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PLANNING COMMISSION**

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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

February 12, 2025

SUBJECT: Borough of Ambler Comprehensive Plan – Open House Summary
TO: Ambler Borough Planning Commission; Glenn Kucher, Code Enforcement Officer
FROM: Tim Konetchy, Senior Community Planner

INTRODUCTION

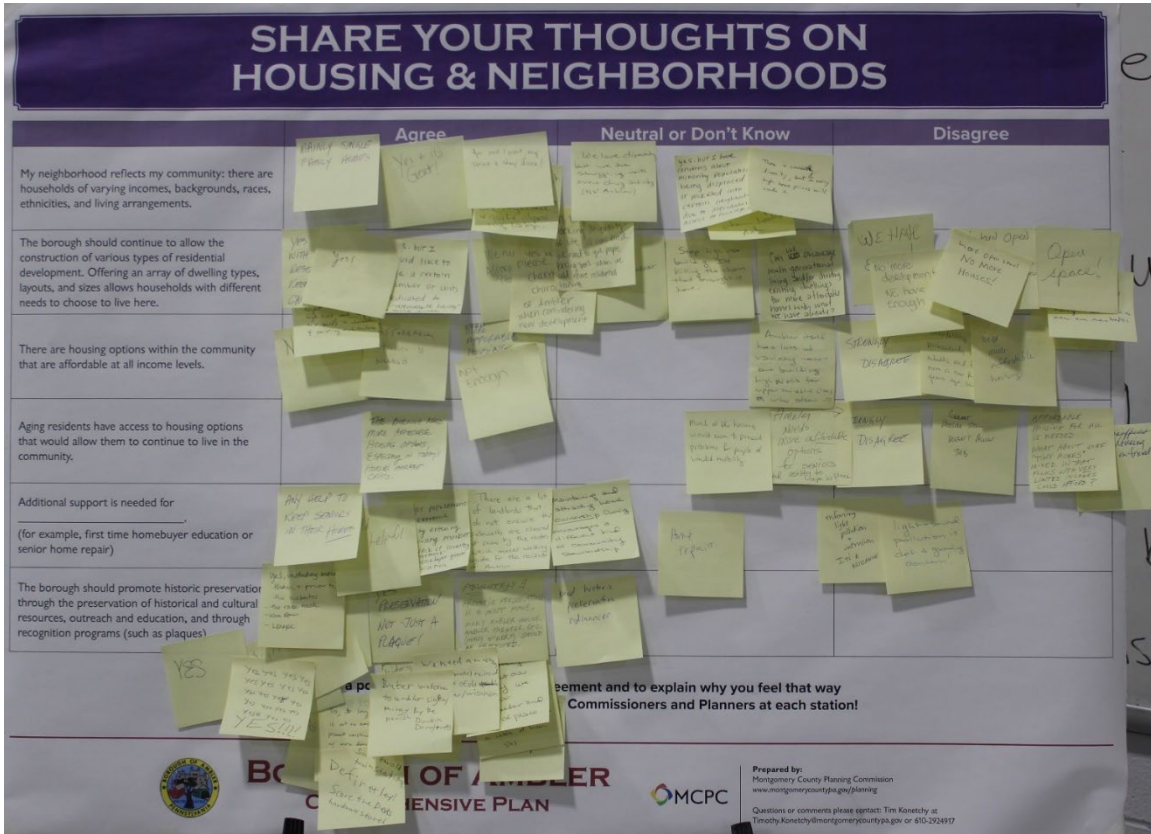
On January 28, 2025, the Borough hosted an open house event to formally initiate the public outreach phase of the comprehensive planning process. A total of 65 individuals were listed on the sign-in sheet. Full attendance is estimated to be roughly double that, as most people came as pairs or families.

The open house was organized into six stations: welcome and background information, housing and neighborhoods, transportation, natural resources and open space, economic development, and long-range vision (placemaking-placekeeping and vision wall). Each station was staffed by a combination of Ambler Borough Planning Commission, staff, and elected officials, as well as an MCPC planner. Those staffing the stations had engaging conversations with visitors and encouraged them to provide written feedback on the posters. A brief overview presentation was provided at the start of the evening.

