

MONTGOMERY COUNTY OPEN SPACE BOARD

January 26, 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

Kim Sheppard, Vice Chair

Michael Stokes

Gail Farmer

Mark Vasoli

Staff Present

Scott France, Executive Director, MCPC

Bill Hartman, Trails & Open Space Planning
Manager, MCPC

Brian Olzsak, Sr. Trails & Open Space Planner, MCPC
Ellen Miramontes, Sr. Trails & Open Space
Planner, MCPC

Yvonne Montgomery, Solicitor, MCPC

Barry Jeffries, Senior Planner, MCPC

Ann Marie Meehan, Exec. Admin., MCPC

Samantha Zrillo, Intern, OS&T, MCPC

Board Members Absent

Bruce D. Reed, Chair

Other Attendees

Chris Mendel, Exec. Director, Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust

Dulcie Flaharty

Scott Berman

Lou Savastani

Len Zangwill

A. Call to Order & Meeting Protocol

Kim Sheppard, Vice Chair, who was virtually present at the meeting, called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

Yvonne Montgomery of the County Solicitor's Office provided guidance for holding public meetings in Montgomery County. Public meetings are being held as "hybrid" meetings— with both physically present and virtually present attendees. In addition, at least one Board member must be present. Michael (Mike) Stokes attended the meeting in person, 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. Vice Chair and virtual attendee, Kim Sheppard, designated Mike to chair the meeting, as he was physically present.

Bill Hartman called the roll for staff.

Mike 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 December 15, 2021 Minutes (Action)

Mike called for a motion to approve the Open Space Board’s December 15, 2021 minutes.

***Motion:** Kim Sheppard moved to approve the minutes; Mark Vasoli seconded the motion. The motion carried 4-0.*

C. Presentations (Information)

Bill introduced Chris Mendel, Executive Director of the Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust (PERT), who presented an overview of the organization and its efforts to protect open space for nature and people. PERT aspires in the coming months to add 90+ acres of land to the existing 725 acres of fee simple, contiguously owned land in the Pennypack floodplain that it currently manages in this densely populated part of Montgomery County. He provided a brief description of some of the 10 most desirable properties that they have on their parcel watch list. In particular, he stated that he had reached out to MCPC Open Space staff regarding the potential protection by both the county and PERT in the Bethayres Swamp, located near the Pennypack Trail. In addition, there may be an opportunity for both organizations to begin a conversation with landowner Carolyn Hirsh Lindy about public access and preservation on her land that was formerly Meadowbrook Golf Course. In conclusion, he said that given development patterns, the corridor of the Pennypack Creek presents fine opportunities for the county and those parties interested in protecting the Delaware Valley watershed and Pennypack Creek.

D. Open Space Updates (Information)

1. Return on Environment Study

Ellen Miramontes reported that staff is awaiting the receipt of the 2nd draft from Econsult and will then select photos and determine their placement along with quotes. A communications strategy will be developed together with advisory committee members and MCPC staff. The report should be delivered post-February, 2022.

2. Floodplain Parcels: Rahns Road, Deep Creek

Bill said staff is in discussions with the owners of 3 floodplain parcels impacted by Hurricane Ida in Perkiomen Township, located near the Perkiomen Trail. Additionally, discussions are ongoing with the Deep Creek Learning Center in Upper Frederick Township due to its proximity to the trail and existing county land.

3. Other

There was no other business discussed.

E. Trails Updates (Information)

1. Chester Valley Trail Extension

Bill reported that Allen Myers has generally demobilized crews for the winter and will restart work in February/March. Staff is engaged in critical negotiations with PECO and Upper Merion Township on trail easement agreements and how existing trail easement agreements might have to be adjusted to address trail location realignment. Target project completion: 4th quarter, 2022.

2. Pennypack Terwood Crossing Updates

Bill said that construction began the first week of January 2022; all materials have been obtained and work has begun on conduit, curbing and foundations. Project aiming to wrap up in March 2022.

3. Cross County Trail East Feasibility Study

Brian Olzsak reported that the preliminary alignment proposal is nearly completed for consideration by the stakeholder committee. Additional stakeholder and public meetings will be held when the final alignment is delineated, probably in a February 2022 meeting, with study completion scheduled for April 2022.

4. Cross County Trail West Feasibility Studies

Bill reminded the Board that \$120,000 in grant funding has been received for the Cross County Trail advanced feasibility studies from DVRPC. The RFP is in development, and it should be a 9 to 12 month process. An April kick-off is anticipated.

5. Cross County/Wissahickon Trails at Erdenheim

Bill said that the Spence floodwall construction is still underway and proceeding well. Staff is working with Whitemarsh Township on a tree replacement plan. With respect to the Erdenheim tract portions of the trail, staff continues to work with PA DCNR to develop a right-of-way license for the Commonwealth-owned land on Stenton Ave. The County Solicitor's Office continues the drafting of a global agreement/MOU to discuss with Erdenheim Farm representatives regarding outstanding issues. Staff remains optimistic that construction can commence in 2023 with project completion in 2024.

6. Cross County Trail Germantown Pike Bridge and Wissahickon Trail Feasibility Studies

Ellen said that the final review of these two studies is underway and the studies will be released soon.

7. SRT 422 Connector

Bill said that the Phase I archeological survey report was submitted to PHMC and an exemption from further study has been requested. The MCCD, DEP and USACOE meeting is scheduled for February 3, 2022 to discuss the joint permit. Staff continues to coordinate with PA Fish and Boat regarding the PNDI report and is waiting for a response. Target completion is 3rd quarter 2022.

8. Trail Junction Center (Norristown)

Ellen reported that the County Commissioners awarded the contract for architectural/engineering services to Seiler + Drury Architecture. Staff is awaiting receipt of the contract between DVRPC and the county. The first step will be to measure/assess conditions of the building and develop a set of base plans.

F. Other (Information)

1. PA DCNR C2P2 Grants

Bill announced the results of the 2021 PA DCNR C2P2 grants. The SRT 422 Connector project was awarded \$398,000 for construction; the cost of this project will almost be completely covered by grant funding. Bill added that a \$500,000 C2P2 grant had been awarded to Natural Lands for the Girl Scouts' 450 acre Camp Laughing Waters conservation easement acquisition. In Upper Salford Township, \$161,500 was awarded to the township toward the Clemens property acquisition. Bill reminded meeting attendees that the current 2022 round of DCNR C2P2 grants are open and accepting applications through April 4, 2022.

2. Review of 2022 Work Program

Bill reported that MCPC Executive Director, Scott France, reorganized the Work Program plan to better align it with the county's comprehensive plan. Bill walked the Board through the various sections of the Work Program that include trails and open space initiatives.

3. Open Space & Trails Strategic Plan

Bill reported that Brian has drafted chapters 1 through 4 of the Open Space and Trail Strategic Plan, which includes the Introduction, Open Space Conservation, County Parks and Trails sections. The chapters are currently under internal review.

4. Other

There was no other business discussed.

G. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

H. Adjourn

Motion: A motion was made by Kim Sheppard and seconded by Mike Stokes to adjourn the meeting. The motion was approved by all present.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

Next Open Space Board Meeting: Wednesday, February 23, 2022 at 4 p.m.