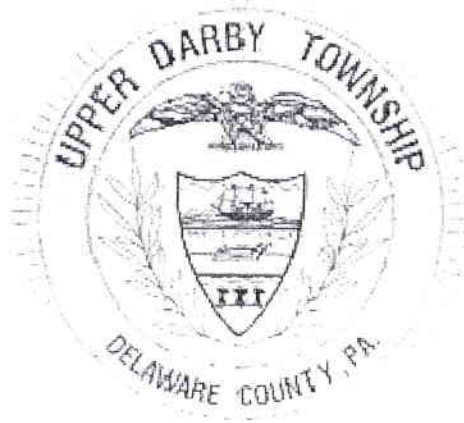


Senate Transportation Committee  
Senator John C. Rafferty, Jr  
Thursday September 12, 2013

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Thomas N. Micozzie , Mayor  
Upper Darby Township



Upper Darby Township/Senate Transportation Committee  
Senator John C. Rafferty, Jr.  
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My name is Thomas Micozzie and I am Mayor of Upper Darby Township. With me today is Thomas J. Judge Jr. the Chief Administrative Officer of Upper Darby Township; Tom has served in that position since 2000 and I, as Mayor, since 2009. Previous to that, Tom and I both served on Upper Darby Township Council, Tom for nine years and I for twenty.

Upper Darby Township is a Pennsylvania Home Rule Charter municipality and a township of the first class located in eastern Delaware County, adjacent to the city of Philadelphia. The township, which is described as an urban, suburban mix, occupies approximately 7.8 square miles of land.

The community was first settled in 1688 and incorporated as a township in 1736. The 2000 census indicates Upper Darby population as 81,722 and we were the fifth largest community in the state of Pennsylvania. The 2010 census data indicates an increase in our population to 82,295 and we dropped to sixth in the state's population ranking. The communities in the state of Pennsylvania with more population are Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Erie, Allentown, Reading and then Upper Darby. I want to mention we believe the 2010 census undercounted Upper Darby's Hispanic community (legal and illegal) by approximately 5,000 individuals.

Upper Darby Township is a true melting pot of cultures; one only needs to take a look at our school system to get a true picture. The Upper Darby school district has families from over seventy two different countries and dialects. In many of the families only the school aged children speak English, with parents depending on the children to act as translators for the households. The Upper Darby School district, like many urban/suburban school districts, is faced with economic challenges due to education funding as is many of the districts state wide.

As mentioned, the township operates pursuant to the terms of the Home Rule Charter adopted in 1976. The Home Rule Charter provides that a Mayor and Township Council, which is composed of eleven members, seven elected from the districts each having approximately 12,500 residents and four elected council at large, govern the township. The Mayor is vested with the executive power of the township and serves a four year term. The Mayor, with the approval of at least six township council members, appoints the township's Chief Administrative Officer.

Upper Darby has certain traits of an urban center, as well as those of a residential suburb. In the eastern part of the community adjacent to Philadelphia you will find the 69<sup>th</sup> Street area is a major commercial and transportation center. This commercial district, for the most part, is owned and operated by a New York based retail real estate firm, Ashkenazy Acquisition Corporation. The township works to support Ashkenazy Corporation in their efforts to move this retail area from numerous single store fronts to a business area that has attracted several big box national retail firms to supplement and compliment the remaining single store front operations.

Located also in the eastern section of the community we have two small, but very distinct, business districts along West Chester Pike and Long Lane. Both of these business districts are

feeling the results of the current economic issues. Both are located on or near state highways. The township is working hard to help the properties along these streets to form a business association and coach them in skills such as how to write a business plan and financial plan and educating them in the value of investing in the community and maintaining their properties.

If you have ever visited or spent time in Upper Darby you will see that a major part of the community is the 69<sup>th</sup> Street SEPTA terminal. The terminal is the western terminus of the Frankford/Market Street elevated line and the starting point of the trolley and bus system that connects with other established communities in the region such as Chester, Norristown, Media and West Chester. Yes, that is correct; the 69<sup>th</sup> Street SEPTA terminal offers transportation in the form of light rail, elevated subway, surface bus service and connection to regional rails. A knowledgeable rider can board a trolley (light rail) in Media and in less than four hours be in down town New York at a Broadway show. The 2012 report from SEPTA shows that the 69<sup>th</sup> Street terminal has close to 16,000 boarding's at the 69<sup>th</sup> Street location every week day.

