

The stated meeting of the Recreation, Parks, and Open Space Advisory Committee of Abington Township was held on Wednesday, September 21, 2022, via webinar with Commissioner Vahey presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:02 p.m.

PRESENT: Township Representatives: Commissioner Vahey, Manager Manfredi, Assistant Manager Wehmeyer, Director of Parks and Recreation Karl Lukens

Simone Collins Landscape Architects: William Collins, Principal, Sarah Leeper, Project Manager, Emma Haley, Registered Landscape Architect

Committee Members: Leah Anderson, Tim Barton, Krystn Kuckelman, Rachel McNeill, Karin Rosen, Steven Sacavage, Mike Scotese, Joe Stevens

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES: No minutes to approve as this was the first meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

Recreation, Parks, and Open Space – Meeting #1 – Kickoff, Protocols and Goals:

Mr. Collins introduced the Simone Collins team and gave a summary about their firm.

Ms. Leeper said planning is crucial to local government in looking towards the future as well as applying for grant funding from state and federal agencies. Parks and recreation facilities are key places where residents interact with their Township more than anywhere else, and it is an essential piece of infrastructure both environmentally and to enjoy the outdoors. We look forward to the journey of planning the future of Abington parks.

Project scope includes public participation in holding committee and focus group meetings; key person interviews; background information; mission statement; facilities and open space inventory analysis; facilities and equipment maintenance; recreation programs and services; financing; recommendations and cost estimates; and plan implementation. Project schedule was presented, and a copy of an online public survey will be sent to the advisory committee for review prior to sending it out to the community.

Ms. Haley presented a Township map identifying parks, non-Township open space, golf course, educational institutions, SEPTA regional rail systems, the Pennypack Trail as well as the creeks and watersheds that run through the Township. STRAVA Run Data is a user populated system to track someone's exercise routine and used to determine where runners are running and whether they are running in the parks. STRAVA also provides bike riding data.

Ms. Leeper presented a list of Township parks and its amenities noting that some parks have clubhouses, which are home to athletic organizations, and we plan to further explore and document the fields.

Ms. Rosen questioned whether Diehl Park in Roslyn is still a park.

Commissioner Vahey commented that it is not a park, it is Township-owned green space. He requested that all members identify any open space in the Township that is not on the list to make sure it is part of the inventory.

Mr. Collins continued that any ideas and concepts will become part of the public record and whether they become part of the final Master Plan will be determined as the process goes forward.

Commissioner Vahey said some parks in the Township are amazing and some are not. For example, Roslyn Park has great lighting, walking trail and a skatepark, and then there is Baederwood and Alverthorpe that feel dated.

Mr. Sacavage said Baederwood Park is split between the Township and School District and there is no official trail, but a lot of people use the loop. Also, there is a large park across Highland known as "Coates Preserve" that is Township property and less used. Grove Park in Roychester Park has a restoration plan with the Army Corp of Engineers along the Sandy Run Creek, and he asked about Lorimer Park even though it is a county park.

Mr. Collins replied we will look at all recreation resources as it contributes to recreation services and open space and it should be part of the inventory; also, any recommendations for changes could be made to the County as part of this process.

Ms. Leeper added that in terms of large pieces of land in the Township that may come up for redevelopment in the future, there is a tool the Township could use such as an official map as a companion document to the zoning code that allows the Township to identify connections such as an improved road, trail, or open space.

Mr. Sacavage continued that he and his family travel to playgrounds outside of the Township because there is no major playground in Abington, and there is a lot of open field green space that is not utilized such as Hallowell Park and Crestmont Park, which is labor intensive to maintain and not welcoming or useful. Also, from an ecological standpoint, there is a lot of stormwater runoff, and the parks could play a substantial role in helping to reduce it. And for bicycling and jogging, there are not a lot of options in the Township aside from the Pennypack and the Ardsley Cemetery property, which is a potential area for improvement.

Mr. Scotese said he lives near Tyson Green and asked about getting a pickleball court or bocce ball court. Also, the schools have a lot of amenities that we should recognize and not duplicate; also, near Crestmont Train Station, there is the Rubicam Avenue Park.

Mr. Collins replied when the process is finished, there will be a consensus as to how to best serve everyone and it could be a Townshipwide program sponsoring various elements that would be accompanied by unit-costs. Our early map shows educational facilities that are adjacent to open space, and we will make sure we get them all.

