



## TOWNSHIP OF DERRY

### Board of Supervisors Special Workshop Meeting Minutes

Friday, May 10, 2024

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#### CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Abruzzo called the May 10, 2024, Special Workshop Meeting of the Township of Derry Board of Supervisors to order at 10:03 a.m. in the meeting room of the Township of Derry Municipal Complex, 600 Clearwater Road, Hershey, PA. He advised that all public meetings are recorded for providing accurate notes. After the Pledge of Allegiance, a roll call was performed.

#### ROLL CALL

##### SUPERVISORS PRESENT:

E. Christopher Abruzzo, Chairman  
Natalie L. Nutt, Vice Chairwoman  
Carter E. Wyckoff, Secretary  
Richard D. Zmuda

##### ALSO PRESENT:

Christopher S. Christman, Township Manager  
Patrick Armstrong, Township Solicitor  
Chuck Emerick, Director of Community Development  
David Habig, Assistant Director of Community Development  
Jenelle Stumpf, Planning/Zoning Coordinator  
Garth Warner, Chief of Police Department  
Tom Clark, Director of Public Works  
Eric Stump, HRG Engineer

##### ABSENT:

Michael P. Corado

**Public in Attendance:** Jerry Feaser, *The Sun*; John Foley; Dan Sherfeld; Jonathan M. Crist, AIS; Chris Brown, HE&R; Kenny Hinebaugh, The Hershey Company; Jim Mandes, 415 West Granada Avenue, Hershey; Chris Painter, Advanced Insurance; Lou Paoletti; Jack Raudenbush, Hidden Still; Kevin Ferguson; Jennifer Renz; Susan Fotos; R. W. Smith; Sue Peck; Jack Peck; Joel Hocking, Life Lion EMS; Tracy Brown; Ken Gall, Hershey Trust Company; Rich Gamble, 39 Hockersville Road

#### NEW BUSINESS

**Discussion regarding considerations for constructing one or two roundabouts on Chocolate Avenue. One roundabout is being considered at the intersection of West Chocolate Avenue and Old West Chocolate Avenue and the other is being considered at the intersection of East Chocolate Avenue and Homestead Road**

Chairman Abruzzo stated that this is not a normal public meeting with a public comment session. It is a workshop and therefore an informational meeting for the Board to learn about an issue. He advised that any member of the public who wants to make the Board aware of their thoughts should e-mail Mr. Christman, who will ensure that all comments are distributed to the Board. This is not a deliberation session, and no decisions will be made during this workshop meeting.

Supervisor Zmuda read his prepared comments into the record as follows: *"In 2017 the Greater Hershey Area Transportation Study (GHATS) was commissioned by the Derry Township Board of Supervisors through the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission HATS transportation and*

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*PennDOT Connects Program. The findings of the study were adopted in 2020 and are available for viewing via the Township website. The study is a 20-year 'look forward' to assist in planning for the future growth of our region. We are now almost a quarter of the way through this 20 years period, and we have realized several issues that were documented therein, remedied, and/or accomplished. Within the pages of this study, among the scores of ideas and priorities, was a proposal for the installation of a roundabout at the west end of Chocolate Avenue at the intersection of Old West Chocolate Avenue. Concurrently The Hershey Company proposed another roundabout at the intersection of East Chocolate Avenue and Homestead Road. The Township Engineer, HRG, has asked to provide direction to inch this endeavor forward or put it aside. They have notified us that there is an opportunity for grant funding for this specific project with the added possibility of additional matching funds to keep the estimated cost at a minimal level. The goal of this workshop is to determine a way forward.”*

Mr. Stump stated that the GHTS identified a roundabout at the Old West Chocolate Avenue/West Chocolate Avenue intersection as a way to improve north/south connectivity in this area of the Township. Currently in order to get from Old West Chocolate Avenue to Hockersville Road or vice versa, many people are cutting through the Swatara Station neighborhood. In order to travel east on West Chocolate Avenue, people are making a U-turn at the Hockersville Road/West Chocolate Avenue intersection. HRG has done a very preliminary evaluation of the feasibility of a roundabout at this location. Because roundabouts cannot be at a steep angle, the existing slope on Old West Chocolate Avenue would need to be flattened out and there would be temporary grading impacts to properties and driveways outside of the right-of-way. HRG does not know the extent of those impacts at this point or what the exact design of the roundabout will look like. The roundabout would allow full movements to and from Old West Chocolate Avenue and would reduce or eliminate the cut-through traffic in the Swatara Station neighborhood. It would improve safety and increase traffic calming because of the reduced speed required for vehicles to travel through the roundabout. It would also improve pedestrian access across West Chocolate Avenue. Generally, roundabouts are safer than traditional signalized intersections.

