

WARREN COUNTY
BOARD OF RECREATION COMMISSIONERS
500 Mt. Pisgah Avenue, PO Box 179
Oxford, NJ 07863
April 12, 2022
Meeting Minutes

CALL TO ORDER: Mr. Helbing called the meeting to order at 5:08 PM, read the Open Public Meeting Notice, Pledge of Allegiance

ROLL CALL

Members Present: John Halmi, Michael Helbing, William Hann Jr., Ray Tobaygo

Staff: Corey Tierney, Elizabeth Roy, Jennifer Kruegel

MINUTES: The February 8, 2022 minutes were reviewed. Mr. Hann motioned, seconded by Mr. Halmi to approve the minutes as presented. Mr. Helbing abstained. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

CORRESPONDENCE: None

REPORT OF COMMITTEES:

Morris Canal Committee/Warren Heritage Scenic Byway

Warren Heritage Scenic Byway –

Morris Canal Committee-

Trail Committee:

Morris Canal Committee:

Mr. Tierney reported that they had the public outreach meeting for the Morris Canal Trail improvements. It is the project that we received a grant from the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority. It went well with the engineer giving a presentation with about a dozen people on the meeting with a number of neighbors who had some questions but no one seemed hostile so it seemed to go well. The schedule for that keeps getting pushed out so we are still waiting for DEP permits at this point. Best estimate is the Spring of 2023 start date but subject to change.

Mr. Helbing pointed out that there are many DEP emails that are going unanswered lately which is frustrating.

Mr. Helbing inquired if there was any recent update on the arch because we originally had some grant money that was set aside to do some stabilization work on it. Mr. Tierney responded that he had not heard anything about it in quite a while. It had come before the municipal and charitable board a number of years ago that was approved. Mr. Helbing pointed out that it was a problem of ownership that was since determined to be owned by DEP. Mr. Tierney responded that as long as you could establish ownership and the applicant at the time was the township. They could apply for an MCCT historic restoration grant and should enter into some type of lease agreement with the state. Mr. Helbing said that part of the problem was that it was an unassigned DEP property so they don't know which agency to go through. Mr. Helbing said he would inquire further for next time. When he last saw the structure,

he noted that the flooding was far worse than expected from the last couple of storms. Some of the mortar-less rock could possibly collapse. Mr. Tierney speculated that it would be assigned to parks because it is a historic feature. Mr. Helbing thought it would be assigned the same way all the properties along the Warren Highlands Trail were assigned because they were in close proximity. The slopes on the north side of town are all assigned to parks and along the south heading down towards Lambertville there are a couple of random pieces assigned to parks. There is no fish and wildlife in those areas. It is easy to assume it would be lumped into one of those areas. Mr. Tierney inquired if there was still anyone at the local level with the town still interested in that. Mr. Helbing responded that Mr. Ellis tries to advocate but it is so ridiculous sometimes in Phillipsburg. Mr. Tierney asked if the town engineer was involved still. Mr. Hann said there was a new engineer for the town so we could call Phillipsburg and ask. Mr. Tierney was not sure at what level of the DEP that decision is made but if an official from the town reached out to Shawn LaTourette's office, he would think that they would get back to him. There is a DEP liaison to the municipalities and it may help to go through them. Mr. Helbing said that everything in the DEP is shifting including the name, as it is no longer the Division of Parks and Forests and they are trying to move all management away from director and straight to the commissioner level, which has pros and cons. They are hiring more positions on the commissioner level but concerned it will not have the same level of priority that a town might make a project like this.

Mr. Helbing said that he has been checking things as much as he can and said they removed an obstruction that looked like you were not allowed to go through off the end of Morris Canal Way and where it goes over to the old aqueduct. Not it only has a yellow chain across it. It could use a couple of Morris Canal Trail markers but it is now something you can just step over instead of feeling like you are trespassing squeezing through the end of a fence next to the excursion railroad.

