

Work Order #09

Coatesville Train Station Area Planning



Documentation of Field View and Stakeholder Goals and Objectives

I. Background and Stakeholder Interviews

On June 10th and 11th, 2009, the Plan the Keystone Team met with Coatesville area community leaders, municipal officials, and representatives from public institutions to gain a better understanding of the community's issues and concerns regarding redevelopment within the City and the opportunities presented from potential new investments in the Amtrak train station. Discussions were held with the following individuals:

Ted Reed, City of Coatesville
Rob Barry, City of Coatesville
Karen Jorgenson, Coatesville City Council Person
Joseph Hamrick, Coatesville City Council Person
Joe Disciullo, Coatesville Redevelopment Authority
Jack Burkholder, Coatesville Redevelopment Authority
Joseph Hacker, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
Greg DePedro, Coatesville Flower Shop
Steve Cunningham, First Niagara Bank
Anthony Coastellaccio, First Niagara Bank
John Forese, Coatesville Savings Bank
Fred Henrich, Coatesville Savings Bank
Judy Skolnik, Coatesville Army Navy
Larry Chertok, Chertok's Furniture
Leon Slobodzian, Pulver Developers
Tim Smith, Iacobucci Builders
Eugene L. Diorio, Graystone Society
Nancy Mohr, Chester County 2020 (and all Chester County 2020 meeting attendees)
Mike Herron, Transportation Management Area of Chester County (TMACC)
Greg Growana, Caln Township
Denis E Forrest, Borough of South Coatesville
Donna Sitter, Western Chester Chamber of Commerce
Natasha Manbeck, Chester County Planning Commission
Justin Smiley, Chester County Planning Commission
Matthew Do, Chester County Community Development
Bob Grabus, Chester County Economic Development Corporation
Gary Smith, Chester County Economic Development Corporation
Bill Shaw, Life Transforming Ministries
Robert Baines, Sovereign Environmental Group
Gary Hudson, Chester County Area Airport Authority
Frances Sheehan, Brandywine Health Foundation

Through the discussions held at these interviews, several important areas emerged as critical to the success of the station and of Coatesville. They are:

Safety and Security – There are several themes associated with a variety of 'quality of life' issues that the city has identified: Crime/Drugs, Lighting, Policing, Code Enforcement and Instant Ticketing, Maintenance,

etc. According to those interviewed, few people feel comfortable leaving their cars at the station, traveling to the platforms, and standing on the platforms given the poor visibility and natural surveillance.

Define the Role of the Station – The role of the station needs to be clarified – will it be used primarily as a Park & Ride (regional commuter) or more of a “community station” focused on local transit oriented development? The team needs to understand the regional positioning of the station and other comparable stations (West Chester, Wayne). SEPTA service is ultimately seen as more suited to the Coatesville market, however existing AMTRAK service could be better leveraged (only 14 of 28 daily trains stop in Coatesville) to grow the station usage which may subsequently encourage SEPTA to extend service to Coatesville.

Access and Parking – The parking supply is inadequate. There is a lack of accessible pathways to the platform, poor sidewalk conditions, insufficient streetscapes, and a lack of regional wayfinding. Overall the access and parking at the station is poor and may be the most important issue to resolve in the near term according to those interviewed. The existing platforms are located on a slight superelevated curve and will require new ADA-compliant full-length high-level platforms to be shifted up to 200’ east of the existing station building.

Image and Character – Coatesville needs positive branding and an overall “push in the right direction”. An improved station, upgraded streetscapes, and attractive and useful wayfinding can assist in the short term, along with eventual economic development and association with higher service rail within a safe area.

Economic Development – Coatesville needs a long term investment undertaking with a strategic market position to encourage both local infill and regional expansion. Tremendous wealth is present in the surrounding townships and communities, however the US 30 bypass and the safety perception keep many people away from the downtown. There is significant corporate travel and job growth located near the airport (3 miles away) that may be used to encourage growth in quality housing and services in Coatesville.

