

OPINION

August 4, 2010

Letters

Survey shows no need for parking garage

To the editor:

The Cheltenham Chamber of Citizens has been joined by regional passenger rail experts, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission's Regional Citizens Committee and the governing bodies of numerous other regional communities in opposition to the SEPTA 700-car parking garage planned for the Jenkintown-Wyncote Station.

However, DVRPC and SEPTA board members continue to advance the plans for the large parking garage transit center and reject the well-reasoned calls by the stakeholders to increase train service regionwide to reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions. On July 22, the DVRPC board passed the 2011 Transportation Improvement Plan for the region that includes \$1.4 million to advance the planning for the J-W station parking garage. Members of CCC attended July 2010 DVRPC meetings and have heard from SEPTA officials that the planning for the garage project is advancing and there has been no wavering in their statements. It is clear that the DVRPC and SEPTA boards intend to move the garage project toward construction as soon as the state transit funding crisis is solved.

Despite advancement of the plans, Cheltenham commissioners of both major political parties are deferring responsibility of leadership by stating the garage will be a non-issue until long after the transit funding crisis is solved. One commissioner has requested that more than 200 yard signs showing opposition to the garage be removed. The CCC board discussed that request and concluded that the yard signs are the only way to give visibility to the issue.

Today, SEPTA's website (www.septa.org/construction/jenk-park.html) states, "Cheltenham Township and Jenkintown Borough underscore the importance of the Parking Demand Study by adding its

findings and recommendations to their respective comprehensive town plans." SEPTA continues to use the township plan as a part of their rationale for the parking garage at J-W station and until our township commissioners remove parking garages from the township comprehensive plan (page 79), we will continue to show our opposition with our yard signs. It's time to get our commissioners to represent what we believe is the vision for our community.

Ten years ago train riders boarding at Jenkintown-Wyncote Station were asked, "If additional SEPTA parking spaces were provided at Jenkintown and Glenside, at which station would you park?" Amazingly, to this day, SEPTA still calls that a "parking demand study." In 2005, the same 2000 "parking study" "data" was rehashed, and the result was a recommendation for a big new parking garage at J-W Station.

In public meetings and "workshops" during April and May of 2009, SEPTA management and their consultants admitted that the 2000 and 2005 parking demand studies were biased, leading and improper. SEPTA management and consultants agreed with residents of both Cheltenham Township and Jenkintown that a new rider survey needed to be designed and administered in order to gain meaningful data pertaining to the need for a parking garage. Residents ask why SEPTA management and websites continue to refer to the 2000 and 2005 parking studies as a foundation for the need for the parking garage.

Residents that are survey experts volunteered, and helped to design a new rider survey and were promised access and input to the subsequent analysis procedure. After the new rider survey was conducted in May 2009, nearly all communication ended from SEPTA management to the residents. Instead of being able to participate in the analysis of the data, or receiving data sets that the resident

experts could easily analyze, SEPTA management waited until late August to provide simple scanned PDF copies of more than 1,500 rider survey forms and a few spreadsheets that were of very little use.

Undeterred, the residents went to work. 76.5 percent of the parkers at J-W bypass every station that is closer to their home. 97 percent of those parkers stated that a lack of service at their home station was an important or extremely important reason why they did not use their home station. 74 percent of those parkers stated that a lack of parking at their home station was an important or extremely important reason for them bypassing their home station. 57 percent of those parkers are driving 3 or more miles each way. In simple terms, 403 of the 527 parking spaces at J-W are used by people that would likely use their home stations, reduce rush hour traffic and GHG emissions, save time and money, and enjoy a better quality of life, if SEPTA planners can find a way to increase service and parking at the outer stations. The new survey results clearly show what the real problems are, and that a parking garage at J-W is not the solution.

SEPTA management finally gave a copy of their draft report of their analysis to the residents on Dec. 23, 2009. Their executive summary ignores the obvious and makes convoluted arguments for a parking garage at J-W based mostly on walkers and drop-offs wanting to park and future population growth in the far suburbs. SEPTA management knows that some parkers are driving from as far away as Doylestown and beyond to park at J-W. The residents are asking how Cheltenham Township and the region benefit from encouraging hundreds of more people to drive to and park in a garage built here. The residents are asking why the \$52.7 million of their taxes is not being used to expand regional rail service.

Since the data proves there is no need or the desire by riders to build this massive parking garage and transportation center here in Wyncote, why do our commissioners insist on inviting hundreds of vehicles onto our small winding roads, increasing risk of accidents, spewing pollution and greenhouse gases, leading to the potential of lower property values?

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Police chief's efforts have made Abington a safe community

To the editor:

Having been a resident of Abington for more than 45 years, I take everything about this outstanding, award-winning community seriously. I cherish the day we chose Abington Township in which to live. It has been a very long time since I have taken the time to write to the editor of this newspaper. Reading the letters, I oft time wonder if I am on the same planet as other writers.

I stopped writing letters because I felt it was time to stop, but one thing I always did was continue to read the Montgomery Newspapers, Times Chronicle, etc. Today I was moved by a person I did not know. He had noticed my name on a form and asked if I were "the" Shirley Weiss and I have to admit I was overwhelmed. This young gentleman started telling me how much he loved Abington Township and what a wonderful place it is to raise a family. His children will soon be completed with college and constantly recol-