

## Traditional look favored for Ardmore Train Station

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Now that SEPTA and PennDOT are raising hopes that Ardmore could see a new train station building in the nearer term, a Lower Merion Township advisory board and community residents were able this week to catch a first glimpse of how it might look.

Officials of the two transportation agencies presented two initial concepts to the Historical Architectural Review Board May 6. The train station site is not a part of the Ardmore Business Historic District, but sits adjacent to it. Because of its relationship to the historic railroad, Jennie Granger, PennDOT executive assistant for multimodal transportation, said plans will also be reviewed by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

While the project is still in the early stages, Granger said the agencies wanted to get a sense of the township's preference for a concept design, and whether there is a consensus.

From the board's discussion, the overwhelming preference was for the more traditional concept of the two. Robert Lund, assistant manager of SEPTA's Engineering, Maintenance and Construction Division, said the shed-roofed building and canopy is similar to the station built recently in Primos, Delaware County.

HARB members, with one exception, said the concept, while not mimicking any of the historic Main Line train station buildings, was more compatible with other stations on the line.

It was a breakthrough in March, when township and SEPTA officials confirmed that the transit agency was stepping up to manage and fund a project to build a full-fledged new station building to replace the 1950s bunker-like structure on Station Avenue.

In its most recent iteration, Lower Merion Township had planned to integrate the station into a long-planned commuter and public parking garage sited along the inbound tracks. A still-unresolved funding gap has stalled that project, however, and at the meeting this week, Angela Murray, assistant director of community and economic development, said, "I don't know when this garage would be built."

In the meantime, SEPTA had announced plans for a first phase of improvements to the station, including construction of new, high-level platforms and other accessibility improvements. The existing station building would have been replaced by a ticketing kiosk and sheltered area. Foundation pilings for the future garage would also be installed in that phase.

But in March, SEPTA CFO Rich Burnfield said the agency, working with PennDOT, had identified funding for a full station building and would move the project forward by taking over day-to-day management.



(Above) A rendering of Option #1 (center) shows a traditional train station adjacent to a new parking garage. (Top) The view from the train tracks and the bottom is the view from the street. Option #2 (bottom) shows a more modern structure.

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Construction could start by the end of 2015, Burnfield said.

This week Lund said the station would include a waiting room and restroom facilities. It would not be staffed, but would have ticketing machines for both SEPTA and Amtrak trains. Elevators will be installed on both inbound and outbound sides of the tracks, connecting to an improved tunnel under the rail line. Extensive canopies would provide protection from the weather that the station lacks today.

Lund said there will also be a canopy and smaller waiting area – heated, but not enclosed – on the outbound side.

For the station building itself, the officials presented two preliminary concepts, one the more traditional design and the other more modern. While drawings showed brick structures, Lund said part of the feedback the agency was seeking was any preference for building finishes to tailor the building to the community.

Feedback from the group was quick in coming. “There is very little precedent in the area for this,” said HARB Vice Chairman Kathleen Abplanalp said of the taller, more straight-lined and glass-fronted modern concept. To member Sharon Sorokin, that option looked “like an extension of the parking garage,” while Chairman Scott Kalner remarked that it “looks like an orphaned commercial building.”

Kalner questioned why, in drawings, the station building seemed to have been shifted, so that it would likely not be visible looking down Station Avenue from Lancaster Avenue. Lund agreed that in this concept it is situated a little closer to Anderson Avenue, in part so that the elevators can be adjacent to the tunnel, but he said there might be some flexibility in siting.

As for building materials, Abplanalp also noted that brick would be unusual in the group of Main Line stations, but she and Kalner agreed it might be higher quality than a stone veneer.

The exception on the concepts came from member Philip Franks, who said the approach should not necessarily be “locked into anything that has to fit historically with Ardmore.” For himself, Franks said he was “willing to embrace a very modern glass and steel structure here,” adding, “I’ve always been interested in seeing some really great design in Ardmore” that “will fit, be appreciated and be an attraction.”

Granger said she appreciated his thoughts, but cautioned that the state historical commission “will probably not agree with you.”

Several Ardmore residents and representatives of downtown businesses and Suburban Square attended the session.

Val Hiscock, president of the North Ardmore Civic Association, said it is “very interested in having a real station in Ardmore.” Referring to earlier concepts of the Phase 1 improvements, she remarked that the temporary station was “little more than a heated bus shelter.”

Asked about a timetable for the improvements, Murray noted that the project will go through the typical land development review process, which might take about nine months.

“We would like to be able to move in a year to have a contract out for bidding,” so that construction would start in 2015, Lund said.

“We want to get this completed,” PennDOT’s Granger assured the group. The ADA accessibility improvements “are long overdue,” she said. “We’re all very committed. We have the funding in place,” Lund added.

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Granger said, after a consultant is brought on board and the concept is refined, there would be a general public meeting, likely in the fall.

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