



MP3 COG Board
Wednesday, May 22, 2024
6:00 PM
Alsace Township Municipal Bldg.

Members: –J. Moore (Alsace Twp), L. Kelleher (Reading), R. Nunez alternate for J. Baez, Jr. (Reading), K. Barnhardt (County), A. Sellers (Lower Alsace), K. Mallatratt (Alsace) – in person.

Members absent: B. Petrov (Mt. Penn), T. Goodman (Mt. Penn), L. Olsen (County), D. Pottiger (Lower Alsace)

Others attending: K. Boyd (Natural Lands), B. Lederer and L. Falk (County Parks) – in person and D. Anspach (City Capital Projects Mgr) - virtually

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Barnhardt called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm. He announced that a quorum is present. He welcomed Mr. Nunez who was appointed by City Council as an alternate to represent Reading when Mr. Baez is unavailable.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Barnhardt opened the floor for public comment. No one present expressed the desire to comment. The public comment period was closed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES & AGENDA

Mr. Barnhardt noted the need to consider the minutes from the March 2024 meeting and the agenda for this meeting.

The March meeting minutes and May 22nd agenda were approved by acclamation.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Mr. Moore presented the January/February Treasurer's Report - the MP3 bank account has a balance of \$54,808.51 after the reimbursement to Ms. Adams for the food/beverages provided to the musicians at the November concert.

Mr. Moore noted the receipt of an unpaid bill from Berks Arts in the amount of \$4,100 for expenses associated with the fall concert.

Ms. Mallatratt moved, seconded by Ms. Kelleher, to ratify the reimbursement of \$476.66 to Ms. Adams for the food/beverages for the musicians at the November concert. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Kelleher moved, seconded by Ms. Mallatratt, to approve the payment of \$4,100 to Berks Arts for expenses associated with the fall concert. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Kelleher moved, seconded by Ms. Mallatratt, to approve the Treasurer's Report. The motion was approved unanimously.

MP3 COG REPORTS AND ACTION ITEMS

A. Natural Lands Stewardship Plan and Trails Feasibility Study – K. Boyd from Natural Lands

Ms. Boyd reviewed the scope of work assigned to Natural Lands for the Feasibility Study. She described the multi-phased process used to gather information from various stakeholders and the public. She stated that the process also included 10 site visits to separately tour and evaluate the trail system and forest (1 site visit remaining). She stated that tonight she will highlight the recommendations made to date.

While there are great trails on Mt. Penn there are erosion issues present due to the increase in severe storms. Ms. Boyd noted that this problem is regional, not local. She explained that the erosion is caused by water runoff and the lack of plantings to catch the runoff. She added that while there is a mature forest canopy, there are very few saplings and understory growth. She noted that the majority of the understory in the forest is composed of invasive species.

Ms. Boyd noted the importance of continuing the deer management program with the USDA. She stated that the oversized population is evident by the severe lack of understory growth and saplings. She stated that many of those who attended the first public meeting agreed with the deer management program. She added that there were a few who balked at the program.

Ms. Boyd described the two public meetings – one in December 2023 and one in May 2024. She stated that the number one issue identified at the December meeting was safety. People noted that while there are events that regularly occur on Mt. Penn those who attend feel unsafe. Other top issues identified were lack of trail maps, lack of sufficient signage, lack of sufficient parking and a multitude of trails that loop together in ways that make them difficult to navigate. Also noted was the differences and conflicts between the groups that use the trail system.

Ms. Boyd briefed the board on the draft recommendations.

- **Trail System**

1. Mr. Tralies from Natural Lands walked 30 miles of trails on Mt. Penn, accompanied by various local representatives who are familiar with the trail system. While many of the trails are in good condition, he found multiple areas with bad erosion. As stated above the erosion is caused by the lack of understory in the forest. He suggests adding swales and native plantings to eliminate the erosion.
2. Develop a trail from City Park to the Pagoda (also in the Mt Penn Preserve Master Plan). While this trail already exists, a trailhead is needed at 14th and Walnut.
3. Stop adding new trails in sensitive areas and eliminate inappropriate trails. Sensitive areas are areas with a good canopy and good native undergrowth. Do not add new trails.

