

**WARREN COUNTY
BOARD OF RECREATION COMMISSIONERS**

500 Mt. Pisgah Avenue, PO Box 179

Oxford, NJ 07863

June 14, 2022

Meeting Minutes

CALL TO ORDER: Mr. Helbing called the meeting to order at 5:06 PM, read the Open Public Meeting Notice, Pledge of Allegiance

ROLL CALL

Members Present: John Halmi, Michael Helbing, Charlie Fineran, Ray Tobaygo, Bill Hahn

Staff: Corey Tierney, Elizabeth Roy, Jennifer Kruegel

Public: Tara Mezzanati

MINUTES: May 14, 2022 minutes were reviewed. Mr. Tobaygo motioned, seconded by Mr. Halmi to approve the minutes as presented. Mr. Hann abstained. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Tierney introduced Ms. Mezzanati who came to discuss the 9/11 memorial trail.

Ms. Mezzanati lives in Knowlton Township and discussed a committee that meets in Pennsylvania to go over the advancement of the September 11 National Memorial Trail, which is meant to go from Knowlton to the Delaware Water Gap. She is representing Knowlton Township and approached Commissioner Kern about it going through the Columbia Lake area along the Paulinskill, which was recently reopened. Ms. Mezzanati offered to be a liaison for the county. Commissioner Kern would like to do something to draw attention to the trail. Ms. Mezzanati felt it would make more sense to report to the Board of Recreation than the commissioners as the BOR has more say regarding the trail systems in the area.

Ms. Mezzanati reported that Monroe County is further along and has about 3 miles of trail that comes in from the village of the Delaware Water Gap down 611. They went ahead working with Penn DOT and they got their signs approved. They will be the first road signs for the trail.

Mr. Fineran inquired if we would go through NJ DOT to do the same as what Pennsylvania did. Ms. Mezzanati said yes.

Mr. Helbing confirmed the area that the area being discussed along the rail trail is State property.

Mr. Hann inquired if the Pennsylvania group intend to cross the river on the Columbia Pedestrian bridge.

Ms. Mezzanati the trail on paper does cross that bridge and then goes North on 611. She was under the impression that the section of trail along Northampton County was much farther along than it is. It is a long-term plan without funding. Goal is to work with other entities to compile a map representing the trail, which goes to the Flight 93 memorial and then connects to the World Trade Center memorial.

Mr. Helbing noted that it is a triangle and they do have funding in different places and they have moved the trail based on what townships were willing to do the work to get it done. He feels it should not happen along 611 because it is too dangerous. He had approached the 9-11 Memorial Trail Board in the past about his concerns. National Park Service doesn't allow connections with the Appalachian trail without going through the Secretary of Interior making it difficult to deal with. Mr. Helbing further shared concerns that the 9-11 trail has been hijacked by the bicycle groups but much of it is not bikable.

Mr. Tierney mentioned about the 9-11 trail steering committee said they discussed having a driving, biking and hiking routes, having three different routes.

Mr. Helbing noted that they did not seem open to alternative routes and it includes 35 miles of road walking. He doesn't feel it makes much sense.

Mr. Tierney said that the NJ section had a good portion of the trail.

Mr. Helbing felt that the trail deserved more consideration from both states involved in the planning of the trail.

Mr. Fineran inquired where the trail went after the Delaware Water Gap.

Mr. Helbing said it involved about 15 miles of road walking.

Ms. Mezzanati expressed that it was for them to work out and that she attends the meetings to be aware of the route and signs.

Mr. Helbing clarified that it is a National Historic Trail not a National Scenic trail which is a unique designation. He doesn't feel comfortable encouraging the maintenance of a trail that goes along a dangerous stretch of highway.

Mr. Fineran pointed out that the Liberty Water Gap trail is considered a Jersey Trail so if we can keep it safe up until it ends at the Portland Bridge where it indicates the end of the Liberty Water Gap trail so once it is in Pennsylvania is not our jurisdiction.

Mr. Helbing said that he feels ethically it is not right to encourage people to walk such a dangerous stretch of highway. He would like to see this be a larger conversation and encourage maintenance.

Mr. Tierney would like the trails to be well maintained for our residents and visitor regardless of who owns the public property. At a county level he feels we could express our support for the trail and new blazes.

Mr. Fineran inquired if they were going to consider this a national trail and break out the name of the segments or are they going to leave that each state has its own segment of the national trails.

Mr. Helbing said that every trail will still have its own identity and they don't want to supersede that when the 9-11 trail comes to a post will have the name of the individual trail first and then the connecting trails after that.

Mr. Tierney spoke with Dave Dech in planning about where the trail crosses county roads so, although the Paulinskill trail is maintained by State Parks, the county should consider the roads it crosses. He wants to ensure all trail crossings are safe.

Mr. Fineran pointed out that the trail going under 46 floods most of the time.

Ms. Mezzanati said that the bridge is being replaced and will be closed for 2 years.

Mr. Fineran inquired how they were expected to get across.

Mr. Helbing said it was the highway bridge.

Mr. Tobaygo motioned to accept Ms. Mezzanati as a liaison for the 9/11 memorial trail. Mr. Fineran seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

Ms. Mezzanati thanked the committee and will return when there is more information of interest.

CORRESPONDENCE: None

REPORT OF COMMITTEES:

Morris Canal Committee/Warren Heritage Scenic Byway

Mr. Tierney gave a quick update that we had ParkFest this past weekend and it was a good event. Well received.

On the West-side of the canal the NJ Youth Corps did the loop trail off of Strykers Road and heads down to the Lopatcong Creek towards Route 22. It then comes back up the slope, make a loop and then come back down the canal. It will be additional mowing that they will have to do regularly.

Ms. Roy reported that the Planning Department has had some summer help so Albert is out GPSing some trails to tighten up our maps. He reported that the condition of trail on Lock Street that parallels the tow path which will be great for the local community. Plans to continue working at Port Colden. We are currently waiting on some feedback from the State Historical Preservation office about some work being done there. We are also planning on getting started at Port Murray but there are a few things we want to do and prep before we start bringing people in. Specifically making sure the powerhouse is sufficiently protected so people don't have access to it.

Mr. Fineran inquired about trout unlimited and if it would help us with our trails.

Mr. Tierney reported that it was all in-stream habitat restoration.

Mr. Fineran inquired if they were asked to put a walkway on the other side of 22 and the same side as Plane 9.

Mr. Tierney said they inquired about that with Trout Unlimited but unfortunately, they weren't able to do that for us because of DEP restrictions and turnover.

Mr. Hann inquired if the crossover was the cattle walk under 22 at the low point where the stream went through.

Mr. Tierney said that his understanding was that where 22 crosses the Lopatcong Creek the bridge there has 3 bays and goes through the water too but the 3rd one was dryer. Idea was to use that one when it was dryer.

Mr. Helbing felt it still needed to be changed similar to the Erie Canal in New York.

Mr. Fineran is hopeful that the existing bridge from Phillipsburg to Easton will add support to what the board would like to do with trails.

Mr. Hann said that at the meeting in P'burg they discussed that a business in Easton owned the bridge and used it to park railroad cars for his business instead of in his yard. It was also discussed that if he owned it, it should be negotiable to sell it.

Mr. Helbing urged the Board that the Morris Canal arch be stabilized as it is in such bad shape.

Mr. Fineran noted that it was an approved MCCT Grant that we weren't sure who owned it, which delayed work on the project.

Mr. Helbing said it is an unassigned piece of DEP land. The town is still willing to take that on.

Mr. Fineran inquired if it was Phillipsburg that made that application.

Mr. Helbing confirmed it was and it needs to be jumpstarted again.

Mr. Fineran inquired to the expense of it. Mr. Helbing said it was most likely more expensive than from the initial application.

Mr. Tierney explained that they would need to go through the MCCT process again.

Mr. Helbing inquired if something could be done with the Commissioners approval similar to what was done at Shippen Manor.

Mr. Tierney explained not without state permission since the DEP owns it. He feels that the MCCT would be amenable to provide funding for the restoration and stabilization of the bridge but we need an owner there. He will try to follow-up with two councilmen in Phillipsburg who wanted to save that.

