Focus Group Summary

November 2023



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Focus Group Overview

Focus Groups

Purpose: Start to understand challenges, asset, and priorities from different community perspectives, inform the community survey, and build plan buy-in.

VIRTUAL FOCUS GROUPS

- 11/2/23: Businesses and Major Employers
- 11/3/23: Environment and Sustainability
- 11/6/23: Housing and Development

IN-PERSON FOCUS GROUPS

- 11/8/23: Cross Generational
- 11/9/23: Asian American Community
- 11/15/23: North Hills Community

Virtual Focus Group Participants

BUSINESSES AND MAJOR EMPLOYERS

- ACTS Retirement Life
- Heritage Commercial Group, LLC
- Compass Real Estate
- GVF TMA
- Temple Ambler
- Toll Brothers
- [written feedback from ESD, Inc.]

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

- DVRPC Office of Climate & Environment
- Environmental Protection Advisory Board (EPAB)
- North Wales Water Authority
- Robbins Park
- Tree Tenders
- UD CARES
- [interview with Colleen Township Natural Resources Manager]
- [interview with Mari Radford, FEMA Specialist]

HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Alliance Partners HP
- DVRPC- Office of Community & Economic Development & Office of Smart Growth
- ERS Law Firm
- Montgomery County Housing Authority
- Montgomery County Planning Commission
- Temple Ambler
- Toll Brothers
- UD School District
- Westrum Development Company
- Zoning Hearing Board (Chair & Solicitor)
- [written feedback from Kuhls Law]

In-Person Focus Group Participants

CROSS GENERATIONAL

- Received contacts from UDSD Principals, Township, and Steering Committee members.
- Promoted through MoCo Senior Adult Activities Center
- Representatives from Baby Boomer, Gen X, and Millennial (Gen Y) generations

ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

- Promoted focus group through UDSD Asian American Students and Families Association (AASF), UD Chinese American Association (UDCAA), and Korean Methodist Church
- Participants from UDSD AASF and UDCAA

NORTH HILLS COMMUNITY

- Promoted focus group through North Hills Manor newsletter, connecting with Visiting Nurses Association, flyers at Antioch Baptist Church, and flyers sent home with North Hills Collective after school students.
- Participants North Hills
 Collective afterschool program
 (parents), Antioch Baptist
 Church, North Hills Manor, and
 Visiting Nurses Association.

Key Findings

Businesses and Major Employers

ASSETS

- Sense of community; welcoming.
- Effort by Township to stay current and change with the time.
- The Promenade place to shop, eat, and gather with community.
- Parks system.
- Good relationship with Township staff and leaderships.

CHALLENGES

- Township had good reputation as business-friendly environment. This has changed within the last 10 years with increased taxes and permitting process issues.
- Permitting process time is longer and requirements are more lengthy than nearby municipalities which affects businesses and real estate transactions.
 - Real estate professional finds that this is an issue for prospective home buyers who are considering renovations.
- Taxes are higher than surrounding municipalities.
- Attracting in-demand retailers to vacant storefronts in existing shopping centers.
- Recruiting and retaining staff.
- Lack of coordination/collaboration among members of the business community.

- Identify opportunities for more engagement with local community – are there opportunities to connect with the School District and Temple Ambler for interns or job training to help with recruitment? Other needs that aren't being addressed that the business community can support?
- Need to address the permitting process challenges.
- Zoning along Pennsylvania Avenue

 how can this be a more
 cohesive corridor that connects
 with the GFW District?
- Multimodal transportation better bicycle and pedestrian connections throughout the Township. This will help attract the new generation of working professionals.

Environment and Sustainability

ASSETS

- Township's Park and Trail Systems.
- Township Waterways and aquifers.
- Tree coverage.
- The Birdtown program.
- Township support for resident efforts.
- Affluence of the area.

CHALLENGES

- Stormwater and flooding issues.
- Known (saline, etc.) and unknown contaminants in the Township aquifers threatening drinking water.
- Litter along most Township roads.
- Residents' perspective on environmental issues, such as recycling, use of leaf blowers, preference for grass lawns, etc.
- Township's partnership with General Motors for Township vehicles limits ability to switch to electric vehicles.
- Affordable housing.

