



**NAS JRB Willow Grove Base Reuse Plan
Breakout Group Meeting Notes
Date: April 20th, 2011**

A. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BREAKOUT GROUP NOTES

- A resident made the comment that the most desirable options also provide return to Town. The returns he was interested in seeing include an expanded tax base and increased employment.
- Residents cited the desire for a mix of industrial, residential, and open space uses. One resident wants to build upon existing land uses in Horsham, rather than incorporate new uses into the site.
- The airport was cited by several residents as less desirable due to noise issues.
 - It was noted that an airport may prevent other development from occurring at the site. For example, an airport would likely add building height restrictions to the immediate surrounding area. Or airport functions may be in direct conflict with other uses that could be placed in the same area.
- Residents desired a planned community with housing, playfields, and a hospital.
- The Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth, New Hampshire was cited as a successful example of redevelopment that has taken two decades to come to fruition. Today the former base has over 7,000 jobs and 250 companies.
- There were concerns as to the economic viability of an airport. The consultant team will study this and report back to the community. RKG will study the economic link between the airfield and job creation.
- Residents generally want there to be a diversity of uses at the site.
- There was concern of how interested community members could stay informed on the process. Information related to the redevelopment plan will be posted on the HLRA website (<http://hlra.org>).
- Some residents wanted a financially viable plan that incorporates a corporate park and low-impact development. The potential impact on tax rates was stated as a concern. One resident mentioned that if open space was programmed at the site, they would need to find a way to pay for it and maintain it. Hotels or housing was also a desirable use.
- RKG indicated that it would prepare a comparative analysis of the three reuse alternatives so the community could see how each would contribute to job creation and the town's tax base.
- Much of the group supported the Town Center concept. They liked the idea of have a central gathering place where people can shop, dine, live, recreate, and be entertained.
- The community is interested in examples of other base redevelopment successes in similar size communities (there will be examples at the June meeting). They would also like to see examples of the types of development that might be achievable at NAS JRB.
- Residents want the uses at the base to blend in with the rest of the town.

- The residents wanted more information about the school district requests. The school district wants ~60 acres at the site. Potentially, the land given to the school district would be a no cost conveyance.
- There was concern from a resident about development happening too fast. He would like to see it slowly phased in. Several people expressed concerns about traffic impacts and wanted to see access opened through the site.
- The audience was interested in how different uses would affect the revenue of the Town. The consultants will be assessing how different uses could impact the Town's tax base and revenue.
- There was concern of how the plan will affect surrounding property values. There is resident concern that an airport would reduce property values. RKG has studied this issue at Peachtree-DeKalb Airport in Atlanta and was not able to find a measurable link in that instance, but did not want to speculate about an airport in Horsham.
- A resident desired a University expansion as part of the Town Center concept.
- Most residents want a well-planned and attractive community.
- A raise of hands within the break-out group indicated that most were opposed to an airport.
- One resident desired homeless Veteran housing and/or rehab facilities at the site.
- One resident wanted the entire site dedicated to solar energy production.

B. TRANSPORTATION AND EXISTING BUILDINGS BREAKOUT GROUP NOTES

- Truck and car traffic are a community concern. An increase in truck and vehicle traffic is not desired at the site.
- The number of Lights on 611 keeps growing. It has also grown on Limekiln Pike. Thirty years ago, there was only one light at the Limekiln Pike. Today, all the traffic lights substantially increase resident's commute time.
- Some residents did not want to see the roads widened as a solution to the traffic problem.
- Residents cited there was already gridlock near the Turnpike. The Turnpike ramp system was mentioned as being ineffective.
- Residents mentioned traffic was particularly bad on Meeting House Road. Some have trouble getting in and out of their driveways.
- Traffic was cited as being better north of County Line Road.
- Residents would like to see traffic remain or improve (as opposed to getting worse).
- Traffic near high density apartments as well as truck traffic peaks at rush hour.
- The community needs to weigh tax benefits of proposed uses against the increase in traffic caused by these uses.
- Most residents liked the idea of a Town Center.
- There was resident interest in solar uses (that could sell energy back to Pepco).
- There was a desire for a Reuse/Recycle plant/facility to educate residents on solar/wind/green energy.
- Potential uses for the hanger included:
 - Indoor sport facility
 - Indoor amusement park
 - Storage facility
 - Demolition

C. LAND USE AND SITE PLANNING ISSUES BREAKOUT GROUP NOTES

- **Issue 1 – Tax Base**

- Residents would like to maintain the current tax base.
- There was concern of how to replace lost revenue due to base closure.
- The audience wanted more information to be able to make decisions about the site.
- Residents want a market study that shows what types of uses would maximize the tax base.
- The school population decreasing in Horsham.
- There was concern of how to weigh the local needs in Horsham against the regional needs of the area.
- Some residents do not feel a “Main Street” is necessary. Horsham has a unique land use situation.
- Residents mentioned the plan would likely not be reusing buildings but starting from scratch.
- Residents would like to see creative land uses such as the green industry. They would like to see revenue producing, lower fiscal impact uses.
- Residents commented that wind turbines generate electricity. If this use was at the site, the existing runway would not have to be removed (however wind farm noise is a concern).

