



West Windsor Township

Office of the Mayor

Redevelopment Questions & Answers

July 22, 2007

A Message from Mayor Shing-Fu Hsueh:

In April of 2004, the Township began the process to redevelop and transform 350 acres around the Princeton Junction Train Station from an unaesthetic sea of surface parking to a vibrant and sustainable transit-oriented town center. From day one, residents, local business owners and other stakeholders have expressed serious concerns, raised important issues and offered various suggestions about what (if any!) improvements should be made to this section of the Township. Over the last three years, our Council colleagues and I have tried to address each issue and provide answers to questions in a number of public meetings and other forums. A project of this size and scope will impact the entire Township for generations to come and all residents should have the opportunity to be involved through each and every step of the process.

Over the past few months, I have heard opinions and comments from residents on both ends of the spectrum who strongly believe that “The Township is doing a great job with redevelopment efforts” or that “The Mayor and Council should be recalled because of redevelopment efforts.” I appreciate that a project of this magnitude will always have its supporters and detractors and sincerely hope that we can continue to have a respectful dialogue and ultimately reach a consensus on a final redevelopment plan. That is why the Township selected the award-winning firm, Hillier Architecture, to guide us all through an open and inclusive process that will help us reach this consensus.

The purpose of this document is to present a number of redevelopment-related questions that have been asked recently and to provide the answers available at this point in the planning process.

I would like to emphasize the fact that the three public workshops recently held are only the first step towards a final redevelopment plan for the 350 acres around the train station. On June 4, 2007, Hillier Architecture presented a draft concept plan, based on all of the public input to date, at a joint meeting of Township Council and the Planning Board. There was to have been a second meeting on June 18, 2007 to continue the question and answer period initiated at the June 4th meeting. This meeting has been cancelled and we are looking forward to Council scheduling a continuation meeting sometime after reorganization July 1. In September, this concept plan will begin a formal review process by the Planning Board which will span up to three (3) open public hearings. Once the concept plan has been analyzed by the Planning Board and its professionals independently, it will be formally presented to the Township Council for further consideration and public comment. In order for any plan to be successful, ongoing public participation in each phase of the planning process is critical. Please reference the redevelopment planning process chart at the end of this document.

Question: *Who would want to live in housing at the train station?*

Answer: Many residents currently live near the Princeton Junction at West Windsor Train Station. The station is surrounded by Penns Neck, Sherbrooke, Berrien City, and Windsor Haven neighborhoods. There are also residential homes located on Wallace Road and nearby in the Estates at Princeton Junction. It is interesting to note that in the Estates at Princeton Junction development, sales of houses in the Heritage Collection which are adjacent to the tracks (i.e., Kent, Juliet, and Lenmore Court) have sold in the \$656,840 to \$823,390 range. Sales of the Signature Collection single-family homes adjacent to the tracks (i.e., Inverness and Renfield Drive) have sold in the \$930,727 to \$1,109,782 range. And finally, sales of townhomes adjacent to the tracks (i.e., Caleb Lane and Wedgewood Court) have sold in the \$493,435 to \$686,149 range.

Question: *If there were to be 1,000 housing units as proposed, how many would be market rate, how many age-restricted, and how many low and moderate income?*

Answer: First, it should be noted that in the most recent presentation of June 4th, Hillier Architecture presented options for 250 housing units, 500 units, 750 units as well as the 1,000 units. Also keep in mind that the units proposed are 1 or 1 bedrooms. For 1,000 residential units, Hillier's presentation included the following breakdown: 548 unrestricted for-sale units, 274 age-restricted (55 and over) for-sale units, and 178 affordable rental units for a total of 1,000 residential units. The 178 rental units will be required to meet the State of NJ's Council on Affordable Housing's (COAH) current *growth-share* requirements for affordable housing. Regardless of the ultimate number of housing units, the objective is to meet affordable housing requirements and limit the number to available school and infrastructure capacities.

Question: *What would be the price range of each type of housing?*

Answer: Prices for the market-rate units will be set by market-forces (supply/demand, comparables in West Windsor, etc). The prices for affordable housing which are set by COAH are based on the median income level of residents within a county region—in West Windsor's case Mercer, Monmouth, and Ocean Counties.

Question: *Even if no housing were included in the redevelopment area, or if the plan did not go ahead at all, will West Windsor face additional affordable housing obligations?*

Answer: Even if redevelopment does not occur and the current land owners develop the properties as allowed under current zoning, affordable housing will be required as a result of development. Hillier has been advised that the State will likely focus only on the net increase in building area. Based on the net increase in building area, approximately 193 affordable units will be required by current COAH guidelines. Using the same methodology, the proposed concept plan as presented on Monday, June 4, 2007 for 1,000 housing units generates a requirement for 178 affordable units. Any calculations associated with the Township's affordable housing requirement are based on development-related growth share and are likely to change (increase) due to recent litigation. Many affordable housing consultants have indicated that a municipality's Growth Share which is a Constitutional Obligation for the Third Round may increase by as much as 40 to 60 percent!