- Advance partnerships with various stakeholders, including Temple Ambler, watershed organizations, and other municipalities in the County.
- Community education on all discussed topics.
- Leverage the Commissioners' support for environmental issues.
- Wider resident understanding and advocacy for environmental initiatives is needed for specific action to be taken.
- Initiatives and programs related to invasive plant species, reducing the Township's carbon footprint, increasing tree coverage, improving water quality, and more.
- Work with business properties to advance initiatives promoted on residential properties.

Environment and Sustainability

POTENTIAL PROJECTS, PROGRAMS, AND INITIATIVES

- Introduce an Adopt-a-Road program to mitigate litter along Township roads and waterways.
- Energy audit of the Township library.
- A single use plastic bag ban.
- Calculate cost savings of potential sustainable improvements to Township facilities/machinery/fleet.
- Revisit the Township's lawn mowing ordinance to encourage or require naturalized areas (stop mowing, don't pick up leaves, etc.) in strategic places.
- Installation of rain barrels and swales to mitigate stormwater runoff issues.
- More pedestrian and bicycle safety projects on dangerous roads/intersections.
- Lawn to Forest program.

Housing and Development

ASSETS

- Diverse housing stock.
- Strong location value for businesses, developers, and residents.
- School district.
- Parks system.
- Mixed-use locations.
- Strong Township pride.
- Good relationships with Township for required development processes.

CHALLENGES

- Lengthy permitting processes affect development and real estate transactions. Impacts demos, additions, and new construction.
- Mismatch between household size and the housing available.
- Few multi-family developments compared to region.
- Traffic and lack of transportation options.
- Interest rates.

- Further diversify housing stock.
- Increase number of apartments to meet changing community needs, such as a desire for less property maintenance.
- Reuse of existing infrastructure.
- Promote mixed-use and residential density.
- Explore permitting requirements of peer municipalities, such as West Goshen and Phoenixville.

Cross Generational

ASSETS

- Strong neighborhood and community networks.
- School district.
- Parks and public spaces.
- Wide range of activities for all ages throughout the year.
 "Something for everyone."
- Seems that more businesses are coming.
- Great location to highways, train station, Philadelphia, job opportunities, etc.
- Can see the value of local taxes – Upper Dublin uses taxes efficiently.

CHALLENGES

- Rising housing prices.
- It's incredibly difficult to move within Upper Dublin due to housing market. People take on lengthy renovation processes to stay in their homes (i.e., stay in the community).
- New construction is mostly age-restricted 55+ communities.
- Gap of housing options for older residents not ready to move to supportive housing, but ready to move out of existing home.
- Tax base is mostly supported by residents due to lack of businesses.

- Make housing more affordable.
- Attract more businesses and institutions that can support the local tax base.
- Shift from an office park business sector to entertainment sector but mitigate any traffic this might bring.
- Connectivity and pedestrian/bicycle access.
- Increase number of sports fields so kids do not have to have as early/late practice times due to lack of space.
- School renovations.
- Another community pool.

Asian American Community

ASSETS

- High ranking School District.
- Sense of community.
- Public facilities.
- The park system.
- Open Space
- Quiet and safe.
- Tax base.
- Transit system location near Philadelphia.

CHALLENGES

- Overall lack of Township transparency with decision making processes and Township initiatives.
- Inclusion: There is community among cultural organizations, but difficult to join boards, other organizations and feel truly included.
- Lack of diversity in decision making at the Township level (and in other circumstances, like the School District).
- Issues with pedestrian safety; several deaths recently due to car crashes.

- Identify opportunities to increase transparency between the Township.
- Work on increasing accessibility of resources (i.e., translation support, improved website navigation, etc.).
- Hold more community events that focus on community building and civic engagement such as bringing back UD Day and block parties
- Establish a cultural center not a brick-and-mortar building per se, but cross-cultural programming in existing spaces (i.e. the Library).
- Increasing diversity in the School District.
- Overall desire to maintain existing residential neighborhoods.

North Hills Community

ASSETS

- Sense of community.
- Heritage/history of neighborhood.
- The community center which has been a pillar within the community for years.

CHALLENGES

- Lack of transparency in decisions making.
- Lack of funding for the neighborhood and North Hills Community Center.
- Issues with pedestrian safety in the community – speeding and running stop signs. No sidewalks for pedestrians.
- Disconnect between what is being planned and what the community wants.
- Lack of programming for youth.

