

2014 Annual Report

The administration is pleased to submit the 2014 Annual Report which describes many of the accomplishments of 2014 and an outline of 2015 programs.

The Board of Commissioners had as its highest priority for 2014 to:

- Enhance efficiency of service delivery in Code Department
- Enhance efficiency of service delivery in Public Works Department
- Enhance financial reporting system
- Develop a plan for the future of Aston

Enhance Efficiency of Service Delivery in Code Department

In order to provide an enhanced delivery of code services to residents, the Board decided initially to retain the services of a consultant, Pennoni Associates, to provide those services while assessing the needs of residents and how best to meet those needs. Two (2) of Pennoni's employees, both certified code inspectors, were assigned to Aston to provide inspection services and to assess the departments needs.

The initial modification in the operation of the department was to lengthen the number of hours that the public and contractors could conduct business with the department. At the beginning of 2014, the code office was open to the public for 12.5 hours per week, by the end of January 2014, the code office was open 42.5 hours per week.

The consultant team, working with the administration and code staff, significantly modified the information and forms that are available to the public and the contractors. This was done to ensure that all parties knew what was required to be accomplished and what the inspection procedures were. The number of inspection reports and forms were modified and expanded in number.

The most important enhancement in the department was to place primary emphasis on the public safety aspect of the Code Department. When all else is stripped away, the enforcement of the statewide building code is to ensure the safety of residents and those customers who visit businesses in Aston.

As the year progressed, it became apparent that the need to rely on consultants to provide inspection services rather than a Township employee became less critical. The determination was made to retain one of the consultants as a Township employee and to hire a second full time certified employee for inspection services. Additional secretarial support was also required to meet the increased administrative need based on the increase in permitted activity.

During the year, the department experienced more than a twenty (20) percent increase in permit activity and inspections.

The department worked throughout the year to develop many how-to guides for such things as deck construction, controls for management of abandoned buildings, demolition specifications, and residential and commercial plan submittals.

These guidelines relied heavily on graphics to better illustrate what the statewide building code required.

More specific guidelines focusing on the life safety aspect of the codes were developed for use and occupancy permits. Visual standards for curb and sidewalk replacement were developed.

As the year progressed, the department studied the effect of the fee schedule was having on residents. Many of the fees were based on a percentage of the cost of construction. The Aston fee schedule was re-crafted to benefit residents and encourage home improvement. The new schedule will move from using "cost based" fees to one that uses "job based" fees. For example, it takes the same amount of time to inspect a formica countertop in a kitchen as it does to inspect a granite countertop. Yet the granite countertop is more expensive, but the property owner will not have to pay a higher fee.

The senior discount was increased to ten thousand dollars (\$10,000).

By modifying the fee structure to more fully align with the cost of the inspection, Aston has been able to reduce fees in many areas.

The administration's position is that a more efficiently operated Code Department can provide higher quality services to residents at lower cost to the residents.

Enhance Efficiency Service Delivery in Public Works Department

Historically, the Public Works Department had relied heavily on the use of third party contractors to perform many of the road and storm drainage repairs and improvements. With the exception of the annual paving project, the administration felt that the Public Works Department could undertake much of the work that the third party contractors had undertaken at less expense. This would enable the department to perform more work and make more repairs with the amount of funds budgeted.

During the year, the department repaired the following catch basins:

82 Weathervane Road
Hearthside Road
723B Mount Road
Brakel Lane
Convent Road

Heatherton Drive
3345 Bancroft Drive
Crozerville Road
Glendale Road

Approximately 1,000 linear feet of storm drain line was cleared and repaired, 825 potholes were patched during the winter season. The department also repaired a number of areas in the roadway network. The department rented a stump grinder and ground the stumps of trees that were removed in the Township's park system. The department also installed 170 linear feet of storm drain pipe on Crozerville Road to replace an existing system that had been totally clogged. Most of this work had been done by third party contractors in prior years.

The department also installed a new baseball diamond at Bridgewater Park.

Employees in the department completed CPR training, two (2) employees became certified park and recreation inspectors and two (2) employees completed entry level management training sessions.

Enhance Financial Reporting System

The major objective in the Finance Department was to modify the basis of accounting from cash to modified accrual. The modified accrual basis of accounting is the most common type of accounting used in government and business. A new accounting system was acquired in midyear and installed and is now fully operational. The new system will provide enhanced monthly reports, and will be able to encumber expenses when contracts are executed.

The second major emphasis in the Finance Department was to provide monthly and quarterly financial reports to the Board. The reports provided updated estimates for yearend balances based on activity that occurred during each month. A five (5) year financial plan was also developed which will provide the Board and the public with an early warning system designed to identify areas where potential problems may arise in the future.

The multi-year budget and capital plan are linked to the recommended actions contained in the Aston Vision Plan.

Plan For Future of Aston

In early 2014, the Board of Commissioners retained a consultant and appointed a citizens advisory committee to work together to develop a Vision Plan for Aston. After many months of work and meetings, the Board approved the plan in November.

One of the cornerstone recommendations of the plan is to develop a marketing plan for Aston. The marketing plan would be in two (2) phases, the first to market the Township as a safe, convenient community in which to live, work and raise a family, the second would be to strengthen the business community.

The Board turned to Neumann University and their staff and students to work with the administration to develop a marketing plan for each of these markets. In 2014, two (2) students began the initial work necessary to develop each of the plans. As work began on this effort, it

became apparent that a third initiative to develop the technical program requirements on which the marketing plan would operate was required. Again, reaching out to Neumann University, the Township retained the services of a student to work with staff to develop this aspect of the plan.

As discussions evolved, a suggestion to reach further into the Township's business community resulted in establishing a collaborative technology initiative with the Aston Business Community. The primary focus of the initiative will be to establish a branded online business directory to exclusively feature Aston establishments so that both local and transient consumers can easily locate and patronize businesses that contribute to the Aston economy. The directory will be syndicated through various web, media, and social media channels and include a mobile component.

A key component of the initiative will be to develop promotional video for online marketing. The Sun Valley High School was approached to determine their interest in having students work with the administration to develop the program. With enthusiastic approval from the school district, and in coordination with the Township, high school students will develop short informational video programming for various Aston businesses who chooses to participate in the program. These videos will adopt a "video spotlight" style format and can include interviews with the business owners and customers, facility tours, and promotional references. They will also develop video that showcases the Aston business community in general. These videos will be utilized throughout the various syndication assets established in the technology initiative including the branded local directory, mobile app, township website & cable channels and other promotional venues.

The development of this aspect of the marketing plan will continue into 2015.

The component to market Aston as a safe community in which to live, work and raise a family is developing as well. The student intern is assembling the attributes that make Aston what it is. One of the marketing elements will be to interview, on video, one or more families that recently moved into Aston. Of critical importance is to have these new residents state in the video interview why they chose Aston.

A second element of this plan is to interview one or more real estate professionals and have them describe the positive attributes of Aston.

As with the other videos, when complete this video will be posted on the Aston website. Copies of this video will be distributed to area real estate agents.

The Aston Vision Plan made a number of recommendations with respect to modifying the zoning in certain areas in the Township to encourage mixed use development. The Board sought, and was awarded, a TCDI grant from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission to develop amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, amendments to the Zoning Ordinance and amendments to the Sub-Division and Land Development Ordinance. A

consultant will be retained in early 2015 and a citizens advisory committee will be established to complete this work. It is anticipated that this effort will take an entire year to complete.

The Board also submitted an application to the state to develop a streetscape program along portions of Pennell Road, Concord Road, and Dutton Mill Road. The Township received a one million dollar grant from the state to develop the first phase of this project. A contract will be awarded to the Township engineer in early 2015 to design work. It is anticipated that construction will begin in 2015 and may be completed by the end of the year.

The Board approved a conditional use for the establishment of the Rockdale Art Center. This was also an important element of the Vision Plan.

Perhaps one of the more notable recommendations of the Vision Plan was to develop gateway signs. The Board approached the school district to determine whether or not students would be interested in developing concept plans for the sign. The school district agreed that the students would be interested in working with the Township and have provided the Board with twenty-one (21) proposals. The Board selected one of the proposals which will be made public in January 2015.

One of the most common comments from residents during the Vision Plan process was the need for a new Municipal Building, and Public Works Facility. The increase in activity at the Community Center, both in the gymnasium and the meeting rooms, has led the Board to the conclusion that the Township needs to consider whether or not to expand this facility. The Library also has a need to expand their facility, especially in the children's section of the Library.

The merger of the Green Ridge and Aston Beechwood Fire Companies necessitates the need to construct a single new fire station, preferably in the center of Aston in order to provide centralized fire and ambulance service to the residents of Aston.

These four (4) building projects, and the alternate sites available, require the Board to retain an architect and planner to assist the Board with various alternatives available. The Board retained this consultant in December. Throughout the first half of 2015, the consultant will work with the Board, the fire company, and the library board to establish the needs and potential locations for these facilities.