Mr. Stump noted that at around the same time as the preparation of the GHTS, The Hershey Company was considering proposing a roundabout at the East Chocolate Avenue/Homestead Road intersection. Mr. Stump believes that consideration was prompted by office space and parking areas that The Hershey Company wanted to utilize and the impact it might have on the traffic signal at the East Chocolate Avenue/Homestead Road intersection. The Hershey Company was indicating that a roundabout would work better in this location than the existing signal. This roundabout is not as simplistic as the single-lane roundabout at the Old West Chocolate Avenue/West Chocolate Avenue intersection; there would be multiple lanes circulating this roundabout. Mr. Stump showed an exhibit that was prepared by The Hershey Company's engineer at the time. This roundabout would have a similar traffic calming benefit at the east end of the downtown area.

Mr. Stump explained that in general, roundabouts tend to have fewer accidents than signalized intersections and the severity is much less. Most studies have concluded that roundabouts are a safer alternative to traffic signals. However, there are some concerns with both potential roundabouts, such as funding (the estimated cost for both roundabouts is 7.5 million dollars). HRG has identified some potential funding sources to offset the majority of the cost. There are capacity limitations to roundabouts as they are more difficult to expand in the future than signalized intersections. HRG has done some projections in traffic volumes at both locations and determined that what is there now can work well with the roundabouts. If there is substantial growth in the future, that could create capacity

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concerns. There are queuing concerns from the square to the Homestead Road roundabout. Having traffic backup through a roundabout is generally considered worse than when it happens at a signalized intersection.

Chairman Abruzzo stated that he does not understand what problem we are trying to solve with these roundabouts. The problem he sees is traffic backing up at the signals at the Ridge Road, Linden Road, and Cocoa Avenue intersections with Chocolate Avenue. He asked how roundabouts at either end of downtown would help reduce traffic. Mr. Stump responded that roundabouts at the two ends would help act as gateways and may improve driver attentiveness so that they reduce their speed as they approach the more congested intersections at the square. The roundabouts will not change the capacity. There have been discussions about getting through traffic out of the downtown. The roundabouts could help with that and incentivize through traffic to go another route. The benefits of the roundabout at the west end are connectivity and reducing neighborhood cut-through traffic.

Mr. Emerick added that an advantage to a roundabout at the west end of downtown is that as Hidden Still and other development happens north of West Chocolate Avenue, it would give those people an opportunity to make a right out of the side streets, come down to the roundabout, and be able to head in the direction that they want to go, as opposed to trying to make a left out of the side streets. Another advantage is that it would provide a much better north/south connection to and from North Hockersville Road.

Vice Chairwoman Nutt asked how much of the 7.5-million-dollar cost of the two roundabouts would be left for the taxpayer to pay if the Township secures a grant. Mr. Stump replied that most grant programs cover 80% of the total cost, so 20% would be leftover for the taxpayer to cover. In response to another question from Vice Chairwoman Nutt, Mr. Stump stated that the Township would also be responsible for engineering costs prior to receiving the grant funding. Depending on how refined the Board wanted the design to be prior to committing to a grant, those engineering costs could be anywhere from five thousand dollars to one hundred thousand dollars.

Mr. Christman inquired if engineering soft costs for design work would be considered part of the 20% match. Mr. Stump said yes, but that typically applies to engineering fees after procurement of the grant. Mr. Christman stated that the Board would have to make a decision about the use of reserve funds to cover the 20% match. Funds can be set aside for this purpose starting in the 2025 budget if the Board wants to do that.