- Upgrades to and ongoing maintenance of North Hills Community Center.
 - Explore historic designation of property.
- More community programming for both youth and senior citizens.
 - Allocating funds to enhance both the programming offered.
- Putting in traffic calming and pedestrian safety measures (i.e., speedbumps, flashing stop signs, kids at play signage, etc.).

Overlapping Themes and Differences

Assets

- Strong sense of community, neighborhood networks, etc.
- High quality school district.
- Township parks, trails, and open space resources.
- Businesses and developers have good communication with the Township.
- Great location to job opportunities, to transportation infrastructure (highways, regional rail), to customer bases, etc.

Challenges

- There is a lack of diversity in the Township, school district, etc. and lack of inclusion of diverse voices in decision making bodies.
- Variety of environmental concerns: water quality, stormwater issues, litter, climate change, etc.
- Issues with pedestrian and bicycle safety and accessibility throughout the Township in general.
- Permitting processes are complex and lengthy and can dissuade developers, businesses, or prospective residents from building in the Township.
- High taxes. Majority of tax base being residential.
- Mismatch between household size and the housing available.
- Rising housing costs.

Future Priorities

Community Partnerships

- Advance partnerships with businesses, institutions, organizations, residents, etc. to meet future goals.
- Education and commitment building throughout the Township.

Housing / Businesses

- Address permitting process challenges.
- Diversify housing stock; increase affordability of housing options.
- Attract businesses to diversify the tax base and provide more amenities to residents.

Transportation

Improve multi-modal transportation options and safety.

Environmental

Pursue identified environmental and sustainability initiatives.

Next Steps

Next Steps

- Incorporate key findings from the focus groups into the public survey and other upcoming engagement activities
- Coordinate with focus group participants and invitees to advertise UD Plan engagement activities and updates
- One-on-one interviews as part of real estate and market analysis

Appendix

Focus Group Presentations & Mentimeter Results



Presentation Slides

Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions (10 minutes)
- Comprehensive Plan Overview (5 minutes)
- Focus Group Discussion Questions (70 minutes)
 - Assets and Challenges
 - Future Priorities
 - Implementation Needs
- Closing (5 minutes)

Introductions

- Name
- How long have you lived in / been involved with the Township?
- What is your favorite thing about Upper Dublin?

Comprehensive Plan Overview

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) enables local jurisdictions to conduct a comprehensive planning process to identify areas where growth and development will occur so that a full range of public infrastructure services can be adequately planned and provided as needed to accommodate growth.

Public Infrastructure Services:

Sewer Public Schools

Water Parks

Streets/Highways Open Space

Police Other Services

Fire Protection

The MPC requires that comprehensive plans shall be reviewed at least every ten (10) years.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

The Comprehensive Plan, consisting of maps, charts, and textual matter, shall include, but not be limited to, the following related basic elements:

A plan for...

- Land uses
- Housing needs of present and anticipated future residents
- The movement of people and goods
- Community facilities and utilities
- Protection of natural and historic resources

Objectives regarding future development, including location, character, and timing of future development.

A statement of interrelationship between plan components, which includes an estimate of the fiscal, economic development, environmental, energy, conservation, and social consequences.

A discussion of short, medium, and longrange plan implementation strategies.

What is an *Implementable* Comprehensive Plan

TRADITIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

- Guide for decisions to be made and actions to be taken after the plan is complete
- Sometimes 'can sit on the shelf'

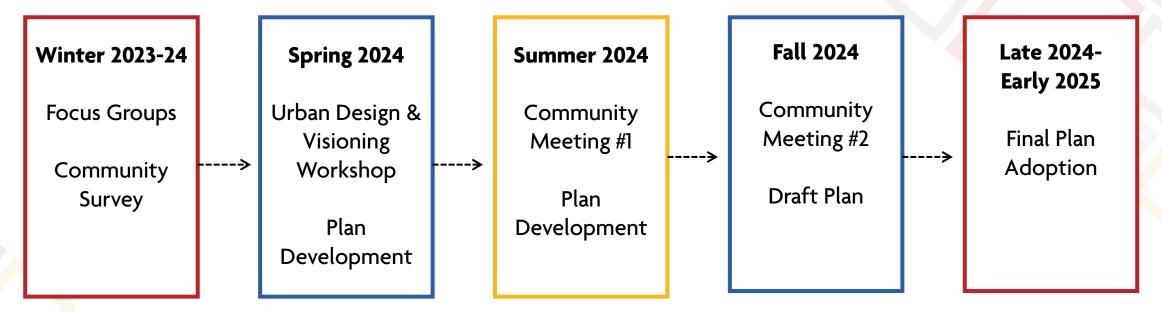
IMPLEMENTABLE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