4. Simplify the existing trail system, rename trails and develop a trail map to cure the confusing navigation problems. Mr. Tralies found that many of the trails loop together and cause navigation issues. He also found the names of the trails to be confusing as there are trails that link or loop together that have several different names. Eliminate unnecessary trails and unify the names of the remaining trails.
5. Improve the signage for the trails and parking areas and improve the trail blazing. Also add Mt Penn Preserve signage in key areas.
6. Connect all users of the trail system and identify solutions to resolve the differences and conflicts between the groups.
7. Close Skyline Drive to traffic (also stated in the Mt. Penn Preserve Master Plan).

Ms. Boyd stated that she and Mr. Tralies recently that the gating of Skyline Drive is underway. She described the benefits the closure will have to cure illegal dumping, help improve the health of the mountains and stop other bad behaviors.

- **Forest**

1. Divide the forest into 5 units to aid with management.
2. Sustain/Restore the health of the forest by eliminating the invasive undergrowth and add native plants.
3. Continue and expand the deer management program by adding sharp shooters to increase the thinning of the herd. The lack of native undergrowth and lack of saplings shows that the deer population is too large.
4. Improve the conditions to allow native plants and trees to thrive; diversify the native plants and trees to improve the conditions for wildlife migration; add buffers and saplings
5. Improve habitation, migration and flow corridor – note Mt. Penn’s location in conjunction with the forest landscape in eastern Pennsylvania
6. Avoid harvesting

Mr. Barnhardt stated that improvements to the trail system and to the naming of the trails will be of great assistance to City and County First Responders.

In response to a question from Ms. Mallatratt, Ms. Boyd stated that there are a few areas on Mt Penn that have mature trees and good understory. She noted that the trees in the western area of Mt. Penn (in the area proximate to Oak Lane) are oak trees. The trees in other areas are mixed.

In response to a question from Ms. Sellers, Ms. Boyd stated that the health of the forest can be improved any sustained through tackling problem areas by the landowners and managers individually and collaboratively.

In response to a question from Ms. Sellers, Ms. Boyd stated that to date, she has not come across and single application that is the “silver bullet” for the Emerald ash borer.

Mr. Lederer noted his agreement with taking a collaborative approach to building healthy greenways.

In response to a question from Ms. Sellers, Ms. Boyd stated that Conservation Explorer and Cornell Bird Stations are two agencies that can assist with wildlife management.

Note: The final report will be issued in August. A Special Meeting for a presentation on the report will be required.

B. Closure of Skyline – Duryea Dr to List Road – D. Anspach, City Capital Project Manager

Mr. Anspach gave a presentation on the City's plan to gate off Skyline Drive to through traffic. He stated that the City plans to install gates at List Road and Skyline Drive and Shearer Road and Duryea Drive. He stated that the recommendation to close Skyline Drive is recommended by the Mt. Penn Preserve Master Plan and the Plan being prepared by Natural Lands. He screenshared the sites and photos of the proposed gates. He stated that the gates will be silver so they are very visible at night.

Mr. Anspach explained the materials selected and described how the orientation of the gates will not interfere with any of the vehicle races that occur in this area. The gates will be "embassy" strength level. The gates can be opened and closed via cell access. The gate at List Road will be solar powered and the gate at Shearer Road will receive electricity from a nearby City owned building. The area at List Road will require the addition of guiderails to prevent vehicles from entering the park area during the closed hours. This guiderail is the same type and material that is being considered for the larger project that will span the entire length of Skyline Drive.

Security cameras that will be monitored by the City's VSU (Visual Surveillance Unit) will also be added at the gated areas, two overlooks, three at the Pagoda area and one at the Fire Tower. He noted that there are various issues that need to be worked through such deciding which agencies will have access, how to handle those who become trapped inside when the park closes, etc.

Mr. Anspach stated that the cost for this project is \$97K and the City is covering that cost in full; however, Lower Alsace will need to agree to the project as the gate at List Road is in Lower Alsace Township. He reiterated that the City is paying for this project in full with ARPA funding.

