

Lower Paxton Township Greenway Committee

Meeting Minutes

March 17, 2021

Members in Attendance

Jim Seidler
Katie Scheib

Susan Landau
Mike Emanuel
Steve Tambolas

Members Absent

Also in Attendance

Rachelle Scott, Staff Liaison
Oak Park Neighbors:
Joe Victor, Brad Rodgers, Bonnie Capazo
Rich Krampe, Resident

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Seidler called the meeting to order at 5:45 pm on the above date in Room 174 of the Lower Paxton Township Municipal Center, 425 Prince Street, Harrisburg.

MINUTES

Ms. Landau made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 17, 2021 meeting, as amended. Mr. Seidler seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

OAK PARK TRAIL

Discussion with the Neighbors Regarding the Development of the Northern Section of the Trail

Members of the Greenway Committee introduced themselves to the public that came to the meeting in response to a notification that was sent out to neighbors of the Oak Park Trail properties. Mr. Seidler explained the background to those in attendance, and the detail of how the southern section was done with help of volunteers.

Mr. Victor, commented that he was involved in the trail discussion several years ago when the Township was interested in running the trail through his property to connect to Mateer Field. He was concerned that the notification came to the neighbors on a Saturday, which was only a few days prior to the meeting. He likes the low density of the area and is very concerned with how things impact the neighborhood. He noted there is a lot of debris that hasn't been cleaned up since the Township took ownership in 2017.

Mr. Seidler stated that the trail is proposed, and the timeline is long. The residents are actually being provided a very early notification. It will be dug by hand, and the map is only the

first draft. He noted that the most popular thing residents request over and over is connectivity and walkability. This is the first trail that has been completed since the committee started. The southern loop was a safe place to start since there are no abutting neighbors.

Mr. Victor stated that the area will not be easily accessible. The trail will also not be very wide, and this area is not ideal for a trail. Mr. Seidler agreed. Mr. Victor noted the land is not buildable or useable.

Ms. Capazo stated she is not happy about the trail going through her yard because it will be about 20 feet from her window. Her house is on the corner, next to Mr. Victor. They enjoy the privacy and the nature in that area, and she felt unsettled about strangers walking through her yard. Mr. Rodgers explained that his back yard faces Mr. Victor's back yard. He noted there are vagrants back there from time to time, and by inviting people into the space, they will naturally be drawn to the cleared area behind his and Mr. Victor's area. Mr. Victor is concerned about the lack of buffer. He also cautioned that the maps are from tax records but are not official property lines and the land will need to be surveyed.

Ms. Scheib asked what the neighbors are concerned about and if they object to the layout of the trail or the entire idea of it. Mr. Victor stated that they object to both. He thinks that Lower Paxton is missing the boat with walkability in places that people with disabilities and the elderly can use them.

Ms. Scheib stated that the area in question is identified as an alternate recreational trail, on the greenway plan which was developed decades ago. She asked if he was involved in the Greenway Plan meetings. Mr. Victor stated that he became involved in 2014 when the Township was investigating a walkway to the ballfield at Mateer Field. Mr. Seidler added that the greenway plan was developed around 1998 and identified quite a few places that could be improved with bike lanes or walking paths or missing connections. Ms. Capazo stated she would rather see a bike lane or walking lane down Oak Park Circle and she will definitely not be using that trail because it is steep and slippery and down in a gulley. If something happens to someone there is no way to get them out. Mr. Seidler stated that the only access is via the short driveway and parking area. Ms. Capazoe stated that people will park in her driveway. Mr. Seidler stated there is some sort of trail already established by the animals, and the neighbors agreed noting there are a lot of animals.

Mr. Seidler explained that the purpose of the meeting is to connect with the neighbors and to talk about the trail, hear concerns, and find a way to do this well. Mr. Victor noted he wants to do what is right for the neighborhood and the area in general, but he is concerned about some things, such as if things go on too quickly, littering, dumping animals. People have homes here, and they may give up their peace and quiet with the installation of the trail. It might not be compelling to neighbors unless there is some sort of buffer. Mr. Rodgers added that visually the general area is a mess, but the area near his house is very nice and is concerned that is where people will gravitate to. Even though the trail is not directly on his property, it will make his property accessible to people. He suggested some give and take be included in the process. Mr. Seidler agreed these are all legitimate concerns. He further explained that he laid out the draft trail trying to maximize the use of the land and get the longest walk possible. He anticipated some feedback from the neighbors which is why he was adamant that neighbors be informed

before going any further, especially when he sees that the neighbors take care of the back area of their lots including swing sets even pushed back into the wooded area.

Members and neighbors reviewed the maps and draft layout of the trail.

Ms. Scott stated that she, Bonnie and Joe talked about meeting on site to see where the trail is in person.