- Record memorializing decisions made and actions committed to and initiated during the planning process
- A 'living' document

5 KEY STEPS OF AN IMPLEMENTABLE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

- 1. Focus on real, relevant issues
- 2. Organize the plan the way officials and citizens think
- Devise practical and workable recommendations
- 4. Recruit partners and create capacity to implement the plan
- 5. Get "community" ownership and commitment

Project Timeline



- Focus Groups are the first of multiple community engagement opportunities throughout the planning process
- Purpose of Focus Groups:
 - Understand the needs, challenges, and desires of the community today
 - Learn about priorities for the future of Upper Dublin
 - Help inform survey and plan content

Thank you!

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Upper Dublin Discussion Questions

Businesses and Major Employers Focus Group

Thursday, November 1, 2023 | 12 – 1:30 p.m.



How does your business or organization work and/or coordinate with the Township? 8 responses

Development opportunitieslong term planning

Coordination on permitting and building review process can be long compared to other municipalities.

Difficultly with permitting

A good relationship with the Township at all levels.

Collaboration on space planning, development, events, permits, public safety.

Wealthy

We primarily work with the township related to development, zoning and permitting.

We offer free virtual educational community programs with the parks department. We have also partnered with the parks on their summer camp. The township also confers with us on tree planting projects.



What are 2-3 words that come to mind when thinking about Upper Dublin Township? 10 responses

supportive progressive

good school district

work wealthy good school distriction lacking diversity close-knit co lacking diversity close-knit community





What drew your business to Upper Dublin? 4 responses

good business reputation home founders church

How would you characterize the business/institutional community in Upper Dublin? 8 responses

Typical

Newish...certain businesses are lacking excitement, but location is perfect & close to other communities that provide what we are lacking.

Answer here was in response to if business will be in UD in 5-10 years (moved to that slide)

Welcoming, friendly, a sense of community

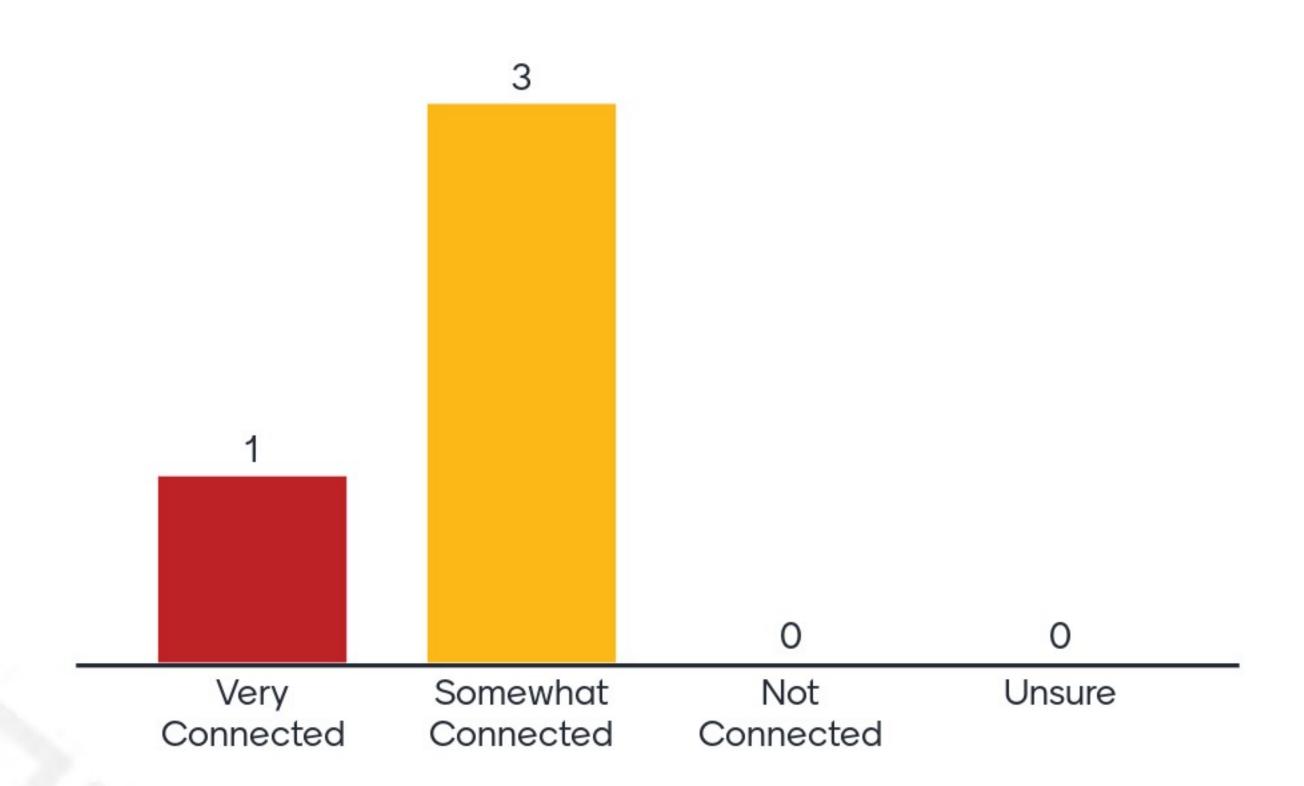
Highly Connected
Social Accountability Efforts
Local Employee Base