- **Issue 2 – Mix of Land Uses**

- Residents cited it was important to get representative input from all levels of the community.
- The mix-use land uses received positive feedback. There are many opportunities that could be incorporated in a mixed use development.
- Residents cited that Horsham can and should control development and residential development pressure.
- There was desire for a hospital to be incorporated into a mixed-use plan.
- A trauma rehab center that serves Veterans and civilians is desired.
- Residents cited the need for a fire dept. and 1st responder unit.
- A medical school or university was a desired use at the site.
- Residents mentioned that senior housing would not impact the schools.

- **Issue 3 – Vehicle and Pedestrian Balance**

- Motor vehicle accidents are a concern.
- There is a concern of how financial viability relates to traffic design.
- There is a desire for pedestrian connections and limiting vehicle infrastructure/impact at the site.
- There is concern of where funds will come from for new infrastructure needed to support proposed uses.
- One resident believed the federal government should not have closed the base. He mentioned the airport strip is vitally important to region.
- Residents believe that “quality of life” costs need to be part of decision on what uses should go on the site.
- There was a concern of environmental safety at the site.

- **Issue 4 – Parks/Open Space**

- Residents want a scenic heritage park.
- Bike trails are desired.

- Active recreation uses are desired, especially ones that teenagers would use (dirt bike trails, multi-use park, indoor recreation center, reuse hangers for active recreation or skateboard park)
 - Residents would like to see multiple users on the property.
 - A museum is desired at the site.
 - A resident mentioned the Township already owns land that can be developed for the uses talked about at the meeting.
 - A fire station could be an Interim uses at the site.
- **Issue 5 – Green Elements**
 - Green themed development is desired.
 - Energy production could be a viable use at the site (geothermal, wind, solar).
- **Planning Principles**
 - Residents would like to use this opportunity to address existing as well as new traffic generated at the site.
 - Residents would like consideration of the political climate as part of green design uses. Technology, financing, and laws change in relation to green development.
 - The audience would like consideration of short-term and long-term uses at the site.

D. KEY ENVIRONMENTAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE BREAKOUT GROUP NOTES

- One of the areas shown on the on-going investigation map is in the same location as a wetland on the natural resources map. Where is the dump?
 - There were three landfills on-site: the 9th St. Landfill, the South Landfill, and Antenna Farm Landfill.
- Has any environmental remediation has been done in these areas?
 - The boundary of Sites 3 (9th St Landfill) and 12 (South Landfill) have been delineated and there have been limited soil investigations at the site. Groundwater investigations will begin this spring.
- Will the residents know the results of these tests before they need to make decisions on which use they would prefer at the area?
 - This will be a lengthy investigation and a feasibility study will be performed to analyze options (i.e. capping or removal of soil). Residents may not know results before they are asked to make a decision on redevelopment. This is part of what this meeting is about, understanding what the residents would like to see.
- Was the comment made during the presentation portion of the evening correct? The Navy is not required to clean-up the site? If that is the case, who would be responsible?
 - The Navy is obligated to clean up the site to a like use, in this case, to industrial use standards.
- Who is paying for the clean-up, the government or the taxpayer?
 - All environmental programs at the site must be paid for from the Department of Defense (DOD). The DOD has a fund account that addresses issues like the issues found at the Base. The Navy is on the hook to meet EPA standards. The landfill would be required to be cleaned to industrial standards.
- What role does the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) and the Montgomery County Conservation District play at the site?
 - PADEP will oversee clean-up and the EPA would ensure that the area is cleaned to federal standards. The Conservation District will be involved when plans for re-use come into play.