The feedback received at the open house is summarized by station, as noted above. Some concepts/themes were provided numerous times by different individuals, while some comments were unique to a specific situation. Every comment is valuable, especially at this very early state of the planning process. Please note that some substantially similar comments were also combined, and others were edited for clarity or conciseness.



HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOODS



SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

1. **My neighborhood reflects my community: there are households of varying incomes, backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and living arrangements.**

Agree:

- Mainly single-family homes
- Yes, it's great!
- Yes, and I want my street to stay diverse

Neutral:

- Agree, but apartments... need to be cared for.
- Yes, but I have concerns about minority populations being displaced or pocketed into certain neighborhoods due to affordability, access to housing etc.
- There is currently diversity, but I worry high home prices will erode it.

2. The borough should continue to allow the construction of various types of residential development. Offering an array of dwelling types, layouts, and sizes allows households with different needs to choose to live here.

Agree:

- Yes!
- Yes, but please keep charm and character of Ambler when considering new development.
- Yes, but with height restrictions in keeping with the character of Ambler. (x2)
- Yes, but I would like to see... “affordable housing.” (x2)

Neutral:

- Planning and regulation of infill development.
- As long as parking and quality of life is considered... we need to give people parking spots when we add more residential housing.
- Can we encourage multi-generational living and/or dividing existing dwellings for more affordable homes with what we have already?
- Stop high rise buildings. It’s killing the charm that brought us here.

Disagree:

- Open space. (x3)
- Traffic congestion during peak hours is already too heavy. More residents mean more traffic.
- Renovate existing structures.
- No more development. (x2)

3. There are housing options within the community that are affordable at all income levels.

Neutral:

- Ambler itself has lots of variety now – but building high-rises for upper middle class who often have no buy-in other than cache does not benefit the community.

Disagree:

- Strongly disagree.
- Need more affordable housing. (x5)

- Affordability is an issue particularly for young adults and families – more so now than 25 years ago, sadly.

4. *Aging residents have access to housing options that would allow them to continue to live in the community.*

Neutral:

- Much of the housing would seem to present problems for people of limited mobility.

Disagree:

- Strongly disagree.
- The borough needs more affordable housing options, especially in today's housing market crisis.
- There is insufficient affordable housing for seniors on fixed incomes.
- Ambler needs more affordable options for seniors and ability to age in place.
- Housing stock doesn't allow this.
- Affordable housing for all is needed. What about some tiny homes mixed in that folks with very limited incomes could afford.

5. *Additional support is needed for _____.*

Agree:

- Maintaining and attracting homeownership. Owning encourages a different kind of community stewardship.
- Any help to keep seniors in their homes.
- Younger populations facing extreme difficulty entering the housing market due to lack of inventory. Offer "First Time Homebuyer" grants and education.

Neutral:

- Home repairs.
- Light and sound pollution. (x2)

6. *The borough should promote historic preservation through the preservation of historical and cultural resources, outreach and education, and through recognition programs (such as plaques).*

Agree:

- Yes. (x6)
- Absolutely. Without our history, we lose our character and sense of place.

