

Back on Track: SEPTA's final design due by July 1 for Ardmore Transit Center

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Ardmore—Although it's been in discussions for over a decade, SEPTA officials say they expect to have a final design for the new Ardmore Transit Center completed by the end of June with work coming some time after AMTRAK does its preliminary work.

SEPTA officials gave a presentation on the project during an Economic Revitalization Committee meeting Wednesday at the Lower Merion Township Building.



A rendering of the proposed Ardmore Transit Center, inbound side.

"We're here because right now we're looking at completing 100 percent design for the Ardmore Transit Center July 1 of this year. There's been a lot of talk, 'where is this project, where is it going,'" said Robert Lund, assistant general manager for SEPTA.

Lund gave details of the time line and the scope of the project to Lower Merion Board of Commissioners and the public at the meeting.

"The project is designing a fully ADA accessible railroad station which will include a new station building and a 500-car parking garage," Lund said. Once work begins, the project would take place in two phases.

According to Lund, the new transit center is fully funded including the construction of the station facilities and the station stormwater as well as the foundation system for the future garage.

"But funding for the garage construction is not yet available," Lund said. "And it's something we're all working as a team trying to find that funding source."

A video was shown with Kristin Geiger, public information manager for SEPTA, giving a brief description of the project. "SEPTA is excited to advance the design of the proposed improvements at the station," said Geiger. "The new station will be named the Ardmore Transit Center and will be completed in two phases. Phase one is comprised of new high -and low level-level platforms, canopies and a station building."

The existing tunnel that runs under the line and serves as a pathway for pedestrians to cross the tracks will be rehabbed and serviced by elevators connecting the platforms, tunnels and sidewalks.

"Phase two is comprised of a new five-story, 500-spot parking garage to be located on the existing SEPTA and municipal building parking lots," she said.

Bob Duncan, director of Building and Planning for Lower Merion Township, said because of what he called the government nature of the project it would not have to go through the regular land development process in the township because it will not need Lower Merion's approval.

According to Lund, the main construction will take place on the existing SEPTA lot, a portion of the

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municipal lot near the police station and then on the Coulter Avenue lot. In the garage, Lund said buses from Lancaster Avenue will be able to go into the ground floor of the garage and there will be some limited commercial space available.

According to Lund, before SEPTA's construction can begin, AMTRAK must do work to the overhead wires which will take place over a six- to 12-month time frame.

"For us to start the actual construction is contingent on where and when they can do this work," Lund said. Once they know when AMTRAK will be able to finish its work, SEPTA will put the first phase of the project out to bid which should take up to six months. Phase one of the project is expected to take two to three years.

"The station will remain operational ... our parking lot will be taken out of service for the duration and we will be looking at alternate parking, including parking at adjacent stations because as we all know parking right in this area is restricted," Lund said.

Along with closing the lot during phase one, Lund said it would also be closed while phase two, the garage, is being completed. He estimated that the garage would take another 18 months to complete after phase one is finished.

"So we're looking at about 4 1/2 years of no parking there is that fair to say?" Commissioner Joshua Grimes asked.

"That's probably a fair comment," Lund responded.

Although funding for the garage is still a question, Lund said the funding for the phase one portion is set and in place.

"But the garage at this point is kind of on a hold?" Grimes asked.

"That's correct," Lund responded.

Lund also put out a general request regarding funding at the meeting. "We're always willing to listen, if you know anybody of any private entities or other key stakeholders who may be able to bring in options to have funding — whether it's private-public partnership or others — we're always looking for that," Lund said. "Something like parking garages is a difficult and expensive proposition and it's always something critical to bring partners into that to help move those types of projects."

Lund said the ownership of the garage would be decided after the funding is identified.

"I would like to urge SEPTA and the township not to seek funding but to commit funding," said Christine Vilardo, executive director of the Ardmore Initiative. "Go to bonds. Issue bonds to find this funding for the garage. With the way the town has changed with the Ardmore Music Hall, with Tired Hands, Fermentaria and with all of the fitness businesses that we have and all of the restaurants, our parking is failing now and I am pleading with you as a body of commissioners not to have all of these projects fall on our heads at once. I am asking for you to be leaders and manage the time line of this project and Suburban Square's project, and the Petes' Project on Cricket and Dranoff's project."

Despite the many years since first proposed, township officials are showing support for the transit center project.

"This is outstanding news for Ardmore and for Lower Merion," said Commissioner Scott Zelov. "There will be a new train station in Ardmore. It's funded, it's designed and it's scheduled and the message is consistent, the plan is consistent and we need cooperation from AMTRAK which has been the uncertainty

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for some time. I know that SEPTA is working closely with AMTRAK. The township looks forward to continue working closely with SEPTA for this new train station and this new parking garage.”

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