

BOROUGH OF GREEN TREE
PUBLIC MEETING FOR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
NOVEMBER 10, 2021

CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Green Tree Planning Commission met on Wednesday, November 10, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. in the Sycamore Room of the Green Tree Municipal Center, 10 West Manilla Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15220 to conduct an informational Public Meeting on Green Tree's Comprehensive Plan.

ROLL CALL

Members Present:

James Turocy, Chair
Firas Abdelahad
Cheryl Bakin
Al Erwin
Robert McWilliams

Also Present:

Mayor Edward Schenck
Borough Manager Judy Miller
Police Chief Colin Cleary
Todd Carter, Code Enforcement Officer
Deborah N. Gawryla, Stenographer
Kim Beck, Stenographer

Mr. Turocy thanked all the citizens in attendance. He introduced Mayor Edward Schenck.

Mayor Edward Schenck

Mayor Schenck said that there are currently only five members on Planning Commission and Mr. Turocy was just elected to Borough Council and will be leaving the Commission. He said new members are needed for Planning Commission and encouraged the residents present to volunteer. Planning Commission generally meets twice a month.

Mayor Schenck said that tonight's meeting was regarding the Comprehensive Plan for Green Tree. It is a document of plans and changes to be used as a guide for the borough to proceed over the next ten years. The Comprehensive Plan can include large items such as shared municipal services, such as Animal Control services or ambulance service such as MRTSA. Green Tree Borough belongs to the Char West Council of Governments (COG) where the borough purchases its municipal vehicles at a lower group cost. A Comprehensive Plan can look at how the borough can share, expand, or improve services.

Mayor Schenck said that transportation services could be considered in a Comprehensive Plan, such as working on improving bus service to additional areas that might need it, such as City Vista. Other issues, such as additional areas for bikes, changes to parks and wooded areas, housing, apartments, etc., are issues that need to be considered as the area changes. Mayor Schenck said consideration might be given to Greentree Road or Aiken School or any of the borough's municipal buildings or properties, such as the library, gym, fire station, swimming pool, etc.

The Comprehensive Plan is not a binding document, but it is a good blueprint to help a community establish some goals and set some ideas with a plan for the future.

Mr. Turocy thanked Mayor Schenck for speaking about the Comprehensive Plan. He reminded residents to complete a paper survey that had been distributed this evening and turn it in at the end of the session or turn it in to the Administrative Office in the next few days. He thanked those residents who had already completed the online survey too.

Mr. Turocy said Planning Commission is in the process of reviewing the previous Comprehensive Plan and has been working on revisions for the future. The Planning Commission generally deals with land use and development in the various districts within the borough. In doing so, Planning Commission always takes into consideration the borough's biggest stakeholders, the borough residents. With the Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission is seeking to determine how Green Tree should grow while keeping it a place where residents love to live, work, and play.

Mr. Turocy said there are a lot of different assets that must be considered while looking at the long-term growth and development of the community. There needs to be a review of the things that are good in the borough and maybe make them even better, while noting things that need to be improved, and keeping Green Tree a good place for the next generation.

Planning Commission is an advisory board, which reviews new ordinances that are sent to Council for review and passage. Under the Municipal Planning Code (MPC), which guides municipal planning and guides the actions of the planning commissions, a Comprehensive Plan should be reviewed and revised every ten years. The last Comprehensive Plan was approved in 2010.

Mr. Turocy said that Planning Commission is seeking input from the residents on the various assets of the community and the relationships with various parts of the community, such as housing. He said that the borough recently had an application to convert hotel rooms into micro-apartments. The Zoning Hearing Board reviewed the application and determined that it was not the right fit for that use in that spot. The case is currently in litigation, but perhaps that is an issue that residents might want to consider. Green Tree primarily consists of single-family houses and consideration needs to be taken regarding how to proceed into the future, especially with the changes that have occurred with the pandemic. Questions such as empty office space because more people are working from home must be considered and decisions whether vacant office space should be converted to housing or some other use instead. New ideas are needed to face some of the future challenges.

Mr. Turocy said that the Comprehensive Plan should reflect the residents' vision for the community. He stated that tonight's meeting was not a political meeting, but was a meeting for members of the community to come together and provide comments on what is good about Green Tree and suggest ideas regarding what needs to be improved upon.