Answer here was in response to trends that impacted business question (moved to that slide)

Community-minded

Answer here was in response to trends that impacted business question (moved to that slide)

Does your business feel connected to the wider Upper Dublin community?







What trends have most impacted your business over the past 10 years? 5 responses

Not a trend, but the tornado definitely impacted us.

The higher taxes do impact us

Labor access

Real Estate Market interest Rates
Pandemic Health Care Environment

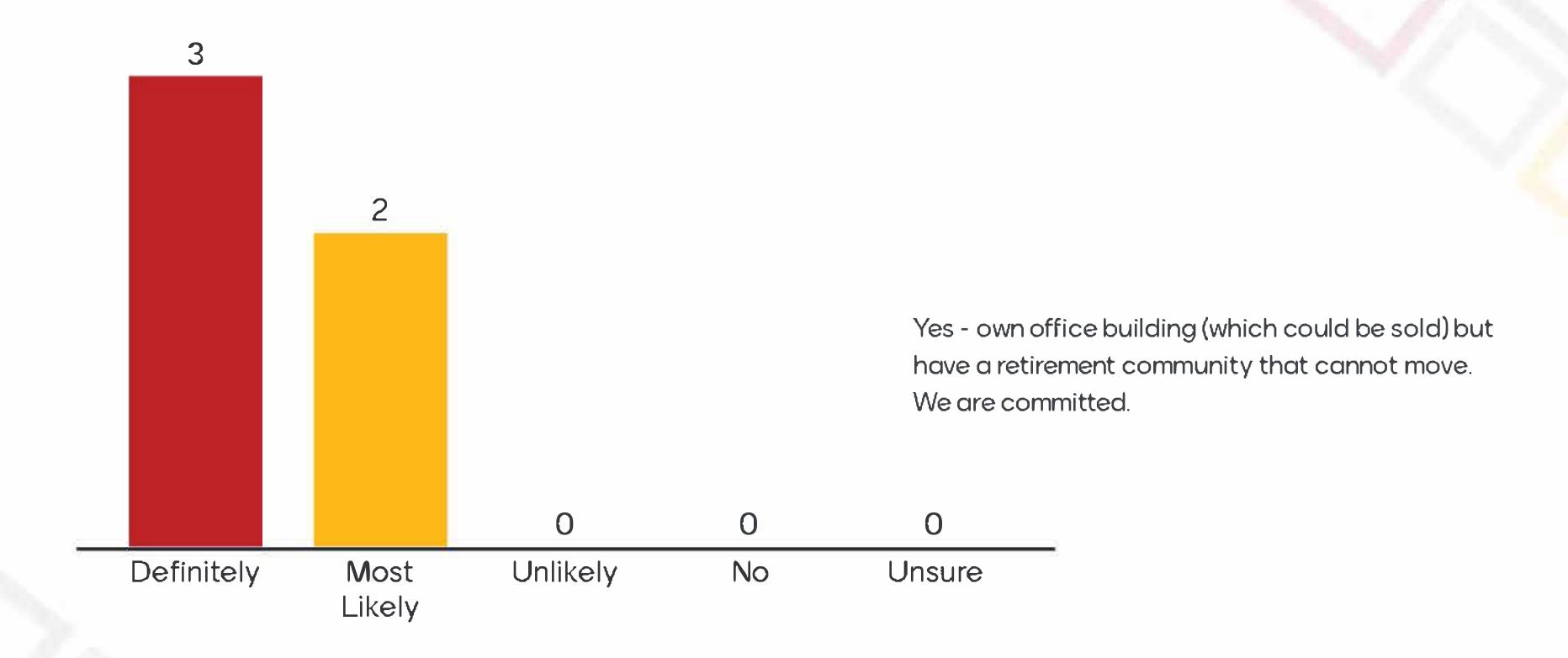
Automation Impact of Al Impact on staffing

