



Natural
Lands

Warrington Township – Open Space Committee Meeting

Summary of Open Space Master Plans Presentation, Discussion and Questionnaire Responses

January 6th, 2021

One January 6th, 2021, Natural Lands virtually attended Warrington Township's Open Space Committee meeting to present our progress on the open space master plans for the Weizel Farm, the Reserve at Emerson Farm, and Mill Creek Preserve. Rick Tralies, Kate Raman, and Hannah Thomas attended on behalf of Natural Lands in addition to members of the Open Space Committee, Township staff, and Warrington residents. Attendees were given opportunities to ask questions at specified times during the presentation.

This document provides a summary of the presentation, the questions asked by the attendees and the answers given by Natural Lands staff members. The summary should be considered as representative of the conversation, but not as minutes or a word for word account.

Following the presentation, Natural Lands staff members provided a web link to an online questionnaire and asked the meeting participants to respond to it by Monday, January 11th, 2021. A summary of responses is included at the end of this document. These responses will be used to inform Natural Lands staff of the opinions and attitudes of the respondents and will be considered much like public comment at a meeting. The responses will not be treated as votes. No decisions will be made based purely on the results of the questionnaire.

Summary of Presentation

Rick Tralies and Kate Raman led Natural Lands' presentation to the Committee. After Kate conducted introductions, Rick opened the presentation with background on Natural Lands as well as the context of the three sites. The project's scope of work and goals of the presentation were also described by Rick. Kate then updated the Committee on the process of Natural Lands' Key Person Interviews (KPI's) with select members of the public, providing an overview of the key takeaways of each conversation.

The majority of the presentation focused on what our team has learned about the three sites so far. The information was shared through diagrams, photography, and notes about each. These described the natural features, views, habitats, built features, opportunities and issues at each site.

After the three sites were presented, Natural Lands' next steps were explained. These include continuing to conduct Key Person Interviews (KPI's), conducting a focus group of potential user group representatives, continuing to visit the sites, and beginning to draft narrative report sections. Additionally, it was noted that Natural Lands hopes to present the first draft of the master plans at a second meeting in the Spring. To conclude the presentation, Rick explained the online questionnaire and opened time for any attendees to provide additional suggestions or ask more questions.



Summary of Discussions, Comments and Questions

After each site was introduced, attendees were able to make comments or suggestions and ask questions.

Emerson Farm Preserve –

- **Dumping** - Ivy Ross mentioned that recently the Township has been in discussion with Toll Brothers about the removal of waste which has been dumped on the property. She mentioned that it will be important to designate the open space areas so that people do not continue to dump on the site.
- **Tree removal** - Ivy has requested that Toll Brothers remove hazardous trees leaving the bottom six feet of the trunk to remain for habitat.
- **Trails** - Scott Vogin inquired about trail materials. Rick suggested that the open spaces will likely end up containing both paved multi-use trails as well as natural surface trails.
- **Agriculture** - Fred Gains asked whether agriculture would be considered as a permanent use. Rick suggested that agriculture will be discussed throughout the length of the project, as Natural Lands is aware of its importance to the community.
- **Property Boundaries** - Mike Diorka then brought up the issue of a survey to show the adjacent property owners where the boundaries of Emerson lay. Kate explained that once the protected areas are finalized a site survey will be completed, but a visual barrier or clear signage is a good idea to let people know where the property lines are. Bill Connelly mentioned that the developer is required to make the boundary legible.

Mill Creek –

- **Streams** - Scott Vogin inquired about the depth of Mill Creek's streams and their suitability to be stocked with fish. Rick mentioned that in certain areas the streams seem to be several feet deep, but the Township would need to work with the PA Fish and Boat Commission to organize fish stocking.
- **Leni-Lenape History** - Fred Gaines asked if this property was once occupied by the Leni-Lenape tribe. Rick mentioned that he was unsure, but it was a topic which could be further investigated, particularly with Natural Lands' IDEA initiative. Ivy Ross said that Mill Creek is a site which potentially has a high quality of archeological resources. Mike Diorka suggested that these resources provide an opportunity for education.