Mr. Stump noted that the opportunity for this specific grant likely will not open until mid-2025, with a decision being made at the end of 2025. Funding would be available, at the earliest, starting in 2026. Construction likely would not begin until three years after that. Vice Chairwoman Nutt asked what happens if the grant is awarded for the currently estimated 7.5-million-dollar cost but the cost of the project increases substantially by the time construction begins. Mr. Stump responded that the difference in cost would have to come from some type of additional funding.

Mr. Emerick noted that these roundabouts are severable. If The Hershey Company does not have much interest in a roundabout at the Homestead Road/East Chocolate Avenue intersection, the Board could delay that discussion and focus on the roundabout at the west end that has more of a community benefit. Chairman Abruzzo commented that the Township would not fund the Homestead Road/East Chocolate Avenue roundabout if it does not benefit Township residents, and he does not see a need

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currently for a roundabout at the east end.

Chairman Abruzzo asked if the Township would be taking property from citizens to be able to construct the roundabout at the west end. Mr. Emerick responded that the unknown aspect is what the grading would look like due to the existing slope. It appears that in many cases the Township would be giving land to residents instead of taking it away because of the elimination of a portion of the roadway on each side of the roundabout; however, until we get into more finite grading, it is difficult to estimate the impact on property owners. Vice Chairwoman Nutt asked if some of the properties use on-street parking for their businesses. Mr. Emerick responded that those businesses also have off-street parking at the rear of the properties.

Mr. Christman asked Mr. Stump to further explain if this is a federal grant or state grant and the timing involved. Mr. Stump stated that he wants to be careful not to tie the question to a specific grant at this point. The question is more “If the funding were available, is the Township interested in applying for it for the two roundabouts?” What HRG is looking at now is ‘Safe Streets for All’, which is a federal funding program. In order to be eligible for an implementation grant, the improvement needs to be identified in a formal action plan. Tri-County is currently preparing an action plan for the region. To be eligible for the implementation grant, Tri-County would need to include the roundabouts in their action plan.

In response to a question from Vice Chairwoman Nutt, Mr. Stump stated that both roundabouts would be designed to accommodate school bus and tractor trailer traffic.

Vice Chairwoman Nutt noted that the Board has talked about converting the portion of eastbound East Chocolate Avenue near Mansion Road into one lane to stop people from trying to “outrun” each other before the two lanes become one lane. She asked how a two-lane roundabout at Homestead Road would impact the possibility of that transition. Mr. Stump responded that a disadvantage of the Homestead Road roundabout is that it would undo the planning to convert the portion of East Chocolate Avenue near Mansion Road into one lane; however, the circumstances would be a little different than the current situation because vehicles would be exiting the roundabout at a slower speed.

Vice Chairwoman Nutt asked for confirmation that a traffic study has not been conducted specific to these roundabouts in today’s time that shows there is a benefit to traffic flow. Mr. Stump stated that HRG had done some traffic counts at the Old West Chocolate Avenue intersection in 2018 or 2019 and The Hershey Company collected data at the Homestead Road intersection during the same timeframe. All data was collected pre-COVID. In general, HRG has seen studies and newer counts that are lower today than they were in 2018/2019. Vice Chairwoman Nutt asked Mr. Stump if he feels that the roundabout at the Homestead Road intersection has been well studied, traffic wise, and if there are numbers to back up the traffic regarding the roundabout at the Old West Chocolate Avenue intersection. Mr. Stump replied that there were numbers from before COVID. If planning on the roundabouts were to move forward, those numbers would need to be refreshed. The data collected at the Old West Chocolate Avenue intersection was never submitted to PennDOT. Mr. Stump’s recollection is that the data collected at the Homestead Road intersection had been submitted to PennDOT, but The Hershey Company did not get full approval of the analysis. Vice Chairwoman Nutt inquired if Hershey Towne Square had been constructed when the 2018/2019 data was collected. Mr. Stump thought that most of the restaurants and other tenant spaces were constructed and occupied at the time. John Foley, a former Supervisor, added that Hershey Towne Square was anticipated in the

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Old West Chocolate Avenue study that was conducted in 2014/2015.