Chief Colin Cleary

Chief Cleary said he is one of the police officers in Green Tree Borough for the past six years and is pleased to serve as the Chief of a small police department. There is one lieutenant, eight full-time patrol officers, and a part-time administrative assistant, but it is a full-service police agency. The police are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week with two or three Green Tree officers on duty at any time. The police department is very responsive to the needs of the community.

Chief Cleary said that Green Tree is a lovely town of 2.2 square miles and about 5,000 residents. The department knows its community, enjoys serving the community, and is responsive to the community. The COVID pandemic has been challenging, but when a resident requests a police officer they get one or two officers in response. If the issue is not a police issue, the officers work to point the individual in the right direction to assist with his or her problem.

The Green Tree Police Department is responsive to what the community wants. The community wants visible patrolling, the community wants the police around the schools, and the community wants school bus safety. That is why at the beginning of the school year the police often trail

school buses to make certain that the bus stops are safe, crossing guards are positioned properly, and people are abiding by the school bus lights.

The police often patrol at the schools during recess and can be found out in the community on foot or on bicycle. It is important to be out in the community so the residents can see the officers and the children get to know them and feel comfortable with them.

One of Green Tree's biggest complaints is traffic, so Green Tree police officers do a lot of traffic enforcement. They may not write a lot of tickets, but they do make a lot of stops. In 2019, Green Tree officers stopped the same number of vehicles as Mt. Lebanon, which is a 33 officers police force that has a reputation for traffic enforcement. Mt. Lebanon police wrote more tickets, but the total number of traffic stops were about the same.

Chief Cleary said that although the Green Tree Police Department is a small department it has access to a lot of different resources. The borough is partnered with two different COGs, SHACOG and Char West COG. SHACOG pools a lot of police resources, so there is a tactical team available, a crash investigation team, a civil disturbance team, and a cooperative investigation team for investigations that may crossover municipal boundaries. Additionally, the borough has the Allegheny County Police, who are called about four to six times a year. The GTPD also reciprocates its services as needed.

Chief Cleary said that the police department could always do more and interact better and can always be receptive to community information, but the department is always available to help even if it is not a police matter.

Mr. Turocy asked if the GTPD still provides the D.A.R.E. program in the schools. Chief Cleary replied that the department has not provided the D.A.R.E. program over the past two years, primarily because of COVID. Guardian Angel Academy was receptive to the idea of resuming some sort of program and there often tends to be an officer interacting positively with the students. As the pandemic declines, Chief Cleary said he was hoping to bring back a program in the schools.

Mr. Turocy asked those present to speak about their ideas and concerns for Green Tree.

Rachel Magliochette, 44 Pocono

Ms. Magliochette said there is a limited amount of draw for new businesses in Green Tree, other than law offices, banks, etc. There has been a lot of business growth in neighboring communities with boutiques and small restaurants. Other communities seem to have opened new businesses and this can result in people moving into a community.

Ms. Magliochette said it would be nice to have a walkable business area with shops and restaurants giving something for people to do in the community. She said there is also a problem with a lack of safe spaces for people to walk their pets. Pets are currently not permitted in borough parks and she felt they should be allowed. She would like to see more walking trails that are kept clear. The Nature Center is not well maintained and has never been well maintained since she has lived in Green Tree. The overgrowth in the Nature Center makes it too difficult for walking on a regular basis.

Ms. Magliochette said there are a lot of parks in Green Tree, but there is not a lot of greenspace where people can walk. She would like to see new businesses in Green Tree to create and attractive main street area. She would also like more safe spaces for people to walk.

Ms. Magliochette suggested that Green Tree could have more of an art presence with paintings, murals, and artwork throughout the community. The flowers in the borough parks are beautiful and the addition of artwork or murals throughout the borough would make it more attractive for both the residents and others who might be thinking of moving to the community.

Ms. Magliochette said that Green Tree seems to have a large older populations and she felt that there should be more consideration to encouraging younger people to move into the area.

Mrs. Bakin asked where Ms. Magliochette might envision additional art or murals. Ms. Magliochette said artwork and murals could be placed almost anywhere. Greentree Road comes to mind because it is the road that is most traveled in the borough.

Mrs. Bakin asked if Ms. Magliochette has ever used the Green Tree dog park. She replied that she does have a key fob for the dog park and she used it for several years, but dog owners do not always want loose dog situations. She would prefer to have walking areas for owners and their pets. Ms. Magliochette said that people are often stopped when walking through Green Tree Park to the dog park and advised that dogs are not permitted in the park. She felt that dogs should be allowed to walk with their owners on leash on the walking paths in Green Tree Park. She felt that opening Green Tree Park for walking leashed dogs and better maintenance on the walking paths in the Nature Center would be a big help. The dog park is only an off-leash solution and not an area to walk a dog safely.

