

MONTGOMERY COUNTY OPEN SPACE BOARD

September 16, 2019
Montgomery County Planning Commission
Norristown, PA

MINUTES

Board Members Present

Bruce Reed, Chair
Kim Sheppard, Vice Chair
Gail Farmer
Michael Stokes
Mark Vasoli

Staff Present

Jody Holton, Director
Henry Stroud, Section Chief
Donna Fabry, Senior Open Space Planner
Ellen Miramontes, Open Space Planner
John Marlatt, Assistant Solicitor

Other Attendees

Dulcie Flaharty
Phil Smith

Welcome

Henry Stroud welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Open Space Board Changes

Jody Holton introduced Gail Farmer to the board. Gail has been the executive director of the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association for three years, and is a resident of Springfield Township.

MCPC Staff Changes

Henry Stroud announced that he has accepted a position with the Bend, Oregon Parks and Recreation Special District. His last day with MCPC will be Friday, September 20.

Henry introduced Ellen Miramontes, open space planner, who joined MCPC on August 12. Ellen brings experience as a planner and landscape architect working on public access initiatives and other projects in the San Francisco Bay area. Ellen and her family relocated to Plymouth Township three years ago.

Approval of the May 22, 2019 Minutes

Kim Sheppard moved to approve the minutes as presented. Michael Stokes seconded the motion. Bruce Reed abstained, as he had not been in attendance. The motion carried unanimously.

Sunrise Mill Restoration Projects

Old Neiffer Road Bridge Restoration – Parks, Trails and Historic Sites (PTHS) has hired Gannett Fleming to design restoration plans for the bridge, which was built in 1845 and rebuilt in 1967. The project started last month and is expected to take one year to complete. Once design is complete, the county will put the project out to bid for construction. It is unclear if the bridge will be stabilized until construction can begin.

Timber Framers Guild Workshop – PTHS has teamed up with the Timber Framers Guild, a national organization, to rebuild the historic sash mill, which produced the lumber for the barns located on-site. Volunteers from the guild will be working at Pennypacker Mills to cut and stage the timber framing, which will be transported to the Sunrise Mill property for assembly. This project will take place during the last week of September and the first week of October. Other improvements to the Sunrise Mill site include the recently completed rehabilitation of the exterior of the grist mill on-site and re-shingling of the pole barn. The second phase of the Sunrise Mill restoration is expected to be put out for bid the last week of September.

Trail Projects Updates

Sunrise Trail & Swamp Creek Greenway Feasibility Study – Henry Stroud reported that the study is completed, and was accepted by the county commissioners on August 8.

Henry Stroud reported on the status of the three active trail projects:

- *Chester Valley Trail* – The design phase is completed. We are awaiting final right-of-way clearance, and are anticipating construction to start in early 2020. Because this is a federally funded project, construction of the four-mile section is being coordinated through PennDOT. The construction costs are approximately \$15 million.
- *Pennypack Trail* – The design of the 0.7-mile extension of the Pennypack Trail from Byberry Road to County Line Road is completed. We are awaiting the final approval from PennDOT on the crossing at Byberry Road and from Norfolk Southern on the canopy structure. The mid-block crossing is expected to go out to bid by the end of the year.
- *Erdenheim Farm Trail* – The project remains at 90% design. We are awaiting the receipt of updated stormwater management plans that incorporates the findings of the infiltration testing that was completed during the summer. Also related to this project is the floodwall that will be constructed on private property on West Valley Green Road, as required by FEMA in order to acquire the permit for the bridge crossing of the Wissahickon Creek. The flood mitigation work is anticipated to be put out for rebid in October and will include alternatives to the original design. Work is underway by Whitmarsh Township on the roadway improvements at the intersection of Stenton Avenue, Flourtown Road and West Valley Green Road.