Insuring the Vision – Implementation of a Coatesville Train Station Area plan will require several key elements. Coatesville needs to focus on encouraging property ownership and decreasing absentee landlords, ensuring stakeholder project support (Amtrak, Chester County, Coatesville, PennDOT, RDA, SEPTA), and building community support and ownership. Perhaps the largest asset to the City of Coatesville is the strong presence of churches and community organizations with a vested interest in the success of Coatesville. It is crucial to leverage these groups to insure the vision of a new and vibrant downtown Coatesville with a thriving rail station.

Through this information, four key themes have been identified to guide the remainder of the project. They are:

- 1. Make the Station Functional*
- 2. Improve the Image and Character of Downtown*
- 3. Develop a Strategic Market Position for Downtown*
- 4. Work with Community Partners to Insure the Vision*

II. Field View Summary



Existing Coatesville Train Station Site

1 Existing Train Station Site

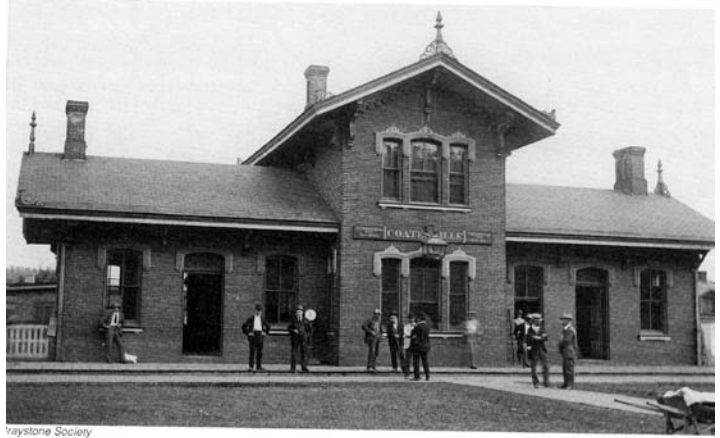
The existing Coatesville Station Site is a low level platform that is shorter than the Amtrak minimum platform length for the Keystone Line (500 ft). The current platforms are located on a superelevated curve that precludes compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. To meet ADA requirements, platforms must be shifted to the east.



The current Coatesville Station platforms traverse over a railway overpass spanning Third Avenue. The overpass is also used as access between the eastbound and westbound platforms. The condition of the overpass is subject to concern from a structural standpoint given the exposed rebar both on the bridge piers and deck. During the interviews it was clear that the overpass is damp, dark, and frightening to passengers, providing a disincentive to ride the Amtrak train from Coatesville. There is a significant need for improved vertical circulation at the Coatesville Train Station for safety and passenger comfort.



The Coatesville Station building is the oldest of its style on the Keystone Corridor, and is of historic significance to the community. The station is not currently closed, and not compliant with ADA requirements. Platform access is under-grade of the current low level platforms, and would be more than 6 feet lower than new high-level platforms. Current schemes show the old station building being used as space for a commercial use (office, coffee shop, etc.), a police substation, and an Amtrak waiting room and ticketing area.



2 Third Avenue

Third Avenue connects downtown Coatesville to the train station, and at one time played a prominent role in Coatesville. Today the street consists of mainly churches and buildings converted to residential rental properties. A parking lot at the corner of 3rd Avenue and Fleetwood Street is currently owned by Olivet United Methodist Church and is used for overflow parking. The parking lot could be shared for use during commute times for train station parking and for church use on weekends and special events. The street has several “no-loitering” signs posted and traffic/security cameras, possibly indicating that undesirable activities occur regularly.



3 Fleetwood Street

Fleetwood Street is the frontage road to the Coatesville Train Station. Fleetwood Street is a narrow one-way street with parking on both sides. Several interviewees compared Fleetwood Street to a “glorified alley”. A building (formerly a freight rail use) at the north corner of Fleetwood Street and 3rd Avenue has been identified as historically interesting and possibly a good building for an ancillary station use. Fleetwood Street has a mix of residential and industrial uses and the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) owns several of the properties (Comfort Care buildings). In January of 2009, nearly half of the row homes on Fleetwood Street were burned in arson fires, nine of which are being purchased by the City for demolition and reuse. Several other properties remained burned, and most are unoccupied. It should be noted that the District Attorney of Chester County recently purchased and renovated one of the row homes for use as a personal domicile.