Mr. Erwin said there have been discussions about making Greentree Road safer for pedestrians. There have also been requests for citizens to help clean and clear the Nature Center to make it more appealing. He said he had discussed possibly getting together with the Green Tree Garden Club to do some work at the Nature Center to freshen up the area.

Mr. Turocy said a copy of the Green Tree zoning map was on display so residents could review the various districts. The zoning map is also online. He suggested that residents look at the map and think about how some areas could be better utilized.

Amy Cesario, 1134 Greentree Road

Ms. Cesario said she is very happy to live in Green Tree. Her oldest daughter has purchased a home in Green Tree. Her middle daughter is a senior at Keystone Oaks, and her youngest child is in high school. Her family has grown up with Green Tree Library. She said she is worried about how the cars along Greentree Road do not respect the lights or the police officers.

Ms. Cesario hoped that the borough could return to pre-pandemic levels for some of its services. She said the recreation program in Green Tree has been curtailed drastically during the pandemic and felt that her daughters have lost something with the closures and curtailment of all the services.

Ms. Cesario said the Greentree Road business district is concerning. The parking lots are in disrepair, the buildings are falling apart, and the businesses in the buildings are not appealing. It is generally a disgrace and there are some landlords that do not take care of their properties. Ms. Cesario did not want to see additional property along Greentree Road zoned commercial until the commercial properties along Greentree Road have been fixed first.

Ms. Cesario said she would like to see Green Tree be more of an inclusive community embracing younger and different cultures. She said she is aware of Green Tree's tax situation and realizes that

there are difficult choices to be made, but she asked that the borough does not cut services as a result. She does not want to lose essential services that make Green Tree special and safe.

Mr. Turocy said that the borough has City Vista, but the residents there do not seem to be involved with Green Tree events in the community. He asked for suggestions about how to make these areas into a single community instead of separate neighborhoods. He said the Rook area is another area where residents do not take part in many community events. Ms. Cesario said it is difficult to get people to participate. As Vice President of the Green Tree Woman's Civic Club she has found it hard to get people to join or attend meetings. The Recreation & Community Activities Board has done a nice job of having fun events throughout the year. With the people coming out after the pandemic, she suggested that some things could be looked at and addressed differently.

Mayor Schenck stated that Council had held a Council meeting at City Vista a number of years ago in an effort to involve the residents living there. He said he would see if Council was interested in holding another meeting at City Vista again.

Ms. Magliochette suggested the Green Tree's Facebook page could promote community events and activities that are not borough-sponsored. She had commented on the Green Tree Facebook page about the need to promote the Community Garage Sale and was told that it was not a borough-sponsored event and that she contact the real estate sponsor of the event for details.

Christine Short, 251 Parkedge Road

Ms. Short said she has lived in Green Tree for about 30 years, but worked in Green Tree before that time. The Green Tree Police Department and Public Works Department are top-notch. When there is a snow event, Public Works has been phenomenal about keeping the borough streets plowed and safe. The police department has always been great since she worked in the borough. She walks her dog throughout the borough, including along Greentree Road, and always feels completely safe.

Ms. Short said she is on the Recreation & Community Activities Board and it was a very big challenge when COVID hit. The board has discussed what programs could be offered for the children, but people first needed to be kept safe during the pandemic. The RCA Board has plans for events over the next year. Light Up Green Tree will be held this year in December and by next summer the recreation program in Green Tree should be back to full strength.

Ms. Short expressed concern about Foster Plaza vacancies. She works for Highmark and most of their employees are still working from home and do not know when they will return to the office. She said that Foster Plaza generates a large share of the borough's revenue for taxes. Planning Commission and Borough Council need to be creative when addressing the vacant office space.

Ms. Short stated that Green Tree Borough has a great police department, Public Works department, and Volunteer Fire Company. The fire company is all-volunteer, but they go through the same training as paid fire fighters. Ms. Short realized that the pool is in need of a lot of work and she hoped that the work could begin soon.

Mayor Schenck said that three members of the borough's Public Works Department are Green Tree volunteer fire fighters, so if there is a fire call during the day those members are in the community and able to quickly respond.

