

Neshaminy Greenway Trail - Dark Hollow Park Citizens Advisory Design Committee November 23, 2021 – Meeting Minutes

- Attendees:

- Marie Carota – Pebble Hill Road resident

- Jeannine Mitchell – Doylestown Township EAC

- Judy Hendrixson – Doylestown Township Bike & Hike Committee

- Andrea Strout – Buckingham Township EAC

- Dan Sharapan – Warwick Township Parks & Recreation Director

- Chris Cook – Bucks County Conservation District

- Chris Stanford, Michael Baker, Inc – Engineering Consultant

- Seth Partridge, Northeastern Forestry Concepts – Consultant

- Deborah Poppel, RK&K - Consultant

- Bucks County Planning Commission Staff:

- Evan Stone, Rich Brahler, Paul Gordon, Christian Regosch

- The meeting began with a discussion of the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI) process:
 - Marie Carota noted that the Red-Bellied Cooter's presence had been noted in the study and inquired as to whether it had been added to the PNDI map/system.
 - Deborah Poppel explained the PNDI process and indicated that it was run by Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (PNHP) who periodically updates their records based on information reported over time.
 - When project applicants use the database, they run a search based on a specific study area which returns results based on contents of database. Indicated that for this project, when Michael Baker submitted the PNDI search, it was done for the initial project corridor and included both sides of the creek.
 - Information, including presence of Red-Bellied Cooter, will be submitted to Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) as part of the permitting process and that the County would consult with the PFBC relative to any measures needed to protect the species.
 - Andrea Strout then inquired as to why purely aquatic life was not included in the study given the presence of PFAS and other chemicals in the Neshaminy Creek and the potential for this project to add additional stress. She also noted that the PNDI does list fish that are threatened or endangered.

- Deborah Poppel responded by indicating the difference between the PNHP list for Bucks County versus the site-specific search results which reports known species in that project area. She also indicated that as the project is currently not planning to look at the water crossings, her scope of work was only focused on terrestrial area.
- Evan Stone reaffirmed the scope-of-work for Deborah's study and acknowledged that PFOS are an area of concern but reminded the group of the County's commitment to not have a paved trail which will help with concerns regarding any potential chemical concerns associated with asphalt. Indicated that the trail is planned to be a combination of trail surface aggregate (TSA) and potential boardwalk segments where needed. Paul reminded the group of the earlier discussion and presentation of trail surface options.
- Evan reminded the group that our charge from the County Commissioners is to finish the design of the trail. He further indicated that we are not actively pursuing construction funding at this time, and that we are focusing our resources on the Newtown Rail Trail.
- A discussion was then held regarding the need for additional studies if federal funding was to be used for construction of the trail. Marie indicated that although we have the turtle and amphibian studies, there is more wildlife in the area including bald eagles. Evan reaffirmed that the County is committed to securing any required studies.
- Marie then expressed an interest in the segmented approach being used for the study and development of the trail, as well as the characterization of the trail as being a nature trail versus the Circuit Trail.

Paul then explained the four stages involved in the trail development process, regardless of whether it is a Circuit Trail or not, including:

- Conceptual trail idea
- Feasibility study
- Design & Engineering
- Construction

He then indicated that each step requires funding and that although ideal, it is improbable to assume that funding for the entire trail would be available at one time, which results in the segmented approach. He also indicated that there are times when due to various circumstances, including funding, projects do not advance from one stage to the next.

- Marie then discussed the environmentally sensitive aspect of this area and how continued development, deer browse, flooding are contributing to the continued degradation of the area and how this area is problematic and is not best suited for a trail, and particularly a Circuit trail.

- Evan indicated that we recognize the challenges of this area but reiterated that we are charged with finishing the design of the trail, and in an environmentally sensitive manner, and that we hope to use the development of this trail as a model for the development of other trails.
- Andrea initiated a discussion regarding connectivity for humans versus connectivity for animal species and indicated that she supports both. She also appreciated the focus on stormwater and flooding, particularly in light of Hurricane Ida and mentioned the history of flooding in the area citing the [Little Neshaminy Creek River Conservation Plan](#) developed by Heritage Conservancy (2007) study which identified areas with repeated flooding, going back to 1865.
- Marie then questioned the location of the strip of land in Stand #3. Evan indicated that he had the same question and had asked for clarification. Seth confirmed that the strip of land identified by the yellow land between designator 1B and 2 was the strip he was referencing. He indicated that the area up by the agricultural field where the trail alignment is proposed, is outside of the strip of land he refers to in his report on page 10.
- A discussion was then held regarding the consistency of the dates surrounding turtle hibernation and mitigation/protective measures to be taken. Deborah clarified this as follows:
 - Nesting season mid-June through late July
 - In water hibernation mid-October through mid-April
 - Turtle exclusion devices installation mid-October through mid-April
 - Avoidance of tree cutting/vegetation clearing mid-April through late August

All these timing requirements are written into planning notes, as submitted to, and reviewed by the Bucks County Conservation District (BCCD) to make sure that contractors are aware of and adhere to the restrictions. Chris Stanford from Michael Baker confirmed this information and indicated that they are responsible for working with contractors relative to the timing of various construction activities and incorporated. Chris Cook from the BCCD, confirmed this information.

- Jeannine Mitchell then discussed the importance of including local environmental experts in the trail design and building process and cited as an example, how this trail project trail has benefitted from, and been altered, because of the involvement of the local environmentalists. However, while she appreciated this fact, she also recognized the focus on connectivity of the Circuit Trail network and inquired as to how to increase communication between the environmental community and the Circuit Trails.

Judy Hendrixson responded by indicating that the Circuit Trail network is fluid and that while paved bicycle trails are the focus, they are receptive to spur/off-shoot trails and other trails that complement the Circuit Trail network.

Paul then provided information on how to become actively involved in the Circuit Trails, as well as links to the various Circuit Trail members and partnership organizations, including many environmental organizations and land trusts including Pennsylvania Environmental Council and Heritage Conservancy.

- Get involved - <https://circuittrails.org/get-involved>
- Circuit members - <https://circuittrails.org/members>
- Circuit partners - <https://circuittrails.org/public-partners>

Evan also spoke to the fluid and highly regulatory nature of trail development and the periodic reevaluation of both County and Circuit Trail priorities.

- Judy reinforced the highly regulatory nature of trail development including stormwater management and other environmental components. She provided an overview of the notification process to residents used by the Doylestown Bike & Hike Committee relative to trail projects. Evan agreed with this and indicated that the County has learned through this process and recognizes the need to reengage with residents since property ownership may change between the different stages of the development process. He then indicated that this committee will serve as a model for the development of future trail projects sponsored by the County.
- Marie then posed the question to Seth as to the survival potential for some of the smaller samplings he noted in his study. Seth responded that deer browse will continue to be an issue and potential deer control measures were discussed.
- Jeannine expressed the critical need for deer control measures and mentioned the formation of a regional committee to address the issue. Deborah reinforced the need for deer control for habitat restoration.
- Andrea then inquired as to the next steps for the project. Evan conveyed the following:
 - The trail alignment will continue to be revised to ensure that the recommendations of the environmental studies are included and applied to the design.
 - Additional details on landscaping and stormwater management planning including rain gardens and other best management practices will be addressed as part of those plans.
 - Archaeological testing will be upcoming in the next few weeks as required by regulatory and approval process. Will not involve any heavy equipment.
 - Once the design has progressed based on these additional studies, the group will reconvene to discuss the preliminary designs.
- Paul concluded the meeting by indicating that the meeting minutes and environmental studies will be posted on the website and encouraged everyone to submit any additional questions.