Most things that impact our business (in a negative way) is typically non-township related

New roads and bike paths would also impact.

The pandemic accelerated the work-from-home trend. Fort Washington
Business Park will be impacted.

Do you envision your business being in the Township in the next 5-10 years?







In your opinion, how do you think the business development landscape will change in the next 5-10 years?

4 responses

I worry about crime and more online businesses/less brick and mortar.

Need to create more places with access to stores/amenities/etc.

Stores, restaurants, etc. are closing so early post Covid.

The tenants that we see in our building like the location (Ft Washington), but the challenge that the Township will have in attracting employers is the sense of place that is lacking.

What are your priorities for business support, retention, and development over the next 10 years?

1 response

More efficient permitting.

Environment and Sustainability Focus Group

Friday, November 2, 2023 | 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.



How does your organization currently work and/or coordinate with the Township? 4 responses

Nwwa works with Township on projects coordinating renewal of water infrastructure during road projects

We provide grants and technical assistance to munis.. I have personally been involved with several trail grants for the twp.. Our agency has done numerous project with the twp - LED streetlights etc.

I chair the UD Environmental Protection Advisory Board, which advises the Commissioners on environmental matters. I was on the team that led the Commissioners to pledgetransition to renewable energy.

I'm a resident of the township. . I was involved in writing a clean energy transition plan for the township a few yrs ago and was in touch w township mngr etc

What are 2-3 words that come to mind when thinking about Upper Dublin Township? 5 responses

conservative in adoption
community
we will not be first
schools and churches
well managed

When you think about Upper Dublin, what is the first place you think of? 7 responses

my grandmothers house
my neighborhood
schools
my home
mondauk
jarrettown church

What do you think the most important natural resources in Upper Dublin are? 8 responses

water resources parks and open spaces streams tree canopy open space woodlands creeks - sandy run

Where is Upper Dublin excelling in environmental protection and preservation? 6 responses

Twining valley park

The township should be a leader and in decarbonization/energy management initiatives with their own operations. Protection and restoration of natural areas.

Park and trail development. Re-greening. Energy efficiency and management initiatives.

The Authority plans to continue to replace aging infrastructure and upgrade/existing treatment facilities

They adopted rf00 as mentioned.

The twp should be a leader in decarbonization efforts with their own operations.





What are your greatest environmental concerns for Upper Dublin? 2 responses

Not enough people care.

Slow adoption of ev and hybrid vehicles by the township (due to buying only GMs policy). Agree about the litter.



What are your priorities for the environment and sustainability over the next 10 years? 5 responses

When the township is making decisions over the next ten yrs, hope environmental consequences will be factored in to those decisions

Widely adopt and facilitate the use of renewable power at all levels in the township. Provide and care for green space at all opportunities.

The twp should be a leader in decarbonization efforts with their own operations.

Move to support expansion of affordable housing

Partnerships with neighboring municipalities.





What partnership are needed to advance these priorities?

4 responses

Partnerships with neighboring municipalities.

A formal effort to learn of and access federal and state level funding. Continues ties w. DvrpcBring in subject matter expert consultants as needed

Work together w other townships and also try to do things county wide (solar arrays for example) Focus on getting grants for green initiatives





What can individuals and organizations do to support Township initiatives in the environment and sustainability?

8 responses

bring your kids with you get involved w volunteer show up volunteer talk to your commissioner go to boc mtgs vote and lead by example tell your commissioner th





Housing and Development Focus Group

Monday, November 6, 2023 | 12 – 1:30 p.m.



How does your organization/business currently work and/or coordinate with the Township? 11 responses

Provide planning research and data

Technical assistance

Provides grant funding

Mostly on issues of zoning.