Ms. Leeper added that one component of our deliverable would be a menu of items that could be funded by community sponsorship.

Ms. Anderson said there are not too many ways to get to the Pennypack by bike from the Rydal area, although there is green space on Valley Road, a potential path for biking and dog walking could be another loop to connect to the Pennypack. Also, she would like a more walkable community that would pull neighbors into communal spaces for interaction as well as pickleball courts, and it would make sense to have park and recreation programs at an accessible price point. Also, she expressed concern about having to show identification at Alverthorpe Park, so why is that necessary?

Manager Manfredi replied it was bequeathed by a family member that it is to be used by Abington residents only.

Ms. Kuckelman commented that she would like accessible programming and recreation to be spread throughout the Township. As part of our work at Glenside Weldon, we met with Upper Dublin's Park and Recreation Director who spoke about a survey they took in their community asking residents what they want from their recreation department, so a survey for Abington residents is very important. She questioned how to make Baederwood Park more accessible and suggested that all parks and playgrounds be smoke-free. Also, she would like to strengthen the Township's partnership with athletic associations to help drive more intermural play as well as transform Hallowell Park into an income-maker.

Ms. McNeill commented that her focus is making Abington's parks ADA accessible. She suggested that elementary, middle, and high schools' partner with Penn State Abington to design their own poll so they would be building a sense of ownership while creating a sense of community; also, she suggested offering more programming such as archery, which is inclusive.

Commissioner Vahey said that regarding a sense of community; residents identify first with their neighborhood and then with the Township. We are the 10th largest municipality in the State, and we should be proud to live here, so if we can use parks to create Township-identity and build that into this plan that would be a great result.

Mr. Stevens questioned whether the planners would define the uses in various size parks, which should be considered in terms of facilities.

Mr. Collins replied that the community will provide guidance and then we will quantify the need within the Township and target specific facilities of the neighborhoods.

Mr. Barton asked about comparing Abington with other municipalities in terms of funding, parks, accessibility, facilities, community centers and engagement because he feels the Township is behind some of the surrounding Townships. Also, there are eight different softball/baseball organizations and there is no "Abington" outside of high school athletics as they are playing for Ardsley, Roslyn, Glenside, etc. Also, the Army Corp of Engineers' plans for Roychester Park is a "hot button" issue in his neighborhood, which needs to be communicated better. And he would like Abington to get new signage for all parks.

Ms. Rosen noted that there are three watersheds in Abington: the TTF, Wissahickon Trail and the Pennypack. Also, she grew up in Rockledge Borough that had an Open Space Committee, and back when a huge factory burned down, they decided not to build but keep it as open space and then made it into a park. Also, Rockledge Park was created from another large area that is connected to Lorimer and beyond, and with St. Basil's, the reaction is to build. She suggested planting meadows with native plants as well as wildflower gardens in open space so there is less grass that needs to be mowed. Also, community groups could help maintain the parks such as "Friends of the Park."

Ms. Leeper said next steps would be to identify focus group meetings with input from the advisory committee and hold key person interviews. SurveyMonkey will be sent out to take the pulse of the community requesting demographics; age of responder and those who live in their households; how they currently use recreation, parks, and open space; and how they feel about the parks in Abington as well as other survey questions including space for comments. Next advisory meeting will be held on November 14th.

Commissioner Vahey asked for any public comment.

Ross Able, resident, commented that he has been advocating for an updated Master Bicycle and Sidewalk Plan as the current plan does not go too far in terms of recommendations. Regarding bike lanes on Valley Road, traffic goes by so fast, and study shows that with just painted bike lanes, it is more dangerous, and he would like to see a plan with protected lanes or a separated path. Also, he would like Alverthorpe to be more of an open park, and he encouraged connections between all green space and more sidewalks in the Township.

Monica Vandergrift, resident, asked for a survey question to be included about an “inclusive playground” and suggested that Roychester Park may be the site for one. Also, accessible tables and other items could be added to parks, and she would like to see the park system promoted better.

Lora Lehmann, resident, commented that there is a “huge” water problem at Hallowell Park, and the Boy Scout preserve is deeded not to have any trails because it is a wildlife sanctuary, but it needs to be maintained. Also, she asked for a community center with an indoor pool for seniors and families that is open year-round.

ADJOURNMENT: 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary