

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

More hand-wringing in New Hanover

Another revised plan for a massive development in New Hanover Township called the New Hanover Town Center has been submitted. The latest plan is a slightly different version of previous plans calling for an agglomeration of housing and commercial space to be built on about 200 acres at the former New Hanover Airport on Swamp Pike between Route 663 and Township Line Road.

Various versions of the plan have been kicked around for more than a decade.

The latest group to bemoan the plan was the Pottstown Metropolitan Regional Planning Committee at its January meeting. Planners were mostly concerned about the huge amount of traffic the development would generate.

Previous estimates forecasted the project would generate another 7,500 car trips daily on New Hanover and Douglass Township roads.

Factor in all the other development planned regionally, and the character of New Hanover will be irrevocably changed. It's called sprawl.

The root cause of sprawl is our car culture and zoning philosophy.

In England, you can own all the land you want, but you need permission to build on it. The English plan development on a very regional scale. That's why tourists marvel at England's compact towns surrounded by vast areas of unspoiled open space. Property owners don't build on "greenbelts" around towns because they're not allowed to.

In America, some areas have no zoning. That means you can build anything you want on your land.

In areas with zoning, like southeastern Pennsylvania, you are restrict-

ed to building what's allowed in your particular zone. However, you still have a right to make economic use of your property. You have the right to build *something*.

Some states zone on a county-wide basis. Montgomery County, Maryland, for example, does all its planning and zoning on a countywide basis. There are no townships in Maryland — just cities and counties. That can allow for vast areas of contiguous open space.

But Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, is divided into 62 municipalities, each with its own zoning ordinance, which must allow for every kind of development. Every municipality must have housing, retail, commercial, industrial — you name it.

That's a recipe for sprawl.

As long as people want to live on scattered housing lots and drive for all their daily activities, more open land will be consumed and ever more traffic will be generated on our roads.

Pottstown is the one local municipality that embodies sustainable development — not sprawl — protecting the environment and open space.

We have hundreds of homes within walking and biking distance of our major employers — the school district, the hospital, Dana, Wal-Mart, and the Hill School. Many Hill School employees live right on campus.

Existing New Hanover residents want to enjoy ample open space and lightly-traveled roads. But they can't pull up the drawbridge and keep newcomers out. So they get sprawl.

And hand-wringing.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton



COMING SOON TO AN INTERSECTION NEAR YOU — It's not the new residents that will bring traffic congestion to New Hanover Township. It's their cars. Car-oriented townships like New Hanover don't need a lot of residents and buildings to degrade the landscape; it's all the cars and parking lots scattered over New Hanover's roads, hills and valleys.