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Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee Minutes of the Meeting January 12, 2023

Call To Order, Pledge of Allegiance: William Connolly, Chairperson of the Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee, called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. Mr. Connolly led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present were:

William Connolly, Chairperson, Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee
Eileen Albillar, Vice Chairperson, Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee
Lynn Laurelli, Secretary, Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee
Joanne Mancini, Member, Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee
Christian Jones, Member, Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee
Melissa Conte, Member, Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc committee
Michael Parker, Member, Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee
Phillip Rittenhouse, Member, Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee
Patricia Tuberty, Member, Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee
Mary Roth, Alternate Member, Warrington Township Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee

Also present were Vincent Kelly, Ivy Ross, Barbara Brown, Ruth Schemm, Rick Weiss, Mike Diorka, Brian Tuberty, and Ilke Werner, all members of the public. Scott Vogin, representing the Bike and Hike committee, attended via zoom. Additional members of the public attended the meeting virtually.

1. OLD BUSINESS: None

2. NEW BUSINESS:

a. Introduction of Members

The newly appointed members were welcomed by the Committee and all the members introduced themselves. Chairman Connolly explained that the Committee consists of nine voting members plus one alternate member. If eight voting members are in attendance, then the alternate will also have a vote.

PUBLIC COMMENT – none at this time.

b. Consider November 29, 2022, Minutes for Approval.

Mr. Connolly asked if there were any comments or corrections to the November 29, 2022, Committee meeting minutes from the original five members who attended that meeting. There were none. Ms. Albillar made a motion, seconded by Mr. Jones, to approve the November 29, 2022, meeting minutes. The November 29, 2022, meeting minutes were approved by the Committee members.

c. Discussion of Committee Mission.

Chairman Connolly stated that the Master Plan discussion will continue in order to recommend adoption of something we can all support.

d. Identification and listing of issues with the Master Plan.

Chairman Connolly opened the floor to comments from members.

Ms. Tuberty has created a written summary entitled "Identification and Listing of Issues with the Mill Creek Master Plan." Hard copies were given to all members to read. Ms. Doyle asked Mr. Connolly if the Master Plan covers all three preserves, which it does. Ms. Albillar asked if the written summary includes most of the concerns of the board.

Mr. Connolly commented that pages 23 through 27 of the Open Space Master Plan dated August 16, 2022, lists the following eight suggested improvements: small parking lot, picnic tables, benches, trail system – mowed trails, signage, habitat restoration, reforestation – management/invasive reduction, and meadows management/invasive reduction.

Ms. Mancini asked if the driveway, which is part of Lingo Landscaping's operation, was a permanent easement. Is there no other access for Lingo? What about the impact of truck flow if there are visitors to Mill Creek Preserve?

Mr. Rittenhouse asked about the proposed trails - can folks walk their dogs? Dogs can be hard on wildlife. Ms. Mancini commented that these proposed trails are not part of the walkable system. (Not a part of trails for transportation.) Mr. Rittenhouse commented that construction of the trail on the outer boundary is occurring now. This trail will connect to the Mill Creek School and then it will dead end at Lower State Road. The trail will cross into Morning Walk and will stop at the light. The proposed parking lot is not connected to anything. It is possible to put a car on the side of the existing road.

a. Organization of Identified Issues.

Mr. Connolly stated that everyone in the room has a contribution to make to the discussion. Items of concern should be categorized into what to do and what not to do. Eight or nine of the items are in the "Identification and Listing of Issues with the Mill Creek Master Plan." Other items are general questions such as what permits are required and how much it will cost. The Committee can prioritize the dos and don'ts list. Ms. Albillar commented that the document was well organized. What is the biggest priority? What is the best framework to get public input? Is this a good process?

b. Discussion of issues.

Ms. Conte suggested that the Committee should make an organized field trip, keeping weather in mind, in order to see everything in the Preserve. She mentioned that dying trees within the Mill Creek Preserve are falling all over which is creating dangerous conditions. Mr. Jones said he can set up a trip and include the group that worked on the Master Plan as it is helpful to have a guide. Mr. Jones will coordinate and organize this in some way.

