Princeton Junction Study Area
Subcommittee Report

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The full Planning Board created a three-member subcommittee to review the planning issues involving the Princeton Junction study area and to prepare proposed goals, objectives and land use policies for Princeton Junction study area for full Planning Board review and decision-making on what to include in the Master Plan.

1.2 The subcommittee members included:

Bill Benfer, Chairman

Steve Decter

Gretchen Fahrenbruch

John Madden served as the subcommittee planning consultant

1.3 Neighborhood participants were designated to represent the following Princeton Junction neighborhoods:

1. Berrien City
2. Sherbrooke
3. Benford Estates
4. Wellington/Sunrise
5. Penns Neck
6. Windsor Haven
7. Bear Brook Road area

1.4 There were eight open public sessions to discuss Princeton Junction issues and proposals, and one non-public session (see December 11).

September 6 — Organization meeting. Homework assignments for each neighborhood group including: a rating of the four proposed location/ alignments of the Alexander Road Railroad Bridge replacement; and a description of a vision for the Princeton Junction Center.

October 4 — Visioning session, Princeton Junction area concepts proposed by the various residential neighborhood groups in the study area.

October 11 — A review of the results of the visioning session and an attempt to identify areas of agreement.

October 25 — Review of videotape on Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) systems; and further discussion of visions for a center.

November 8 — A discussion with Carlos Rodriguez, Manager for Special Projects New Jersey Office of State Planning, on center designation requirements, alternative center possibilities, including those adjacent to railroad stations in New Jersey. Rodriguez showed a design concept for the Princeton Junction NEC railroad station to improve its appearance on the west side of the tracks.

November 29 — Strategies for implementing the center vision.

December 11 — Non-public meeting between the New Jersey Department of Transportation and representatives of West Windsor (the Mayor, township professionals, Council representatives, and two subcommittee members) See attached meeting report by NJDOT representative.

December 13 — Report by the subcommittee to neighborhood representatives on the meeting with NJDOT on the Alexander Road bridge replacement alternatives; circulation issues in the study area.

January 10 — Subcommittee draft report outline reviewed

II. PRIOR PLANNING PROPOSALS FOR THE PRINCETON JUNCTION STUDY AREA.

2.1 1992 Town Center/"Metropark" Plan approved by Planning Board. Regional Planning Partnership/Regional Plan Association developed computer-assisted design concepts based on the 1992 plan. This Plan was not pursued after the change in West Windsor form of government.

2.2 1998 Village Center Plan approved by Planning Board. Application to NJ Office of State Planning for village center designation was never officially acted upon, nor was written response to West Windsor ever given. Unofficial comments by representatives of the state indicated that the application did not include a growth component, and particularly new housing, to justify center designation.

III. PRINCETON JUNCTION STUDY AREA BOUNDARIES AND TYPE OF CENTER PROPOSED

3.1 For the purposes of this report, the Princeton Junction Study Area was expanded by 307.5 acres from the area mapped in the Master Plan under consideration by the Planning Board to include lots abutting Clarksville Road in the Wellington/Sunrise neighborhoods; and on the west side of the tracks, the 292 acre Estates at Princeton Junction site.

3.2 The subcommittee is not recommending strict compliance with center designation requirements of the Office of State Planning. It is our view that Princeton Junction study area be village-scale, with distinct residential and non-residential activity areas served by improved circulation.

IV. EXISTING CONSTRAINTS/PRESSURES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PRINCETON JUNCTION STUDY AREA.

4.1 *Constraints/Pressures*

1. The confluence of local and regional traffic, existing and forecast, with points of origin and destination in the Princeton Junction/railroad station area and the adjacent Route 1 Corridor employment centers
2. A road system with limited east-west connections across the railroad barrier and limited travel options for residents, commuters and workers to reach their destinations.
    a. Impeding community integration of both sides of the tracks
    b. Impeding access to emergency services especially west of the tracks.
    c. Increasing traffic and congestion on local residential streets affecting safe access within neighborhoods and to schools and other community facilities, adversely impacting the quality of residential life in the Princeton Junction study area.
3. The failure to date to implement key regional road projects like the Penns Neck Bypass and replacement of the Alexander Road railroad bridge.
4. Projected growth in local and regional development that will exacerbate traffic problems in the study area and will require circulation solutions beyond road improvements.
5. A contradiction between neighborhood desires to limit the capacity of CR 571 and local collector roads to two travel lanes, and the likely result that traffic will thereby spill over onto local residential streets in the study area.

    A need to rethink the peripheral road concept previously adopted by the Township, that sought to concentrate regional peak hour traffic onto four-lane arterials and collector roads, in light of residents' preference for a more equitable distribution of such traffic burdens on local roads, and their seeming willingness to suffer congestion during

extended peak hours rather than widen roads which would encourage higher traffic speeds during non-peak hours.

