

MONTGOMERY COUNTY OPEN SPACE BOARD

Minutes – March 28, 2019

Montgomery County Planning Commission

Montgomery Room

Norristown, PA

(Approved May 22, 2019)

Board Members Present

Bruce Reed, Chair

Kim Sheppard, Vice Chair

Michael Stokes

Mark Vasoli

Staff Present

Jody Holton, Planning Director

Henry Stroud, Section Chief

Donna Fabry, Senior Open Space Planner

Other Attendees

Dulcie Flaharty, Vice Chair, Montgomery County Planning Commission Board

Patrick Gardner, Land Protection Project Manager, Natural Lands

Noelle Halter, Lower Frederick Township resident

Phil Smith, Lower Frederick Township resident

Peter Williamson, Vice President of Conservation Services, Natural Lands

Welcome

Henry Stroud welcomed everyone to the meeting. Henry noted the new agenda format, which no longer includes the annotations. The Board concurred with the change.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Jody Holton requested nominations for Board Chair. Kim Sheppard nominated Bruce Reed as Chair. Mark Vasoli seconded the nomination. The nomination passed unanimously.

Bruce nominated Kim for Vice Chair. Michael Stokes seconded the nomination. The nomination passed unanimously.

Approval of August 28, 2018 Minutes

Mark Vasoli made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Kim Sheppard seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Property Acquisitions Update

Camp Laughing Waters DCNR Grant Application – Montgomery County Planning Commission

(MCPC) and Natural Lands are partnering on a grant application to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) Acquisitions Program. The proposal would support placing the entire 455-acre Camp Laughing Waters property, owned by Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania, under conservation easement. Natural Lands proposes to hold the easement and the Girl Scouts would retain ownership of the property. The grant application also proposes a trail easement along the perimeter of the property for a 1.65-mile section of the Sunrise Trail. The county would design, construct, and maintain the trail as part of the county trail network. Two hundred seventy acres of the property have been identified as Highest Protection Area (HPA), which is eligible for 50% funding by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The remaining acreage would be conserved as Standard Protection Area (SPA) and Minimum Protection Area (MPA), which would permit camp activities to continue. The provisions of the SPA conservation easement would permit future development of the site, either for the expansion of camp facilities or as an additional three residential units if the property were to be sold. Under current zoning, and without the conservation easement, 240 single-family detached homes could be developed on the property. The total value of all easements proposed is \$3.9 million. The maximum amount that can be requested from DCNR is \$1.1 million, which represents 50 percent of the value of the HPA. It is anticipated that the remaining \$2.7 million would be funded by the county, municipal partners (New Hanover and Upper Frederick townships) and leveraged grant funds. New Hanover Township has a dedicated open space fund. Patrick and Henry have been in discussions with New Hanover Township about making a funding commitment that will formalize a partnership and strengthen the grant application.

Jody presented three options for the Board to consider in regards to how the County's share of the acquisition could be funded, including providing the full match, providing a partial match, and phasing the project over multiple grant rounds. The Board discussed the merits of each. One challenge with phasing the project is that DCNR's public access requirement may not be met in subsequent phases. Given the potential that future phases are at risk for not being funded, the Board was in favor of making an application in support of funding that would enable the entire tract to be put under conservation easement for the current round. The Board discussed making a recommendation to the Commissioners that the county provide the full amount of match funds, plus related expenses, for this project.

Mark Vasoli made a motion that the Board endorse the application to DCNR for the Girl Scout property for a total project cost currently of \$3.9 million, possibly to be revised at grant application, with the total county commitment of \$2.7 million, possibly to be revised at grant application. Kim Sheppard seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Potential New Open Space Acquisitions

DiDomizio Property (Salford Township) – Henry Stroud met with Peter Williamson and Barb McMonagle, Chair of the Salford Township Planning Commission, for a site visit of the White's Mill property. Salford Township recently applied to the Montco2040 Implementation Grant Program for \$90,000 to acquire an additional 9.3 acres of the White's Mill property. The

property would be owned and maintained by the township. The county had funded acquisition of a portion of this property through its original Open Space Grant Program in 1998. Henry asked the Board to consider recommending the use of open space capital budget funds as an alternate funding source. This will be an action item on May's agenda.

Reynolds Property (Lower Frederick Township) – Donna Fabry met the property owners, Tom and Andy Reynolds, for a site visit of the approximately 4.5-acre property located along the Perkiomen Creek south of Spring Mount Road. The majority of the property lies within floodway and regulatory floodplain. There is a 2 ½ story house located on a slope at the south end of the property; the structure is located outside of the floodplain. The driveway connecting the property to Spring Mount Road uses a 50-foot driveway access easement through land owned by the Lower Frederick Fire Company. This property will be on May's agenda for further consideration as a fee simple acquisition.

Grant Announcements/Opportunities

Schuylkill River Trail, Lower Pottsgrove – MCPC was awarded \$353,700 from Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission's Regional Trails Program for construction of the Schuylkill River Trail in Lower Pottsgrove.

Upcoming Events

The Board will meet in Pottstown on April 24 for a walking tour of the Schuylkill River Trail along Industrial Highway and the proposed alignment to connect to the Route 422 bridge. The group will meet at Pottstown United Brewing Company after the walk to celebrate Paul's retirement from the Board and Mike Stokes' retirement from the County.

Public Comment

Phil Smith thanked the Board and staff for their efforts to conserve the Girl Scout camp property.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 pm.