Upcoming Projects – Henry Stroud identified that the following projects will be put out to bid in the near future:

- *Design of the Schuylkill River Trail connection in Lower Pottsgrove*, which will connect the existing sidepath along Industrial Boulevard to the Route 422 bridge crossing over the Schuylkill River;
- *Cross County Trail and Wissahickon Trail Feasibility Study* – the study will look at two sections:
 - Crossing over Germantown Pike at Chemical Road – This study, which was a recommendation in the original Cross County Trail feasibility study, will include preliminary engineering to determine cost and feasibility of a bridge crossing;
 - Connection from Forbidden Drive to Morris Arboretum – The county has funding from DVRPC to look at formalizing this connection. Kim Sheppard inquired about specific options that are being analyzed. Henry identified potential opportunities as being a reconfiguration of the parking lot between Bruno’s and the Cedars House Café or traversing Harper’s Meadows to connect to the intersection of Germantown Avenue/Pike and Northwestern Avenue, and evaluating a connection through Chestnut Hill College.
- *Norristown Trail Junction Center* – Ellen Miramontes stated that an RFP will be issued soon for architectural and design services for the freight station building at the corner of Lafayette and DeKalb Streets. Ellen presented an overview of the history of plans and studies that have been completed for the site, along with a virtual tour of the site, which highlighted the landscaping improvements and amphitheater steps that have been installed. Ellen identified the following potential services for trail users to be considered: bathrooms, bike racks, storage for PTHS, flexible community space, and interpretive materials. The design principles for this project are sustainable design, universal design and historic character, as the building was constructed in 1934 for the Pennsylvania Railroad.
- *Schuylkill River Trail Mural* – The site for the mural is the retaining wall that extends from the rear of the trail junction center site along the trail for approximately 280 feet. The height of the wall ranges from 3 feet to 10 feet. Ellen is meeting with local organizations that have completed mural projects, including Mural Arts Philadelphia; Schuylkill River Greenways, regarding their mural rug project in Pottstown; and Kay Sykora of the Manayunk Development Corporation, who was involved with the murals along the Schuylkill River Trail in Manayunk. Community involvement will be emphasized in the project.
- *Trail Access, Diversity & Awareness Plan* – Donna Fabry presented an overview of the plan background, study areas, goals and outreach activities to date. To date, the study

team has completed a literature review, an existing conditions report, three rounds of interviews for each study area, and attended Norristown Night Out, as well as several other events to survey participants about trail usage on the Schuylkill River Trail. Upcoming events include a booth at Lorimer Park at the end of September, a focus group meeting for Norristown stakeholders on October 1, and a booth at Pottstown's Carousel of Flavor event on October 20. The plan is anticipated to be completed in June 2020, and a Planning Smarter event will be held in Fall 2020.

Open Space Projects Updates

Banks and Oxychem Properties (Lower Pottsgrove Township) – Donna Fabry reported that the county acquired the Banks property on July 31. At the beginning of September, the solicitor's office sent a letter to Michael Hilfinger, Real Estate Manager for Oxychem, stating the county's interest in acquiring the property. John Marlatt stated that there has been no response to date.

Marshall Property (Lower Frederick Township) – Donna Fabry stated that Judy Marshall has been in Maine during the summer and is expected to return to the area in October. It is anticipated that the paperwork for the property donation will be completed before the end of the year.

Kehs Property (Lower Frederick Township) – Donna Fabry met with Jessica Kasmari, of the state Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Southeast Region Bureau of Clean Water regarding an active enforcement action related to underground storage tanks that had been removed from the property in 1993. Kevin Kehs has contracted to have a two-phase assessment to identify any soil or groundwater contamination. The test results are expected to be available before the end of the year.

Murray Property (Schwenksville Borough) – Henry Stroud instructed Donna Fabry to develop an estimate of the costs for asbestos testing and demolition of the existing two-story residence.

Upcoming Events

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

The annual Pennsylvania Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) conference will be held in Lower Merion Township on May 2, 2020. This event is open to all municipalities that have EACs or are interested in developing an EAC.

Gail Farmer mentioned that the annual "Walk the Wissahickon" event is coming up.

The board thanked Henry for his service.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna Fabry