6. Resident neighbor fears that any substantial center development or redevelopment would attract more vehicular traffic through existing residential neighborhoods, and their concerns about physical and environmental constraints in the commercial core of the study area.

4.2 Opportunities

1. Community support evidenced at the initial hearings on the revised Master Plan, for the need of an improved center in West Windsor, most logically located in the Princeton Junction/Railroad Station area.

2. The combination of substantial railroad station usage and concentration of large employment centers and housing in place or already approved by the Planning Board could lead to support of traffic management and transit solutions, particularly a bus rapid transit system. The opportunity for the BRT could be further facilitated by transit friendly design of the Sarnoff and American Home Products properties integrated with and supporting future Princeton Junction center development and circulation infrastructure.

   There seems to be some support for proposals to develop or redevelop in the Princeton Junction center if it involves transportation improvements to facilitate traffic movement (even if not reducing traffic volume), by better distributing traffic and avoiding traffic congestion, by facilitating pedestrian and bicycle access and safety, and by creating mass transit opportunities to replace vehicular trips.

3. The likelihood that the combination of rail commuters, employees at nearby employment centers and the proximity of neighborhood residents in the Princeton Junction area (including those projected to live at the Estates at Princeton Junction) would provide potential market support for a greater variety of convenience goods and services, located at developed or redeveloped activity areas both east and west of the railroad tracks.

4. There is potential that a village-type commercial and service center could be designed to enhance the character of adjacent compact and historic residential neighborhoods.

5. The interest by the Office of State Planning and New Jersey Transit in a West Windsor center and transit-friendly railroad station development could be exploited even if we choose not to qualify for official state center designation.

V. **The subcommittee recommends that the Land Use Plan section of the Master Plan include the following goals and objectives and proposals for the Princeton Junction study area and the additional areas recommended for inclusion.**

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE PRINCETON JUNCTION STUDY AREA

5.1 Develop a center in Princeton Junction to enhance community identity and pride and to serve as a commercial, civic and cultural focal point that can integrate the diverse needs of various residential neighborhoods, local commuters and employees.

Proposals

1. Promote village-scale activity areas on both sides of the tracks to serve the needs of existing and projected residents, commuters and local employees.

2. Encourage a greater diversity of retail uses serving every day needs and the expressed desires for more specialty goods and services.

3. Encourage development of nonprofit or commercial uses which add to the center's function and identity as a community meeting place, e.g. acquisition of the firehouse for community purposes and development of a health/ recreational facility etc.

4. Create a town green, plaza or central gathering place with civic features east of the tracks and incorporate other open spaces throughout the center

5. Beautify or redevelop the commercial area on both sides of CR 571 between Wallace and Alexander Roads in a more traditional main street style design.

6. Improve the appearance and functioning of the Railroad Station by improving pedestrian movement through the station and by adding retail goods and services and local employment opportunities which allow for the performance of multiple retail tasks in one easy-to-walkto location which can reduce vehicular trips in the peak hour.

7. Promote use of the Maneely tract and plan it as a mixed-use village- scale area to serve the needs of existing and future residents, commuters and local employees.

8. Plan for retail and office development along an extended Vaughn Drive, with structured parking to replace existing surface parking lots that are located in the future rights-of way for the reconstructed Vaughn Drive and BRT system.

5.2 Protect and enhance the quality of life of the existing residential neighborhoods in the Princeton Junction study area.

Proposals

1. Retain two travel lane road cross-section on roads in the study area.

2. Promote development of CR571 through the center area with two travel lanes, left hand turn lanes at appropriate locations (including a left turn arrow at Wallace Road), and, if feasible, shoulders to facilitate snow removal and bicycle access and safety and medians to promote safe pedestrian crossings at key points.

3. Employ traffic calming techniques to maintain speed limits and promote safe pedestrian and bike access (e.g. lighted brick crosswalks and sidewalks for pedestrians, and paths and road shoulders for bicyclists).

4. Preserve existing features such as the Courtney Woods and the Wallace Pond as natural buffers, and incorporate other open space areas as part of center design.

5. Bury or relocate utility and power lines less than 69 KV and buffer power station and township facility on Wallace Road (and possibly relocate the latter).

6 Enhance the physical appearance of the center area by better organization, and a design vocabulary including street trees and plantings, street lights, signage, benches etc.

7. Evaluate all options to relocate the compost area remote from residential neighborhoods.

5.3 Develop multimodal transportation solutions to deal with peak hour traffic congestion.

Proposals

1. Promote the construction of the Penns Neck Bypass as an essential component of the center's traffic solution.

2. Extend Vaughn Drive to a realigned CR 571 on the west side of the railroad tracks linking the Penns Neck By-pass to Alexander Road (and Meadow Road to the south), to reduce the impact of peak hour traffic on Alexander Road and to divert regional traffic from minor residential streets.

