

The stated Public Meeting #1 of the Recreation, Parks, and Open Space Advisory Committee of Abington Township was held on Wednesday, October 19, 2022, via webinar and in-person with Commissioner Vahey presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:03 p.m.

PRESENT: Township Representatives: Commissioner Vahey, Assistant Manager Wehmeyer

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

NEW BUSINESS:

Recreation, Parks, and Open Space (RPOS) – Public Meeting #1 – Plan Overview & Brainstorming:

Commissioner Vahey said the Board of Commissioners is focusing on planning for the future and we are very happy where we live; however, we want to be sure it is a great place to live for many years to come for the next generation. Actively, a Comprehensive Plan is in development; we are planning for economic development; a strategic plan for capital budget spending as well as planning for our parks and recreation for the future. For him, parks are an essential part of this great planning process and the sole of our community where we gather, grow, and repair.

However, to build this plan, we need input from our citizens to make sure we are developing it so that it represents the needs of our Township, and we are excited and eager for your feedback, and this committee will help guide the process, but it will truly be led by residents of Abington Township.

Ms. Leeper said Simone Collins has a great working relationship with the State's DCNR (Department of Conservation and Natural Resources), and our plans for park improvements are designed to follow their standards to be able to apply for potential grant funding that could be put towards implementation of any recommendations.

The plan will be a guiding document over the next 10-20 years on how the Township would like parks and open space to evolve, and it will identify recreational needs as well as future improvements as parks and open space are common ground for everyone in the community.

Project scope includes purpose, goals, and objectives as well as public participation on what the goals should be. The plan will provide recreation for all abilities and ages, and we will review each specific site and make recommendations for improvements including community facilities and programs.

Currently, we are gathering background information and the next step will be development of the mission statement and goals and completing the inventory and analysis of the Township's existing facilities. Project schedule was presented noting this is the first public meeting with one advisory meeting held to-date. Beginning in November, we will begin getting additional public input in the form of key-person interviews, holding focus group meetings and then another advisory meeting will be held on the status of the progress.

The web-based public opinion survey is a tool to take the pulse of the community and is now live, and residents are encouraged to share as much information as possible. Also, we use a parks improvement map tool, which is a form for public suggestions, facts, and ideas. Focus group meetings are set up by invitation to organized sports groups, tweens and teens, young families, senior citizens, and ecology such as meeting with the Audubon Society, the EAC and watershed groups. Key person interviews are also by invitation to the park team, maintenance team, emergency responders, inclusive design committee, County Planning Commission, stormwater planning consultant, DCNR reps, and community organizations.

When considering Abington's needs for the future, we will consider recreation standards such as the National Recreation and Park Association that benchmarks the Township against peer municipalities similar in size. The team will review and understand current prior planning documents to help with the plan.

Ms. Haley presented the map of existing land use showing that Abington is mostly built out; however, there are some undeveloped lands, and we will look at that as well as institutional lands to determine whether they are viable spaces for parks and open space. Map of Township's recreation and open space inventory was presented along with the watershed and hydrology map and STRAVA data that tracks walking/running in high-use areas as well as data on bike riding.

Parks were divided into various types highlighting their amenities as well as trails and institutional lands.

Mr. Collins said there is another project concurrently with this plan, which is the inclusive playground and information as it develops will be included in this report.

Brainstorming session of ideas, comments, and suggestions to create a program for improvements began with input from residents.

A resident expressed concern about the poor existing conditions of the football field in Alverthorpe Park including the sidelines causing safety issues.

Gina Kennedy, resident, commented that she has disabled children and accessibility is a major need across the Township for all ages and all abilities. The target is an inclusive playground; however, ideally, all playgrounds and pathways should be more accessible and inclusive.

Mr. Collins replied we will set the standards for park rehabilitation, and as specific parks are rehabilitated, they will be done according to modern standards.

Laurel Frazier, resident, commented that her grandson plays for the Raiders at Alverthorpe and agreed with the previous speaker's comment. Also, her grandson plays baseball on the Glenside-Weldon field, owned by the School District that is "horrendous," and the porta-pots are vandalized during the nighttime, so there are security and infrastructure issues at the parks. She suggested improving the lighting, the public facilities, and have a place for a snack shop.

Mr. Collins replied that the School District will be an important partner to engage with at one of these meetings.

Kim Delaney, resident, commented that her son also plays for the Raiders, and there is not enough space, and the baseball field completely floods out. Also, the bleachers are not great and there is no sound system for the bathrooms.

Mr. Collins suggested using the focus groups as a way for the sports organizations to work together. Also, the older parks were developed on lands that were not used for other things and then development surrounding it caused increased runoff, so stormwater needs to be addressed at the source. And we can explore working with watershed groups regarding conservation work to protect the parks.

Ms. Haley read online comments from residents: a paved trail safe from vehicles to roller skate, rollerblade, scooter and bike ride; how will the Township accommodate and consider the neighborhoods in terms of safety, management of traffic, noise, trash containment, and vandalism; upgrade lighting at the park; bring back the YMCA; more trees and raingardens will help with erosion, flooding, and provide shade for spectators as well as beautify our parks; partner with ecology groups; condition of the lake in Alverthorpe needs to be addressed; indoor space and ballfields at St. Basil's property; opening a swim night once a week at the high school pool in the wintertime; and put a fence around turf fields to keep bikes off.

Mr. Collins replied traffic is a bigger issue than just recreation. Also, key person interviews with the police and EMT will help us understand issues from their perspective.

Deb Burns, Guernsey Avenue, commented that there is no cohesive communication between the sports organizations and the various neighborhoods, and it is difficult to find out what programs are available. Also, there are a lot of people who are low income and struggling single parents and the programs are unaffordable, and there is a lack of community space for indoor activities.

A resident from Rydal commented that the tennis and basketball courts within walking distance are difficult to access because they are along busy roads and there is a lack of sidewalks making it hard to meetup with friends.

Mr. Collins replied that the survey will help us understand what is needed in terms of locating where facilities should be placed as well as improving access.

A resident from Hollywood commented that a rec center is needed for children to join activities safely as well as a place for everyone to be able to walk indoors with vending machines, restrooms, and handicapped parking.

Mr. Collins replied that we can provide a cost-comparison of similar indoor facilities in the region, although that is a capital item for the Township to consider.

Lora Lehmann, resident, commented that she supports the rec center idea.

A resident from Ardsley commented that she walks in the Ardsley Wildlife Sanctuary; however, the walking path is a hazard, and at one time, there was a boy scout project to map out the trail and she would like to see that completed.

Mr. Collins replied that wayfinding within local parks and trail systems could be funded as part of the specific park/trail projects.

Ms. Leah Anderson, RPOS committee member, suggested adding the Meadowbrook Farm Garden to the list of resources, which is a nonprofit privately owned space. Also, SEPTA yards are large, and some are adjacent to green space; however, they are not in good shape, and she suggested partnering with SEPTA.

Ms. Rachel McNeill, RPOS committee member, commented that all parks should be accessible, and she suggested more programming geared towards tweens and teens and make them all-inclusive.

A resident questioned whether adjacent properties to parks are being considered for expansion of parks.

Mr. Collins recommended considering all ecological buffers as an accessway to get to other resources.

Ms. Leeper provided the website info for the project as well as the link to the public opinion survey, and the next public meeting will be held on January 26, 2023.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary