

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY OPEN SPACE BOARD**

**October 23, 2019**

**Montgomery County Planning Commission**

**Norristown, PA**

**Adopted December 4, 2019**

---

**Board Members Present**

Kim Sheppard, Vice Chair

Gail Farmer

Michael Stokes

Mark Vasoli

**Staff Present**

Jody Holton, Director

Donna Fabry, Senior Open Space Planner

Ellen Miramontes, Open Space Planner II

Brian Olszak, Senior Open Space Planner

John Marlatt, Assistant Solicitor

**Other Attendees**

Ryan Beltz, Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy Executive Director

Ted Poatsy, Upper Salford Township Supervisor

**Welcome**

Jody Holton welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**MCPC Staff Changes**

Jody introduced Brian Olszak who will transition from his role as a Senior Community Planner to the Trails and Open Space Section over the next few months. Brian has been a planner at MCPC since 2014. Brian shared that he was excited to make this shift given his interest in open space conservation and lifelong fondness for the outdoors. Additionally, he noted that he'd grown up as a Boy Scout enjoying lots of hiking and had earned his Eagle Scout Award.

Jody also announced that the vacant Trails and Open Space Section Chief role would soon be posted.

**Approval of the September 16, 2019 Minutes**

Kim Sheppard moved to approve the minutes as presented. Michael Stokes seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**Guest Presentations**

*4891 Garges Road, Lower Salford and Skippack Townships*

This presentation was canceled and will be rescheduled for a future Open Space Board meeting.

*Wolford Road Lot Project, Upper Salford Township*

Jody introduced Ted Poatsy who is a supervisor for Upper Salford Township and shared that Ted had taken her and Ellen Miramontes on a tour of the Wolford Road Lot and the surrounding area a few weeks prior.

Ted explained that he has lived in Upper Salford his whole life and has been involved in open space preservation in the township over the last several decades. He went on to provide a brief history of open space preservation beginning with the first major open space, Upper Salford Park, which is a 27-acre park that was donated to the township in 1993. He then described the background and context surrounding the 13-acre Wolford Road Lot for which the township is seeking county open space funds to assist with purchasing.

Currently the Folk Song Society owns the lot and uses it as a parking lot for four days each year during the Philadelphia Folk Festival. During the rest of the year it is farmed for hay and the parking lot roads are used as public walking trails that connect with the Upper Salford Park. For the last 15 years the township has been leasing the property for one dollar per year to make the trails available to the public. A few years ago the township offered to pave the parking lot roads after a particularly muddy festival in order to improve access for both parking during the festival and also for use as walking trails during the remainder of the year. This multi-use arrangement for the property has worked well over the years but now the Folk Song Society is struggling financially and needs to liquidate assets. Although the festival draws 15-20,000 attendees each year and is the largest event in Montgomery County, it does not receive adequate sponsorships and is struggling to compete with other similar events in the region.

Ted continued on to explain how the Wolford Road Lot fits within the context of existing and planned open space and trails. He shared a map showing Rahmer Park, Salfordville Park, Upper Salford Park, and a trail easement the township recently purchased in order to connect with Spring Mountain. He further explained the joint preservation and trail planning efforts on Spring Mountain carried out by Upper Salford, Schwenksville and Lower Frederick Townships. He pointed out how the walking trails on the Wolford Road Lot would connect to the Folk Festival, Upper Salford Park, Salfordville Park, and eventually to Spring Mountain and beyond to Schwenksville and the Perkiomen Trail.

Mark Vasoli asked about the distance to Salfordville Park and the width of the existing walking trail to which Ted replied that the distance is about one mile and the trail is ten feet wide.

Jody stated that the Wolford Road Lot already feels like a part of the township's park and while the property does not rate highly in terms of its natural resources inventory, it does serve as an important trail connector and functions to promote better health in the community. Michael Stokes commented that Spring Mountain is a high priority area for the natural resources inventory.

Kim Sheppard asked whether the property would remain in agricultural use. Ted explained that currently the property has an Act 319 agreement and while the township would likely leave it in agricultural use they would make minimal improvements such as adding a split-rail fence and a line of trees along its perimeter to match the appearance of Upper Salford Park. If additional soccer fields were needed in the future, the township may consider that and subsequently remove it from agricultural use.

Michael explained that Upper Salford Park is the best park to be found in the surrounding area and, as a result, functions like a regional park.

Gail Farmer asked whether the lot is within the Perkiomen watershed and, if so, whether the township had discussed the property with the Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy. Ted responded affirmatively to both questions.

Jody explained that based information Ted had provided, the property would likely cost \$240,000 with ten percent down. And while the property fits in well with the township's open space network, the township had not been prepared to acquire it this year.

Kim asked whether the Folk Festival planned to continue and, if so, where would attendees park if this property was sold. Ted explained that the festival is in its 58<sup>th</sup> year (it is older than Woodstock) and plans to continue. As part of an agreement of sale, the township would agree to continue to allow for festival parking each year.

Jody explained that the purpose of this presentation was to inform the Board about the property and its potential acquisition and that the Board would vote at a future meeting regarding the use of county open space funds.

### **Trail Projects Update**

Donna Fabry reported that the following two Requests for Proposals had been advertised and bids were expected to be received on November 8, 2019:

- *Schuylkill River Trail Connector to US Route 422 Design*
- *Wissahickon and Cross County Trail Feasibility Studies*

### **Open Space Acquisition Update**

#### *Murray Property*

Jody explained that Donna is bringing the proposed acquisition of the Murray Property located at 51 Park Road in Schwenksville Borough to the Board for action. She explained that the proposal is to purchase the property, remove the existing house, and reforest the land as natural open space. Donna stated that the property is located in the county's park expansion area and is wholly situated within the floodway. The proposed cost to acquire the property is \$165,000.

Mark asked what the estimate was for removing asbestos if it were found. Donna explained that while not much asbestos was expected to be found, the testing would be performed as a precaution and removal costs would be minimal if required.

Kim asked whether FEMA funds could be used to purchase the property since it is located within the floodplain. Michael explained that the county had attempted to do this with prior property owners but were never successful since the process with FEMA requires that the property owners must agree to participate and they did not.

Jody commented that since the property does not have any type of septic system, its sewage currently goes directly into the creek and diminishes water quality.

**BOARD ACTION:**

*Mark Vasoli motioned for the Board to recommend to the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners that the property be purchased and remediated. Michael Stokes seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.*

**Upcoming Events**

Jody reviewed recent and upcoming events including the Newtown Rail Trail Groundbreaking, the Montgomery Awards, and the Pennsylvania American Planning Association awards to Rick Collier for his distinguished service and to Montgomery County for its 2018 Bike Montco plan.

Donna shared about a recent public outreach event in Pottstown related the Trail Access, Diversity, and Awareness Study.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:49 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ellen Miramontes