Question: *The redevelopment presentations have projected 300 additional children in the district. There are those who believe the number is closer to 600. Which is more likely? Would either number require the building of a new school?*

Answer: For the 1,000 residential units, Hillier projected 303 new students, which is based on the low end of the School Board's per-unit ratios. These ratios assume a low level of child-friendly amenities. If the extreme high end of the School Board's ratios is used, meaning Hillier designed the units to be extremely favorable for families with lots of amenities for children (e.g., playgrounds, protected fenced-in yards, etc.), that would result in the range of 600-650 students. Hillier believes the lower end of the range is much more likely, given the plan and the types of units being proposed. Neither Hillier's projections nor a projection of 600-650 students would require construction of a new school.

Question: *The School Board has indicated that the schools can physically accommodate the number of children generated by the proposed housing. What other strains and costs might be incurred by the schools?*

Answer: In a presentation given by Dr. Katz of the School Board to the Township Council, it was indicated that the District could accommodate upwards of 2000 new housing units (or 700 students) if not completed before 2014 or 2015 (please reference the complete presentation on the redevelopment website www.WWAllAboard.org). Hillier's projection of 303 students is well within this. To maintain and enhance the quality of education, Hillier plans to look at the capacity and other concerns within the district as they develop the project's phasing strategy to more carefully document this for the public.

Question: *If the redevelopment area added children to the district, are there any other neighborhoods that are projected to send fewer students?*

Answer: Hillier is not projecting any additional impacts to the schools at this time, but will continue discussions with the District as plans are advanced.

Question: *Would additional students in West Windsor mean that busing to Plainsboro would have to be increased?*

Answer: Hillier will need to look at the specific enrollment projections for specific schools, and will aim to minimize busing to the extent possible. Central to this is the phasing of the residential units, as previously mentioned.

Question: *Hillier mentioned a figure of \$160 million in costs associated with the redevelopment. What does that figure include? How much would be the Township's burden; how much NJ Transit or AMTRAK or NJ DOT; and how much developers?*

Answer: Hillier presented a list of Infrastructure and Amenities items that total approximately \$163MM. These are the costs that would be privately funded by either direct contributions from developers or through a Redevelopment Area Bond paid for by the projected annual revenue surplus of \$7MM. The \$163MM does not include any contributions from the state, NJ DOT, NJ Transit, or West Windsor. Funding for the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRT) will come from both federal and state contributions through NJ Transit, with the exception of right-of-way which Hillier and other developers outside of the redevelopment area are providing for them. Also, NJ DOT is currently planning to fund 1/2 of the Vaughn Drive Extension, which is excluded from the \$163MM projection.

Question: *What will redevelopment mean for taxes?*

Answer: Hillier's project is showing a zero impact on taxes. Technically, the new development shows a revenue surplus of \$7M, but that is being re-invested to generate \$108 to \$114MM of funding for the infrastructure and amenities described above. Once the redevelopment plan is further along in the process, the Township will be better able to assess the impact to residential and non-residential taxpayers.

Question: *It is believed that the current tax burden between homeowners and business is currently 70-30. Would redevelopment shift that burden?*

Answer: Hillier hasn't evaluated the township-wide tax split between residential and non-residential uses but the Township will work with Hillier as the project advances.

Question: *What are the risks associated with the project for the municipality?*

Answer: If the entire redevelopment project is privately funded, Hillier sees very few fiscal risks for the Township. That said, Hillier would want to see significant portions of the commercial space leased before construction to minimize any reduced tax revenue to the Township.

Question: *Have any of the vacant office buildings in West Windsor failed to pay their property taxes. If a developer builds an office building that cannot be rented immediately, does that affect the property tax bill?*

Answer: The assessed value of commercial property is based on its annual rental income less operating expenses, and occupancy is an associated factor. Hillier is aware that a vacant building is assessed at a lower rate than an occupied building, which is why they would advocate pre-leasing. The majority of office buildings located in West Windsor has normal occupancy rates and there are no significant commercial property owners within the redevelopment area that are currently delinquent in their property tax payments.

Question: *How much of the parking will belong to West Windsor?*

Answer: The two current surface lots—Wallace and Vaughn Drive—are currently planned to remain as-is (and owned by the Township). These two lots total 935 spaces. Hillier indicated in the presentation that the proposed plan can provide for up to 950 additional parking spaces for residents. These would be accommodated in a new garage on the Township-owned compost site, after it is cleaned-up. Note that currently, approximately 1850 residents from West Windsor use the station regularly, including those that are dropped off, carpool, walk, bicycle, or arrive via bus or shuttle. While Hillier would not want to discourage the alternative modes of access to the station, the numbers indicate that spaces would be available for all current WW resident commuters.

