A community workshop is an intensive planning session where citizens, designers and others collaborate on a vision for development. It provides a forum for ideas and offers the unique advantage of giving immediate feedback to the designers. More importantly, it allows everyone who participates to be a mutual author of the plan.

The workshop is located at the project site. The team of design experts and consultants sets up a working studio, complete with drafting equipment, supplies. Formal and informal meetings are held throughout the event and updates to the plan are presented periodically.

Through brainstorming and design activity, many goals are accomplished during the workshop. First, everyone who has a stake in the project develops a vested interest in the ultimate vision. Second, the design team works together to produce a set of finished documents that address all aspects of design. Third, since the input of all the players is gathered at one event, it is possible to avoid the prolonged discussions that typically delay conventional planning projects. Finally, the finished result is produced more efficiently and cost-effectively because the process is collaborative.

Community workshops are organized to encourage the participation of all. That includes everyone who is interested in the making of a development: the developer, business interests, government officials, interested residents, and activists.

Ultimately, the purpose of the workshop is to give all the participants enough information to make good decisions during the planning process.
The subject of the community workshops is 2300 Route 1, a 212-acre site bounded by US Route 1, Commerce Road, and the Northeast Corridor Passenger Rail Line. This property is commonly known as the Johnson & Johnson North Brunswick Campus. North Brunswick TOD Associates, LLC, a major New Jersey developer, currently has an agreement under which it may elect to purchase the property.

The rectangular site benefits from over 4,000 feet of frontage on US Route 1 and over 5,000 feet of frontage on the Northeast Corridor Rail Line. The primary access points to the property are full access, signalized intersections at Commerce Drive to the north and Aaron Road on the south end of the property.

The office, manufacturing and research facility was constructed in 1955 and expanded in the 1970s and again in the 1980s to encompass the current 1,133,000 square feet of space under roof. 2300 Route 1 has been zoned I-2 Industrial for many years with manufacturing, research and testing, office, medical clinics, hotels, warehouse and distribution uses permitted. The I-2 zone provides for a 75-foot height limit with density and coverage limits that would provide for in excess of 3.6 million square feet of space and associated parking.

As the community works through developing a new Master Plan for the Township, it is hoped the Community Workshops will serve to stimulate discussion on choices that can lead to the creation of a great place in North Brunswick.

Workshop Series Schedule
Hosted by North Brunswick TOD Associates, LLC

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23
6:30 - 9:00 p.m.
Opening Presentation on Smart Growth

THURSDAY, MARCH 2
6:30 - 9:00 p.m.
What do you want to see in our town center?

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS
Thursday, March 23 - Tuesday, March 28
Schedule and sessions to be published at a later date.
Why Should I Get Involved?

By Joyce Marin, Knight Fellow ’01

Have you ever wondered, “Why don’t THEY fix that?” or “How could THEY let that happen to our neighborhood?” I have learned, since we live in a democracy, when the questions of “Why don’t THEY fix that?” come to mind, “THEY” actually means “WE,” as in “We, the people.” Increasingly, I have also come to appreciate, even more personally, that “we” often means “me.” If it comes to me that a special quality in my community needs to be protected, preserved or lifted up, if an idea has hit me like a thunderbolt, if it’s nagging at me or keeping me up at night, then I have come to accept that it’s my responsibility to move that idea forward.

In many communities when challenges arise, the citizens move out. But what if you don’t move out? What if you stay? What if you stay and fight for the health of your community, finding solutions for its problems? Citizen activism is about rising above the specific negative circumstances that your community faces, whatever those challenges may be. Plus, any community can be improved upon. A community doesn’t need to be troubled to benefit from your efforts.

Benefits. The communities in which the citizenry is actively involved benefit in many ways. If your idea improves the quality of your life, then it may improve the quality of life for your neighbors as well, demonstrating that what benefits one, benefits all. For this reason, true activism is not for the selfish or the self-serving, but rather for those with a generosity of spirit. However, when an idea improves a community’s quality of life, that improved quality of life is often translated by the real estate market into a tangible benefit: stabilizing or improving property values. If you own your own home, you can be financially rewarded by being actively involved as a citizen in your community.

Sense of Community. As you work together toward a common goal with your neighbors, another benefit of activism is that you will make friends and experience a feeling of belonging. Not unlike the barn raisings of old, neighbors who work together on community projects share a common sense of pride and a heightened sense of community.

Making Your Mark. Another of the benefits of citizen activism is that it preserves and strengthens a community’s identity and its sense of place. A unique community identity results from the individual identities of people who get involved. When you get involved, you make your mark. This results in your living in a community that is unique because it reflects some quality unique to you.

