

MONTGOMERY COUNTY OPEN SPACE BOARD

May 22, 2019

**Montgomery County Planning Commission
Norristown, PA**

Adopted September 16, 2019

Board Members Present

Kim Sheppard, Vice Chair
Michael Stokes
Mark Vasoli

Staff Present

Jody Holton, Director
Henry Stroud, Section Chief
Donna Fabry, Senior Open Space Planner

Other Attendees

Barb McMonagle, Salford Open Space Committee Chair
Phil Smith, Lower Frederick Township resident

Welcome

Henry Stroud welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Jody Holton updated the Board about press coverage on recent events that occurred on May 17, including county staff that participated in Bike to Work Day on May 17 and Governor Wolf's press conference at the Trail Junction Center in Norristown to highlight the Restore PA Initiative.

Approval of the March 28, 2019 Minutes

Michael Stokes moved to approve the minutes as presented. Mark Vasoli seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Trail and Open Space Projects Updates

Swamp Creek Greenway – A final draft of feasibility study is completed, and will be distributed to the study steering committee next week. A steering committee meeting will be held June 7 at the Limerick Township municipal building to get feedback from the committee and to provide updates on the county's activities in the Swamp Creek corridor, namely the Girl Scout Camp property. Henry anticipates submitting the study to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) by the grant deadline date of June 30. Henry mentioned that the Parks Department has advertised a bid for repair of the Old Neiffer Road bridge. Phil Smith commented that the second phase of the Sunrise Mill restoration is expected to be put out for bid the last week of September.

Open Space Acquisitions Update

Camp Laughing Waters (Lower Frederick Township) – Henry Stroud and Donna Fabry attended an event hosted by the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania on May 2 to showcase Camp Laughing Waters to DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn. Attendees included: Babette Racca of the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania; Drew Gilchrist, DCNR Regional Advisor; Jackie Tallon, Upper Frederick Township Supervisor; Ross Snook, New Hanover Township Supervisor, and Peter Williamson (Executive Director), Peter Hausmann (Board Chair) and Patrick Gardner (Project Manager) from Natural Lands; and Carol DeWolf of Schuylkill Highlands.

Henry confirmed that the grant application to DCNR was submitted. Henry will be leading the county's effort to secure additional funding towards the cost of the conservation easement between now and September. The county intends to apply for \$250,000 from the state Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)/Commonwealth Finance Agency's Greenways, Trails and Recreation Programs (GTRP) grant program. Applications are due May 31. Henry is planning to attend the New Hanover Township supervisors meeting on June 6 to request funding support from the township in support of the project.

Mark Vasoli moved that the Open Space Board recommends that MCPC apply to DCED for the GTRP grant application. Michael Stokes seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Henry shared that Patrick Gardner will be leaving Natural Lands, but that he will assist with preparing the grant application. Patrick has accepted as position with the Trust for Public Land in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

DiDomizio Property (Salford Township) – Henry Stroud and Barb McMonagle presented an overview of the 9.3-acre parcel adjacent to the White's Mill Preserve property owned by the county. Salford Township is seeking funding of up to \$90,000 from county open space funds to acquire the parcel, which would be owned and maintained by the township. The township had originally requested funding through the Montco 2040 Implementation Grant Program.

Michael Stokes moved to recommend using up to \$90,000 of county open space funds to enable the township to acquire the property. Kim Sheppard seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Reynolds Property (Lower Frederick Township) – Donna Fabry presented an overview about the 4.5-acre property located along the Perkiomen Creek in Spring Mount. The Board discussed the value of acquiring a property that is located in the floodway and the potential of making a local trail connection from an existing high-density neighborhood to Foy Park. Phil Smith stated that the township had applied for, but did not receive, Montco 2040 Implementation funding for this local trail connection. Kim Sheppard commented on the value of preserving habitat. Michael Stokes commented that the county does not want to take ownership of a house. The group discussed alternatives for subdividing the home from the property, and that a mechanism would be needed to enable the owner of the house to have access to the creek. Phil commented that the township has not seen a presentation about the

property, but that a conversation would be welcome. Jody Holton offered that the county could reach out to the township.

Marshall Property (Lower Frederick Township) – Henry Stroud stated that this property was not included as part of the DCNR grant application. Natural Lands currently holds a conservation easement on a portion of this property. Natural Lands would continue to perform easement inspections if the county acquires the property. Henry is talking with the county's Department of Assets and Infrastructure about accepting the donation of the entire property.

Kehs Property (Lower Frederick Township) – The appraisal for fee simple acquisition of 4.6 acres of the rear of the property, including the dam, and a trail easement along Spring Mount Road, values the property at \$184,000 (~\$40,000 per acre). This value seems to be driven by the parcel being zoned for commercial use and frontage along Route 29. The Board instructed Henry to contact Kevin Kehs, the property owner, about negotiating a lower price.

Recent and Upcoming Events

Jody Holton and Henry Stroud met with Josh Stein and Abington Township officials to look at a potential connection to the Pennypack Trail from Moreland Road near Huntingdon Pike.

The Mid-State Trail was named Pennsylvania's Trail of the Year. Henry will attend the event to celebrate this designation.

Lower Merion Conservancy's annual gala will be held May 29.

The Pennsylvania Trails Summit is being held September 22 through 24 in Shippensburg. Henry and Donna will attend. Donna and Rachel Hendricks from the county conservation district are presenting a session about stormwater management considerations for trail design.

The Audubon Center is holding a ribbon cutting for its new building on June 4.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna Fabry