

**WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP
PARK & RECREATION BOARD MEETING
MILES PARK - PARKS AND RECREATION BUILDING
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1ST, 2022 AT 7:00 PM**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Joanne Crawford, Kevin Kissling, Tom Manley (via phone), Jim Convey

LIAISONS PRESENT:

Laura Boyle Nester (BOS), Joy O'Brien (WAC), Chris Epstein (CSD)

TWP. STAFF PRESENT:

Tom Blomstrom (*P&R Director*), Robert Vandegrift (*P&R – Minutes*)

ALSO PRESENT:

Megan Hector (Public), Judy Goldstein, Emily Paskewicz, Bob Thomas, and Brian Williams (Public)

1) CALL TO ORDER

- a. The Whitemarsh Township Park & Recreation Board Meeting was called to order on Tuesday, February 1st, 2022, at 7:04 pm, by Joanne Crawford.

2) PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3) ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a. Reappointments
 - i. Terry Ferris – Decided to not seek reappointment.
- b. Tom Blomstrom alerted the Parks and Recreation Board to the attendance of Megan Hector who was invited by Laura Boyle-Nester.

4) RE-ORGANIZATION

- a. Selection of a Chairperson
 - i. Jim Convey nominated Joanne Crawford and Kevin Kissling seconded. No other nominations were made. Motion passed unanimously.
- b. Selection of a Vice-Chairperson
 - i. Jim Convey nominated Kevin Kissling as Vice-Chair and Joanne Crawford seconded. No other nominations were made. Motion passed unanimously.
- c. Parks and Recreation Board Member List
 - i. If you have updates, please let us know.
 - (a) Kevin Kissling – Home number can be removed.
 - ii. No other changes needed. Kevin Kissling motioned to accept; Tom Manley seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
- d. List of 2022 Meeting Dates – meetings are at Koontz Park on Harts Ln. unless otherwise mentioned.
 - i. Tuesday, February 1st – Reorganization Meeting
 - ii. Tuesday, April 5th – Miles Park Parks and Recreation Building
 - iii. Tuesday, June 7th
 - iv. Tuesday, August 2nd
 - v. Tuesday, October 4th
 - vi. Tuesday, December 6th

5) APPROVAL OF THE DECEMBER 7th, 2021 MEETING MINUTES

- a. The December 7th minutes were motioned for acceptance by Tom Manley and was seconded by Kevin Kissling. Motion passed unanimously.

6) PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD LIAISON – COMMITTEE REPORTS

- a. Miracle-Nature Trail (MNT) Steering Committee (Liaison: Joanne Crawford)
 - i. Miracle-Nature Trail Presentation tonight, will be touched on then.
- b. Spring Mill Study Steering Committee (Liaison: Kevin Kissling)
 - i. Kevin Kissling missed the most recent meeting but will share the meeting minutes with group in meeting minutes.
- c. Open Space Committee (Liaison: Tom Manley)
 - i. Tom Manley mentioned that there have been no meetings since December, but they were hoping to meet later in February. New member, Steve Malloy will be joining the group on account of Kristyn Vandegrift's departure.

Motion to accept Board Sub-Committee reports made by Kevin Kissling and was seconded by Jim Convey. Motion passed unanimously.

7) WHITEMARSH ART CENTER REPORT

- a. Joy O'Brien presented the Whitemarsh Art Center (WAC) report and highlighted the following items from the report:
 - i. New WAC Director of Development, Allison Boyle was unable to attend the meeting.
 - (a) Excited that she joined the Art Center as Allison has a lot of non-profit experience, which will help with the development. First goal is to update the marketing plan.
 - (b) Also noted the promotion of Kelly Bruce to Director of Operations. Also noted both director positions are part-time roles that combine to meet the needs of a full-time Executive Director.
 - ii. January Art Center classes began after having been delayed a week following the COVID surge. Vaccines are required of all WAC students over 18 and they have not experienced any push back yet, as there is also an online option for classes.

Motion to accept made by Tom Manley and was seconded by Jim Convey. Motion passed unanimously.

8) PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- a. Whitemarsh Township Parks & Recreation Director, Tom Blomstrom, presented the report, as submitted.
 - i. Tom gave thanks to Chris Epstein for her attendance tonight given busy CSD Board schedule.
 - ii. MLK Jr. Clothing Drive went well, as we collected over 6,000 pounds of clothing in 547 bags. Total amount earned from donation was \$960.00 which will be go towards Township Day and Colonial Neighborhood Council.
 - iii. The McSnowflake's are out in the parks again this February. Crystal joined Magic today as the lovebirds were reunited!
 - iv. A new friend may be joining us soon, as we have a groundhog joining our team for Groundhog Day Whitemarsh Will.
 - v. Our mini-event Valenteenie's Day is approaching on February 14th.
 - vi. Spring Shredding Day is set for March 5th, 2022 at the Miles Park Lower Lot 8am – Noon. We'll be joined by Whitemarsh Community Ambulance as our partner in the event.

- vii. Shamrocks in the Park is the next community engagement event and starts in March.
- viii. Upcoming mini-event Teenie Shamrock scheduled for March 10th at the Cedar Grove Barn.
- ix. We're excited for the spring return of our Eat and Enjoy Social Series on March 17th at the Miles Park Building.
- x. Overview of various email engagement and their topics, including Staycation, Nature's Touch, Health Hub, and other local promotions. Eblasts upcoming for Black History Month throughout this month.
- xi. Our Recreator went out in early December. Took in \$132,000 in December alone for our 2022 programs. Enrollment is off the charts at Cedar Grove Summer Camp and we're half-filled at Miles Park Summer Camp.
 - (a) Kevin Kissling asked if the allotted attendance will differ from last year. Tom Blomstrom answered that we're going in with a limit, but it will be flexible and increase depending on the COVID situation. 100 at Miles Park summer camp and 50 at Cedar Grove summer camp.
- xii. We bought and installed equipment for live broadcasting the fitness classes at Koontz Park and the dance classes.
- xiii. Currently searching for part-time summer camp positions and park attendants. We're also searching for the Recreation Services Associate full-time position and applications just closed this past Friday.
- xiv. Shout-out to the Community Holiday decorations set up by Bill Koelewyn and Bob Puksta.
- xv. Franco Cappabianca joined our Parks and Recreation Team in December as the full-time Facility Maintenance Manager.
- xvi. Fun Club is running at Whitemarsh Elementary School. Shout-out to the CSD and WES for being easy to work with.
- xvii. Dance programs are on hiatus for a month as the instructor is dealing with a family matter.
- xviii. Parent's Night Out continues to do well.
- xix. Afternoon Games were postponed to the beginning of the month due to the COVID situation, and there were no complaints.
- xx. Gingerbread Party had 65 attendees. Emily does a great job each year.
- xxi. Holiday Lights had lower numbers but was still a success and enjoyed by the community.
- xxii. The upcoming Eat and Enjoy Social Series dates are March 17th and we have the King Brothers performing, while on May 19th the performer will be Stephen DiJoseph.
- xxiii. Miracle Nature Trail presentation is upcoming after the Director's Report.
- xxiv. We are happy to announce that we received a grant from DCNR for \$219,000 as they are matching the grant from before. This will help progress Miles Park project. A nice large project that will help the pavilion, basketball court, help make the playground more accessible and will also help with stormwater management.
 - (a) Kevin Kissling asked if there was a timeline for the grant. Tom Blomstrom answered that he had a phone call about the grant acceptance and talked with the engineers following the grant. We have until 2025 to complete. Also thank you to Val at Gilmore.
- xxv. Thank you to the tree tenders for the tree plantings across our parks.
- xxvi. Recreator is online and accessible to all.
- xxvii. Included in the packet is the 2022 Fee Schedule. Note that the cost recovery model dictates that programs cover their own costs. Subsidized programs include Senior events, CEP and Nature Events – and large community events (Township Day/4th of July Parade).
- xxviii. Partnership and Sponsorship Packet is also included. Feel free to pass along to anyone you know who may be interested, and we'll work with them to build a good relationship.