Mr. Anspach stated that currently the park is closed from dawn to dusk but suggests the adoption of a more standardized schedule to aid public education. He suggested closing the park from 10 pm to 7 am.

Mr. Anspach stated that this proposal will be made to City Council and Lower Alsace Township. He stated that the City would like Council, the Lower Alsace Supervisors, and the MP3 to support this project.

Ms. Mallatratt moved, seconded by Mr. Barnhardt, to provide its support for the project and to encourage the City and Lower Alsace to also support the project. The motion was approved unanimously.

C. Master Plan Initiatives that could be linked with events

- 1.11 1.12 Trailhead Improvement at Drenkel Field
- 1.14 1.15 Gravity Sports at Spuhler Lane
- **2.1 Dog Park at Egelman's Park**
- 2.6 2.7 Trailhead Improvements at Mineral Spring Park
- 3.6 3.7 Trail Connection from Antietam Lake to Lower Alsace
- 4.2 4.3 Trailhead Improvements at Rotary Park
- **5.7 5.8 Frisbee Golf Course – 9 holes approx. \$20K**
- 6.13 6.14 Trail Difficulty Standards
- 6.16 6.21 Security Cameras on Mount Penn tied to Police - \$500K budgeted for 5

Capital Project Mgr suggests trail maps/kiosks, trash cans, dog waste stations, etc. can be added to increase interest beyond grading and gravel to get sites more functional rather than trailheads

Ms. Kelleher stated that the Events Committee suggested tying one of the Master Plan Initiatives to the events to help encourage sponsorships. She stated that she reviewed the plan and extracted items that seem doable. She noted that she forgot to add Ziplining at the Gravity Railroad in the Mineral Spring Park area.

The board discussed the listed initiatives. Mr. Anspach stated that the installation of trailheads would cost between \$10-15K each. Frisbee golf was favored by those present for either Mineral Spring Park or Egleman's Park.

Mr. Anspach noted that either location would work well. He described the work at Mineral Spring Park, after the demolition of the hotel. He described the plan to rebuild the damaged pavilion and to add a 2nd pavilion at the remaining foundation of the hotel. He screenshared a Frisbee Golf Goal and stated that it is installed in concrete similar to a flagpole. He added that the design of the goal should not be conducive to vandalism.

Mr. Barnhardt stated that the cost of approximately \$20K should be attainable. Ms. Mallatratt suggested that MP3 funds could cover any shortage.

Ms. Sellers moved, seconded by Ms. Mallatratt, to approve linking the Frisbee Golf initiative at either Egleman's Park or Mineral Spring Park with the MP3 events. The motion was approved unanimously.

E. Update Meeting with Preserve Partners - framework

No update

F. COG Events

- SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 2024 - MOUNTAIN FOLK BLUEGRASS FEST
@ The Reading Liederkrantz up on the Mountain
- SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2024 - BERKS COUNTY ROCK & ROLL HALL OF FAME CONCERT & INDUCTION PARTY

@ The Reading Liederkrantz up on the Mountain

- WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2024 - BERKS BLUES FEST

@ The Reading Liederkrantz up on the Mountain

Ms. Mallatratt stated that the performers are scheduled. She stated that she does not have any update on the sponsorships as she could not attend the last meeting. She inquired if the letters Mr. Baez drafted seeking volunteers gained any support.

Ms. Kelleher was asked to follow up.

Mr. Barnhardt suggested buying golf Frisbees with the MP3 logo to handout or sell at events. All present agreed.

COMMITTEE REPORTS & RECOMMENDATIONS – submission in written form only

- Finance & Capital - none
- Promotions & Marketing - attached to the agenda
- Public Safety & Public Services - none
- Environmental & Land Use Committees - none

WRITTEN REPORTS FROM PRESERVE STAKEHOLDERS

None received.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Nunez noted his support of the MP3's work and efforts.

Ms. Kelleher stated that she cannot attend the July meeting.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 24th at 6 pm at Reading City Hall, Council Chambers.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:20 pm on motion of Mr. Nunez and Mr. Moore, respectively.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher, Secretary

Action Items:

1. Ms. Kelleher to follow-up with Mr. Baez on the letters seeking volunteers