

WHY SHOULD SMALL TOWNS TRY TO DICTATE THEIR OWN FUTURE?



DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

Regionalism, Urbanism, Smart Growth are all buzz words out there concerning revitalization. Many times, people get all their hopes and dreams defined and try to fit into the buzz words. Then there is an attempt to tell people what they want to hear, rather than what they need to do. If, when planning, there is no context to the planning study, you could find yourself running around in circles looking to establish something that is not what you want to do.

If you really want to get things done, there is a plan to be more operational concerning what you are doing and deal less with revitalization clichés. I often refer to the crosswalks to nowhere which are the height of the kind of actions that should be avoided.

No one wants to go out on a limb when making recommendations about revitalization, and much of what you get in a planning study.... a master plan so to speak, is boiler plate jargon directing you to some set of principles that are good in a theoretical sense, but in reality, are not useful. Many of the studies misunderstand what is real and what is perceived and send you down the path of ordinary just to be safe.

By the same token, even if you have a good plan, sometimes no one listens to you unless you have someone in your corner. I remember in Pittsburgh when

I did the Castle Shannon Train station project, I had a representative named Dan Miller who cared about the project and personally made sure that we secured the money for it. Locally I will always point to Curt Schroder in Downingtown as being a champion of the people when he fought for the Main Street Association plan.

So, what happens when you get a plan that is not particularly relevant to dealing with your issues, and no politician sees value in your project? You have to take matters into your own hands and create your own reality. I know you immediately wonder how is that going to happen?

I think first a town should take a step back from "their reality" and try to identify a more "third person reality." Know who you are and know what you want.

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DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

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Know that your ideas are probably more cogent than those of someone you hire. In writing, come up with a list of what you want in your study and don't be afraid to challenge the paid professional on how your issue is addressed.

When I initiated the latest train project for Phoenixville, rather than opting for a planning firm, I hired an operational consultant. He has tended to provide a document that is more "how you can" versus "why you should" projects. There are a lot of things that you should do, but really there is no use spending the money to plan it if it is not what you want to do. You should read some of the TRID studies that I reviewed. To say that some of it was boiler plate would be a stating the obvious. I think what I noticed the most was the self-constraints that were levied in the document that were mere opinions rather than facts.

So as a prequel to doing the train study, Manny DeMutis wanted to provide the regional transportation plan with input for the train. Professional planners basically blew off the requests in the planning meetings, and decided that the trails and intersection improvements were more appropriate. So rather

than let it go and just realize that we were never going to get a train, instead Phoenixville moved to see for itself if it was possible. It turns out it is possible, and it could be a boom to the town which has already distinguished itself as a destination and as a regional hub.

So why is it so important that we went forward without the help of the professional planners? In my opinion it is the only way that a town can get ahead without a significant lift from the politicians and the technocrats "may I" policy. One must be cognizant that there is a regional competition for money, and there is a pecking order in terms of geo-spatial politics... you know, the winners and the losers in the revitalization game.

I wanted to use the Transit Revitalization Investment District as a funding scheme. I started by going to the professional planners who immediately told me I had to get in line in order to get the district designation. I was told that there were only two districts designated per year, and I was given the impression I was jumping line.

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I was told to "READ THE LAW" ... well I had read the law, and I am not a novice and went about my business rather than questioning. No need to argue.

There is more than a possibility that these kinds of incidents would stop a town directly in their tracks. This is why towns must take control of their own future and do what is best for them, whether or not it is in vogue or is the flavor of the day. Towns need to develop the necessary actors in terms of leadership and thick skin to get through the system rather than wait for someone to determine when it is their turn.

In addition, other towns who are jealous of your effort will try to bad mouth the project to mask their own inability to navigate the system. I had a neighboring town issue a press release that we could not do the project. Stuff like that is inexcusable, and it makes it harder to accomplish a task. When elected officials act in that kind of manner, they only make fools of themselves.

In order to do a project that is widely viewed as impossible for all of the

wrong reasons, towns have to believe in themselves as a town. Understand that local knowledge and expertise may be transferable in what you want to do. Most of all, you must realize that other towns are in competition with you and they may have more horses in the race than you, which would improve their chances of succeeding.

Barry Cassidy is a freelance grant and economic development consultant. He can be reached at barrycassidy@comcast.net.

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PHOENIXVILLE RAIL PROJECT MOVES FORWARD

The Phoenixville Train Project moved closer toward realization March 12th when Phoenixville Borough Council approved by a 7-0 vote the appointment of an individual to be part of a multijurisdictional review committee to arrange for the financing of the train project. The following day March 13th the Phoenixville School District agreed to provide a person to serve on the committee. April 3rd Schuylkill Township appointed two people to the committee.

Each affected municipality and school district are being asked to designate a representative to join the existing Mayor's Task Force Review Committee to discuss the project plan and the value capture financing. The Review Committee shall meet to discuss the creation, boundaries, development within the district, the tax increment that the municipalities and school district would contribute to the tax increment fund, the exclusion of particular parcels of property in the district increment value capture, tax collection for the district and any other matter relevant to the proposed tax increment value capture district.

The presentations to both groups was made by Phoenixville Developer Manny DuMutis who reviewed the potential for the project to increase property values for the homeowners. "We have reviewed the studies concerning the level of appreciation in housing values and feel that the main beneficiary of this project will be the existing homeowner who will see their home values increase without the potential for increased taxes."

