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LM board discusses CIP

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Clogged or accident-prone intersections, continuing library renovations, and athletic fields were on the minds of Lower Merion commissioners as they looked ahead at a new five-year plan for capital projects.

In a workshop meeting June 27, the board began discussing priorities, as well as some potential new projects, for a 2013-2018 Capital Improvement Program to be adopted later this year.

Following the same structure they have used in recent years, commissioners considered different categories of projects: "A" projects, often infrastructure projects that need to move ahead immediately; "C" projects that can be deferred to outer years; and "B" projects that could move either way, at board direction. The program of improvements to the remaining four library branches due for upgrades is included in a separate, fourth category.

The lists of projects presented by Public Works Director Don Cannon included few major new projects or changes in priority, but board members in their discussion highlighted some projects they want considered before the program is finalized this fall.

Among those, traffic improvements were at the forefront for Commissioner George Manos, representing the Bala Cynwyd area, including the newly rezoned City Avenue corridor, and Commissioner Cheryl Gelber, who pointed out problem intersections in Wynnewood and Ardmore.

Manos noted that the list includes a potential township match of some funds for a grant sought by the City Avenue Special Services District. It would support implementation of an adaptive signalization

project on City Avenue.

While the project would no doubt improve traffic flow on that road, Manos warned it might cause even worse backups at other intersections in Bala Cynwyd, if improvements that have been identified are delayed. He said he has identified about \$1.9 million of those improvements that he would like the board to consider moving forward, perhaps using some of the \$6.9 million the township collected in settlement of disputed business-tax obligations in 2011.

Gelber suggested improvements should also be considered for some problem intersections in Wynnewood and Ardmore. A couple might be done at little cost to the township – improvements at the Coulter/Anderson Avenue intersection in Suburban Square and addition of a right-turn lane at Penn and Wynnewood roads near the Wynnewood Train Station, for example.

Another would be more costly. Reconfiguring the intersection at Penn Road and Montgomery Avenue could be a major project, but is needed because of the high incidence of accidents, Gelber said. A plan for improvements was designed in connection with the proposed Merriam Estate development, but may need to be dusted off while that project languishes, she suggested.

In library projects, town-

ship staff have recommended moving forward in 2013 on simultaneous projects at the Ardmore and Gladwyne libraries, once Ludington Library reopens in the fall and Bala Cynwyd Library by early in the year. They hope a larger project will attract more favorable construction bids, and also delay the need to fill library vacancies by reassigning staff during the one-year closure of Ardmore and Gladwyne.

There has been a difference of opinion in Gladwyne about the \$1.5-million elevator project there, however, and, recapping a community meeting that was held June 26, ward Commissioner Daniel Bernheim said views were "about evenly split."

Some in the community support the elevator to provide handicapped access to all levels of the building, but others question the cost-effectiveness of the project, Bernheim said. Then there is the complicating factor that the Gladwyne building is owned by the Gladwyne Library League, not the township. Some residents have suggested raising money themselves for a project. If a township-supported project proceeds, there should be some legal agreement between the parties, it was suggested.

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A meeting of the board's Library Committee is scheduled for July 9, at which there will be more discussion of the next steps. One concern is that the Ardmore project not be delayed, if the Gladwyne project does not move forward now.

The long-delayed Ludington project also got attention last week, but not in the public part of the workshop. The nine board members present met in executive session later to hear a presentation from staff on the status of the project and budget and potential litigation issues with contractors.

Commissioner Lewis Gould, the commissioner who has been most vocal with concerns that neither the public nor the board has been informed on those issues, was not at the meeting. Board President Liz Rogan said she had notified members that the presentation would be made in closed session that night, however, and that any who were absent would be provided information.

Another area of particular interest was recreation and athletic-field improvements.

Cannon said the project to construct the first phase of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail has been completed, and a new project to be added for 2013 is in discussion and some planning for a second phase, with \$25,000 earmarked for that limited effort. He said it was important to begin planning now, so that the very active Friends of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail could focus their volunteer work and fundraising.

Bernheim and some others wondered why that work couldn't be done at little or no cost. Parks and Recreation Director Lindsay Taylor said it would involve some staff and possibly consultant time.

Another project already penciled in calls for improvements to the Polo Fields shared by Lower Merion and Haverford townships.

There is an opportunity, because part of the fields will be rented for parking for next year's U.S. Open golf tournament at the Merion Golf Club, to run a water line to the fields to be used for irrigation later, Taylor explained. The two townships would share remaining costs.

Gelber and others highlighted the continuing and increasing demand for field space.

She wants to explore the possibility of constructing a field or fields at the township's Croyle Property in Penn Valley – the same Croyle Property that was the subject of long-running litigation several years ago when the Lower Merion School District wanted to use it for a bus depot.

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