As part of zoning bd. Intgrated with township

We have had office in Township for 35 years. Family has built nearly 2,000 homes in the township over 38 years.

The county planning commission works closely with the township and has a community planning assistance contract in place.

Funding opportunities

Extensively during land development, but no mostly 'as needed' basis around municipal services.





How does your organization/business currently work and/or coordinate with the Township? 11 responses

First Class

Good mix of uses

What are 2-3 words that come to mind when thinking about Upper Dublin Township? 19 responses



How would you characterize the housing development market in Upper Dublin? 8 responses

Strong housing demand

Strong market

Median detached housing price is \$625,000

Strong market. Taxes constrain demand.

Lots of multifamily proposals

Very little condo development, apartments are moreso rentals

Apartments

Over 55 developments





What does affordable housing mean to you?

12 responses

Starter homes

Rentals

Condominiums

Not paying more than 30% of one's income

Affordable housing has a true definition.

lower case affordability - attainable housing

Row homes

Spending less than 30% of income on housing

Housing choice and variety





What does affordable housing mean to you?

12 responses

Singles and young couples, not a 4 person household

The use of the phrase "workforce" housing is more palatable than "Affordable" housing.

families need rental options too



What trends have most impacted the housing development landscape over the past 10 years?

18 responses

Apartments

Restrictive zoning has created pent up demand and artificially inflated housing costs and values

55 plus housing

Changing household demographics

rising construction costs

Construction slowdown

changing demographics: shrinking household size

Cost of Construction. Desire for less maintenance. Move to multifamily products.

NIMBY misinformation



What trends have most impacted the housing development landscape over the past 10 years?

18 responses

Owner occupied switching to corporate owned to rent

Investor buy up of single-family property

Remote workforce

Rising interest rates

Interest rates

Interest rates

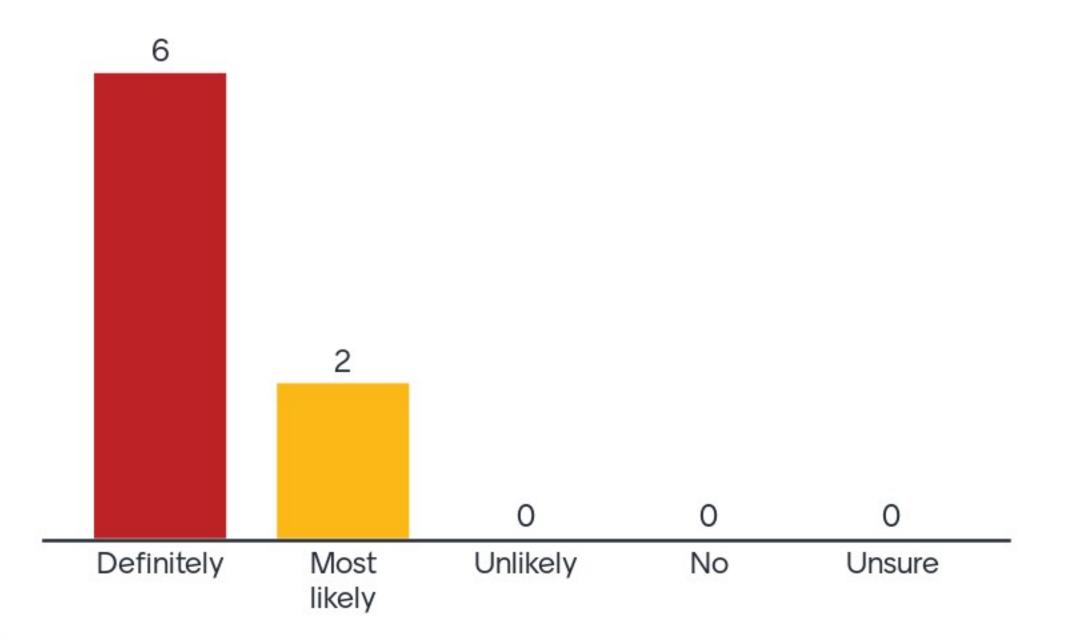
Demand for home offices

Decrease in the number of "starter homes" available

Renter by Choice versus renter by need.



Do you envision your organization/business operating in the Township in the next 5-10 years?





In your opinion, how do you think the housing development landscape will change in the next 5-10 years?