Ms. Mancini commented that the big issue is the trails. Ms. Tuberty emphasized that the land must be protected; for example, controlling the presence of shooting clubs, rifle clubs. She stated that this is a beautiful area that has been declining for a long time. What is the best way to preserve this space? Ms. Conte commented that once the area is opened up, the township will have difficulty managing it. Ms. Albillar stated that we must manage invasive species.

Mr. Rittenhouse stated that the Pennypack Preserve is much larger. Two folks manage the park and maintain a meadow. Does the Warrington Township already have enough walking trails? Mr. Rittenhouse asked if the Mill Creek area is large enough to accommodate the proposed trails. What about the Lingo truck traffic? There are a lot of trucks. Ms. Mancini mentioned that the Committee needs a layout of the area, which is Map 21, but the map is unclear.

Mr. Connolly commented that the "What is a Master Plan" section on page 2 of the Open Space Master Plan dated August 16, 2022, states that no steps are taken without some further governmental action.

Ms. Albillar said the members should look at the topic areas and have presentations about each area. The Committee should examine the process of how we got here. Prioritize the first topic.

At this time (8 pm.) Chairman Connolly asked for public comment.

Fred Gaines, a member of the public, (via zoom) commented that when PA DOT must build on wetlands, they provide land to compensate in a replacement area (referenced County Line Road project.)

Scott Vogin (via zoom) stated that an individual from Fish and Boat said the stream is conducive for stocking trout and conditions might improve. The Bike and Hike Committee is aware that certain trails need certain types of benches. What type of trails do we want?

Mr. Connelly looked at the language of the original voter's referendum. The vote was to purchase land to improve and preserve open space. Ms. Conte said the decision is about what improvements to make, if any? Mr. Rittenhouse stated that there are 66 acres of land. Are we Improving it for Nature's sake or for human sake? Do we need to develop this land for humans? We must weigh the pros and cons of this. Mr. Connelly stated that it is very important for the public to get some use of or appreciation of open space. Mr. Rittenhouse agreed about the need for the public to have an opportunity to appreciate nature.

Ms. Laurelli suggested that the Ad Hoc Committee make a field trip to visit Miriam's Meadow and the Wilma Quinlan Nature Preserve in New Britain in order to visualize meadow possibilities.

Ms. Albillar stated that the land should be preserved for all of us, for all the folks in Warrington.

Ms. Conte said we should focus on habitat disruption/land preservation. What improvements should we make in the open space in addition to wetland preservation.

Ms. Albillar stated that there should be a connection with the other Township committees. They should be invited in to tell the Ad Hoc Committee members about the issues from their perspective. We can encourage them to be part of the field trip. Again, there was discussion about when to schedule as right now the property is wet.

For the next meeting, prepare to have information about habitat and wetland. Ms. Tuberty will send a digital version of her document to Mr. Jones.

Mr. Connelly asked if there were any other comments.

Fred Gaines, a member of the public, (via zoom) commented that anyone can get to the Mill Creek Preserve but where can they park? The use of trails rather than wandering all through the land will prevent the destruction of native shrubs and plants.

Ms. Mancini asked if any preparation was needed for the next Committee meeting.

Mr. Connolly said that the Committee members should keep reading the pertinent documents including the resource management plan. Meanwhile we will be lining up committee folks. All are welcome to individually take a walk over to the Preserve.

Mike Diorka, a member of the public, commented that the Park and Rec Director has a drone. Ms. Ross, a member of the public, said we can show drone footage at the next meeting.

Mr. Connolly reminded the Committee members that according to the rules of the public meeting or Sunshine Act, the Committee cannot meet anywhere else except in this room. As an example, if you hit "reply to all" committee members in an email you have just had an illegal public meeting. Up to four members can have a discussion.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Ms. Albillar, seconded by Mr. Jones, to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

The next meeting will be Thursday evening, February 9, 2023, at 7 p.m. in the Township Building.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lynn Laurelli
Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee Secretary