4 Main Street (Lincoln Highway/Bus 30)

Lincoln Highway in Coatesville serves as the commercial main street, and has several thriving businesses that attract patronage from the wider region. However, there is a high level of frontage vacancy, and several open parcels that were cleared for development but were stalled for various reasons. Most notable are the “Tower 1” and “Tower 2” sites owned by Chetty Builders on the northeast and southeast corners of Lincoln Highway and 3rd Avenue. The “Tower 1” site, as pictured at bottom right, has been converted to a community garden in the short term and there is still no concrete plan for development. Most of those interviewed indicated that there is good community support for some type of development on these parcels. Lincoln Highway appears to have good building stock and many properties owned by the RDA or the City.



5 Steel Mill Sites

The ArcelorMittal steel mill in Coatesville occupies 950 acres and has been the economic engine in the City for over 200 years of operations. Automation has replaced a bulk of the historic workforce however the mill is said to be more productive now than ever. As of early 2010 the mill had 840 workers in Coatesville. Its annual payroll is \$45.5 million, according to the union. Building consolidation has taken place at the mill, as operations have streamlined and the cost of renovating underutilized buildings becomes prohibitive. Most recently a weld shop and part of the old 120-inch rolling mill was razed. There are no immediate plans for the future of these brownfield sites, which remain as company property. Former industrial lands and parcels adjacent to the mill present both opportunities and challenges for Coatesville.

The Riverwalk is a one-quarter mile, multi-phase project to construct a walking/bicycling trail along the banks of the Brandywine Creek. While this trail is not a part of any larger development, private developers are seeking to use the trail as an integral part of their plans. A large former industrial parcel, known as “The Flats”, lies at the base of the Riverwalk. Recent attempts to sell the Flats have fallen through and development plans are uncertain. Plans have ranged from a retail center – including a much needed grocery store, a bicycle velodrome, and a music fair/convention center, The trailhead and The Flat site is located approximately one-third of a mile southeast from the current Amtrak Station.



New Development

The region surrounding Coatesville has experienced significant residential and commercial growth in recent years. The introduction of the US-30 bypass has resulted in loss of through traffic, which business owners attribute to impacting their attractiveness and overall viability. The main access point from the bypass into downtown Coatesville is PA Route 82. At this interchange location (PA Route 82 and US-30 bypass), the Oliver Tyrone Pulver Corporation of Conshohocken, PA is preparing a site for a 125-room hotel and Type A office complex. The total site is approximately 22-acres and was acquired from the Coatesville Redevelopment Authority. Further south from this site approaching Coatesville on PA Route 82 lies The Villages at Hillview, a new and expansive senior (55+) community by Orleans Homebuilders. Iacobucci Home Builders has development plans on the same hill, and indicated the potential for townhomes or similar development during later phases on a parcel located just north of the current train station. On the opposite hill, across PA 82 from the Amtrak station is Mill View Apartments, a development by Chetty Builders.

Lack of Wayfinding

The current Amtrak station is located approximately 2 blocks from Main Street. Due to elevation differences and the fact that the station building is offset from 3rd Avenue, the station is difficult to locate to those not familiar with the area. While there is signage at the station, there are no signs along major routes approaching the station (PA Route 82, Blackhorse Hill Road, US 30) to direct traffic to the station. Station parking is not well marked, parking lines on the pavement have completely faded, and the only sign identifying a location for commuter parking is facing the dead-end direction of Coates Street. Pedestrian signage, pointing users towards the station from sidewalks and establishments downtown is non-existent.



Topography

The Keystone Corridor line is elevated at this location, with steep slopes found in the vicinity of the existing station. This topography will impact the future station area development potential and limits parking and access improvements to the southern (Philadelphia bound) side of the tracks. The city had proposed to connect Route 82 via Coates Street right-of-way to increase station access; however the near vertical (30°) separation between these two roads precludes this arrangement. Adams Drive, which runs parallel to the tracks immediately north of the station and Coates Street, is approximately 50' above 3rd Avenue as it passes under the railroad right-of-way. Adams Street continues to climb to about 500' elevation, placing it approximately 125' above track level. At many locations along the tracks, stairway and pedestrian ramp connections would be needed from adjacent development. The roadway and track are almost level at the intersection of Adams Drive, Harlan Drive and Coates Street.