He stated that he did not expect the values to quadruple like they did with the commercial buildings during the downtown revitalization, but he pointed out that Phoenixville would gain value and reposition itself for future growth and economy by enacting the project. The expected increases in property values will encompass a three-mile radius from the station area with the greatest appreciation taking place over a ¾ mile area from the station.

The project as currently configured is roughly \$110 million and would encompass the Phoenixville/Schuylkill Township/King of Prussia corridor. There are three stations planned but it is not neces-

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REGIONAL CHAMBER ROUNDUP

Please see pages 33-42 for the TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce news and information section.

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PHOENIXVILLE
REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Phoenixville Regional Chamber of Commerce is an independent organization serving the business interests of Northern Chester, Western Montgomery and parts of Delaware Counties.

The Chamber's mission is to "advance the principles of free enterprise by providing the leadership which will enhance the economic climate of the region, address the priority needs of its members, and interact with other individuals and organizations for the overall benefit of the business community."

UPCOMING EVENTS

2019 marks the Chamber's 90th year of serving the Phoenixville business community. We're celebrating all year long with events and excitement, ending with a Roaring 20s Charity Gala on November 23rd at Rivercrest Golf Club & Preserve. For more information, visit www.phoenixvillechamber.org!

Young Professionals Networking Event (YPN) with the Phoenixville Jaycees – Tuesday, May 7th, 6:00 PM @ Rebel Hill Brewing Co.

Join the Phoenixville Chamber and the Jaycees at the Professional Networking Group in the Phoenixville Area. Created for business minded people aged 21 to 40 to gather in a relaxed atmosphere, YPN meets the first Tuesday of every month.

Join us to network with other young professionals. Refreshments will be provided with a Cash Bar. Bring plenty of business cards. Visit our website at www.phoenixvillechamber.org for information and registration

May Monthly Membership Luncheon – Ryan Conroy Presents: History, Tuesday, May 14th, 11:15-1:00 PM @ Phoenixville Country Club

Join the Phoenixville Chamber for an afternoon of education and networking. Ryan Conroy will do a presentation on the history of business in Phoenixville, including the Chamber's contributions to the community over the past 90 years. Visit our website at www.phoenixvillechamber.org for information and registration

Cost: \$20 pre-registered, \$25 at the door. \$30 for non-members.

A Networking Event You Can Literally Sink Your Teeth Into - Tuesday, May 21st, 4:30-7:30 PM, Kessler Dental Associates, 1150 Valley Forge Road, Phoenixville

Chamber members get a huge discount on teeth whitening* during this unique networking event! Bring your business cards and your best smile, and help us celebrate Kessler's 50th Anniversary in the Phoenixville community!

*Whitening MUST be scheduled in advance. Call Kessler Dental at 610.933.3342

Cost: free to network; paid teeth whitening

Ribbon Cutting - Woodbridge Place Senior Living - Thursday, May 30th, 11:00 am @ Woodbridge Place,

1191 Rapps Dam Road, Phoenixville

Come help us celebrate Woodbridge Senior Living with a ribbon cutting, a tour, and some refreshments in their beautiful cafe. Cost: free

PHOENIXVILLE EVENTS

First Fridays in Downtown Phoenixville –

Visit our Phoenixville on the First Friday of every month, May through October, to experience the vibe of our eclectic town. Sample some of the region's best craft brews, grab some local eats, shop our sweet boutiques, and listen to live music on the street. Main Street is closed between Bridge & Church Streets to allow vendors to set up and showcase their wares. Visit www.phoenixvillefirst.org to apply to be a vendor!

May 3, June 7, July 5, August 2, September 6, October 4; 6:00-10:00 PM



Food Truck Festival

30+ food vendors, music, arts, craft beers, and so much more. This family-friendly day of food and fun. Bridge Street is closed between Starr and Gay streets, and Main Street is closed between Price and Church Streets for this awesome food truck festival. Parking will be tricky, FREE shuttle service is available. Visit www.phoenixvillefoodfestival.com for more information

Saturday, May 4 & Saturday, October 5
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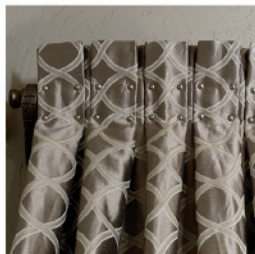
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sary for all of those communities to become involved. "We are reaching out to the other communities to be part of a unique regional rail project that the locals control their own destiny," DeMutis said.

The Review Committee will then order a project plan be agreed upon to include each tax increment district and then submit the plan to the governing body of the municipality and to the governing body of any other municipality or school district that levies property taxes within the boundaries of the proposed district.

The Review Committee shall recommend the boundaries and other information relating to the potential three tax increment districts and shall submit a recommendation to the governing bodies of the municipalities and School Districts which would then vote to create the Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID).

The TRID planning study shall consider the need for capital transit costs, ridership development program,

improvements to transit-related facilities and adjacent public infrastructure, including roads, sidewalks and water, sewer and storm drainage service and public facilities, as well as opportunities for private sector real estate development and ways in which such facilities, services and development can be financed.

The boundaries of a TRID may be expanded or reduced by an amendment to the ordinance establishing the TRID and shall be accompanied by justification for the boundary change supported by findings in the original or amended TRID planning study. If warranted by a redevelopment opportunity, changing economic or community condition, planning goal, real estate development, or a demonstrated need for transit or community facility improvement, a TRID or TRID planning study may be amended. A TRID planning study may be amended by approval of the municipalities, school districts, counties and the transit agency that are parties to the TRID designation.