



**Agenda – Aston Township Vision Plan - Committee Meeting #1 – April 10, 2014**

**7 PM to 8 PM**

**Welcome and Introductions**

- John Granger, Township Manager
- Simone Collins - Simone / Keller / Lowman
- Urban Partners – Jim Hartling
- Project Committee Background / Introductions / Expertise / Interests

**Project Goals (a work in progress)**

- Create value (increased property values, increased business activity)
- Improve motorized and non-motorized circulation through area
- Create a “town center” (to be defined) for Aston
- Improve the aesthetics for commercial and residential areas
- Improve aging and historic residential neighborhoods

**Existing Conditions**

- Traffic congestion / poor access control / very limited ped-bike facilities
- Shopping / driving environment unattractive
- No sense of place / no distinguishing physical or aesthetic features (utterly forgettable)
- Affordable residential neighborhoods and taxes, good school district and proximity to Philadelphia.

**Possible Focus Areas:**

- Commercial areas along Pennell, Concord Roads and Dutton Mill?
- “Big box” shopping centers?
- 5 points intersection?
- Areas around Newmann University?
- Green Ridge Residential Neighborhood
- Kings Mill historic area?
- What is the market niche? Can Aston capture spin-off development from Ice Works? Other recreation facilities? Accommodations for spectators?
- How to retain and attract young folks? Can Aston attract Millennials?

**Possible outcomes of Vision Study**

- Market study to identify the existing market and opportunities
- Recommendations for zoning and land use ordinances and incentives to allow better response by private sector to market and development trends
- Transportation concepts - promote and seek funding for all transportation modes
- Beautification recommendations – streetscapes, gateways and architecture
- Action plan to prioritize next steps

**What does Aston Township need?**

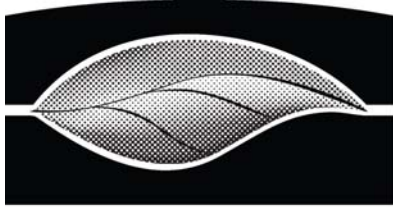
- What are your ideas?? Suggestions?? Broad or specific.

**Consultant Contact Info:**

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Justin Keller [jkeller@simonecollins.com](mailto:jkeller@simonecollins.com) 610 239 7601

**Please See Reverse for Meeting Schedule.**





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## MEETING NOTES

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Project: **Aston Township Vision Plan** Project No.: **13091.10**

Location: **Aston Municipal Building** Meeting Date/Time: **April 10, 2014 7:00**

Topic: **Committee Meeting #1** Issue Date: **5/15/2014**

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**IN ATTENDANCE:**  
See attendance list attached.

### NOTES:

1. Pete S. provided a brief introduction and project background followed by a review of the agenda items.
2. John G. stated that project materials including meeting agendas and notes will be posted on the Township's website. He emphasized that this is a long term vision plan and many action items will be passed down and implemented by future generations.
3. The meeting was subsequently opened to the committee to obtain their ideas for the goals, facts and concepts for the vision plan.
4. Michael Link would like to see a variety of businesses in the Township.
5. Jim H. stated that big box retailers have historically drew away small businesses - older towns must adapt to community serving uses, recreation uses and uses that recall the Township's history and do not drastically alter the fabric of community.
6. Jim H. stated Urban Partners will identify gaps in the market that Aston may be able to fill.
7. **Jim H. asked the committee to send him contact info for potential business owner interviews.**
8. MaryAnn B. stated that Aston needs welcome signage. Hotel rooms are needed for athletes and spectators at Ice Works and Newmann. Nearby mixed uses could make a hotel more viable. There is a need recreation uses including miniature golf, batting cages and gym. Also needed is an urgent care facility.
9. Mike P. stated that the crown Hotel in Newcastle, Delaware captures visitors from the Aston market area.
10. Jodi A. stated that final four soccer guests and teams need accommodations. A medical office building is needed. Streetscape is vitally important. It is easier and nicer to get to Aston as opposed to hotels near the airport.

