

Elkins Park Free Library  
November 28, 2007, 7:00 P.M.

The Steering Committee kick-off meeting of the High School Park Master Plan for Ecological Restoration was held tonight. Members present were Commissioner Morton “Mickey” J. Simon, Jr., Cynthia Blackwood, Thom Cross, Joanne Dahme, Barbara Duffy, Diane Ehrich, Jack Holt, Mark Kaplan, David Kratzer, Marvin Morganstern, Rosemary Porter, and Amy Steffen. Also present from the Consultant Team were Suzanne Forbes, Phil Perhamus, and Debbie Mengoni of Forbes Environmental Land Use Planning. Township Staff members present were David G. Kraynik, Township Manager, Bryan T. Havir, Assistant Township Manager and Joseph Baxter, Parks Maintenance Superintendent. Also present was Fran Rubert, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PADCNR) Southeast Regional Office. Friends of High School Park members were Linda Stern, Marc Cortec, Margie Pattak, Gail Korostoff, Caroline Stritzinger, Gina Craigo, and Jeanine Vannaw. An attendance sheet is attached.

**Handouts:** The following handouts were distributed to all attendees: Agenda, Citizen Steering Committee List, Powerpoint Presentation (Forbes), DCNR Public Participation Manual, Master Plan for the Ecological Restoration of High School Park: Identified Issue Areas (Forbes), and Friends of High School Park Newsletter (Volume 31, Fall 2007).

1. The kick-off meeting was called to order by Amy Steffen at 7 P.M. A quorum was present.

2. **Welcome- Morton J. Simon, Ward 6 Commissioner and David G. Kraynik, Township Manager-** Messrs. Simon and Kraynik provided a warm welcome to the attendees along with some historical information about High School and Ogontz Parks (e.g., Montgomery County Open Space Plan, Historic Land Use, High School Fire, and Township Staff & Friends of High School Park Commitments).

3. Ms. Steffen also welcomed the group and commended Bryan Havir for the effort he made to obtain DCNR funding for the Master Plan. She noted that he applied for the grant

two times. Ms. Steffen further noted that this project marks a milestone in the park's history, as it was a park that used to be an eyesore. Ms. Steffen described the purpose and structural organization of the Friends group, and its accomplishments over time noting that over 300 volunteers help out each year, with 10-12 volunteer days per year. Ms. Steffen recounted some history noting that when the group started, the Friends presented what was seen as a novel approach by proposing a *passive* park that emphasized *native* plantings. Ms. Steffen also shared that *The Arts in the Park* is a large community event for the Township and coupled with membership dues, provides the major source of funding for Friends group. The event includes arts, crafts, rides and approximately 1000 people attend each year.

4. **DCNR funding, DCNR Public Participation Process & Steering Committee Formation, Bryan Havir, Assistant Township Manager-** Mr. Havir described how the project was funded (\$25 K) and how the DCNR requirements have to be adhered to, most notably the public participation process. Mr. Havir provided highlights of the public participation process (see manual) and informed the attendees that the Steering Committee will review all the different elements that are required from the consultants.

5. **Agenda Review & Introductions, Suzanne Forbes, AICP, Forbes Environmental & Land Use Planning** – Ms. Forbes introduced herself and went over the key agenda items for the evening. Everyone attending then introduced themselves and shared why they were motivated to become part of the Steering Committee (see Steering Committee List).

6. **Project Scope & Steps, Suzanne Forbes, AICP Forbes Environmental & Land Use Planning-** Ms. Forbes noted that the project team is comprised of team members from AMEC Earth & Environmental (Phil Perhamus) and RETTEW (Debbie Mengoni, Gerry Reidel & Mark Metzler). Ms. Forbes indicated that the intent of this meeting is a meet and greet, and that greater details will be available at subsequent meetings. Ms. Forbes provided an overview of

her environmental planning background and then described all the pre-scoping that was conducted prior to the contract award (e.g., site visits, identification of issue areas, etc.) as well as the various goals and components of the project (see power point presentation).

Phil Perhamus, Amec Earth & Environmental provided an overview of his component of the project (ecological restoration) noting the goals, objectives and tasks within the scope of work. Mr. Perhamus noted that work had been completed previously on the Tookany Creek Streambank Restoration and that, although a full-fledged restoration plan was not the scope of work, recommendations to improve the streambanks and stream buffer would be provided.