Why do people get involved? People are called to action and stay involved because they care. In fact, the persistence and patience needed to be effective in community work is often the real test of how much a person does care.

Sometimes activism is reactive. A highway is planned through a neighborhood. A power plant is planned in the countryside. The people organize to say, “This thing going on is not who we are. This does not belong here.” They talk to their neighbors, organize meetings, circulate petitions, write letters to the editor, fill up municipal meetings, hire attorneys and fight. While this type of activism gets headlines, it also sometimes gives a bad name to activism. You don’t need to wait for a community crisis to be involved.

Other times, activism is proactive. Just one person with an idea of how their community can be improved formulates the idea, articulates it and moves it forward. They say, “We need a skate park, community garden or bike trails.” This type of effort can improve an already strong community or can represent the first efforts to turn around a neighborhood with serious problems. It all starts with an individual willing to make an effort. With community activism, just one person can make an enormous difference in a place.

But how? In our democratic form of government there are some natural ways to make your voice heard. You can get involved by calling your elected or appointed officials. You can start attending and speaking out at regularly scheduled public meetings of your municipality. You can write letters to the editor, talk to your friends and organize them for action, join a service organization, or volunteer to chair a committee.

There are many ways to improve our neighborhoods and most of them start with you.

Joyce Marin is a borough councilwoman in Emmaus, Penn., where she has been involved as a citizen activist. She has also worked in commercial real estate finance and downtown revitalization.

It’s All About Mixing the Uses

Town-making principles begin and end with the premise that uses within a neighborhood [residential, lodging, office, retail, manufacturing and civic] should be laid out in such a manner as to benefit the entire area. This approach represents an attempt to replicate the planning of our country’s older towns rather than continue the more recent practice of developing separate single-use pods.

Traditionally, American town planning was the work of pragmatic pioneers, government consultants or, in the early 20th century, developers using architects and town planners. After the Second World War, however, planning practices took a complete about-face. Zoning ordinances were adopted by thousands of municipalities in a sweeping movement across the country. Using these conventional zoning ordinances, master plans were drawn up for individual municipalities marked with symbols like R-1, R-2, R-3 (residential); C-1, C-2 (commercial); and I-1, I-2 (industrial). These symbols stipulate the use and density in each area. Single-family homes were completely separated from townhomes and apartment buildings. Commercial buildings could only be built in spaces marked with the “C” code, totally segregated from the residential areas. High-speed roads, or “collectors,” were designed to connect all of the separated uses. Under these conventional zoning practices, “open space” is provided in the form of buffers, easements and setbacks instead of traditional parks and squares.

What planners did not foresee was the outcome that would result from the endless repetition of this pattern. Instead of roads moving people swiftly from home to work to play, they have become clogged with traffic. People spend hours every day in the car shuffling children and themselves from one use to the other. Gaining access to cultural and social experiences has become a frustrating, time-consuming experience.

Traditional town planners are now making an effort to recover the wisdom of the past — intermixing uses within neighborhoods and developing plans with flexibility. This is not always easy: In order to accomplish mixed-use planning, local governments must either grant numerous variances to overcome the restrictions of current zoning policies or adopt entirely new ordinances that allow for this type of zoning.

Dozens of municipalities are currently adopting traditional neighborhood development (TND) ordinances that restore the option of creating new development in traditional patterns. These ordinances enable a broad range of activities within a neighborhood. People are able to move with ease from home to shopping and workplaces and automobile reliance is reduced because biking and walking options are provided.

This article provided by The Town Paper.
Certain Residents Suffer Particularly From Suburban Sprawl:

* **The young**, who are below the legal driving age and are therefore dependent upon adults for their social needs. They are bused from schools, because they are located far from the neighborhood, and isolated at home until their working parents arrive. The alternative is to relegate one parent to a career as the child’s chauffeur. The single-family house with the yard is a good place for childhood only if it is structured as part of a neighborhood, where the child can walk or bicycle to school, to play, to the store, to the movies and to friends.

* **The middle class**, which is forced into multiple automobile ownership. The average yearly cost of car ownership is $4,500 — the equivalent of a $40,000 mortgage payment. The possibility of owning one car less is the single most important subsidy that can be provided towards affordable housing. Furthermore, by forbidding mixed-use areas, the investment of personal time in the activity of commuting is mandatory. A person who drives two hours a day spends the equivalent of eight working weeks a year in the car.

* **The elderly**, who lose their self-sufficiency once they lose their drivers’ licenses. Seniors who would otherwise be capable of independent living are consigned to specialized retirement communities in sprawl. This isolation has negative consequences for society at large and for the seniors themselves.