I am not here to give you statistics about SEPTA ridership, I am sure the SEPTA staff can do a much better job than I can. I am here to tell you that a fully funded Comprehensive Transportation Legislation is critical to communities like Upper Darby Township. The SEPTA system is a critical partner for the suburban commuters that work in the city of Philadelphia, but more importantly, it is the life line to many of the residents in Upper Darby Township and surrounding inner ring communities. Many of our residents find themselves using the light rail and surface bus system to commute to their jobs in the retail industry in King of Prussia and the Philadelphia Airport. These same individuals use the SEPTA system to move around town for their daily activities such as grocery shopping and visiting the library or their place of worship. Many of these individuals do not own a vehicle some out of choice, however a fair number because of economics.

SEPTA transportation in our community is not a luxury of choice, but a necessity for a reasonable quality of life. In 2011 the township spent over \$2.0 million dollars to upgrade the pedestrian walkway bridge over Market Street connecting the 69<sup>th</sup> Street terminal and the shopping area. The pedestrian bridge over Market Street allows the general public to cross Market Street without impacting the traffic flow around the terminal on busy Market Street.

Earlier I mentioned that the 69<sup>th</sup> Street shopping area has just seen or shortly will see the arrival of the Burlington Coat Factory, Ross Dress for Less shop and H & M. These department stores supplement the existing H-MART Korean shopping market and numerous mom and pop operations. Perhaps a few of those in the audience today recently viewed a live show at the Tower Theater, a national icon to the region and less than 100 yards from the Septa terminal.

I am sure many in the audience or on the Committee have heard about the feasibility investigation to extend the Norristown High Speed Line to King of Prussia, thus providing a direct connect between the 69<sup>th</sup> Street terminal and King of Prussia.

Upper Darby Township, in conjunction with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, completed a Transportation and Land use study for the West Chester Pike corridor. The West Chester Pike study recommends many roadway and pedestrian improvements along

the corridor. The store proprietors in these areas are minorities or immigrants to this country.

The residential properties in this area are row homes or twin homes built in the 1920-1940 era. The properties are aging and showing the wear associated with their age. The township, through the Housing and Urban Development Agency, has made available an income based Home Improvement Program which consists of grants and loans to homeowners. This area was developed during the early 1900's as a direct result of the 69th Street terminal and transportation system. The post war expansion increased trolley rail west into the county providing housing and transportation and employment in the Philadelphia area.

Now if you move west along the route 101 and 102 trolley line you will visit the Aronimink Station stop, again a mixture of small business and residential properties. The regional rail line R-3 has several stops in Upper Darby Township's southeast communities like Fernwood, Primos and Secane. SEPTA has made investment in station improvements and upgrades to the Primos Station. We understand that the Secane Station is targeted for upgrades should funding be available. Senators, these upgrades are crucial to the life line of the community.

If you would move south west in Upper Darby Township you will find a more suburban area with a mixture of homes from a Warner West row home, to twin homes to 1940 era single homes. You will also find that the assessed value of these homes requires the homeowners to annually pay close to, or above, \$10,000 in real estate taxes. This western part of our town has several distinct business districts: Township Line Road/State Road, Pilgrim Gardens, Aronimink Station, Baltimore Pike and the Providence Road shopping area. All of the districts mentioned receive service support from SEPTA. These shopping districts are feeling the effects of the economy, however occupancy figures are improving.

The township provides a broad range of services to the residents which could be impacted by Comprehensive Transportation legislation. This includes services such as, firefighting, police, sanitary sewers, solid waste and recycling collection, libraries and recreation areas. The Upper Darby Township Fire Department includes fifty-four full time fire suppression staff. The Township's police services are provided to the residents by one hundred thirty-three sworn police officers in the Upper Darby Police Department. With twenty-three non-sworn support personnel, the sworn force is comprised of a superintendent, four captains, seven lieutenants, eleven sergeants and one hundred and ten police officers.