Debbie Mengoni, RETTEW provided an overview of her role in the project. She provided a large aerial of the project area. As a landscape architect, she will be asking questions that frame the approach including “How does the park function now?” and “How do we bring the history and natural resources together?” Per the scope of work and the park plan thus far, the landscape design will use a native plant palette.

7. The attending audience asked the following questions as noted below:

- David Kratzer, AIA and Steering Committee member asked why the mandate was for native plantings (or more accurately) where does this seeming mandate for native plantings come from? Ms. Steffen answered as follows: This stems back to the original plan to purchase the land. The use of native plantings was then embraced by the Friends group and incorporated into Andropogon’s landscape design. The use of native plantings also ties into the educational component of this project. The benefits of native plantings was then briefly discussed with the intent to discuss it in greater detail, if needed, at future meetings.
- Another question was, “What problems are there with Ogontz Park?” Ms. Forbes and Mr. Havar answered that the Township is currently satisfied with Ogontz Park. However, the park will be mapped (e.g., baseline mapping) and the focus of that part of the Master Plan will be recreational planning and recommendations. Ms. Forbes noted that there will be a community survey and one-on-one interviews and issue areas may surface during that project phase. All issues will be identified and included in the Master Plan. Mr. Havar then noted why Ogontz Park was included (along with High School Park) in the project. The DCNR asked that it be included.
- Another question was “Was the apartment complex contacted?” Ms. Steffen indicated that they were contacted at the onset of this effort, and had been contacted previously to

see if recent plantings might include native plant species. Ms. Forbes noted that she would like to see them included in the planning process and that the survey and one-on-one interviews should include them.

**8. Review & Input on Project Goals, Suzanne Forbes & Amy Steffen – Ms.**

Steffen then asked the group to consider the following question (What would make the Ecological Master Plan valuable?), to discuss it with the person next to them and provide feedback after a few minutes. The following comments were provided:

- The plan should be specific and address how to accomplish things successfully in a step by step process.
- The local community needs to know what is going on, and needs to be energized about this effort.
- We would like to know if the survey input counters the project's goals.
- There is a big concern about the creek and the fact that it has flooded nearby homes.
- Educating people is the key. Even information about ground-nesting birds would be helpful.
- The issue of dogs in the park is another thing that has to be considered. They should be leashed, cleaned up after, and kept out of the plants.
- The plan needs to contain elements designed to bring people into the park.
- It would be helpful if the roles of the Township and the Friends are better defined.
- Signage for naming the plants would be helpful.
- There should be different-colored blooms in the meadow at different times of the year to increase the park's curb appeal and enhance the aesthetic quality of the upper meadow.
- The entrances to the park need to be better defined.
- Defining regular maintenance of the park areas and what is the Friends' responsibility versus the Township with respect to the role of ongoing maintenance.
- The plan should also address maintenance of the ongoing erosion of the streambanks (both sides).

**9. Election of Committee Chairperson, Bryan Havar – Mr. Havar opened the**

floor for nominations for chairperson. Ms. Steffen was nominated to serve as chairperson by Mr. Simon. There being no further nominations, Mr. Havar asked to close the nominations. Upon motion of Mr. Kaplan, seconded by Ms. Blackwood, the nominations were closed. Ms. Steffen was elected chairperson of the Steering Committee by unanimous consensus. Ms. Steffen assumed the chair.

**10. Wrap Up, Suzanne Forbes, AICP – Ms. Forbes noted that the Steering**

Committee and Community meeting schedule is pretty rigorous. The next scheduled meeting is

for a Community Meeting in January. However, the exact date, time, and meeting location has not been determined. Mr. Holt recommended another steering committee meeting before making a public meeting and all agreed. Ms. Steffen will check to see if the library is available or if another meeting place would need to be arranged. Ms. Forbes and Mr. Havir will work on the minutes and make sure that all Steering Committee members receive them. The meetings will be posted on the Township website. Potential agenda items at the next Steering Committee meeting will be: the community survey, one-on-one interviews, draft master plan agenda, and the community meeting.

11. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 P.M.

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David G. Kraynik  
Township Manager

Per Bryan T. Havir  
Assistant Township Manager

Suzanne Forbes  
Forbes Environmental & Land Use Planning