

## Pa authorizes grants for Ardmore Cricket Lot, train station projects

Published: Thursday, December 18, 2014  
By Cheryl Allison

ARDMORE— A key piece of the complex puzzle that Lower Merion Township's plans for Ardmore revitalization have become is now in place.

At the start of a meeting Monday night, Board of Commissioners President Liz Rogan announced that the township that morning had received a copy of a signed contract from the Pennsylvania Office of the Budget authorizing a total of \$14 million in Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) grants for the Ardmore Transit Center project.

The authorization is divided into two parts. As the township had requested, \$3.5 million of the funds are authorized for a first phase of planned improvements at the Ardmore Train Station, a project now being managed by SEPTA.

In what has become a lightning rod for controversy in recent weeks, the remaining \$10.5 million is authorized for the mixed-use redevelopment project proposed for the Cricket Avenue municipal parking lot in partnership with developer Dranoff Properties. The grants are to support the public parking and new retail components of the complex, to be known as One Ardmore Place. The project also includes 110 rental apartments.

Monday was one day short of a year since Lower Merion officials received word that the budget office was withdrawing \$12 million in RACP funds requested for the One Ardmore Place project, questioning whether it was near shovel-ready and citing a change in scope from a revitalization project focused around the train station.

In September, however, the office wrote that it had reconsidered and determined the project was eligible, though for a reduced amount. Still, the lack of a written confirmation of authorization had been a source of lingering uncertainty, as community opposition to the scale and impacts of the project heated up.

The meeting Monday night, following a tumultuous session five days earlier when opponents of the project filled the room, saw some other steps forward toward a construction start in the new year.

With briefer discussion, the board approved agreements called for under its developer's agreement with Dranoff Properties that relate to the use of the RACP funds, which will be channeled through the Redevelopment Authority of Montgomery County.

One is a cooperation agreement between the RDA and One Ardmore Associates, the entity under which Dranoff will build the project. Another authorizes the transfer of a deed for the Cricket Lot to the RDA, by which the parcel will eventually become the property of the developer.

The board had tabled the agreements Dec. 10, wanting to see greater assurance that the developer, rather than the township, would be responsible to pay back grant funds in the event – unlikely, the board was assured – that the state later determined that the project was in fact not eligible for the funds.



Ardmore's Cricket Lot is the site for the condominium development known as One Ardmore Place, a Dranoff Properties development.

## **Pa authorizes grants for Ardmore Cricket Lot, train station projects**

MainLine Media News, December 18, 2014

page 2

With a new “completion guaranty” added, commissioners meeting as the Economic Revitalization Committee prior to the full board meeting Monday voted 9-5 to approve the agreements. Remaining consistent in their opposition to the project, Commissioner Steven Lindner, in whose ward the Cricket Lot sits, and Commissioners Jenny Brown, Lewis Gould, Cheryl Gelber and Brian Gordon voted no. (Gelber was not in the room later, when the board took formal votes on the agreements.)

Because of questions about other required agreements between the township and Dranoff Properties, action on those documents has been tabled to January, when the board is also to consider a temporary parking plan for the construction period, when the greatest part of the Cricket Lot will be out of commission.

A scattering of opponents of the project returned to the board room Monday, reiterating now familiar objections that the One Ardmore Place project is out of scale and character with Ardmore’s traditional downtown and neighborhoods, and that existing businesses that depend on the lot may not survive 18 to 24 months of construction. Questions were raised about the \$2 million Dranoff is to pay Lower Merion for the land, perhaps not for 20 years. Was an appraisal of the value of the land fair?

Cricket Avenue resident Michael Frank said his concern came down to whether Lower Merion Township and its community will really gain much for the \$10.5-million investment of public money. A few dozen additional parking spaces in the new garage may be more than taken up by apartment residents and their guests, he suggested, but it should be considered that Ardmore is also losing a rare piece of open space, currently used for various community events. The testimony from business owners is “heartbreaking,” he said. Is the township really gaining, “if we have to trade [existing] businesses for new ones?”

It was a sign of the polarizing nature of the project that shop owner Carrie Kohs, who has been outspoken in her support for the Dranoff project as a catalyst for revitalization, came to tell commissioners about an anonymous “bullying” phone call she had received that afternoon from an opponent of the project.

Maria Love, owner of Gymboree on Lancaster Avenue, said the young mothers with infants and toddlers who come to her classes will have to go elsewhere. Meanwhile, “A wedge is being driven between the community, separating pro and against. A lot of the passion you’re seeing should tell you something,” Love said. “Take a second look at what’s happening to your community.”

In response to comments Monday night and earlier, Gelber, who said she has been torn over the project, assured residents that even her colleagues who support the Dranoff project “are not sitting up here and listening to you with callous hearts. We feel the pain.”

“It’s going to be hard,” she went on to say, “but accepting that the project will go ahead, the emphasis now has to be on what can be done to help the businesses and the residents.”

“Now it’s time to come together and make this work,” said Commissioner Brian McGuire, who has supported the project. It is time, he said, “for Ardmore to look at the next phase of its life.”

In response to the specific question about the appraisal of the Cricket Lot parcel, completed more than six years ago, David Scolnic, the township’s special counsel for the project, offered some new information. In September 2008, two appraisal numbers were sought, he said. One was of the value of the Cricket Lot, if no public parking was required to be replaced; the second was if public parking was required.

The answer the township received in the first case was a figure of \$2.8 million, Scolnic said, but in the latter case, the value was “nominal or virtually nothing.” In any event, it was pointed out, the deal is done.

As previously reported, the board on Dec. 10 tabled some other required agreements between the township and Dranoff Properties, seeking more information. The board will take those documents up

**Pa authorizes grants for Ardmore Cricket Lot, train station projects**

MainLine Media News, December 18, 2014

*page 3*

again in January, along with consideration of a temporary parking plan for the construction period. The conversation about the Cricket Lot project will continue.

*source: [www.mainlinemedianews.com](http://www.mainlinemedianews.com)*