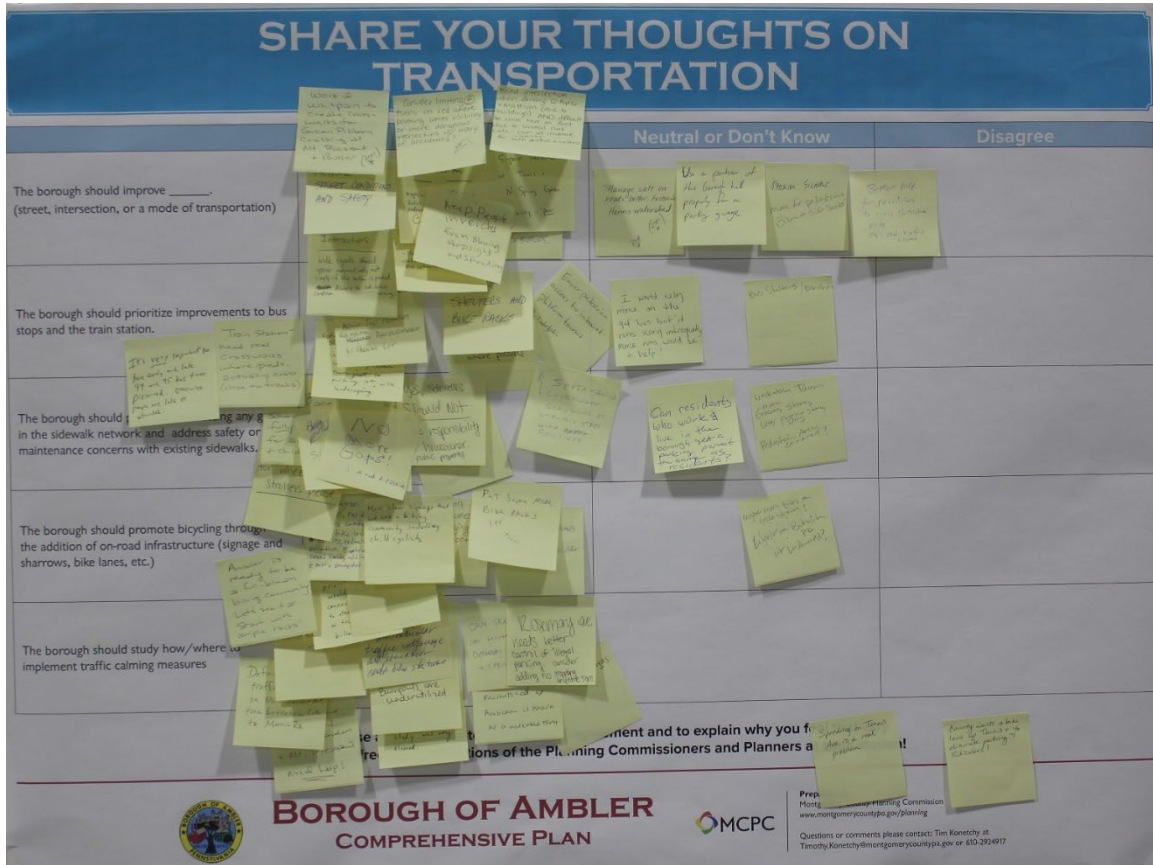
- Absolutely! Historic Preservation is a must have. Mary Ambler House, Ambler Theater, many others should be protected.
- Yes, but so long as it is not an excuse to prevent construction with more density.
- QR codes on historic sites with more information. Clear map and info on website of historic sites.
- Renovate existing structures, maintain facades
- Encourage owners along Butler Avenue to restore cornices and other features.
- We need a museum with a model railroad diorama of old Ambler/Wissahickon

Neutral:

- Need historic preservation ordinance



TRANSPORTATION



SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

1. The borough should improve _____.

Agree:

- Tennis Avenue. (x3)
- Intersections. (x3)
- Better help for pedestrians to cross Bethlehem Pike. (x2)
- Work with Whitpain to create crosswalks for the Green Ribbon Trail crossing at Mt. Pleasant and Butler. (x2)
- Clearly marked bike lanes/trails for children.
- Stop sign compliance.
- 5-point intersection at Tennis/N. Spring Garden - visibility is poor.
- Street conditions and safety.

- Consider limiting right turns on red where parking limits visibility or more dangerous intersections with a history of accidents.
- Blind intersection when driving at Poplar/Mattison and difficult to cross here on foot due to limited curb cuts. Can we improve visibility for both drivers and walkers?
- Blinking lights at crosswalks: Bannockburn/Spring Garden and Park/Butler.
- Condition drivers to look before turning.

Neutral:

- Use a portion of the Borough Hall property for a parking garage.
- Manage salt on roads better to avoid polluting local waterways. (x3)
- Parking signage.
- More signage for pedestrians and bicyclists on side streets.

2. The borough should prioritize improvements to bus stops and the train station.

Agree:

- Train station - need real crosswalks where pedestrians *actually* cross.
- Covered areas where possible.
- Easier pedestrian access to inbound platform toward Philadelphia.
- SEPTA should coordinate schedules of local buses with rail lines
- It's very important to have early and late 94 and 95 bus times preserved; otherwise, people are late or stranded.
- SEPTA station should invite foot traffic into town, rather than just to parking lot, with landscaping.
- Bus stop shelters and bike racks.
- I take the train, and I'm worried about the proposed residential development in the parking lot.

Neutral:

- Would rely more on the 94 bus but it runs very infrequently. More runs would be a help!
- Bus shelters/benches.