17 responses

Demand will continue

I'm not sure it will without intervention at the state level

Central cities and rural areas will see demand, homogeneous suburban communities will see decline in demand. Higher home prices

More multifamily proposals.

More older senior housing

Escalating rent

Uncertainty about future interest rates influencing homeownership opportunities

More public transportation options/less car based is desirable.



In your opinion, how do you think the housing development landscape will change in the next 5-10 years?

17 responses

Amenities-rich suburban communities will continue to be in demand.

Lots of teardowns and rebuilds of obsolete stock. Will challenge current zoning code.

More and varied transportation options beyond personal automobiles

Facilities to care for aging population

What will millennials/Gen Z do after 5-10 years in an apartment or townhouse?

Zoning reforms that make it easier to build "gentle density" in suburban areas

Maintain our existing housing stock

As an educational institution; housing that is appropriate/desirable for students.

What are your housing and development priorities for Upper Dublin over the next 10 years? 12 responses

More opportunities to age in place

Greater variety of housing types (forms and tenure)

Enhancing diversity without unwelcoming present residents

Increasingly attainable and transitaccessible.

More development, more of everything Fort Washington as a dense community center

More opportunities for walkability

Creating a vibrant live/work/play environment for obsolete uses in Business park.

possibly rezone obsolete office buildings for resi

As educational institution: housing that is appropriate/desirable for students.





What are your housing and development priorities for Upper Dublin over the next 10 years? 12 responses

Maintain our existing housing stock.

Re-use of existing infrastructure to promote less expensive housing.

Guardian at the gates



What should Upper Dublin's housing priorities be for the next 10 years? 9 responses

Diversification of the housing stock.

Guardian at the Gates

Embrace density versus opposing density. Demographics have changed.

Bring diverse types of housing to market with incentives for reusing existing infrastructure.

Incentive public transportation access.

Education of residents, making sure people understand what density means for the township

Promote mixed use and residential density.

Placemaking with housing component.

Apartments don't necessarily mean lots of new schoolchildren





What partnerships are needed to advance these priorities? 6 responses

Acceptance of Development Community work outside of Township that can be brought to Upper Dublin from a learning perspective. Not to reject the experts and the investors.

Better communication to community

Municipality and Development Community: Clearer expression of what the community would like to see

Figure out how to make the development process easier. Less time and costs to do something that is positive. The comments today about the difficulty to make development happen shouldn't be ignored. Are there interim changes that can be made to local codes?

Municipality and Major Employers working together on transportation, housing affordability, and civic pride





Cross Generational Focus Group

Wednesday, November 8, 2023 | 6 – 7:30 p.m.



How would you describe Upper Dublin to someone who's never been here before?

Why did you move to Upper Dublin? Why have you stayed?

What existing strengths and assets in the Township should be maintained and/or built on?

What are some challenges you're seeing in the Township?

How would you characterize Upper Dublin as a place to live for your generations?

How would you characterize community collaboration with the Township?

Do you think you will live here in the next 5-10 years?

Are you seeing any trends that might impact Upper Dublin in the future?

If you could change one thing about Upper Dublin, what would it be?

How can the Township work with the community to advance these priorities?

Asian American Community Focus Group

Thursday, November 9, 2023 | 6 – 7:30 p.m.



How would you describe Upper Dublin to someone who's never been here before?

Why did you move to Upper Dublin? Why have you stayed?

What existing strengths and assets in the Township should be maintained and/or built on?

What are some challenges you're seeing in the Township?

How would you characterize Upper Dublin as a place to live?

How would you characterize community collaboration with the Township?

Do you think you will live here in the next 5-10 years?

Are you seeing any trends that might impact Upper Dublin in the future?

If you could change one thing about Upper Dublin, what would it be?

How can the Township work with the community to advance these priorities?

North Hills Community Focus Group

Wednesday, November 15, 2023 | 6:30 – 8 p.m.



How would you describe Upper Dublin to someone who's never been here before?

Why did you move to Upper Dublin? Why have you stayed?

How would you characterize Upper Dublin as a place to live?

What existing strengths and assets in the Township should be maintained and/or built on?

What are some challenges you're seeing in the Township?

How would you characterize community collaboration with the Township?

Do you think you will live here in the next 5-10 years?

Are you seeing any trends that might impact Upper Dublin in the future?

If you could change one thing about Upper Dublin, what would it be?

How can the Township work with the community to advance these priorities?