

Frequently Asked Questions about plans for the Paoli rail yard:

Q: Where is the rail yard and who owns it?

A: Amtrak owns the former rail yard (now vacant) across North Valley Road from the current Paoli train station. The property is bounded by West Central Avenue on the north and west, North Valley Road on the east and the railroad tracks to the south. The commuter parking lot, owned by SEPTA, next to the rail yard (across North Valley Road from the current station) also will be included in the station and development plans.

Q: What will happen to the current Paoli train station?

A: Amtrak owns the property and has not disclosed what they plan to do there after the new station opens.

Q: Why does Tredyffrin Township want to change Paoli?

A: Paoli has been incrementally changing without any impetus from Tredyffrin. For example, traffic has increased noticeably over the last 10 years without any significant new development. Tredyffrin is not trying to bring about change or halt change; instead the Township is recognizing that change is inevitable and looking for ways to manage it in positive ways for Paoli.

It has been known for years that Amtrak planned to develop its 30-acre rail yard property following completion of the Superfund cleanup at this site. The property is located in both Tredyffrin Township and Willistown Township, but it is owned and controlled by Amtrak. Now that the Superfund cleanup has been completed, the property will be developed, regardless of whether the two Townships amend their zoning ordinances. Recognizing this fact, the Townships have been working with Amtrak, SEPTA, Chester County, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and PennDot for over 12 years to plan for appropriate development of the rail yard and necessary infrastructure upgrades.

Q: Who is building the new station and the rest of the rail yard development?

A: Amtrak is in the process of finalizing negotiations with a developer that will build the station and parking on behalf of Amtrak and SEPTA, and design and construct the rest of the development on the property.

Q: Who is paying for the new station and the rest of the rail yard development?

A: Amtrak and SEPTA will be responsible for paying for the new station and parking. The developer will pay for the private development.

Q: Who is paying for the road improvements?

A: Road improvements are a shared responsibility among PennDOT, Tredyffrin and Willistown Townships and the developer. Significant road improvements will be necessary to relieve existing gridlock in Paoli, improve safety, and manage the additional traffic generated from the new station and private development. Tredyffrin and Willistown are working with regional officials in an effort to obtain the bulk of the necessary funding from the federal and state governments. There is strong support for the project from all area legislators. The two

Townships must contribute a local share match toward the cost of the road improvements. The Townships will expect the developer to contribute as well.

Q: How will spending all this money benefit Paoli?

A: The new facility will include a modernized train station, increased commuter parking, and a bus/shuttle waiting area. The increased transit use will help to justify the investment in road improvements that Paoli needs right now. With the right road improvements and easier access for buses and shuttles, the station project will make it easier for employees who work at places such as Vanguard or the Great Valley Corporate Center to get to work, thus reducing cut through traffic on our local side streets. Other road and sidewalk improvements will make it easier for people who live in Paoli to walk to and from the station and around the business district. Today many of the Paoli retailers around the station struggle with the commuters who park in their lots. The additional parking at the station will eliminate that problem thus benefiting our local merchants.

Q: How would the zoning amendments impact the traffic plans?

A: The zoning amendments do not include, and are different from, traffic plans. The advantage of the new zoning amendments is that they include regulations giving Tredyffrin and Willistown more control over the traffic elements that the developer must address in the plan. Because of development that is happening or is going to happen outside our two Townships, traffic will continue to increase regardless of whether the Townships change the zoning.

Traffic issues were addressed in the comprehensive plan amendment adopted by Tredyffrin Township and by Willistown Township in 2001. Traffic improvement projects suggested in that plan include a new bridge over the tracks to improve circulation around Route 30; the realignment of Paoli Pike to allow for improved access to Route 30 and the station from the west; and the expansion of the two-lane bridge over Route 252, near the intersection of Route 30, to accommodate the four lanes of traffic that back up on either side. These are just concepts for now. The Townships are unable to work on any of these improvements until a developer is selected for the rail yard.

Q: What could Amtrak develop today on the rail yard, without any zoning changes?