Mr. Helbing said we need to express urgency to DEP to anyone who will listen.

Trail Committee

Mr. Helbing said he met with Mike Muckle who has a Youth Corp Grant so they will be doing a bunch of work on state land for Warren/ Highlands. Mr. Helbing identified areas and they spent the whole morning going through them. The Youth Corps will be doing a whole lot of cutting back of stuff that has grown in since he hasn't been able to go there in about 5 months. We are ordering 50 wooden posts to go in the ground to mark the field edges by the Youth Corps to help delineate those fields. There will be one post every 50 feet so you will always be able to see the next one.

Mr. Helbing met with Down to Earth Farms about the trail going through their property. He seemed amendable to it.

Mr. Fineran inquired if we are doing ok with the leases with the farmers who have trails near their property and are they clearing the edges regularly.

Mr. Helbing said that we still have to figure out a Geiger on the county end but the rest is all state land.

Mr. Hann inquired about the posts being put in at Geiger.

Mr. Helbing said that they kept getting knocked down.

Mr. Helbing said that he will need to trailer equipment to the Youth Corps putting in the posts the week after July 4th.

Mr. Helbing said he wants to establish where the trail is going to go around Hoff-Vannatta with a possible story-walk interpreting the buildings.

OLD BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS:

Administrator's Report:

Mr. Hann inquired about the Janecko property on the acquisitions report and if there were funds in our accounts to match the appraisals.

Mr. Tierney reported that they rejected the offer. The appraisals we had done were about \$4200/ acre with 94 or 95 acres which made it around \$400,000. So he rejected that appraisal because they wanted twice that amount. They wanted to keep the fields, house and complex along 57 so we were going to acquire the canal and everything uphill from there. An access easement off the side road was going to be included. The problem is that there are some wetlands and steep slopes with some fields there but there was limited development potential there because of the slopes, which impaired the value. Mr. Tierney will circle back with Janecko and see if they would be willing to include some of the area between the canal and route 57 which is the most easily developed and valuable. If included, it could raise the appraisal value. He's not sure how much he is willing to part with. There will still be a lot of clean up to deal with.

Mr. Hann inquired about Prospect Street.

Mr. Tierney said that in working with county counsel we have to draw up a donation agreement. The training incorporated is going to donate that Prospect Street parcel as well as a piece under bridge development partners but is now owned by Train on Lock Street parcel.

Mr. Tierney further reported that the towpath village, which is not on the report, has been looked at for a trail easement. They are under new ownership so he reached out to them and they are amendable but have some concerns with liability. He got permission to go out and walk the property and is not sure what remains there of the canal and determine some wetlands mapping.

Mr. Fineran asked if the stretch going past the apartments were we going to keep a space from the apartments.

Mr. Tierney said if you follow the boundary line between the towpath and M&Ms and then it wraps around the property like an 'L' shape to a parking area and wooded area. He is afraid that some of the path has been destroyed from storms. We'll have to explore some options. He said her concern was liability and he explained to her that we had the NJ Landowner's Liability Act and she would be protected as long as she had an easement that was open to the public. She further inquired if people wandered onto her property. He suggested including more of the property but we need to give it some thought. They don't want to be the parking area to access the trail.

Mr. Helbing suggested signage for where trail parking is or make use of M&M/Mars property.

Mr. Tierney will keep the board informed.

Mr. Hann inquired if the price Ken Miller was offered was similar to the price he paid for it.

Mr. Tierney said that it was valued in two ways, one was life estate and the other was fee simple. He declined the life estate value and wanted more time to think about the fee value. Mr. Tierney thinks the fee value was above what he had paid for it but not significantly more. Additionally the barn collapsed and the house is in need of repair. He has been having some health issues.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

NEXT MEETING - The next meeting is scheduled for July 12, 2022.

ADJOURNMENT - There being no further business, Mr. Halmi motioned to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Fineran, to adjourn the meeting at 6:18 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Correa-Kruegel
Community Service Aide