Mr. Helbing noticed areas where the canal trail markers were either hammered completely into the tree instead of sticking out a little. He had walked the entire section of Bread Lock Park to Stewartsville recently and someone must have went through and hammered everything into the trees and some were on the ground and some were just missing altogether. Mr. Tierney suggested it was someone who probably thought they were helping. Mr. Helbing did note that it was there and at the Port Murray preserve where all but one or two markers have been removed along the entire thing of Terracotta Lane, which he put in himself. Mr. Tierney said with Port Murray, we do not have anyone maintaining that connection through and the plan is to reblaze the trolley trail with just one trail out and back. We have increased visitation at Port Murray with people going back to the turbine chamber. Ms. Roy is looking into having a gate installed to prevent vehicles from going back there and request some sections of fence to keep people out of the turbine because it is not safe. Mr. Helbing agreed that there is a lot of dirt bike traffic going in there and he feels that a gate will help. Ms. Roy said that she has a thoughtfully selected group with the foundation they are working with who are sensitive to the site at Port Murray. Mr. Helbing agreed we have a very delicate and valuable relationship with the landowners at Port Holden and Port Murray. Mr. Tierney said at Port Murray we only have the two neighbors in the back of the property who have been very cooperative. Hearts Lane neighbors had questions at the Morris Canal Trail improvements meeting about parking and public access along that road. Our response was that we were not planning parking there or public vehicle access. The trail will be down and back but we are not doing anything to direct them back there.

Mr. Helbing noted that there was a lot of ATV traffic at Bread Lock where the trail leaves the towpath, in the water and along the fields there. They are doing a turnaround in the prism turning it into a very muddy course. It looks like they are coming in from one of the properties off Route 57. They use to come in from under the railroad underpass by the solar field. They have since piled up barricades that prevent them from accessing it.

Mr. Helbing pointed out about 60 or so pallets. Ms. Roy clarified that they belong to the farmer there who had a death in the family and will take care of them.

Mr. Tierney inquired if there were any ATV trails leading to the houses off Route 57. Mr. Helbing said it was not clear where it goes. Mr. Tierney said they would look into it.

Mr. Hann inquired if we got the agricultural push back on Geiger. Mr. Tierney said that he needs to have a talk with county counsel because he looked at the state's contract and some of their in-kind services. He has some questions on how to mirror the language. Enforcement is an issue. He said we have had some issues with the open space farmland easements that were being processed by the purchasing department. They are in the process of rewriting the lease. Mr. Helbing inquired if it was a similar lease with the Canal Greenway. Mr. Tierney said yes, we own a lot of farmland along the greenway and we have had various problems with different leases.

Mr. Helbing the spot with the pallets there is a problem with full-size trucks going in that area and partying at night. There was trash past the pallets and along the wood line and beer bottles that need picking up. Not really a way to block them from going through because they can just drive in the field. Maybe a gate at that first vegetative line. Mr. Tierney pointed out that the difficulty there is the farmland and solar access easement that runs to substation on Richline Rd and it is difficult to get ahold of them. Mr. Helbing suggested putting a double lock on. Mr. Tierney said they would try again to contact them.

Mr. Helbing said that Lock 5 is looking worse every year. The lock is obscured by vegetation and requested canal volunteers to clean up the area.

Trails:

Mr. Helbing reported that he was on Marble Hill last night and it is looking pretty good. It looks like someone tried to dismantle the signage in front of the fulmer mine again because it is tilted more and looks almost pulled apart. The nearby fire pit was turned into a chair. Mr. Tierney pointed out that with the school nearby there is more visitation to the site. Students will use that as a route to walk to and from school and no one to manage it. Mr. Helbing said that the YouthCorps had helped a bit but still some work that needs to be done. Mr. Tierney said that they will be there for Earth Day for a clean-up. Mr. Helbing requested that a tree be removed by the old ATV access by the pump house along the pull off.