3. The borough should prioritize addressing any gaps in the sidewalk network and address safety or maintenance concerns with existing sidewalks.

Agree:

- Yes. (x4)
- Every street except alleys should be fully sidewalked for accessibility and child safety.
- Curb cuts for wheelchairs and strollers please.
- There is a big problem with sidewalks that lack ADA curb cuts.

Neutral:

- Can residents who work and live in the borough get a parking permit the same as residents?
- Walkable town. More grocery stores, less drug stores, pedestrian areas enhanced.

4. The borough should promote bicycling through the addition of on-road infrastructure (signage and sharrows, bike lanes, etc.).

Agree:

- More bike lanes. (x6)
- More bike parking. (x4)

Neutral:

- Maybe more bikes on side streets.
- Light on Bethlehem/Lindenwold.

Disagree:

- Disagree with concept to add bike lanes on Tennis Avenue.

5. The borough should study how/where to implement traffic calming measures.

Agree:

- Yes. (x6)
- Enforce stop signs.
- Rosemary Avenue needs better control of illegal parking. Consider adding no stopping anytime signs.
- Calm traffic on Highland, between Park and Spring Garden.
- Need traffic measures on Mt. Pleasant Avenue from Bethlehem Pike to Morris Road.
- Tennis Avenue, 200 Block and N. Spring Garden/Mt. Pleasant need help.
- Bumpouts.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

	Neutral or Don't Know	Disagree
Ambler needs more _____ businesses. For example, restaurants, entertainment, clothing, cafes.	More businesses in the area (like restaurants, cafes, etc.)	There are already too many businesses in the area.
Commercial areas in the borough need more _____. For example: benches, street lights, trees, sidewalks, landscaping, crosswalks.	Trees!	
The businesses in Ambler are easily accessible for all users (walkers, bikers, transit-users, drivers, wheelchair users).	Good accessibility	Not accessible for wheelchair users.
I frequently patronize businesses in the borough.	I patronize businesses in the borough.	
I attend borough events, such as the Ambler Auto Show, Arts & Music Festival, Fire and Ice Festival, Holiday Parades, Oktoberfest, First Fridays, Small Business Saturdays, and restaurant week.	Agree!	

Please use a post-it to note your level of agreement and to explain why you feel that way. Please feel free to ask questions of the Planning Commissioners and Planners at each station!

BOROUGH OF AMBLER
 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

MCP

Prepared by:
 Montgomery County Planning Commission
www.montgomerycountypa.gov/planning
 Questions or comments please contact: Tim Konecny at
 Timothy.Konecny@montgomerycountypa.gov or 410-326-9177

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

1. Ambler needs more _____ businesses.

Agree:

- Hardware store. (x6)
- Bookstore. (x5)
- Bike repair stations and shops. (x2)
- Professional organizations and jobs, such as architecture and engineering.
- Pet store.
- Affordable consignment/thrift store.
- Tea house.
- A community peace center (we used to have one).
- South of tracks, close to the station, a coffee and sandwich shop.

- A variety of businesses.
- A Korean restaurant.
- A family diner.
- Stationary and card shop.
- Child-centered businesses.
- Family-friendly pub/bar.
- Spin/cycle studio downtown.
- Authentic bagel shop.
- Store that carry cheap, everyday items such as hardware, not boutiques.

Neutral:

- More choice for groceries and less drug stores.
- Affordable general store.
- More businesses if parking is planned for and available.

Disagree:

- Less hair and nail salons. (x2)
- Too many breweries.
- Please curtail smoke/vape shops. (x2)

2. Commercial areas in the borough need more _____.

Agree:

- Trees. (x5)
- Crosswalks. (x4)
- Managed parking.
- Less trucks traveling through Main Street and Butler Avenue.
- EV charging/parking.
- Butler streetscape - pavers, benches, lights.
- Visitors.

- Better maintained planters.

Neutral:

- Businesses ought to be open on Sundays.

The businesses in Ambler are easily accessible for all users (walkers, bikers, transit-users, drivers, wheelchair users).

Agree:

- Agree. (x2)

Neutral:

- Somewhat.
- Slightly. Had to enter some with a stroller.
- Not accessible for wheelchairs or strollers. Largely by because of uneven sidewalks.

