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Easton gateway to be improved

The Third Street/Larry Holmes Drive Corridor in Easton is changing: new shops and restaurants are opening, residents have improved access to the River and a redesigned recreational park, and a garage and intermodal transfer facility and museum are planned.

To celebrate these changes and to improve pedestrian bicycle access throughout the City, the Pennoni/Taggart team was selected to design an appropriate Gateway to the City.

The project's goals are to: provide a pleasant gateway for travelers entering the City's downtown from Route 611 and Interstate 78; update Third Street's "look" to reflect its new vitality; and provide for the safe and efficient movement of motor

vehicles, buses, pedestrians and bicyclists into and along this active artery of the City.

Pennoni will prepare the engineering and landscape architecture services and Taggart Associates will lead the public information responsibilities. Design is expected to begin shortly and be completed before October 2010.



The intersection of 3rd St. & Larry Holmes Drive

Emmaus studies parking feasibility



Borough Clock on Main Street in Emmaus

In addition to safety and cleanliness, adequate parking in the right location is crucial to attracting patrons to a shopping district. For years, the leadership in Emmaus Borough, located in Lehigh County, PA, has discussed whether additional parking was necessary. Earlier this year, the Borough selected the team of Langan Engineering and Taggart Associates to conduct "...a feasibility study for the possible design, financing, and construction of a multi-level parking facility." This six-month study is expected to begin in spring 2010. Taggart Associates will be responsible for the analysis of the legal issues and the identification and analysis of financing sources.



From the President May 2010

“Redevelopment of urban centers has continued to outpace construction in the outskirts of suburbia, according to a recent U.S. EPA study, suggesting a “fundamental shift” has begun in the real estate market as the Obama administration pushes denser development through its “livability” initiative.” – *New York Times*, “‘Smart Growth’ Taking Hold in U.S. Cities, Study Says, March 24, 2010.

This news means that more demand will be thrust upon local municipalities that have already stretched their budgets to meet an increased demand in services.

We’ve seen many communities working on the development of a variety of types of plans – transportation/circulation, streetscape improvements, walkability and overall economic development. Traditionally, these plans identify how the improvements will be financed. In the past, state and federal funds were available to underwrite most or all of the costs of implementing these improvements.

This approach to funding and redevelopment planning is no longer viable, since the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development annual budget was cut by 53 percent from its 2008 to 2009 total, and its overall funding nose dived from \$568 million to \$265 million. The funds that remain now face even greater competition. Funds for improving circulation systems and safety improvements have also been extremely competitive. On April 6, the USDOT ruled against Pennsylvania’s request to toll I-80. Senator John Rafferty, a Montgomery County Republican called the decision a “setback” for the state’s transportation improvement plans.

Ed Wilson, Acting President & CEO of 10,000 Friends, wrote on April 1, 2010:

“Sustainability” is one of the great buzzwords of our time. Ever since the U.N.’s Brundtland Commission issued a call for “sustainable development” back in 1983, the term has been applied to an ever widening array of issues. Today we have sustainable agriculture, sustainable forestry, sustainable energy, sustainable business, sustainable design, sustainable tourism, sustainable living... you name it. At 10,000 Friends we and our colleagues are talking a lot about sustainable communities these days. But what exactly do we mean by that?

The original idea behind sustainability – meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs – is simple and appealing. But like all overused words, “sustainability” risks losing its meaning. Whenever people start talking about sustainable-something-or-other, I find myself wondering if the term is more than just feel-good jargon.

Recently, though, I’ve been gaining a new appreciation for the concept, simply because so many things right now seem unsustainable. The Commonwealth is facing what Governor Rendell has described as a “fiscal tsunami” created in large part by an unsustainable increase in pension obligations. Nearly all of our cities are in a similar predicament, with astronomical bills for pensions and other expenses coming due at a time when coffers are already nearly empty. And the pension crisis is just the straw that’s breaking the camel’s back. For decades, Pennsylvania’s cities and older communities have been caught in an unsustainable cycle of decline – raising taxes to compensate for eroding tax bases, in turn encouraging more flight to the suburbs and more loss of tax base. The current municipal tax system, with its reliance on property taxes, is proving itself unsustainable, and many cities are on the verge of bankruptcy. At the same time, the bills from decades of unsustainably low levels of investment in infrastructure are coming due.

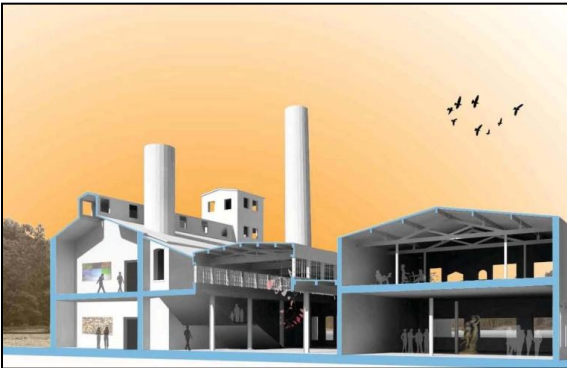
Our older communities are the victims of various unsustainable trends that are now hitting their limits. Does this mean we’re heading toward an Armageddon of collapsing communities and governmental structures? I don’t think so. I have enough faith in our system to believe that somehow we’ll muddle through and avert catastrophe.