Mr. Helbing said that he is having trouble getting support for trail projects. He had attempted several times to get a kiosk put in at Marble Hill over the last few weeks and it did not happen. Then he was advised that it will be at least 2 years before the state will do anything on that property again and that goes for all of the state's Warren Highlands properties. Ran into Dennis Hickey who has been trying to volunteer but his emails to the state have gone unanswered. He has advised hunters who to email regarding down trees on the property but they are not hearing back from anyone. Recommended to keep asking. Another reason he has not been able to do it is because he needs a pick-up truck and they will not allow him to do it through work anymore.

Mr. Helbing met with Tanya Sulikowski at Merrill Creek a couple months back to code blaze trails and finish a connecting trail. She is going to redo all the Merrill Creek blazing in international standards style. She is also amendable to connecting parts of the Warren Highlands Trail with other places in Merrill Creek. Tanya has been taking GPS coordinates of everyone's deer stands and have a delineated line for land management purposes along their property boundary. He recommended making it a public trail so that it stays within the safety zone of the property boundary and she loves the idea. It will give a complete reroute off Ragged Ridge and will help eliminate half mile road walking. Mr. Tierney recommended that we meet with the Warren Highlands group again with a meeting portion, then hike a section at Merrill Creek, and invite the Superintendent of Spruce Run.

Mr. Helbing does not want to organize it due to conflict of interest. They are changing many titles and it is difficult to know who to talk to. He said Harker's Hollow might be a good place to meet up since they are very neutral regarding government. They are private landowners who he met with as they had

dumped a whole bunch of stuff over the trail again. Among the things they dumped were a whole bunch of posts and he was given permission to put the posts in the ground and can delineate the trail with those.

Mr. Helbing said there was nothing new to report regarding the Native American thing on Ragged Ridge. The Lenape spokesperson was meeting with Chris and Tara from the Route 80 coalition but there was a death in the tribe in Oklahoma and he unexpectedly had to fly back. No new timeframe.

Mr. Helbing talked about the switchbacks put in the Buckhorn Creek section and has not talked with Dave recently but met with him twice regarding a cross walk by 519 in Belvidere. It is now blazed on either side of the road. It follows a field side all the way south through more state land along the Buckhorn Creek and comes out to Hutchington (sp?) Station Rd. There is room for a couple of cars. He is trying to find some history on it as there used to be a sawmill there which is what the creek follows.

OLD BUSINESS: None

Administrator's Report:

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Tierney just had one update from the report we did close on the Singley Property which was 95 acres in Franklin and we closed on that on Thursday. We now have a section of the canal between Millbrook Road and Halfway House road. We will need to work with the YouthCorps to get the boundaries posted. We can work on getting a section of that towpath cleared. We will also want to consider opening that area up for hunting. We can revisit that in the fall as that is something we want to look into for a number of parks. We only allow hunting right now in the three natural resource areas Marble Hill, Oxford Mountain and White Lake and White Lake is limited to bow-hunting. Port Murray and Mount Rascal should be considered as well for hunting. We had a neighbor who came to a past meeting and did not want hunting. We also have an existing farm lease that will run through this growing season and then we will put it out to bid for next year as there will be some fields there.

Mr. Helbing cautioned about hunting in Port Murray Preserve, Brian H. (sp?) really did not want hunting on the property so we might want to try and give the safety zone a wide distance from his place to keep the positive relationship. There would need to be some signage out there. Mr. Tierney pointed out that we do not have any other ways of monitoring it other than the signage so that was why we have been more conservative with it in the past. We can revisit it later this year.

Mr. Helbing inquired about the Sigler property. Mr. Tierney said they would be reaching out to them later this year. Mr. Helbing recalls an issue with the aquifer. Mr. Tierney said yes, that was an issue in the past but the commissioners now fully fund projects there.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

NEXT MEETING - The next meeting is scheduled for May 10, 2022.

ADJOURNMENT - There being no further business, Mr. Tobaygo motioned to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Halmi, to adjourn the meeting at 5:55 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Correa-Kruegel
Community Service Aide