

MONTGOMERY COUNTY OPEN SPACE BOARD

May 25, 2022

4:00 P.M.

Montgomery County Planning Commission

Norristown, PA

Hybrid Meeting (both Virtual & In-House Attendees) via Zoom

DRAFT MINUTES

Board Members Present

Bruce D. Reed, Chair

Gail Farmer

Mark Vasoli

Michael Stokes

Staff Present

Bill Hartman, Trails & Open Space Planning
Manager, MCPC

Donna Fabry, Senior Trails & Open Space Planner,
MCPC

Brian Olszak, Senior Trails & Open Space Planner,
MCPC

Ellen Miramontes, Senior Trails & Open Space
Planner, MCPC

Yvonne Montgomery, Solicitor, MCPC

Board Members Absent

Kim Sheppard, Vice Chair

Other Attendees

Beth Pilling, Lower Gwynedd Township

Dulcie Flaharty, Green Lane Borough

Scott Berman, Whitemarsh Township

Lou Savastani, Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia

A. Call to Order, Chair Recognition & Meeting Protocol

Bruce D. Reed, Chair, who was virtually present at the meeting, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Yvonne Montgomery of the County Solicitor's Office said that this public meeting is being held as a "hybrid" meeting— with both physically present and virtually present attendees. In addition, at least one Board member must be present. As Chair and virtual attendee, Bruce designated Mike Stokes to chair the meeting, as he was physically present, therefore satisfying the County's current public meeting requirements. Prior to the meeting, the agenda was published on the county website and included a phone number, meeting access code and password, along with instructions to allow the public to participate via phone or Zoom.

Mike called the roll; four of the five board members were in attendance. It was determined that a quorum was satisfied.

Mike called the roll for staff and asked that the members of the public present identify themselves for the record. The names of members of the public who attended are noted above.

B. Approval of the March 31, 2022 Minutes (Action)

Mike called for a motion to approve the Open Space Board’s March 31, 2022 minutes.

***Motion:** Bruce D. Reed moved to approve the minutes; Ms. Gail Farmer seconded the motion. The motion carried 4-0.*

C. Open Space Updates (Information)

1. Return on Environment Study

Ellen Miramontes shared that the Return on Environment study was presented to the MCPC Board on April 13th and to the County Commissioners on June 2nd, 2022. Some members of the Advisory Committee and staff have been drafting a summary brochure and considering how to best get the study’s message out, perhaps via video and a more robust webpage. An MCPC Planning Smarter event is planned for October 25, 2022. Bill Hartman added that the report has received good publicity and is gaining momentum.

2. Floodplain Parcels

Donna Fabry reported on developments on the possible acquisition of several parcels in the floodplain that were impacted by Hurricane Ida. Staff submitted a DCNR C2P2 grant application in April to obtain acquisition funding for three parcels located on Rahns Road in Perkiomen Township and are actively engaging with the owners via a real estate negotiator, who will interface with the property owners and provide recommendations. Another single parcel under investigation/negotiation is located in Perkiomenville at the base of Green Lane Park where the Deep Creek Learning Center (DCLC) is situated. DCLC staff approached the county in September 2021 to ask if the county was interested in acquiring the property. Staff is exploring the possibility of acquiring the property for use as a trailhead for the Perkiomen Trail.

3. Other

There were no other items discussed.

D. Trails Updates (Information)

1. Chester Valley Trail Extension

Bill said that that the agreement amendments among PECO, Upper Merion Township and

Montgomery County had been executed. Vegetation clearing in the eastern portions of the PECO corridor for the trail will take place soon, while work in Bridgeport is underway, including the SR Bridge. Target completion remains 4th quarter, 2022.

2. Cross County Trail East Feasibility Study

Brian Olszak said the final preferred alignment has been developed and will be released for public comment along with supporting materials next week. A drone flyover of the route is being completed. Projected completion: June 30, 2022.

3. Cross County Trail West Feasibility Studies

Brian reported that a grant agreement with DVRPC has been executed and an RFP for consultants was released. Submissions were reviewed and the Board of Commissioners selected NV5 as the prime consultant. There will be an early June project kick-off, and a 12 month process is anticipated.

4. Cross County/Wissahickon Trails at Erdenheim

Donna reported that work on the Spence floodwall is in progress, and permitting is 90% complete. Legal agreements are being prepared for review by all relevant parties. Right-of-way license amendment with DCNR has been received for execution. Staff will continue to coordinate with the county solicitor's office and representatives of Erdenheim Farm. Donna is optimistic that construction will commence in the first half of 2023.

5. SRT 422 Connector

Donna said a press event with DCNR's secretary, Cindy Dunn, was held on May 10th to celebrate the county's receipt of a \$398,000 DCNR grant for this project. Permitting is in progress through the end-of-year for PennDOT, MCCD and DEP. The project schedule is currently design completion, 1st quarter 2023; advertising, early 2023; construction completion, fall of 2023.

6. Trail Junction Center (Norristown)

Ellen reported that the architect is working on the project design, including the TJC's bathrooms and access. Bill added that the plan is to finish design and construction documents by the end of 2022 and complete construction renovations by the end of 2023.

