



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Borough of Chambersburg

A full service municipality in Franklin County celebrating over 65 years of consumer owned natural gas service over 120 years of community electric and a regional wastewater, water, storm sewer and municipal solid waste utility

CHAMBERSBURG ADOPTS CURB AND SIDEWALK MASTER PLAN

Chambersburg, Pennsylvania – In what turned out to be one of their longer meetings, Chambersburg Town Council deliberated upon and approved several resolutions, which when combined make a Curb and Sidewalk Master Plan/Map for the entire Borough.

The planning process, which began in 2017, including dozens of maps, going block by block through the community, attempting to articulate a comprehensive vision for pedestrian connectivity going forward. An animated crowd of approximately 75 citizens joined with Council, adding commentary, feedback, input, and the occasional exclamation as Town Council discussed the various streets where a citizen committee had identified issues that required resolution.

The Council meeting on Monday, December 9, 2019, lasted over four hours and required two five-minute breaks as the deliberations continued.

As explained in January 2018 by Deputy Borough Manager Phil Wolgemuth, “once the new plan was adopted, instead of deciding on a case by case (block by block) basis, the Borough will decide where to build sidewalks by a Borough-wide adopted sidewalk plan. The plan depicts each street frontage for each tax parcel (each lot) on an official sidewalk plan map, where either the sidewalk network already exists or is recommended by Council to be extended; based upon when certain events or conditions occur.”

The action by Council resulted in one key change, which led to most of Monday’s discussions. This plan permitted Council the opportunity to exempt certain areas and neighborhoods where they felt there was no compelling need for property owners to install future curbs and/or sidewalks. On Monday night, Council adopted a new policy along with the maps. The old policy did not allow exceptions to the installation of sidewalks. In both policies, a number of triggers, most commonly the paving of streets, automatically begins the process of compelling the installation or repair of sidewalks. However, now process will follow the Council’s sidewalk plan rather than everywhere.

“The one-size fits all policy of the Borough ended with this action,” explained Borough Manager Jeffrey Stonehill. “Now, Council has set a holistic plan for the entire municipality, staff will follow this plan, and as streets are paved, reconstructed, or new streets added, the plan will inform us whether or not curbs and/or sidewalks will be required.”

However, according to Borough Manager Jeffrey Stonehill, “this new system of deciding where and when sidewalks will be ordered does not diminish the authority of any future Town Council to order the installation of sidewalks; and make the adjacent property owners pay the cost, as long as the installation is determined by Town Council to be in the best interest of the entire community. That is state law.” Future Councils may update the plan and maps, as they feel necessary.

A citizen led Curb and Sidewalk Policy Compliance Committee spent over a year poring over the maps and making recommendations for Town Council to consider. They held five public meetings over the last year. Council President Heath Talhelm thanked the volunteers for their efforts and their service. Many of the members were in attendance at the meeting.

According to President Talhelm, who chaired the long meeting, “Council accepted the recommendation of the Committee with respect to Wards One, Two, Four and Five. When it came to Ward Three, the Council modified the proposed plan, but eventually settled on an adopted plan for that neighborhood as well.”

Some of the discussion centered upon the newly reconstituted Committee, which will transition from making map recommendations, to becoming an appeals board, hearing appeals from property owners, who wish the Borough to reconsider curb and sidewalk decisions. Some on Council thought it best that the appeals board be comprised of three citizens where others, including staff, had recommended that they be comprised of three members of Town Council. Mr. Stonehill pointed out “Council has the authority under State Law to compel the installation of curbs and sidewalks where in the best interest of the community. Therefore, it was the opinion of staff that an appeal of the decisions articulated in the Master Plan/Map be heard by a subsection of Town Council.” In the end, Council approved the staff recommendation, but some noted they might revisit this issue in 2020.

If you have any questions about the curb and sidewalk Master Plan, or whether your property may someday be required to build curbs and/or sidewalks, call Phil Wolgemuth, Deputy Borough Manager, at 717-251-2436 or pwolgemuth@chambersburgpa.gov. The final plan along with the ward maps and policy will be posted on the Borough website, www.chambersburgpa.gov, later this week. Click on maps.

Chambersburg is a unique community. Chambersburg supplies more services than any other municipality in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In addition to typical town functions, Chambersburg is Pennsylvania’s only municipality supplying electric and gas. Chambersburg is one of 35 Boroughs to operate a municipal non-profit electric utility. Chambersburg is the largest municipal electric utility in the State, twice as large as the second largest, Ephrata, Lancaster County; and, the only one to operate generation stations. Chambersburg is one of only two municipalities in PA to operate a natural gas utility. The other is Philadelphia, which does not operate an electric utility. Nationally, Chambersburg is one of 2,000 communities to have its own electric system and 1 of 800 communities to have a natural gas system but 1 of only about 50 to operate both. Chambersburg manages a regional water system, a regional sanitary sewer system (not through an Authority), and a new storm sewer utility; one of the first storm sewer utilities to form under the new Federal mandate to regulate stormwater. Chambersburg currently has 20,508 residents (2013).