3. Promote replacement of the Alexander Road Railroad Bridge to better distribute traffic and limit it to two travel lanes with shoulders for bicycles and /or sidewalks for pedestrians and bicycles.

4. Facilitate the development of bus rapid transit as a long-term solution for the Princeton Junction area as a way to improve circulation by offering an opportunity to reduce vehicular trips in the center and Route 1 Corridor, and to give an organizational structure to future development of the center. Improve conventional bus service as an interim solution.

5. Encourage alternatives to vehicular travel to reduce traffic in the center, including all modes of non-automobile dependent travel (mass transit, pedestrian and bicycle), or such traffic management programs as park and ride facilities.

5.4 Improve the circulation connections of all modes of travel within the center and from the center area to key community points like Community Park.

Proposals

1. Improve all modes of east-west circulation movement across the railroad line.

2. Recognize the need to protect safety in accessing such community facilities as town hall, churches, the library and schools etc.

3. Facilitate safe pedestrian and bicycle crossing over the Alexander and Washington Road bridges and elsewhere in the study area.

4. Install sidewalk improvements on both sides of all streets, where possible, to provide safe access to and from the train station and other locations in the center

5. Construct road improvements which serve to reduce peak hour traffic congestion, improve access by emergency vehicles and divert traffic from minor residential streets.

VI. CENTER IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Planning Board

1. Prepare alternative center plan concepts with visual illustrations of center proposals.
2. Prepare detailed circulation plans for autos, pedestrians and bicycles.
3. Conduct a zoning review on land use changes needed to implement a center plan.
4. Prepare design criteria to guide future center redevelopment.

6.2 Administration

1. Conduct a community survey on center goals and development options.
2. Include center issues and proposals on the West Windsor website.
3. Pursue financing options to implement center proposals.
4. Follow-up on Alexander Road bridge location issues to better determine its functions, traffic impacts, approach road engineering issues and costs, costs and feasibility of land acquisitions, environmental constraints etc. Pursue an interim solution to current bridge congestion.

Appendix

1 December 11, 2001 Alexander Road Bridge replacement meeting and Project Delivery Process.

MEETING MINUTES

Subject:	Alexander Road Bridge Replacement Meeting with Municipal Officials 12/11/01	
Date of Meeting:	December 11, 2001	
Attendees:	Shing-Fu Hsueh	West Windsor Township Mayor
	Allison Miller	West Windsor Township Council
	Rae Roeder	West Windsor Township Council
	Bill Benfer	West Windsor Township Planning Board
	George R. Fries, PE, LS	West Windsor Township Engineer
	Stephen Dectin (sic.)	West Windsor Township
	Sam Surtees	West Windsor Township
	John Madden	John Madden & Assoc.
	Thomas Carbone	NJDOT - BPSD
	Abe Rezaeian	NJDOT - BPSD
	T. Alexander Meitzler, PE	Vollmer Associates LLP
	William E. Anderson	Vollmer Associates LLP
	T. Alexander Meitzler, PE	Vollmer Associates LLP
	William E. Anderson	Vollmer Associates LLP
Location:	West Windsor Township Municipal Building	
Prepared by:		
Copies to:	Attendees	

A meeting was held at the West Windsor Township Municipal Building to discuss the four alternatives, suggested by West Windsor Township officials, for the NJDOT project to replace/rehabilitate the Alexander Road Bridge over Amtrak's Northeast Corridor Line.

Mr. Carbone started the meeting by re-emphasizing the NJDOT Project Delivery Process and that this project was part of the NJDOT efforts to Replace/Rehabilitate Orphan Bridges. The current schedule for this bridge replacement is to complete Concept Development by March 2002, and Feasibility Assessment by August 2003.

Summaries prepared by BPSD and Vollmer of the comments and perceived pros and cons for the four potential bridge locations by six community associations/homeowner groups were distributed. The options as presented are: Option #1, Old Alexander Rd alignment; Option #2, North Post Rd. connection; Option #3, replace on existing alignment; Option #4, Everett Rd connection. A discussion of the universality of the comments ensued and resulted in the Township representatives indicating that while

these comments were valid; they did not necessarily represent a cross section of the separate communities, and should not be characterized as such.

Mr. Rezaeian highlighted the impacts and benefits of each of the potential alignments and a lengthy dialogue resulted. Issues with each option raised included:

Option #1 - Old Alexander Road Alignment (North of the bridge)

The advantage of this alternative is that much of the required ROW is already publicly owned, as it follows an old alignment (pre-1941) of Alexander Road. Design challenges would include maintaining the appropriate railroad clearance for the bridge and obtaining a design that would minimize grade differentials at the Alexander Road/Wallace Road intersection. The diversion of additional traffic through an existing residential area seemed to be a major concern of township officials with this option.