7. Germantown Pike Bridge & Wissahickon Trail Link Feasibility Studies

Ellen reported that these two feasibility studies were completed a few months ago and were presented on May 11th to the MCPC Board. Next steps are: 1) Obtain funding for the construction of the Germantown Pike bridge; 2) Pursue alignment within Montgomery County to get the trail from where it ends at Morris Arboretum to the intersection of Northwestern and Germantown Avenues. Ellen explained that an RFP for preliminary design, engineering, and right-of-way acquisition will be forthcoming. Bill added that he has copies of the studies in his office and they are also posted on the Trails and Open

Space Planning Projects section page of the MCPC website, if anyone would like to read them.

8. Springfield Township Trail Plan

Brian explained that as part of MCPC’s contract with Springfield Township, the Trails & Open Space section is assisting with the development of a township trails master plan. An outreach survey was created in preparation for an upcoming task force meeting, along with a Wikimap illustrating potential trail routing/destinations.

9. Montco Trail Challenge Kick-off and Community Art Day Event on Saturday June 4th

Ellen announced there would be a public event on June 4th at the Trail Junction Center for the Montco Trail Challenge kick-off and community art activities. Two flyers were distributed to promote the event, and there will be a variety of fun activities for attendees. She expressed her appreciation for the partnership with the County’s Health and Human Services (HHS) Department. HHS obtained \$25,000 in state funding for the community art efforts. Two local nonprofits, Expressive Path and Brush With the Law, will lead community art activities at the June 4th event. Following the event, these nonprofits will continue to work with the broader community on the creation and installation of more permanent art installations along the SRT over the summer.

10. Other

Pennypack Trail at Terwood Road

Donna explained that construction was completed in March 2022. State-of-the-art thermal detection signals have been installed and will serve as a good model for future trail crossing projects.

Upper Salford Township to Perkiomen Connector Trail

Donna reported that a Montco 2040 grant for \$100K for Phase 2 construction was received by Upper Salford Township. The trail will be open to the public this summer.

E. Other

1. PA DCNR C2P2 Grant Applications

Bill reported that the county’s 2021 application for a PA DCNR C2P2 grant for the SRT 422 Connector Project was awarded \$398,000. The 2021 application for Camp Laughing Waters submitted by Natural Lands Trust was awarded \$500,000. The 2022 application for the Rahns Road Parcels in Perkiomen Township included a grant request of \$109,000 towards these potential applications.

2. Statewide Local Share Account (LSA) Applications

Bill explained that there are also Statewide Local Share Account (LSA) grants available, funded by revenue from casino and gambling revenues. Staff prepared 3 applications this

spring: 1) Trail Junction Center renovations, \$500,000; 2) Cross-County/Wissahickon Trail construction at Erdenheim Farm, \$1 million; 3) Whitemarsh Floodplain restoration, \$1 million. Gail Farmer, OSB Member, said that she had just recently completed a floodplain project with Wissahickon Trails. Bill appreciated her sharing that and said he would be grateful for her input and would like to consult with her on this upcoming project.

3. ARPA Grant Applications

Bill reminded attendees that the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden in 2021. The county was allotted \$161 million in funding, and the Open Space & Trails staff submitted 2 ARPA grant applications to the County Recovery Office: 1) Open Space Funding Program, \$4 million; 2) Haws Ave./Chain St. Trailhead Improvements, \$690,000.

4. Community Project Funding Application

Bill said that MCPC staff has been in contact with U.S. Representative Madeleine Dean's office as members of Congress received funding for projects around their districts. The Cross County Trail bridge over Germantown Pike and Cross County Trail to Joshua Road projects were selected for advancement in the amount of \$2.5 million and recommended to the U.S. House Appropriations Committee for fiscal year 2023.

5. PA APA TDS Presentation

Donna announced that she and Anne Leavitt-Gruberger will give a presentation on Trail Access, Diversity and Awareness Planning at the PA chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) in Lancaster, PA, October 2-4, 2022.

6. Open Space & Trails Strategic Plan

Bill said that chapters 1 through 4 of the strategic plan have been drafted, including an introduction to open space conservation, county parks and trails, existing conditions/goals/lessons learned/challenges. Review will begin soon.

7. Other

Bill announced that the next meeting of the OSB will be held on June 22, 2022.

F. Public Comment

Mike called for public comments.

Beth Pilling commented that she found today's meeting very helpful and would share this information with the Montgomery County Parks Trails and Historic Sites Advisory Board to aid in developing their priorities. She added that the public conversation regarding electric bicycles and pedestrians is significant. She thanked the Open Space Board for their efforts.

Dulcie Flaharty mentioned that electric vehicles and the increased use of electric bikes draws attention to the need for charging stations in the future and should be examined when planning trails.

Mike added that the issue of electric bikes and their speed will be an upcoming issue when crafting policies and the need for education of the public. Mike also wanted to share a local human interest story of a Montgomery County resident and trail runner who recently set a record for running a sub-4 minute mile on one of the county’s trails. He thought it was an incredible feat that would be a great feature for a video advertising the county’s trail system.

G. Adjourn

Mike Stokes adjourned the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:25 p.m.

Next Open Space Board Meeting: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 at 4 p.m.