A: Amtrak can build the station and associated parking to any height or scale it desires because it is not bound to abide by local zoning. Amtrak has indicated that it is willing to work with the two municipalities, however, and has been made aware of the proposed local zoning changes. It is in Amtrak's best interest to work cooperatively with Willistown and Tredyffrin.

According to Amtrak, all of the station-related improvements will be in Tredyffrin. Under current zoning, the remaining portion of the rail yard property in Tredyffrin could include 3-story buildings used for retail, restaurants, offices and personal services.

The Amtrak property in Willistown will be targeted for private development. The current zoning permits 3-story buildings used for offices, research labs, and light industry.

Q: How would the new zoning work better than the existing zoning?

The zoning amendments require that a Master Plan for the entire rail yard development be created. This key step provides Tredyffrin and Willistown with the opportunity to analyze the long range plan for the site and its impact on the community from the beginning of the process. Required components include the general site layout; land uses; proposed pedestrian and vehicular connections; a traffic and circulation study; a community impact study; the impact on natural features; and a concept plan for stormwater management. More details about all of these issues will be required on the land development plan that will follow approval of the development Master Plan.

A traffic study is one of the most important components of the development Master Plan. The developer must demonstrate how proposed road improvements will be designed to reduce congestion, improve safety, improve pedestrian access to the station and the surrounding road network, and anticipate and accommodate subsequent development. If the zoning amendments are adopted, the development Master Plan provision will require that adequate road infrastructure be constructed in the first phase of implementation to support the new station and related parking. Current zoning does not include this requirement.

The zoning amendments also include: design standards for buildings, a 25-foot buffer requirement next to existing residential uses, a requirement for at least 10% of the development to be improved as public space, streetscape regulations, and an incentive for the buildings to be constructed in an environmentally efficient manner.

Q: Why is Tredyffrin trying to put so much density and such tall buildings in Paoli?

A: Density: The Tredyffrin Planning Commission struggled with the amount of density to permit at the rail yard. Originally, the new zoning was intended to follow the principles of “transit oriented development” which calls for high densities around public transportation facilities to encourage convenient access to public transportation and provides a potential customer base within walking distance of retail and service amenities. Because of public concerns, the Planning Commission scaled down the maximum permitted density (measured by “floor area ratio” in the ordinance) to a level lower than that promoted by smart growth advocates, but one they felt would still encourage transit use and pedestrian-friendly development.

Height: The 5-story height limit applies only to a small portion of the rail yard – an area close to the tracks and at least 150 feet from any residential property. The height limit allows the denser development to be pushed closer to the tracks and away from existing homes. Because of the grades on the rail yard, 5-story buildings near the tracks should not appear that high to properties across Central Avenue, and even less so from Route 30. Main Line Berwyn Apartments near Conestoga High School is an example of an existing 5-story building.

New buildings to be constructed closer to existing homes can be no more than 3-stories high and there must be a 25’ landscaped buffer between the existing homes and new buildings. Amtrak does not have to abide by that height regulation – it is not subject to municipal zoning. However, Tredyffrin hopes that by providing the rail companies with a little more

flexibility close to the tracks, they should be able to design more attractive and adequately-sized parking structures away from existing residences, and therefore respect these limits.

Q: How long have Tredyffrin and Willistown been working on the ordinance amendments?

A: A consultant began working with a subcommittee of Tredyffrin and Willistown representatives to develop draft ordinances in early 2005. The public input part of the process began in January 2006 with a joint Tredyffrin/Willistown meeting. Since then, Tredyffrin has discussed the ordinances at 11 regular meetings of the Planning Commission where public comment was heard, 9 Planning Commission workshop sessions where the members discussed the ordinances but no public comment was taken, 2 Environmental Advisory Council meetings, 3 Board of Supervisor public hearings, and 3 neighborhood meetings. Willistown has discussed the ordinances at Planning Commission and Board of Supervisor meetings also.

Because of input obtained at those meetings, proposed regulations for items such as density, height, parking requirements, permitted uses, design standards for parking structures, environmental incentives, and zoning district configuration were changed and the proposed ordinances reflect those changes.