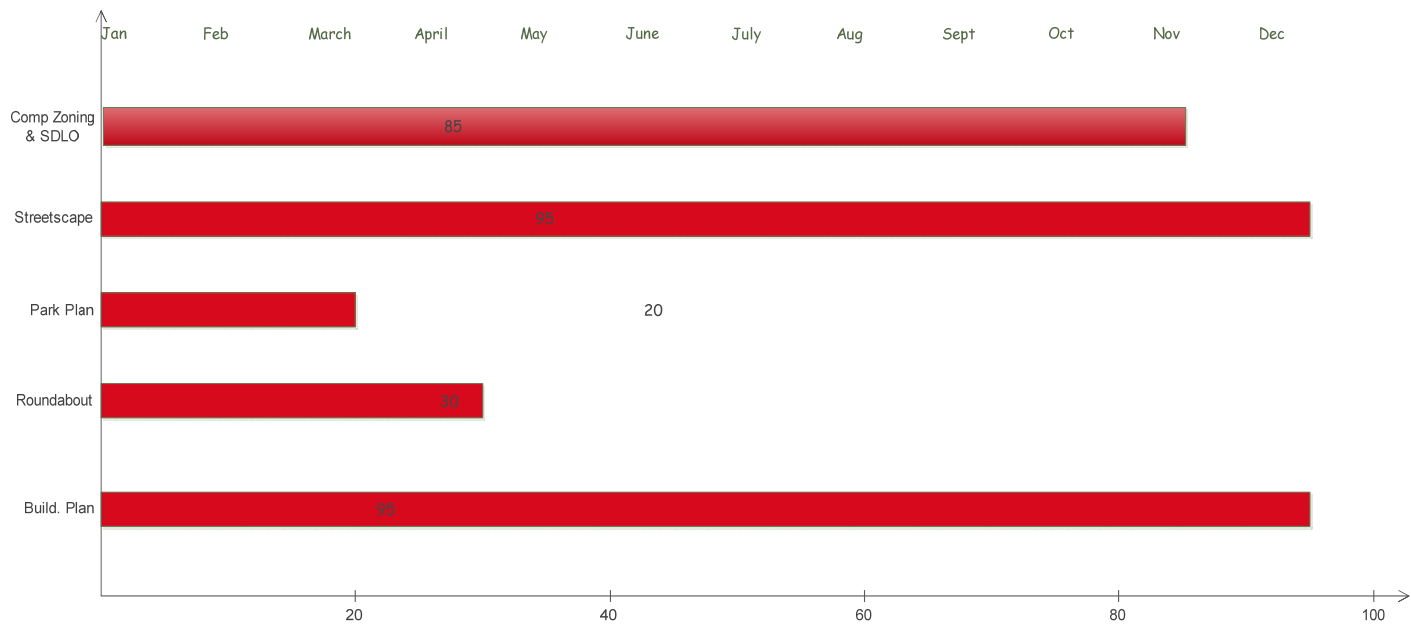
2015 Plan of Action

The Board of Commissioners has established the following goals to be accomplished in 2015:

- Construct streetscape improvements along portions of Pennell Road and Concord Road
- Update the Aston Comprehensive Plan/Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Land Development Ordinance to reflect the concepts of the Aston Vision Plan
- Erect gateway signs

- Develop a Township wide park and recreation plan
- Develop a plan to market Aston as a great place to live
- Develop a marketing plan to strengthen the Aston business community
- Assess the feasibility of Five Points and Donnelly Avenue roundabouts
- Develop building plan options for the Fire Station, Public Works Facility, Township Building, and Community Center/Library Building
- Enhance road and storm sewer improvements

The following timeline is offered to the public and the Board information with respect to each of the major projects planned to be undertaken during 2015:



The Board will appoint two (2) citizen advisory committees to work with the administration and consultant team to develop a park study and to develop the planning and zoning work necessary to implement the recommendations contained in the Aston Vision Plan.

One of the compelling attributes of Aston is its neighborhood park system. In many areas of the Township, residents can walk from their house to a neighborhood park within five (5) minutes. This is an exceptional attribute as many communities do not have the extensive neighborhood park system of this type. Residents in many suburban communities must drive to a park rather than walk.

The park and recreation plan advisory committee will evaluate the current and projected needs for recreation facilities and assess the degree to which the existing facilities meet or fall

short of that target. Options for expanding the existing system to better meet the needs of the community will be explored.

The Township wide park study is a critical requirement for future grant funding as the state Department of Conservation and Nature Resources places great emphasis on not only the park study but also the prioritization of needs within the study.

The recently enacted increase of gasoline taxes has made a significant amount of funding available to local governments for roadway improvements. Aston has been successful in securing funding through the automated red light enforcement program (ARLE) to upgrade the traffic signals in the Township. PennDot is also placing great emphasis on providing funding for traffic calming improvements and streetscape improvements. With Aston having a secured funding for the initial streetscape project in 2014, the Board has decided to investigate the feasibility utilizing traffic calming measures at two (2) locations. The first is to assess the feasibility of a roundabout at Donnelly Lane and Concord Road, the second is to consider the feasibility of a roundabout at Five Points. The Board has placed a first priority on the Donnelly Road intersection first. It is planned to have the feasibility analysis completed and, should the analysis prove to be beneficial, to submit a grant application through the ARLE program in mid year for construction in 2016. The ARLE program is a 100% construction grant.

The Board will also assess the feasibility of developing other traffic calming approaches to address the incidents of speeding and traffic accidents throughout residential streets. It is anticipated that a prioritized list of potential traffic calming improvement projects will be developed by the Board by the end of 2015.

In late 2014, the Board appointed an architect/planner to work with the Board, Fire Department, and Library Board to assess the building needs for many of the municipal buildings. With the consolidation of the two (2) fire companies occurring on January 1, 2015, it is imperative for a single fire station, preferably located in the central area of Aston to serve the future needs of not only the residents but the fire department. The planner will also assess the needs for a new Municipal Building and a new Public Works Facility. Finally, an assessment of the need to expand the Library and Community Center will also be undertaken.

This work is designed to assess not only the needs but also where these needs could/should be located in the Township. With this information, the Board and public will be able to assess a number of alternatives and to develop a plan of action for the Township in future years.