No further questions from the Board. Kevin Kissling motioned to accept the Director's Report. Jim Convey seconds. The report was accepted unanimously.

b. NEW BUSINESS

- i. Miracle-Nature Trail Presentation by Judy Goldstein and Emily Paskewicz from Gilmore and Associates, as well as Trail architect and historian Bob Thomas.
 - (a) The presentation follows the Miracle-Nature Trail Presentation unless otherwise noted below.
 - (b) Judy Goldstein started off the presentation with the following slides:
 - (i) Project Goals
 - (ii) Project Purpose
 - (iii) Project Location – Approximately a mile long stretch from Butler Pike to Hector St. in the PECO Right of Way.
 - (iv) The Miracle-Nature Concept – The trail will consist of two segments, the Miracle Segment from Butler Pike to Wells St. and the Nature Segment from Wells St. to Hector St.
 - (v) The Miracle Concept embodies the Whitemarsh and Parks and Recreation beliefs.
 - (vi) The Nature Concept is focused on working with wildlife and nature. We even had encounters with animals – deer and foxes – during the public walkthrough.
 - (vii) Steering Committee Members – The members have all been active in the process in their own way. We’ve had great attendance at the meetings.
 - (viii) Project Timeline – The Miracle-Nature trail process has been awesome. The township has received kudos from DCNR and other townships for the webpage, as others strive for similar pages. You can also see the draft report online, as the physical book is several inches thick.
 - (c) Bob Thomas followed Judy’s portion with some history of the area.
 - (i) Tom Blomstrom introduced him and noted that Bob is renowned and has worked on other local trails in the past.
 - (ii) Project Background and History – There’s a need for connections between trails as it opens a host of benefits. These benefits can be seen on the Appalachian Trail, as it connects a lot of places and opens additional business opportunities. The utility corridor was identified as there would be a lot of connections to local housing areas and county trails. The connections open up connections to a number of business opportunities.
 - (d) Emily Paskewicz followed Bob’s portion with the following.
 - (i) Site Analysis – Opportunities and Constraints – This map shows the utility corridor’s important connector. We’ve analyzed the various opportunities and constraints of the trail. The right of way is owned by PECO, which is a constraint to the trail. While designing, we followed their guidelines, which you can see marked off on the map with red circles. From here, Emily went through the various information on the map.
 - (ii) Key PECO Guidelines – These guidelines were used when designing the trail as presented.
 - (iii) Environmental Considerations – This point was a big one from the community as we received the feedback from the public through the survey and the public meetings. The recommended trail alignment aims to minimize disturbing nature areas to also avoid disturbing the local wildlife. One of the biggest public worries was stormwater maintenance and how the implementation of the trail would impact stormwater.
 - (iv) Neighbors’/Community Feedback – A public focus group was held in August at Cedar Grove Barn with local neighbors to the project. The major themes from the feedback session included:
 - (i) Alignment – This is a major consideration due to the number of properties the trail will be behind.
 - (ii) Buffering – The amount of room between the trail and the local properties.