But it does mean that change is coming, one way or another. Our tax system, our patterns of spending and investment, our delivery of public services, and our structures of local governance all will change because they’ll have to change. Either we’ll take action and change them ourselves, instituting reforms that will move our communities toward a desirable future. Or change will be thrust upon us in ways we don’t like.

Viewed in this light, the concept of sustainable communities becomes a lot clearer. Sustainability isn’t just a meaningless buzzword or a vague, utopian dream. It’s about taking the steps we need to take to keep our communities moving forward, even in hard times like these.

In our opinion, new approaches are needed to plan and fund downtown redevelopment. They will require even more creative partnerships to accomplish the improvements. The private sector will be required to play a larger role. Property owners and shop owners need to

Master Plan for Easton's Silk Project Completed



A GREAT

On January 20, a team lead by Spillman Farmer Architects delivered its final facilities analysis and preliminary master plan for the redevelopment of the Simon Silk Mill complex in Easton, PA. This report provides several critically important pieces of analysis including:

- Measured building plans and elevations for the existing structures on the site
- Detailed engineering evaluations including structural investigations, geotechnical studies, existing infrastructure and utilities assessments, and site/civil/land development recommendations
- Recommendations for adaptive reuse of historic structures and associated design guidelines
- A preliminary master plan referred to as Silk, a pedestrian-friendly, sustainable, mixed-use community anchored by the arts and creative industries that is integrated into the fabric of the community

A copy of the report is available on the City's website at www.easton-pa.gov. The City and its partners are committed to making Silk a reality and plans are currently being put in place to move forward with Phase I of the project.

The redevelopment of the Simon Silk Mill complex is one of the cornerstones of the City of Easton's Bushkill Creek Corridor revitalization project. Taggart Associates serves as project manager for the corridor project, which also includes the development of a recreational trail along the Bushkill Creek and significant revitalization work being spearheaded by Lafayette College along North Third Street.

From top: A rendering of the proposed main entry way to the site from 13th Street; A rendering of the proposed "cultural core," which includes gallery/education space, a large flexible group meeting space, and small performance venue; and project's logo. All images are courtesy of Spillman Farmer Architects.

From the President, Continued from Page 2

apply business-type decisions: determine what value this improved environment will have on your business and what you are willing to contribute. Through our work with Community Benefit Districts (CBDs), we have seen first-hand that small business owners tend to be independent self starters who are willing to take reasonable risks. Some owners just want to make a living, while others aspire to grow the business, and many wish to contribute to their community's quality of life. This is especially true for small business owners who

operate in downtown areas.

If you/they agree that "a rising tide lifts all boats," then it is important to participate in the broader community efforts. The days of large public subsidies are gone. It is time for a fundamental shift in thinking that places more of the responsibility on the private sector to get involved in areas that traditionally were provided by the public sector.

Taggart Associates is prepared to talk with you about this new environment and how you can prepare for new redevelopment initiatives. Please call or write me to get started.

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Sustaining Downtown Momentum

Downtown Easton is a very different place today than it was four years ago, and many of the positive changes can be attributed to the Greater Easton Development Partnership's (GEDP) support of the Easton Main Street Initiative and Easton Ambassador Program. GEDP is the parent 501(c)(3) organization of both programs. The Easton Main Street Initiative focuses on economic revitalization of the downtown largely through volunteer efforts, and dedicated staff working for the Ambassador program keeps the downtown safe and clean. With the five-year limit on state funding coming to an end, questions arose as to how the efforts of these two valuable programs could be sustained.

What's the history?

In 2008, Taggart Associates (TA) formed a partnership with New City America, Inc., a California-based firm specializing in the formation of Community Benefit Districts (CBDs) across the nation. TA saw that these Districts could sustain downtowns if municipal budgets grew tighter and more

restrictive. Since we assisted the City of Easton in obtaining Main Street certification in 2005, GEDP turned to TA again, through its subsidiary, New City America East, for guidance with a feasibility study for the creation of a Community Benefit District.

What is a CBD?

A Community Benefit District is a defined geographical area in which the property owners assess themselves to pay for services over and above those provided by their municipal government. Securing state funding and corporate donations has been challenging in the past two years. A CBD allows people with significant investments in the area to improve or sustain the area and usually boost property values. Assessments generated by a CBD can be used for projects like beautification, marketing, and underwriting a bond for capital improvements.

What is Taggart Associates up to?

TA is conducting surveys, conducting community outreach, and working with a steering committee to advise GEDP on whether the community would support a District in Downtown Easton. TA is gathering all of the property ownership information, tabulating surveys, and identifying and talking to key stakeholders. Additionally, we are educating the Steering Committee on the best practices learned from the formation of other Districts. The feasibility study will be finished within the next month, and depending on the decision of the Steering Committee, the District could begin the formation stage by early summer 2010.

Above, from top: Lynn Flanagan, owner of the Purple Cow Creamery, and the Purple Cow accept the Golden Bloom award from Megan McBride, asst. MS Manager and Mayor Sal Panto.



Lafayette College students and other patrons gather outside at a recent art opening at one of Easton's newest galleries, Mercantile Home (526 Northampton Street).



Easton Ambassadors and volunteers pitch in to spruce up the flower beds next to Merchant's Bank at the 2010 Easton Main Street Clean Up.