11. Kevin M. asked what sets Aston apart from other communities. Aston should capitalize on history including the Revolutionary War and mills that could be incorporated into an interpretive greenway that would facilitate pedestrian/bicycle connectivity.
12. The Delaware County Tourist Bureau is making an effort to attract tourists that would otherwise visit Philadelphia. Contact Tory Fury for info.
13. Don M. stated that there are many churches in Aston to cater to young families.
14. Judi S. stated that the Sisters of St. Mary are an asset that is not well known.
15. It was stated that host families are being sought for the Pope's visit.
16. Sun Oil and Wawa trucks traveling through Aston reduce safety on Township roads. Consider opening a discussion with these companies to direct truck traffic to Route 322 to access I95.
17. Nancy B. stated that hundreds of cars and trucks from New Jersey pass through Aston. She asked about the status of the proposal for a bypass road from the industrial park (Bridgewater Road)?
18. MaryAnn B. was of the understanding that 322 will be widened over the next 15 years.
19. Michael L. of Rockdale suggested that adaptive reuses such as coffee shops bed and breakfast and similar uses should be considered in old homes around Newmann. Take advantage of the creeks to draw people to water. The creek needs to be cleaned up. Developers in Rockdale are buying up houses and filling them with students. A welcome center could be provided in an existing building and retirees could volunteer for staff positions. Pete S. stated that a visitors' centers typically needs to incorporate other businesses.
20. Jim H. will analyze locations where affordable housing is transitioning to investors.
21. Jim H. stated that many universities have employee assistance programs for employees to buy houses near the university.
22. Revitalization of Glassboro and Swarthmore were given as examples for Aston to emulate.
23. Judi S. stated that most Newman visitors go to Concordville.
24. It was noted that a majority of businesses close in the evenings. Aston needs to encourage businesses that promote nightlife such as music and art uses and a movie theater/restaurant similar to Collegeville.
25. It is estimated that 4 million visit Ice Works each year.
26. John G. suggested an information kiosk at major destinations could contain a smart phone application to download a map for visitors.
27. Jodi S. stated that many Newmann students go home at night and on weekends.
28. Jim H. stated that a survey could be conducted to determine needs for Newmann students.
29. Jodi S. suggested that branding should be family oriented and added that Aston's location between Wilmington and New Jersey offers a lot of opportunities.
30. Pete S. suggested that Aston's slogan, "a community that cares", should be expanded to hone in on specifically what the community cares about.
31. It was noted that some businesses are unattractive. Pete S. asked attendees to identify communities that appeal to them. Some examples given were: Swarthmore, Media, Royersford and Society Hill. It was agreed that most of these communities have trees, green infrastructure and interesting architecture.
32. Zoning and screening should be employed to reduce the visual impact of industrial / storage uses.
33. Jody A. acknowledged that traffic can be good for businesses. A town center should be located somewhere between Pennell and Concord Road. Pennell Road

is more of the commercial corridor. Concord Road is more community serving and pedestrian oriented.

34. Modern apartment housing is needed to attract millennials.
35. A shuttle should be considered to Elwyn train station.
36. Many people are afraid to exercise outside due to lack of safe facilities and pedestrian/bicycle accommodations.
37. Mike L. Stated that Rockdale has been forgotten for too long. Take advantage of the water's edge by providing lighting, a pedestrian way and hardscape features. The train trestle on 452 could be rehabbed to display a Township gateway sign.
38. Look for ways to attract high wage employers.
39. Improve the Aston municipal building to provide an example for other development along the corridor.
40. Adaptive reuse of older buildings are opportunities.
41. An attendee asked about the viability of a hotel with a convention center. Jim H. stated that the convention market is mostly saturated. Current trends have been to provide banquet spaces in recreation centers.
42. Jim H. stated that new uses should be located in close proximity to promote greater pedestrian activity. Areas within 1/2 mile of Newmann University should provide pedestrian/bike connections.
43. There is some undeveloped land around the Convent that could be a future growth area.
44. Jodi S. acknowledged that the Sisters own allot of land near university and should be include in conversations about the growth plan.
45. Traffic signals need to be timed to facilitate safer pedestrian crossings.
46. John G. stated that traffic signal retiming on Pennell Road is anticipated to commence by early summer 2014.
47. Jodi S. stated that the presence of utility poles and wires inhibit nice views of the Commodore Barry Bridge.
48. Most of the Township's housing is affordable and property maintenance and enforcement is important. One solution could be to provide a remote lot to store boats RVs and other large vehicles.
49. There is a lack of facilities for fares, events and banquets. It was stated that Newmann's community hall is available for banquets and other university spaces could be used for community events.
50. An attendee asked if a hotel could be placed at the current location of the Township building. John G. stated that the township is contemplating an new firehouse, township building, recreation center and other projects. He added that all cannot happen at once and the community will have to prioritize projects. One idea was to reuse materials from several decaying historic buildings to be incorporated into new township buildings.
51. It was noted that the lack of trees in shopping center parking lots creates a less than desirable appearance.