Mr. Tambolas stated that he has lived in the area for 34 years, and there is a trail that was installed behind his and about 8 other homes. The area is where kids used to gather to drink beer and other things. Since the installation of the trail, it has become a neighborhood asset and the neighbors all walk it so when it is used by people for “regular” use it actually cuts down dramatically on the other types of uses. He felt it was important to hear that in his neighborhood a trail was a very positive experience. Mr. Victor noted that this trail will be different in that it is in the woods and not accessible for young families, it will be for adults in a more difficult terrain. There will be no strollers or young kids, and it isn’t long enough to do much. He does support walking trails, but this isn’t even accessible to handicap folks. Interconnective trails should be installed and made accessible to everyone, not going through people’s backyards with kids and dogs and things. Mr. Seidler shared a Facebook post of two older residents enjoying the southern portion of the trail with two young grandchildren, adding that he disagrees that it isn’t walkable by a variety of people.

Mr. Seidler explained that he installed a trail at East High School on land that was later sold off. What is interesting is that the neighbors also used it, not just the school for track, and they liked it so much that they continued to maintain it for their use long after the land was sold. The neighbor kids walk the trail to get to school still. One of the challenges is how to install trails for the least amount of cost, minimum maintenance and the least negative impact to the community. This area was chosen to work on initially because there are no neighbors on the southern half, in a somewhat experimental way, to see if it could be done and done well with little to no negative impact. Now that they are looking at the northern half, there are neighbors and it is important to not upset them, this trail should be an asset not a problem to the community. He explained that the trail can be modified to come to an agreeable compromise. Staying away from the roadway is important because it is muddy, and staying on higher ground does put it closer to the homes and to the open area, so a redesign is appropriate now that there has been input from the neighbors. He wants to make sure the neighbors’ voices are heard so he asked those in attendance to reach out to the other neighbors. He apologized that it seems to be short notice, but there is no real timeline with this, and it is just done in spare time as he is able, and the committee meets every month, so the neighbors are invited every month; this is an important step in the process. There are people that enjoy the southern section, but the northern section has neighbors that are closer. Mr. Rodgers thanked him for the explanation and agreed it’s a great idea but reminded him that it is important to involve the residents who are impacted. He will go down and take a look in order to provide feedback. Ms. Capazo stated she is concerned about the animals. Mr. Seidler agreed noting there are fox at the other end that have a den and have babies each year.

Mr. Seidler stated that the original intent was to give this a try in an area with minimal neighbors, no paving and minimal expense, in an experimental way. This will help the Township

in general decide if this is something that would be possible, and then it could be used to demonstrate its feasibility or lack thereof. He emphasized that the comments and concerns from the residents are very important and he encouraged them to come to more meetings. He would like to hear from them more and encouraged them to take notice of any positive impacts to the area, such as removing the downed wires and debris. Ms. Scott stated that the Township is pushing the cable company to remove the wire, and the cable company is having trouble accessing the area with a truck to do the work. Mr. Seidler stated that a person even had a tree stand there for hunting, but that has since been removed. Mr. Victor noted that the cemetery is extending their gravel road recently and has been pushing dirt towards the trail for some time. Because it is a remote area there are things that happen, like the vagrants that sleep there, even camp out there.

Mr. Victor commended the committee members for their efforts noting that they are doing this on volunteer time and for the purpose of helping the community, but there are things that don't always make sense. He would like the committee to pause the work on the north end of the trail until it can be mapped out exactly and perhaps clear some of the area in question. He would like them to think about buffers for the neighbors

Ms. Capazo asked if the committee would come out and show them where the trail will be. Mr. Seidler stated that it isn't decided, so he would like to spend some time out there and work on it. He asked the neighbors to come to more meetings and discuss it with the committee. Mr. Victor asked why the trail was designed as a loop and Mr. Seidler explained it is because the only access is at the small parking area. Mr. Victor would like it to be an out-and-back style and Mr. Seidler agreed that is a possibility. Mr. Victor stated that if it were one trail the buffer could be greater and it eliminates the loop close to the homes. Mr. Seidler noted that one of the early drafts of the layout was to go point to point from the parking lot to Oak Park circle, but there is no good place to end it at the circle. Mr. Victor offered to help with the trail when it is time to work on it. Mr. Rodgers agreed the trail can work as long as it is mindful that people will see the clearing and want to hang out in there. Ms. Capazo asked if anyone is coming out to show us anything. Mr. Victor stated it is on hold for now until things are worked on some more. Ms. Scott stated she would be in contact to meet on site with neighbors or anyone interested. (Brad Rodgers 408 Trudy Road)

REORGANIZATION

Ms. Scheib nominated Jim Seidler as Chairman and Sue Landau as Vice Chairman. A unanimous vote approving the nominations followed.

OTHER

Brightbill

Ms. Scott stated that the township is preparing for an Arbor Day/Earth Day event, and is asking for help from the Greenway Committee. Mr. Seidler would like to start organizing more maintenance type events at trails. That can be discussed at a future meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting ended at 6:55 pm. The next meeting of the Greenway Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, February 17, 2021, at 5:45 pm in Room 174 of the Municipal Center.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michelle Hiner
Recording Secretary