Disagree:

- Need more bike racks x2

3. I frequently patronize businesses in the borough.

Agree:

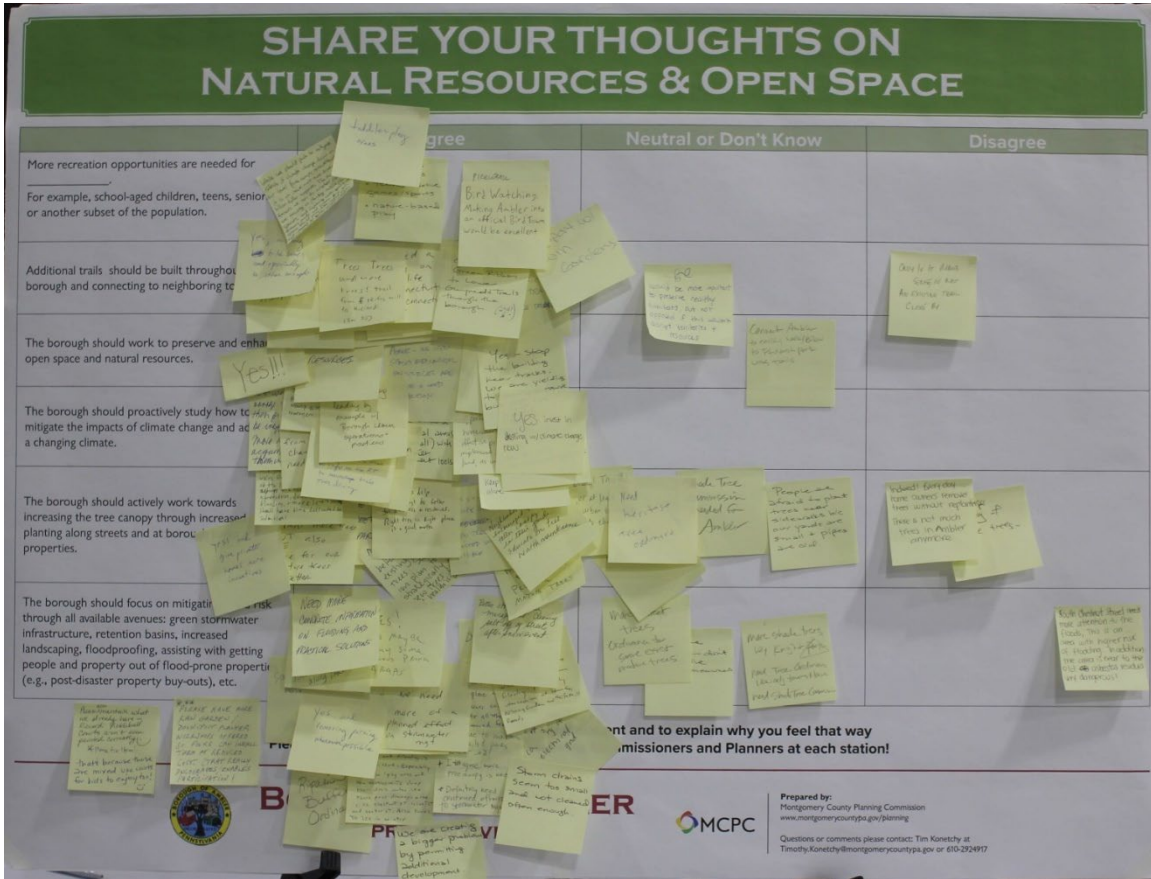
- Yes. (x3)
- Yes, and would do more local shopping if more options came.
- We love the toy/train store, Weavers Way, Swaddle, and the variety of restaurants.

4. I attend borough events, such as the Ambler Auto Show, Arts & Music Festival, Fire and Ice Festival, Holiday Parades, Oktoberfest, First Fridays, Small Business Saturdays, and restaurant week

Agree:

- Yes, we love them! (x4)
- Thanks Ambler Main Street!
- The borough offers a diverse array of events that appeal to different ages and interests.

NATURAL RESOURCES & OPEN SPACE



SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

1. More recreation opportunities are needed for _____.

Agree:

- Toddlers.
- Children with disabilities.
- Teens (active games/sports).
- Nature-based play.
- Continue to maintain our trail and parks. (x2)
- Birdwatching. Making Ambler into an official Bird Town would be excellent.
- Pickleball.
- Support rain gardens.