- Parking - As people already park along the driveway at Mill Creek, Fred asked about the potential of establishing a formal parking area. Rick said that a designated parking area would be appropriate at Mill Creek and Natural Lands will explore options as part of the master planning process.
- Birding - Barbara Brown suggested looking into a natural bird blind, and wanted feedback on the most appropriate location.
- Agriculture - Ivy stated that the grant agreement for the funding used to acquire the site stipulated that all farming at Mill Creek needs to end by 2022.

Weizel Preserve –

- Solar Panels - Fred Gaines asked if Natural Lands had any experience with solar panels, and if it was a possibility for any of the sites. Rick answered that other than implementing solar panels sparingly on some buildings, Natural Lands usually doesn't recommend them as the nonprofit's main concern is promoting public access and habitat which solar panels tend to limit.
- Ice Skating - Scott Vogin gave the input that from the Township's perspective, the potential of ice skating on the pond is concerning due to liability.
- Leaf/Yard Waste Dump - Scott said that the Leaf Dump is necessary for the Township to have, or else they would need to vacuum each resident's leaves. Ivy said that it was critical for the area to be cleaned up and have an aesthetically appealing presence.
- Bird habitat - It was mentioned that the property is ideal for wood ducks, blue birds, and screech owls.
- The Pond - Kathy suggested that the pond is most likely not a natural feature, and may have been built by farmers for irrigation. This, would mean that there are potentially pipes located at its base. Fred suggested that it could have been built by firefighting services as a water source. As it serves as a habitat resource, and could pose a liability issue if publically accessible, the general consensus of the group was to leave the pond as is.

Final Comments –

- Deer management - Mike Diorka, Rick Weiss, and Andy Oles mentioned their concerns about deer impact to the sites. It was concluded that deer need to be controlled at a Township wide scale for impacts to be mitigated at a site level.



Post Meeting Questionnaire Results

After the meeting, Natural Lands sent an email to attendees which reiterated the project's next steps and included a link to take the online questionnaire. The questionnaire was twelve questions with multiple choice and open ended response options. Natural Lands received fifteen responses which offered insight to attendee's perspectives, opinions and concerns.

1. Where is agriculture appropriate? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Mill Creek Preserve **(4, 26.7%)**
- b. Open Space at the Emerson Reserve **(8, 53.3%)**
- c. Weizel Farm Preserve **(10, 66.7%)**
- d. All open space should contain agriculture. **(3, 20%)**
- e. Agriculture should not be a permitted use in the Township's open spaces. **(1, 6.7%)**

Written in responses –

- Can't continue on Mill Creek after 2022.
- Not sure until we solidify all plans.
- I have no expertise nor prior knowledge of any of these projects, but I think there needs to be an underlying 'credo' and when/where/how to support or allow is on a case by case basis.

2. Where are meadows appropriate? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Mill Creek Preserve **(5, 33.3%)**
- b. Open Space at the Emerson Reserve **(7, 46.7%)**
- c. Weizel Farm Preserve **(6, 40%)**
- d. Meadows are appropriate at all sites. **(12, 80%)**
- e. Meadows are not appropriate in the Township's open spaces. **(0, 0%)**

Written in responses –

- I have no expertise nor prior knowledge of any of these projects but I think there needs to be an underlying 'credo' and when/where/how to support or allow is on a case by case basis.

3. Where are natural surface hiking trails appropriate? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Mill Creek Preserve **(7, 46.7%)**
- b. Open Space at the Emerson Reserve **(6, 40%)**
- c. Weizel Farm Preserve **(5, 33.3%)**



- d. All open space should contain natural surface hiking trails. **(9, 60%)**
- e. None of the Township's open spaces should contain natural surface hiking trails. **(0, 0%)**

Written in responses –

- Along with paved trails connecting main routes and future uses.
- I have no expertise nor prior knowledge of any of these projects but I think there needs to be an underlying 'credo' and when/where/how to support or allow is on a case by case basis.

4. Where is water access appropriate? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Mill Creek Preserve **(5, 33.3%)**
- b. Open Space at the Emerson Reserve **(2, 13.3%)**
- c. Weizel Farm Preserve **(1, 6.7%)**
- d. If there is water on a site, people should have access to it. **(5, 33.3%)**
- e. People should not have access to water features on Township open space. **(3, 20%)**

Written in responses –

- Need limitations for safety of wildlife and keep out dogs off lead.
- Along with paved trails connecting main routes and future uses and hopefully connecting in ways to avoid crossing roads at grade. Under grade provides separation for safety.
- I can see this impacting wildlife in the area.
- I am not on board for access to water at all our sites especially where water is limited. In my experience especially in areas where habitat is crucial the public is not always respectful for its use. Example Bradford Dam where people come to fish leave behind fishing lines hooks etc. Mill Creek where we plan to put up Wood duck boxes and hopefully plant along the riparian area to stabilize the bank would be at risk.
- I have no expertise nor prior knowledge of any of these projects but I think there needs to be an underlying 'credo' and when/where/how to support or allow is on a case by case basis.

5. Where should habitat be the priority? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Mill Creek Preserve **(8, 53.3%)**
- b. Open Space at the Emerson Reserve **(4, 26.7%)**
- c. Weizel Farm Preserve **(5, 33.3%)**



- d. Habitat should always be a priority. **(10, 66.7%)**
- e. Habitat should never be a priority. **(0, 0%)**

Written in responses –

- I have no expertise nor prior knowledge of any of these projects but I think there needs to be an underlying 'credo' and when/where/how to support or allow is on a case by case basis.
- Along with paved trails connecting main routes and future uses and hopefully connecting in ways to avoid crossing roads at grade. Under grade provides separation for safety.

6. Where would paved multi-use trails be appropriate? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Mill Creek Preserve **(2, 13.3%)**
- b. Open Space at the Emerson Reserve **(7, 46.7%)**
- c. Weizel Farm Preserve **(5, 33.3%)**
- d. Paved multi-use trails should be incorporated at all sites. **(4, 26.7%)**
- e. Paved multi-use trails should not be incorporated in Township open space. **(1, 6.7%)**

Written in responses –

- I see a combination of paved and natural trails.
- Along with paved trails connecting main routes and future uses and hopefully connecting in ways to avoid crossing roads at grade. Under grade provides separation for safety.
- I think paved areas should be carefully considered at each site and limited where possible. A natural pathway should always be considered first.
- Each site is case by case.
- I have no expertise nor prior knowledge of any of these projects but I think there needs to be an underlying 'credo' and when/where/how to support or allow is on a case by case basis.

7. Where would afforestation be appropriate? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Mill Creek Preserve **(5, 33.3%)**
- b. Open Space at the Emerson Reserve **(3, 20%)**
- c. Weizel Farm Preserve **(3, 20%)**
- d. New Trees should be incorporated into all open spaces. **(14, 93.3%)**
- e. Additional trees should not be incorporated in open spaces. **(0, 0%)**



Written in responses –

- I have no expertise nor prior knowledge of any of these projects but I think there needs to be an underlying 'credo' and when/where/how to support or allow is on a case by case basis.

8. What amenities are most important to you? (Select the three most important please.)

- Bathrooms **(4, 26.7%)**
- Wayfinding signage **(4, 26.7%)**
- Trail and Park information signage **(12, 80%)**
- Educational signage **(7, 46.7%)**
- Dog related amenities **(1, 6.7%)**
- Benches **(8, 53.3%)**
- Water fountains **(2, 13.3%)**
- Picnic areas **(3, 20%)**
- Cycling amenities (pumps, racks, etc.) **(2, 13.3%)**
- Lighting **(0, 0%)**

Written in responses –

- Along with paved trails connecting main routes and future uses and hopefully connecting in ways to avoid crossing roads at grade. Under grade provides separation for safety.
- Trash cans

9. What activities would YOU do at preserves? (Select the three most important please.)

- Walking **(13, 86.7%)**
- Dog walking **(1, 6.7%)**
- Connecting with nature **(12, 80%)**
- Running **(1, 6.7%)**
- Cycling **(4, 26.7%)**
- Birding **(5, 33.3%)**
- Socializing **(1, 6.7%)**
- Plant and wildlife study **(6, 40%)**
- Equestrian trail riding **(1, 6.7%)**