This report represents the Professional's summation of the proceedings and is not a transcript. Unless written notice of any correction or clarification is received by the Professional within ten days of issue, the report shall be considered factually correct and shall become part of the official project record.

Sincerely,  
SIMONE COLLINS - LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, INC.

## **Committee Meeting #1 Cards Record**

**Date: 4/10/14**

**Time: 7pm – 9pm**

**Location: Aston Township Building**

### **Goals**

- Develop a Vision
- Identify market opportunities
- Incorporate public participation
- Retain/Attract residents and businesses
- Develop implementation priorities
- Create distinctive places

### **Facts**

- College town
- 7 Wards
- Kings mill
- Sisters of St Francis
- Close Proximity to Rt 95 and Philadelphia
- Aging housing stock
- Historic neighborhood
- Lots of mill history
- Contact Brandywine conference center
- Good schools
- Park and recreation facilities
- Traffic congestion

### **Concepts**

- Improve access roads
- Improve appearance
- Develop a sign for Aston
- Hotel for Ice Works patrons
- Crown hotel in Claymont, DE is often used by Aston visitors
- Need to clean up creek
- Good views are disrupted by utility poles
- Traffic calming creates “sense of place”
- Concord Rd = town atmosphere, Pennel Rd = commercial district
- Multi family residential could be an attraction
- Shuttle to mass transit
- Create safe Multi modal routes
- Bike/pedestrian facilities
- Neumann University uses housing in Concordville for visitors
- Recreation center in Aston

- Urgent care facility in Aston
- Hotel in Aston for Chester events
- Medical office building
- Property maintenance enforcement
- Event facility
- Community Hall – Neumann Univ. for events
- Relocate municipal building
- Adaptive reuse for municipal building
- Traffic from New Jersey “pass through”
- 322 Widening
- New zoning
- Reuse old homes for businesses
- Employee incentives
- University and community cooperation
- Rockdale - bring community together
- Attract night life
- Cultural events at night
- Movie theater/restaurant combo?
- Maps for visitors

- Use kiosks and technology
- Welcome center
- Neumann U = suitcase college, lots of commuters
- Student survey
- Aston is “family”
- What is Aston’s brand?
- Aesthetics of business
- Code enforcement
- Traffic congestion can be beneficial
- Safe pedestrian crossings and routes
- Adaptive reuse is an opportunity
- Improve municipal building sets an example for community
- Attract the right businesses
- Railroad trestle – Rt 452 is a possible sign location
- Rockdale – lots of pride – is an opportunity
- Community center with hotel
- Available land for town center
- Round about at town center?
- Coordinate with Neumann University master plan
- Pennell Road signal retiming to be complete by Labor Day
- Community groups need more space for meetings
- Municipal building location is valuable
- Short term improvements – parking lot trees
- Preserve historic neighborhoods
- Town Center
- Sense of place in Aston?
- Rail Trail
- Housing with families?
- Reroute dangerous vehicles
- Hotel with convention center
- Green infrastructure
- Aesthetics through zoning
- Sidewalks and trees
- Swathmore, Media, Royersford Society Hill are precedents for Aston
- Improve gateway aesthetics