Mr. Turocy said he appreciated Ms. Short's comments regarding what the borough has been getting right as well as what the borough is being challenged with. He said consideration should be given

to the future of Foster Plaza. He said he would like to hear comments from new residents in the community and their view of the borough. He would like some ideas regarding how to attract more people to come to Green Tree. There are not a lot of apartment spaces, restaurants, and businesses in Green Tree that might attract younger residents.

Matt Cesario, 1134 Greentree Road

Mr. Cesario said Greentree Road is walkable and it would be nice to have places where he could walk to eat or shop. He said that Potomac Avenue in Dormont is an example that could be looked at with all of the new businesses they are attracting.

Mr. Cesario said that many of the new people who have come to work with him have at least looked at the apartments that are available in Green Tree as a potential place to live, so the current apartments have been an attractive place for professionals. Foster Plaza could become an issue, but he said the borough should not seek one big tenant to come in to fix the problems because it can become another problem when that big tenant decides to move on. He suggested that Foster Plaza could be considered for more residential or a mixed-use type of development.

Mr. Turocy said that the relationship between the community and the schools has not been discussed this evening. Aiken has been recognized as a top notch school and part of the Keystone Oaks community. Mr. Turocy said consideration should be given to the borough's relationship with not only the Keystone Oaks School District, but also Guardian Angel Academy and Canevin High School. He asked residents to provide comments on this issue either tonight or in the survey.

Mr. Cesario said the school district has been seeing a steady increase in students at Aiken. He could see the need to add a temporary classroom in the next year or two and predicted a strong student population continuing there for the foreseeable future. He said, based upon the increasing number of students in the school district, that Green Tree seems to be a community that attracts people who want to start their families and keep their children here.

Mr. Turocy asked Mr. Cesario how he envisioned the relationship between the borough and the school district. Mr. Cesario said there have been comments about the buses and transporting the students to and from school safely. The recent land sale of the property behind Aiken has been completed. He did not see any major issues between the school district and the borough.

Mayor Schenck said that, pre-COVID, the Keystone Oaks superintendent used to invite the mayors and police chiefs from the three communities (plus the Mt. Lebanon police chief since the high school is located in Mt. Lebanon) for a breakfast to meet and discuss any concerns. This has always been a good line of communication to discuss and learn of any concerns.

Elias, 1031 Greenlawn Drive

Elias said he and his family moved to Green Tree this past summer and they are new to the borough. He has lived in a lot of places from Texas to North Carolina to Virginia and this is the first place that he has felt that he would like to stay for a long amount of time. It has been a great community so far. He has already joined the Garden Club.

Elias asked if the former Parkway Center Mall and the Giant Eagle were part of the borough. Mrs. Bakin replied that the area was in the City of Pittsburgh. He said that there is so much space in that area that could be put to good use. There is a lot of room to create new buildings or restaurants. All the bars and restaurants seem to be located in other communities and the few that are in Green

Tree close too early to attract younger people who might want to hang out at a later hour. He said the Parkway Center area should be developed.

Elias said that he has enjoyed being a part of the Garden Club and the many parks and parklets in Green Tree. He said that the appeal of the Nature Center is that it is a large, untamed area of woods that is hard to find in an urban area, but it is difficult to walk it in some parts. He said it would be a good idea for the Garden Club to work on planting some interesting, non-invasive plants in the Nature Center to make it look brighter. Elias said there appears to be a homeless encampment in the Nature Center. There is a poorly built shelter past the creek and this should be looked checked out. If it is a homeless encampment, he suggested that perhaps the police could look into offering they some resources.

Elias said he really like living in Green Tree, participating in these types of meetings, and joining the various clubs. He hoped the borough would continue to do good things.

Mr. Erwin said there has been an online survey via the website and there has been a paper survey distributed at this meeting. He suggested that everyone look at the 2010 Comprehensive Plan that is available on the Green Tree website. It is an extensive document to read, but the Quality of Life section might give residents some additional thoughts and ideas about the borough.

Mr. Turocy agreed that residents should look at the current Comprehensive Plan. He said that there are a lot of sections from land use to housing that can be considered. He asked residents to give their input on transportation services such as bus routes and schedules. Other items to consider are natural and historic resources. The borough has a Historical Society that has preserved a lot of Green Tree's history. He said that additional comments are welcome and can be given on the website or include them on the survey and turn the survey in at the Administrative Office.

Mr. Turocy thanked all the residents who were in attendance and for their comments.

James J. Turocy, Chairman

Al Erwin, Secretary

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