- While we should push to mitigate the impacts of climate change down on our level (tree canopy, renewables, etc.), it is an issue much more driven by billion-dollar companies. The two biggest favors we can do ourselves right now are focusing on planting native plant species, and improving water quality in streams, ponds, and rivers. Any open spaces should prioritize native flora, and we need to better control what flows through stormwater outfalls.

2. Additional trails should be built throughout the borough and connecting to neighboring townships.

Agree:

- Yes! And bike lanes. (x4)
- Connect sidewalks to the Green Ribbon and other nearby trails. (x3)
- Trail from Reiff's Mill to Ricciardi (I'm 10).
- We need a study on wildlife connectivity and build connectivity trails.
- Yes, and published to encourage alternative transportation.
- Agree. More trails – more recreational opportunities, and also healthier, less polluting alternative for residents to get where they are going in town without a car.
- Trees, trees and more trees.

Neutral:

- [It] would be more important to preserve healthy habitats...

Disagree:

- Only if it makes sense, i.e. no existing trail close by.

3. The borough should work to preserve and enhance open space and natural resources.

Agree:

- Yes (x6)
 - ... One way would be to cooperate with other boroughs on the R5 to encourage trains over driving
 - ... Especially near water bodies and existing parks. It is important to preserve our mature trees in particular, which provide many air and water quality management benefits.
 - ... involving leading by example with borough operations and practices Preserve natural and historic resources.

- ... Our open spaces and natural resource are finite and need protection
- ...stop the building near tracks.
- A borough survey covering trees that endanger nearby houses, locations that might flood, and other threats.
- Preserve natural and historic resources.

Neutral:

- Connect Ambler to easily walk/bike to Fort Washington Park and Wissahickon trails.

4. The township should proactively study how to mitigate the impacts of climate change and adapt to a changing climate.

Agree:

- Encourage planting of shade trees.
- Yes, invest in dealing with climate change now.
- Explore green energy and mitigating climate change will keep my generation alive.
- Provide educational opportunities for homeowners to learn effective practice and implement on private land, as well.
- With federal funding evaporating from climate change, we need to step up.
- If we don't actively manage climate change, then planning will be ineffective. Acquire land in perpetuity.

5. The borough should actively work towards increasing the tree canopy through increased planting along streets and at borough parks and properties.

Agree:

- Yes! And give private homes more incentives.
- More tree canopy is needed.
- Yes- plant more trees (x5)
- Yes – preserve and care for existing trees (x6).
- More trees help our borough be better for business and residences. Right tree in right place is a good motto.

Neutral:

- More shade trees by Knight Park

- Need tree ordinance like adjacent towns have
- More street trees. Ordinance to save existing mature trees.
- Shade Tree Commission X3
- Choose wisely! Trees that thrive, or at least tolerate, urban environments and climate changes.
- Heritage Tree Ordinance.
- People are afraid to plant trees near sidewalk because are yards are small and pipes are old.

6. The borough should focus on mitigating flood risk through all available avenues: green stormwater infrastructure, retention basins, increased landscaping, floodproofing, assisting with getting people and property out of flood-prone properties (e.g., post-disaster property buy-outs), etc.

Agree:

- Yes (x7)
- S. Chestnut Street needs more attention to the floods. This is an area with higher risk of flooding. (x2)
- Storm drains seem too small and not cleaned often enough.
- Please have more rain garden/downspout planter workshops offered so folks can install them at reduced cost. That really encourages/enables participation.
- We are creating a bigger problem by permitting additional development.
- Riparian buffer ordinance
- Better stormwater management. Cleaning of salt off of streets after snow events.
- Everyday homeowners remove trees without replanting.
- Better flow control during heavy rains to keep areas near the Wissahickon Creek from flooding- particularly intersection of Tennis, W Spring Garden, and Reiff's Mill Road. (x2)
- Not enough has been done to help replace all the drainage issues caused in Ambler after all the trees were removed from St. Mary's, which caused runoff into Ambler.
- Need more concrete information on flooding and practical solutions.
- This is an issue by Pickering. We have runoff and the trees need to be saved along Park.
- Buy flood-prone areas.

- Focus on flood mitigation by Knight Park.
- Remove parking wherever possible.