- (iii) Lighting – There will only be lighting where it is deemed necessary and currently there are no lights proposed.
- (iv) Security – The community is worried about illegal activity being promoted by a trail by their house.
- (v) Preserving the Natural Character of the Site – A lot of the township has been developed, so this is one of the few remaining untouched areas in the township.
- (vi) Kevin Kissling asked if there had been talks with Township Police regarding security. Emily answered that they were involved and interviewed during the process, while Tom Blomstrom followed up by saying that the trail will be included in the Township park system and will be monitored as other parks are monitored. Bob Thomas followed up by stating that there would be accessibility for emergency personnel.
- (v) Overall Study Findings
- (vi) Recommended Alignment – Butler Pike to Wells St. keep the trail on the western side with a 60-foot buffer from residential areas. A proposed parking lot on Bulter was alluded to and was a good thing to address neighbor parking concerns. There are also the following proposed features: a gathering area at Sherry Lake overlook, crossing at Cedar Grove Park, switchbacks along the trail, a second gathering area overlooking the river and sidewalks/crosswalks at the Hector St. exit.
- (vii) PECO Right of Way
- (viii) Budgetary Cost and Funding
- (e) Judy Goldstein took over the presentation once again at this time.
 - (i) Key Implementation Steps –
 - (i) Kevin Kissling asked if Gilmore and Associates have worked with PECO in the past and how involved they are in the planning process. Judy Goldstein answered that they have. Gilmore and Associates noted PECO will be an active partner in the process.
 - (ii) Laura Boyle Nester asked what the current vibe from PECO is in regard to the project. Judy answered that it seems in flux currently. They're worried about their goals of providing power to the public firstly. PECO is rethinking and restudying their process. The feasibility study needs to be concluded to then begin work with PECO to figure out the next steps.
 - (ii) Trail Benefits
 - (iii) Project Timeline
 - (iv) Feedback
 - (i) Laura Boyle Nester led off the feedback period by asking where the Sierra Club easement would be. Bob Thomas replied that it would be under the powerlines and above River Rd, but not in this section or feasibility study.
 - (ii) Chris Epstein inquired if there would be separate sections of the trail, such as specific paths for biking and another for walking. Judy Goldstein answered that it would be a multi-use trail, but that it would have to be analyzed more at various spots. Chris followed the answer up by referencing the problems the Schuylkill River Trail has with width and why that makes it a concern.
 - (iii) Kevin Kissling inquired if there were any other opportunities for North/South connections. Judy Goldstein let him know that the connection to Cedar Grove Park is imperative for the restrooms there. Tom Blomstrom added that it would also connect to Wells St. Open Space, as well as Spring Mill County Park, which could help increase the usage of that park.
 - (iv) Kevin Kissling asked if the team thought there would be increased traffic issues at the parking sites. Judy Goldstein answered that much work and approvals are needed before progressing on the parking lot at Butler.

- (v) Kevin Kissling asked what the recurring concerns from the public were. Judy Goldstein said the biggest concern seemed to be the buffer between the public's property and the trail. The design recommendations for the trail will be analyzed and incorporated by the team when the next step in the process is taken. Environmental items were also a concern that was addressed noting limited changes to the current landscape. Both Judy Goldstein and Tom Blomstrom acknowledged that it was great to get the public feedback and that it was important to get the feedback at this stage of the process.
- (f) Following the public comments, which can be seen below in 9(a), Laura Boyle Nester thanked the Gilmore team for their work on this project and the Washington St. process. A motion to accept the study and move it to the Board of Supervisors was made by Tom Manley and was seconded by Kevin Kissling. The study was accepted unanimously and recommended to move to the Board of Supervisor's for adoption.

c. OLD BUSINESS

9) COMMUNITY MEMBER COMMENTS

- a. Brian Williams of 249 Hillcrest Ave. thanked the team for the presentation and their work. He hopes that more buffering between the community properties and the trail can be added and that the trail can be laid as far east on the property as possible. He enjoys seeing the wildlife he can see in his backyard and doesn't want that disrupted by the trail. Tom Blomstrom responded that the group is working with the public and will be the biggest advocate for their desires. We know the preferred route and will pitch that as we move along, but there will also be requirements that need to be followed . Judy Goldstein inquired if Brian believed his concerns have been heard, which he confirmed.

10) BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

- a. Kevin Kissling inquired about the Township's electric vehicle charging stations. Tom Blomstrom responded that Whitemarsh currently has them at Miles Park, the Township Building and at Public Works. Kevin wondered if any other places were under plans to receive stations. Laura Boyle Nester stated that we could get the numbers on the charging stations usage from Jack Fields or Sean Halbom. Kevin Kissling said that 5 to 7 year projections show increased demand for the charging stations and it is something to keep an eye on.

11) ADJOURNMENT

- a. Jim Convey made a motion to adjourn, Tom Manley seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:36pm, unanimously.
- b. The next Park and Recreation Board Meeting will take place on April 5th and the meeting will be at the Miles Park - Parks and Recreation Building.