- The industrial standards only apply to former industrial uses; some areas on the site will be pristine.
- Why save the landfill as a wetland?
 - The area meets the formal definition of wetland and wouldn't necessarily be left on-site.
- Believe that the person/company who would profit from the site should be responsible for cleaning it up; that the people of the area should not be responsible.
- Who would pay the difference if the area is not reused as industrial, since the area will only be cleaned up to industrial standards?
- They are not likely to build houses in environmentally sensitive areas.
 - Agreed that redevelopment would be focused on areas that do not have constraints.
- Are we were getting ahead of ourselves with the discussion of residential redevelopment? If one of the three uses that is chosen for final consideration turns out to be the airport, any of the decisions made about environmental could go out the window.
 - Every option will be reviewed. Agreed that they become less of an issue if residential is not the chosen option.
- What is Bucks County doing here?
 - They are here because of the Willow Grove Housing located in Bucks County. They also submitted a Notice of Interest on the airport, which is something that the BRAC legislation allows them to do. The RKG team is in the process of evaluating the airport proposal to see if it meets all the requirements.
 - The power here is in the hands of the residents.
- Agreed and stated that if the residents want the area cleaned to a higher standard, they could work towards that.
- What percentage of land is contaminated, according to the illustrations, it does not seem like much of the area is contaminated.
 - It is not a high percentage. And these areas could have controls (i.e. cannot extract ground water).
 - The contamination on site is primarily related to groundwater.
- Is there soil contamination?
 - The area with soil contamination is Area 12, which is the landfill area.
- Is there contamination at the end of the tarmac? Are we going to learn from Johnsville and bring the example here?
- The situation is different because Horsham Township is not being given this property; some of the property will be conveyed through PBC, the rest will be transferred through a negotiated purchase of some type.
- How did the Board get elected? How do the residents know what they will be doing? Will the board do what the residents want them to do?
 - This is why these public meetings are happening. Engagement by the residents will make the difference.
- Only a small majority of the public come to the meetings.
 - This is not a one-time meeting/discussion because of that fact. All information is also posted on the website for all residents to see.
 - Discussed the two day planning charrette meeting planned for June and that all comments can be submitted to the HLRA.
- All of the officials are elected and represent either Bucks or Montgomery Counties. The decisions are made by those that show up.
- Is this site on the National Priority List?

- As a federal facility, Willow Grove would not receive Super Fund dollars. The DOD is responsible for clean-up and that the rank of the site precipitated EPA oversight.
- Will the site be listed as a Super Fund site after the DOD no longer has control of the site?
 - Under CERCLA 120, the DOD would be on the hook should there be any issues identified in the future.
- When the sewer was brought down one resident's street, she had to pay to have it connected and stated that the taxpayers should not be responsible for any sewer connections created during redevelopment.
- When a developer comes in, wouldn't they bring the land up to the appropriate standards?
 - The developers buy the property as-is.
- People are concerned that the taxpayer would have to pay for that.
 - Everything will fall under a Master Plan and Zoning. The cost for any upgrades will be borne by the developer/purchaser.
 - Team discussed the limitation to the amount of groundwater that can be extracted.
- The DoD is not held to local ordinances regarding to water being removed. What about the Air Force? They use the treatment system on the Navy side of the base.
 - The Air Force is using the system on base until they have another option established.
- Is the runway 15' thick and if so, wouldn't there be an environmental impact from the demolition of the runway?
 - Demolition is very expensive, but that there could be uses for the runway.
 - There is no reason that the runway would be 15' thick. The concrete is most likely approximately 3' thick with a sub base underneath.
- Do we have data from the runway?
 - We do not have it at this time, but are working to obtain the original specs.
- The Sewer Authority stated that the sewer capacity is not as big an issue as water. As soon as the well is transferred from the DoD, the DRBC requirements will begin, and new owner will be restricted to the amount of water that can be used. She presumes that the remaining wells will be given a docket with limitations on water use. She wondered what the residents feelings were about potential water reuse, use reclaimed water. This water can be used to recharge the aquifer, for toilets, etc. She pointed out that this might be something to consider.
- Who would pay for that?
 - Resident asked WESTON if it is an option to say to the developer, you must put this system in?
 - Yes, with Green Development Guidelines. The residents have the ability to control the reuse and what options to use. This is all part of the community process.
- Asked the group to think about how much taxes each option would bring to area.
- Putting heavy residential into the area feels like reinventing the wheel.
- Mixed use could be put on the runway and that this would expand the tax base.
- Heavy residential would cause school taxes to go up.
- The school district has already put in for 60 acres on-site for schools, fields, and administration buildings.
- Do the wetlands need to remain on site?
 - They do not need to remain but must be addressed properly if encroached.
- Will the removal of these wetlands need to be mitigated?

- Two types of regulated wetlands, state and federally regulated. Both have a no net loss policy; new wetlands must be created if existing wetlands are filled in. This is negotiable, and dependent on the quality of the wetland.
- Suggested a new map, to show wetlands after the clean up and that the rules of the Township should apply and the wetlands will remain.
 - The wetlands do not need to stay on-site. Each agency follows the avoidance, minimization, and mitigation policy. There are several ways to work this out.
- The flood rules will come into play when planning to place buildings near the creek on site.
 - No buildings can be placed in the 100 year flood plain.
- The environmental issues convoluted people's views. Wanted to know which Key Issues and Planning Principals to circle to stop the airport. He stated that industrial sites have a minimal rental rate and no value, that there is more value for office/residential. He wants to be able to tell the Council about EDUs. Two other residents spoke up and said that they wanted to be informed about the environmental issues.
- Why is archaeological on the handout and why is it important?
- The site is on the remains of Davis Grove and that it has a historical value important to the country.
 - The Navy is in the process of looking at this. A cultural resource survey was performed in 1996 that looked at buildings 50 years or older and other historic/prehistoric resources on site. The survey found that there are 4/5 sites from moderate to important for cultural resources. However, there has been much disturbance in the areas being reviewed and it is unlikely that there will be resources found that are eligible for listing.