Written in responses –



- Fishing

10. What activities do you expect OTHERS to do at the preserves? (Select the three most important please.)

- Walking (**10, 66.7%**)
- Dog walking (**8, 53.3%**)
- Connecting with nature (**6, 40%**)
- Running (**6, 40%**)
- Cycling (**4, 26.7%**)
- Birding (**3, 20%**)
- Socializing (**4, 26.7%**)
- Plant and wildlife study (**4, 26.7%**)
- Equestrian trail riding (**0, 0%**)

11. Should access be limited anywhere? (Select all that apply.)

- Mill Creek Preserve (**7, 46.7%**)
- Open Space at the Emerson Reserve (**0, 0%**)
- Weizel Farm Preserve (**3, 20%**)
- Access should not be limited. (**3, 20%**)

Written in responses –

- Any sensitive areas no matter where they are should be limited, very limited.
- Unless critical habitat with specific breeding or other sensitive issues. IE mowing should be alternately restricted as was planned for Bradford dam, but it should be enforced for bird nesting times.
- Depends on conditions variety of factors.
- Should be limited as appropriate for habitat/wildlife preservation.
- Depends on situation and season.
- Access limited on seasonal basis.
- I have no expertise nor prior knowledge of any of these projects but I think there needs to be an underlying 'credo' and when/where/how to support or allow is on a case by case basis.

12. Are we missing anything? Please feel free to share any other considerations or concerns that you may have.

- Signage that educates public.



- B. How much is this going to cost on annual basis including NLT supervision, operations of facilities including trash removal, maintenance and insurance?
- C. Like to encourage plantings that provide berries for people and animals. i.e. edible forest
- D. In the Mill Creek Resource Management Plan, January 2019- a number of recommendations were made which should have more specific detail and recommendations as part of the Master Plan. As in any feasibility study, recommendations are made along with project cost estimates that need to be clearly defined and eventual operational costs over time. It would also be most helpful to know any phasing strategy for the three parcels and timelines associated with proposed Master Plan completion. Your recommendations should be clear regarding any deer management program, plan to control invasive plants, lantern fly infestation, best practice for stewardship. As Natural Lands has provided development and implementation for a number of preserves, it might be a good idea, if Covid restrictions lessen to have a select representative group from open space, EAC, Park and Recreation, and Bike and Hike to have a site visit to see results of what the parcel can become for Warrington. As Warrington's recreation inventory expands, the enjoyment of what can be comes with a cost- which truly needs to be explained to all and the management it will take. Thank you for your time and efforts in providing a path forward to improve the quality of life for our community. Please let me know if you need any clarification of my response. Take care.
- E. In my line of work, you always have to worry about downstream affects. Given the location of my property, I am concerned with 'down creek' affects - as I have Mill Creek running through my property for an acre or two, ending at the bridge on Bristol Rd!
- F. Better mowing management and maintenance for bird nesting and wildlife. Crossings from one parcel to another along with paved trails connecting main routes and future uses and hopefully connecting in ways to avoid crossing roads at grade. Possible under grade provides separation for safety. Future crossings under rt 611 and rt 132 and connectors under county line road when upgraded should also be planned. Long term invasive maintenance and native plant educational signs are helpful.
- G. Since we have been blessed with being able to protect these few remaining natural areas in Warrington I want to see habitat restoration, reforestation, minimal human intervention, ok to walk and bike the trails etc. As I suggested in our Zoom meeting the other night, I would like to see things like the establishment of a naturalized area for birds through planting of plants for food, shelter, etc. There were comments on how to hide the area of the Warrington tradesville recycling from the trail at Wiesel, how about the planting of many Eastern Red Cedar. Relativity inexpensive, great habitat, a natural screen. Let's not go White Pine overused but better than nothing.



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- H. There has been ATV and dirt bike activity on some open space. Perhaps there should be signage restricting that.
- I. I am concerned about the long term maintenance of all three areas. I also think the frog pond should be converted to a marsh d/t the probable pollution from the years of being a farm run off area. The marsh could help renew this area.
- J. Adequate and ongoing maintenance of the spaces is critical and should be a township priority. Trails that are linked together enhance the experience.