Neutral:

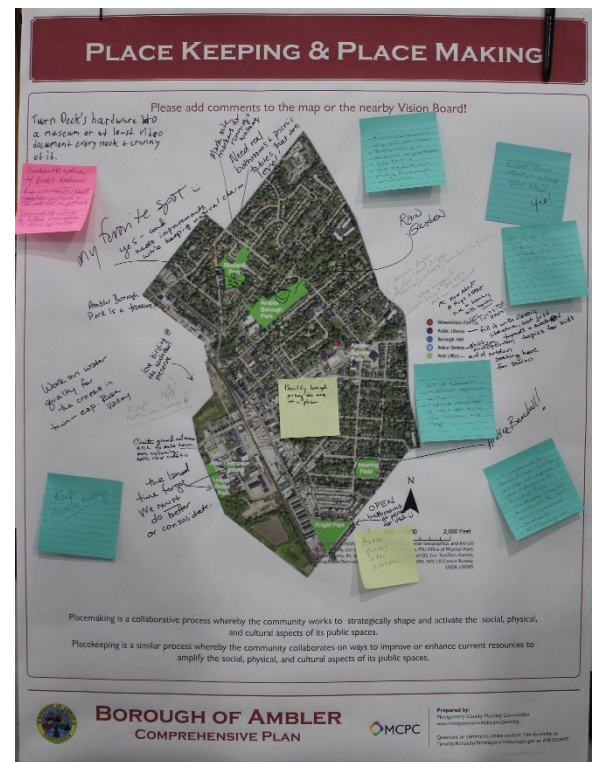
- Fix the issue. Don't just drive out homeowners.



PLACEMAKING AND PLACEKEEPING

PLACEMAKING

- Butler streetscape - pavers/lit trees/benches/lights.
- Beautify Borough Hall parking into more of a plaza.
- Open restroom at Knight Park (x2)
- Open restroom at Ricciardi Park. (x2)
- Improve basketball courts and ball fields children.
- Create sidewalk on streets without.
- Add lit crosswalk at the Green Ribbon Trail.
- Turn Deck's Hardware into a museum or at least video document every nook and cranny of it.
- "The land time forgot" – enhance South Ambler.



PLACEKEEPING

- Maintain the exterior of Deck's Hardware. Any conversion should maintain as much of the interior as possible. Document the interior for historic preservation for future generations.
- Keep historic buildings (x2)
- Maintain the train station as-is, don't build (x2)
- Coordinate historical architecture for new builds/rehabs. Stop the high-rises.
- Ambler Borough Park – "My favorite spot," "a treasure."
- Rain Garden at Ambler Borough Park.
- Birding at the waterfowl preserve.
- Baseball at Pickering Field.

OTHER COMMENTS

- Incentivize homeownership versus rentals,
- Traffic calming in residential neighborhoods.
- Bike parking.

- Give residents free parking on Butler Avenue.
- Make all parks and sidewalks wheelchair accessible.
- Add mile markers at Ricciardi Park.
- Turn Fire Station siren DOWN.
- Police – shift funds elsewhere.
- Library – more classic literature.

VISION FOR AMBLER IN 5, 10, 25 YEARS

The comments received at this station primarily reflected a handful of underlying themes: sustainability (especially renewable energy generation), walkability, maintaining the sense of place and building on the borough’s past success. One of the comments under the question, “how are we doing?” is demonstrative of the input received at the event:

It’s tough to balance the needs of homeowners, workers, and businesses. Thank you for attempting to include us all in the future of Ambler!

Residents had a similar vision for Ambler in 5, 10, and 25 years:

In five years, Ambler will be... well on the way cutting GHG emissions and entrenching the priorities of RF100... an official bird town... a walkable town... a place where everyone belongs, and we have affordable housing for families... opening new buildings... increasing road and sidewalk safety... preserving our wonderful old buildings.

In 10 years, Ambler will be... inclusive... still charming, not full of high-rises, but still built on hard-working families... walkable... have a form-based code... in control of the asbestos sites and will use the area to create renewable energy.

In 2050, Ambler will be... a fully walkable and bikeable town... powered off 100% renewables... a model for the country for welcoming all and caring for the environment... a model of environmental sustainability, 100% renewable energy used... enjoying a dense tree canopy over all street and in parks... leading on PA’s commitment to climate... a “transition” town.

