

MONTGOMERY COUNTY OPEN SPACE BOARD

Minutes – February 26, 2019
Montgomery County Planning Commission
Montgomery Room
Norristown, PA
(Approved March 28, 2019)

Board Members Present

Paul Meyer, Chairman
Bruce Reed
Kim Sheppard
Space Planning
Michael Stokes

Staff Present

Jody Holton, Planning Director
John Marlatt, Assistant Solicitor
Henry Stroud, Section Chief – Trails & Open

Donna Fabry, Senior Open Space Planner

Other Attendees

Patrick Gardner, Land Protection Project Manager, Natural Lands
Phil Smith, Lower Frederick Township resident

Welcome

Henry Stroud welcomed Michael Stokes to the Board.

Board Changes for 2019

The Board presented Paul Meyer with a framed resolution in recognition of his twenty years serving on the Montgomery County Open Space Board. Henry Stroud encouraged the Board members to submit names of candidates to fill the vacancy created by Paul's departure. The group discussed its preference for a candidate from the Tookany-Tacony watershed area (Abington, Cheltenham) to balance the Board's geographic representation. Several names from local nonprofit organizations were discussed. Paul emphasized the importance of technical experience and political clout when choosing a Board member. Jody Holton will reach out to the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association.

Approval of August 28, 2018 Minutes

Kim Sheppard made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Bruce Reed seconded the motion.

Property Acquisitions Update

Donna Fabry gave an update on the status of the following acquisition/conservation easement projects that are currently underway: Girl Scouts Camp Laughing Waters, Kehs, Marshall, Lev, Banks and Oxychem. Appraisal Funds for the Lev property acquisition were

approved by the county commissioners. The Girl Scout, Kehs and Marshall properties are currently being appraised. Henry is awaiting receipt of the agreement of sale from the Lev family's attorney. A survey has been completed for the Banks and Oxychem properties. Authorization to purchase the Banks property is on the County Commissioners meeting agenda for March 21.

Henry presented two new projects, the Murray property and Camp Hope for Kids, to the Board. The Murray property is a potential fee simple acquisition. The property is located adjacent to the Perkiomen Trail on Park Avenue in Schwenksville Borough. The 1.05-acre lot is bordered to the east by the Perkiomen Creek; the rest of the parcel is surrounded by County open space. There is a single-family detached structure on the property, which has been elevated. An appraisal is currently underway.

Camp Hope for Kids is an approximately 86.8-acre property in Lower Frederick Township. The Open Space staff have been coordinating with Natural Lands staff on an opportunity to secure a conservation easement and future trail easement on this property, which is located within the Sunrise Mill County Park Focus Area in the 2015 Priorities Report. Patrick Gardner provided the Board with an overview about the types of uses permitted within the various protection areas (Highest/Standard/Minimum) as part of the conservation easement. This property and the Girl Scout Camp Laughing Waters property are targets for PA DCNR 2019 Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) Acquisition Grants.

Bruce Reed made a motion for a resolution requesting the County Commissioners support of the grant application. The motion was seconded by Kim Sheppard.

Open Space Project Updates

Henry Stroud presented a draft of the Sunrise Trail and Swamp Creek Greenway Feasibility Study. The document is being reviewed by the Graphics Section. After the internal review is completed, the draft will be shared with the feasibility study's steering committee. A public meeting and comment period will follow.

Henry provided the Board with an update on the Hatboro Open Space and Recreation Plan. The last of three public meetings for the plan was held on February 12. It is anticipated that the plan will be submitted to Graphics in March or April.

Trails & Open Space Capital Budget Update

Henry Stroud presented the Board with an overview of the capital budget funding for fiscal year 2019-20 and for the five-year period, 2019-2023. The presentation distinguished between the amounts designated for both open space and trail projects within the County's capital budget, as well as grant revenue secured from outside sources. Henry offered to email the Board a copy of the slide featuring the capital budget.

Upcoming Events

Henry Stroud presented four upcoming events. Henry will present on the County Open

Space and Trail program at the Montgomery County Association of Township Officials (MCATO) Spring Conference on March 1. Henry will be presenting at the International Trail Symposium in Syracuse, New York in late April. Henry and Donna Fabry will attend the Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference at Skytop Lodge in the Poconos on May 17, and the Statewide Trail Summit, being held in Shippensburg September 22 through 24. Donna has submitted a proposal for the Trail Summit. The proposal is to do a joint presentation with Rachel Hendricks, a resource conservationist at Montgomery County Conservation District, about stormwater management for trail projects.

2019 Future Meetings and Priorities

There is no meeting scheduled for April. The Board discussed meeting in Pottstown on April 24 to tour the recently completed section of the Schuylkill River Trail and the future trail alignment to connect to the Route 422 bridge. The group discussed meeting at Pottstown United Brewing Company after the walk to celebrate Paul's retirement from the Board and Mike Stokes' retirement from the County. An invitation will be sent to Paul after the day's schedule is confirmed.

During the discussion about the Pottstown site visit, Henry Stroud mentioned an art mural "rug" that is proposed to be installed on a section of trail in Pottstown's Riverfront Park. The Board would like to discuss opportunities to incorporate art on the trail at a future meeting.

The next Board meeting will be held on Thursday, March 28 beginning at 4:00 pm. Reorganization of the Board will take place at this meeting. The meeting announcement will highlight that the meeting will take place on a Thursday.

Public Comment

Phil Smith indicated support for the plan and commented on the importance of building public support, referencing the effort that was made to overcome significant opposition to the plan.

Bruce Reed related that the alternate site being considered for development by the Lower Merion School District has gardens that were designed by Frederick Law Olmstead. The property owner is considering reconfiguring the property's existing conservation easement to protect the gardens.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 pm.