and increases property values, but it needs to be safer. It makes the community one that people want to move to and he said the City has a tremendous foundation already. Atlantic County Engineering has been a part of the improvement project and South Jersey DOT is part of the committee makeup as well as being part of road

improvements. The State DOT is responsible for Route 9 improvements and their involvement and source for funding is key. There are a number of regional improvements going on. Tilton Road is only partially improved and it is not safe to bike ride on the 'cow paths' created in the areas without sidewalks. As the Parkway improvement is completed, there will be a new bridge over Tilton Road with a pedestrian sidewalk. There are two longer term projects being studied by the DOT to connect Pleasantville with Egg Harbor Township which will create a bigger network connection between the cities. The other project is on the Somers Point side with a new Parkway Bridge over the Egg Harbor River which will include a Bike Path connecting to Route 52. The connection system is being studied and created.

Mr. Federico asked for questions and comments. Mr. Rutala said the US DOT is pushing for safe pathways and there may be funding available. Mr. Bill Revere of the DOT said adopting a Complete Streets Policy will help with funding. Mr. Dave Cox said the whole trail system including Birch Grove and the Bike Path can obtain funding with State coordination taking place and County prioritization. He said there are many health and obesity issues with today's children and the kids need to ride bikes, walk, and exercise. Mr. Federico said the next step in the plan is to refine the plan elements with the Steering Committee and develop and draft a final report. Mr. Cox said this will help to create a healthy environment and a recreational asset for the City, and the time is right to accomplish this. Mr. Federico added that people who walk and bike can help to patronize local businesses.

Mr. Leeds stated that there is a real need to improve the connection of Mill Road to Burton Avenue to get kids from the Bike Path to Birch Grove. It is difficult to cross Route 9 on Mill Road. Mr. Federico said he recommends improvement of the intersection and will look into this further. Mr. Leeds suggested complete sidewalks on Burton Avenue. Chief Newman said he sees a lot of people using the Bike Path as a connection to bordering towns and improvements would increase this. Mr. Cox said there is a counter on the Ocean City Bridge connection and they have counted over 100,000 hits serving a lot of recreational purposes. Mr. Rowe agreed that the Mill Road and Route 9 intersection is treacherous and the inconsistent sidewalks create unsafe conditions. Chief Newman said most follow the Bike Path, but some do not. Crossing Guards assist with safety when on duty. Mr. Rowe said there is no complete safe provision to get to the school. He gave the example that Cedarbridge Road to the school is an issue. Mr. Scharff said he thinks there are a lot of good safety points in the plan.

Mr. Rutala summarized by stating that he would like the Board to consider adopting the City of Northfield Bike & Pedestrian Plan as part of the Master Plan. He said this will make it your plan. It will assist with obtaining funding and you will need to publically advertise. Mr. Rutala said they would be happy to return if there are any questions or comments. Mr. Leeds asked about sourcing. Mr. Rutala said the City of Pleasantville received \$1,000,000 in grants last year for this type of improvements and Somers Point received funding as well. They needed funding to finish their Bike Path as it just ends with no connection to anywhere. Somers Point put together a plan and applied and received the grant after 5 or 6 years. It is a competitive process and it is important to be able to fill in every box and complete the application completely and successfully. They want to know there is a commitment from the City. There are no guarantees, but adopting this to the Master Plan is a great step. Determining what the

priorities are would be the next step in the process. Councilman Perri said he felt Zion Road and the Bike Path are major priorities to consider and he noted that the plan to cut the angle down at Zion Road, Fuae Avenue, and Northfield Avenue is like night and day to the original design and he thanked the group and said they did a really nice job with the presentation. Mr. Perri added that bringing the signage up to present day standards is a good thing and makes a lot of sense. Mr. Federico said the signage will educate people riding through the community. Mr. Perri said Tilton Road is terrible and as the County improves the roadway they do not always add sidewalks. There should be a plan for sidewalks and bikeways. Mr. Rutala responded by saying that the County deals with the same financial problems with more of a demand. This plan is a good first step. As development occurs, there should be sidewalks installed. He added that there may be opportunities to jointly fund this between the City and the County. Mr. Perri said that Birch Grove runs behind businesses on Tilton Road and he asked if it would be possible to run a path from Fire Road to connect to Burton Avenue. He was recently in Maryland and said they had an elevated area behind the business district. It was city owned property and was not environmentally intrusive. Mr. Rutala said that would be worth looking into, but he understands there may be wetlands in this area. Mr. Perri asked if the New Road sidewalk improvements were state funded. Mr. Cox said they were federally funded. This ended the presentation.

Mr. Perri discussed outdoor dining as City Council is interesting in pursuing the possibility and is looking to making it available by resolution and permit. There are many questions and Mr. Perri said it is more complex than just allowing it and specific zones need to be addressed. He would like the opinion of the Planning Board. As it is right now, a full application would be necessary to allow outdoor dining. Mr. Zlotnick suggested making it a formal discussion for a future Planning Board meeting. If an Ordinance exists prohibiting it, a permit could not be granted. Mr. Scharff suggested coordinating it with the LED signage changes and the re-writing of the Ordinance to include both items. He said restaurants are more upscale now and this type of dining is becoming more popular. Mr. Zlotnick added that fresco dining is the big thing in cities today.

Mr. Scharff noted that there was no one from the public who wished to speak tonight.

Mr. Perri made the motion to close the meeting and Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Vice Chairman Scharff closed the meeting at 8:02 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robin Atlas