Question: *What cost does West Windsor have to bear for other parking improvements?*

Answer: There is no cost to the Township for the proposed parking improvements. The new garage for residents is completely funded by private sources.

Question: *If West Windsor did not redevelop the area around the train station, would other entities expand the parking there? Could West Windsor limit the number of spaces to what is now available?*

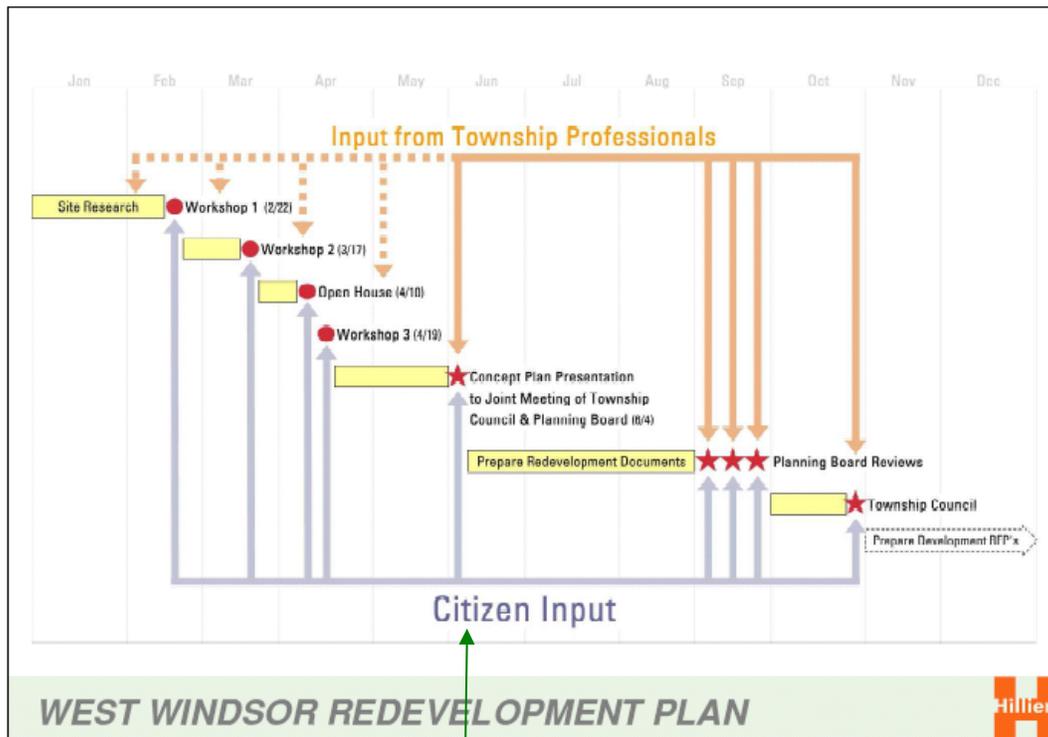
Answer: Because NJ Transit owns a substantial amount of property at the station, it is possible that they would develop structured parking independently. Current land owners in the redevelopment area could also elect to build structured parking on their property, if they could individually justify the costs. Because NJ Transit is a state agency, it is not possible for the Township to limit the number of parking spaces that NJ Transit could provide on their own property. The Township may be able to revise zoning to limit parking on privately-held sites but will possibly face challenges. While a redevelopment area allows for site-specific zoning, this is restricted outside of redevelopment areas.

Question: *What impact would the redevelopment have on the Penns Neck neighborhood?*

Answer: At this point in the planning process, Hillier has not evaluated all of the impacts. That said, the Vaughn Drive Extension will allow more drivers to efficiently bypass Penns Neck, using the current 4-lane stretch of Alexander Road instead. Hillier is conducting more detailed traffic studies to evaluate the impact more specifically. Hillier is also advocating the construction of the master plan road through the Sarnoff property, which would be a major improvement for Penns Neck. Hillier is in discussions with Sarnoff on this possibility.

Question: *Is the April 19th workshop the last meeting in which the public is allowed to comment?*

Answer: The public should continue to be part of the decision-making process to its conclusion. In fact, at all future meetings, the public is encouraged to ask questions to facilitate continued direct dialogue with the Hillier team and our independent professionals. A joint meeting of the Township Council and Planning Board was held June 4. A second meeting was to have been held on June 18 but was cancelled. More meetings are anticipated to be scheduled.



We are here in the planning process