In response to a question from Supervisor Zmuda, Mr. Christman explained that if the Township started saving money for the roundabouts in the Capital Projects fund under a generalized title but then decided to forego the project in the future because it turned out to be more expensive than anticipated, the money that had been saved could be reallocated to another Township project.

Supervisor Zmuda commented that there are other categories of roundabouts. Generally they are circular, but some have different shapes. Since there is a concern about the potential impact to property owners regarding the roundabout at the Old West Chocolate Avenue intersection, should another type of roundabout design be considered? Mr. Stump stated that some of those other types are used when there are multiple legs coming into the roundabout, or sometimes the space requires that the roundabout be more elliptical than circular in shape. The issue with the roundabout at the Old West Chocolate Avenue intersection is more about grading the approaches than it is about the size or shape of the roundabout. Supervisor Zmuda inquired if there is enough space to allow for a regular circular roundabout with minimal impact to the surrounding properties. Mr. Stump responded that since this is a very preliminary concept rendering, he cannot say for sure at this time what size roundabout would fit.

Secretary Wyckoff voiced his concern about the impact of the roundabout on the war memorial. He asked if there would be less of an impact on the memorial if the roundabout were to be moved further to the east. Mr. Stump noted that if the roundabout were to be located further to the east, it would need to be a smaller size. It is unlikely that the war memorial would not be impacted in some way. There has been discussion about placing the memorial in the center of the roundabout; however, the drawback is that it would be undesirable to have pedestrians in the center of the roundabout. In response to a question from Supervisor Zmuda, Mr. Stump stated that PennDOT wants the edges of a roundabout to be mountable. There can be items on the island in the middle of the roundabout, as long as they do not interfere with sight lines.

Supervisor Zmuda asked what HRG would need to do, at a minimum, to be able to answer some of the Board's questions regarding elevations, sight distance, and impacts on adjacent properties. Mr. Stump recommended going through a preliminary design, which would involve new counts and analysis and a survey, and then submitting that to PennDOT for their endorsement before committing to a size and location.

Chairman Abruzzo noted that the Township has spent a lot of money over the years making sure there is an ability to control the signalized intersections in the downtown so that emergency vehicles can get through. He asked how emergency vehicles will navigate a roundabout when traffic is backed up. Mr. Stump replied that if it is a busy day and there is a long queue approaching the roundabout, there will not be a way of clearing traffic that is stopped in the roundabout so that the emergency vehicles can get through. He added that the signalized intersections are more adaptable to change traffic patterns in order to accommodate the numerous events in Hershey. There may be more difficulties with traffic flow and congestion during the events with a roundabout.

In response to a question from Secretary Wyckoff, Mr. Stump stated that if O Street were to be affected by the Old West Chocolate Avenue roundabout, he expects it would be by restricting it to a right in/right out only movement, not closing it off entirely.

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Mr. Stump stated that there may be opportunities for other entities to help offset the 20% local match regarding the cost of the roundabouts, but HRG has not asked the question of anyone at this point.

Chairman Abruzzo commented that if people wanted to go eastbound on West Chocolate Avenue when leaving the businesses on the north side of West Chocolate Avenue, they could use the loop road by the war memorial to access westbound West Chocolate Avenue and then make a U-turn at the Hockersville Road/West Chocolate Avenue intersection to travel eastbound. Garth Warner said that directing traffic to make a U-turn at the Hockersville Road/West Chocolate Avenue intersection is not a good idea. Mr. Stump pointed out that U-turns are not restricted at that intersection.

Supervisor Zmuda asked how roundabout intersection maintenance costs compare to signalized intersection maintenance costs. Mr. Stump responded that roundabout intersections are lower in maintenance costs.

Chairman Abruzzo advised that if there is any further discussion about the roundabouts, it would take place at a regularly scheduled Board of Supervisors meeting and members of the public could make comments at that point. In the meantime, anyone who wants to make the Board aware of their thoughts should e-mail Mr. Christman, who will ensure that all comments are distributed to the Board.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Supervisor Zmuda made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:18 a.m. Vice Chairwoman Nutt seconded the motion. Motion carried 4-0.

### **SUBMITTED BY:**

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Carter E. Wyckoff, Township Secretary