Option #2 - North Post Road Connection (south of the bridge)

This is the alignment that has been indicated on the Township Master Plan for many years. Support for this alignment comes from those who see it as a means to divert traffic away from the northerly portion of Alexander Road. It was confirmed that the location of the bridge in this option, as indicated on the aerial mapping from the September 5, 2001, meeting, is shifted to the south of the existing sharp curve on North Post Road so that the impacts on the residential properties facing that road are diminished. This will result in the road being shifted toward the library on the south side of the roadway. The design challenge with this alignment is the fact that it is significantly removed from the existing bridge and may result in having to meet higher standards relative to railroad clearance. Additionally, because of the distance from the existing structure there was some concern that roadway construction costs may be beyond the scope of the current project. The skewed alignment will present some challenge but it is not critical. Roadway alignment alternatives to approach the bridge from the westerly side of the railroad and cost participation will have to be addressed if this option is pursued. Township officials also stated that Option 2 would not necessarily impact Toll brothers property.

Option #3 - Existing Alignment

Since the roadway will not be significantly displaced this alignment will have the least impact on existing residential properties. Two significant challenges with this proposal are the impacts on traffic while the new bridge is being constructed and the control of traffic at the intersection of Alexander Road and North Post Road. Interim intersection improvements by the Township at this intersection are anticipated in the near future and will include a traffic signal and minor roadway widening. The possibility of a modern roundabout, installed as part of the bridge project, was discussed and appeared to garner enough support that it should be considered as an alternative to a signalized intersection. Township officials stated that once constructed, Option 3 would provide better emergency vehicle access.

The Township representatives indicated that they intend to purchase the vacant parcel of land just to the south of the bridge, immediately east of Amtrak right of way. If accomplished , this action could help Option 3

Option #4 - Everett Road Connection (Far South of the bridge)

A structure at this location would be well south of the existing bridge and would involve the construction of more than 4000' of roadway on the westerly side of the railroad. Challenges to be addressed under this scenario include involvement with properties owned by Toll Brothers, potential wetlands, archeological involvement, substantially increased costs and potential need to improve Everett Road and its intersection with Clarksville Road. This alignment will provide for the best connection to the development to the west of the railroad from the new firehouse under construction at Clarksville Road and Everett Drive. This alignment has the potential to divert traffic away from the Benford Estates neighborhood, however the overall impacts on circulation will require further study.

There was concern expressed by some Township officials about the width of the proposed structure. It was indicated that the anticipated new bridge .would provide one travel lane, a shoulder and sidewalk for each direction. This would result in a bridge with a total width in excess of 50 feet. Township representatives also raised concern about the existing bridge and its life expectancy. It was indicated that the bridge's, superstructure and substructure are rated as poor and fair conditions respectively, but it is not posted for weight limitation. The existing physical condition of bridge does not warrant immediate attention, while planning it is appropriate to begin planning for its eventual replacement.

Issues of greatest concern to the Township were the impacts on residential properties of ROW takings for the new bridge, the proximity of traffic to residential properties and increased traffic in residential areas. The effect of construction on existing traffic flow was also of particular concern. It was noted that Options #1,2 and 4 would be built on alignments that would have limited impact on existing traffic during construction while option 3 may require a detour. During FA phase, a more in depth analysis will be made to assess the possibility of shifting the alignment of the new bridge slightly to the south and stage construction to limit offsite detours.

Mr. Carbone emphasized that the project, as currently envisioned, was for a replacement structure, which is most closely defined as either Option #1 or #3. He indicated that if the Township wished to actively pursue Options #2 and #4 it would be necessary to obtain approval of NJDOT management for the expanded scope of the project.

Township officials questioned whether the NJDOT would still pursue the project if the Township could secure a commitment to cQnstruct the approach roadways for Options #2 or #4 without State funds, but rather using local or private funding. The State representatives indicated that this public/private partnership option was potentially feasible, but the roadway would still have to be studied for environmental impacts subject

to FHWA regulations. Otherwise it would be viewed as segmentation of a federal project to circumvent federal environmental regulations, which is prohibited by law. The design of the roadway would also need to comply with AASHTO standards.

At the end of the meeting, the following key points were summarized and agreed upon:

1- West Windsor does not support a new four-lane bridge on any location. Only 2 lane alternatives for approach roads and bridges should be studied by BPSD.

2- The Township endorses the continued study of all four bridge location options as they provided to BPSD.

3- The Township believes there exists a reasonable possibility for Toll Brothers (or other developer funding source) to construct the approach roadway for either Option 2 or 4.

Vollmer Associates LLP will now move forward to close out the Concept Development phase of this project and supply information to the BPSD to support a request to the Capital Programming Committee to expand the scope of the project in the Feasibility Assessment phase.

Cc: Alex Brown (NJDOT-Office of Community Relations)