Yes, you heard correctly, 133 sworn police officers with an annual budget close to twenty-six million dollars. While the State Police provide no patrol support we have been able to receive service in the way of investigative support and we may get a twice a year - one day radar traffic enforcement on a state highway. The 83,000 residents of Upper Darby receive direct police protection from our 133 sworn officers. In 2012 the Upper Darby Police Department was responsible for answering 49,302 calls for service; 1,719 arrests; 1,829 criminal investigations; and 270 missing person investigations. However, the State regulations do not entrust the professional police staff to operate a radar gun to help ensure safety on our highways. If you will allow me to think outside the box for a brief moment, perhaps legislation associated with the use of a radar gun could be limited to communities with populations larger than 50,000 and/or a police staff greater than 100 sworn officers. In addition, as Mayor and engaging in the discussion on a myriad of state and local funding issues, I hear the cry of mid-state or central



state residents or state legislators concerned about, or vocally opposed to, funding mass transit in the eastern or western tiers of the state. I hear that they believe it is not equitable funding for their region of the state. I feel the same way while we work on a budget that allocates twenty-six million dollars for police protection, while a great many of municipalities in the state rely solely or heavily on utilizing state police funded by taxpayers here in Upper Darby. Equitable funding is important to us all, albeit in different forms and in cooperation with each other.

PennDot has also cut funding in their operational budget and no longer provides weed control along our state highways median strips; trimming along the state highways is virtually nonexistent. To be honest Senators, this is frustrating to me as Mayor--- and I can imagine it would be equally as disturbing to you if that condition exists in your home community. How can we send a positive message to our communities if we cannot take care of what we are responsible for? This policy is what has led to the current debate of major infrastructure issues due to an aging and ill maintained highway system and the lack of funding to maintain our investment. A community cannot survive if its leaders do not provide the necessary assets to meet their collective responsibility. To have local municipalities be forced to provide maintenance to state highways in the form of grass cutting, weed control, storm inlet cleaning and street sweeping is a tremendous burden on already strained communities.

In summary, between 1970 and 1990 Upper Darby lost some population however, we have remained unchanged growing slightly since 1990.

The population comparison for the Township from 1970 to 2010 is as follows:

Upper Darby Township Census Population

2010	82,795
2000	81,821
1990	81177
1980	84,054

The township has increased taxes in each of the last several years. While the township has worked to control expenses, the collection of township taxes and fees continue to be strained. If you look at a page from our audited financials you will see that the collection rate is approximately 95% of the billable taxes. You need to add to the tax equation the tax assessment challenges by many large property owners which have dropped the taxable assessment values of properties by \$10,000,000 in the last five years. The 2013 pending appeals, if successful, will add approximately another \$ 2,500,000 to that reduction.

Clearly widespread availability of public transportation is a strength that Upper Darby Township has to offer to companies that want to invest in our community. As Mayor, I have a vision that the local higher education institutions from University City in Philadelphia will find Upper Darby Township an attractive location for student living and perhaps business incubator operations. To date we have had some success in this area, however we are hopeful more success will follow.

As with any older community we have an aging infrastructure of streets and highways, with limited bridges (*yes one local bridge appears on the recently released watch list*). The township has a plan to annually improve or resurface local streets. A very small portion of the funding for this resurfacing comes from the state via the liquid fuels program.

The township has been involved in several studies that are looking at bike trails in our community.

As Mayor of a major community, I clearly understand that funding is tight and you must consider many aspects and requests from many constituent programs. You must look to where you will get the best return for the dollar invested. I am here to convince/urge you that every dollar you commit to transportation, highways and infrastructure will make a return to the community in the way of economic development, the ability to encourage the work force to effectively and efficiently get to work and it will allow individuals to shop in urban/inner ring communities and keep the retail dollar local.

I ask you to give long consideration to a solid comprehensive transportation bill with proper funding and to think of every dollar in the program not as a dollar going to a specific program, but a dollar of reinvestment in our communities and the quality of life enhancement for your citizens.

Thank you. Tom and I are here to answer any questions you may have.

Thomas N. Micozzie  
Mayor of Upper Darby Township