

The stated Meeting #2 of the Recreation, Parks, and Open Space Advisory Committee of Abington Township was held on Monday, November 14, 2022, via webinar 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

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Ms. Kuckelman to approve the minutes from the Recreation, Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee Meeting of October 19, 2022.

MOTION was ADOPTED 9-0.

NEW BUSINESS:

Recreation, Parks, Open Space (RPOS) Advisory Committee Meeting #2 – Work in Progress Reviews:

Ms. Leeper said this is the second advisory committee meeting, and on January 9th, we will back before the committee to vet initial concepts and recommendations, and with the public on January 26th. Feedback from the advisory committee as well as focus groups will be developed into recommendations moving towards a draft plan in March and April with meetings held through June and the goal of presenting a final plan in July 2023.

Public Meeting #1 had good attendance with goals, facts, and concepts shared that were categorized as ecological efforts; teen spaces; community center; new recreation activities; guides/wayfinding; working with partners; security/safer spaces; and accessibility.

The web-based public opinion survey had 421 responses to-date with the majority being Abington residents and a handful of nonresidents. Respondent demographics were broken down by average age, household size, and length of time living in Abington. Existing recreational trends showed how often the parks and open space have been visited in the past 12-months as well as annual trips to the parks and we are hoping to see more trips than just 10 a year.

Commissioner Vahey said 10 trips seems low and questioned whether that is typical in other municipalities.

Ms. Leeper agreed that it does seem low and will consider revising that survey question.

Continuing with the survey review; visitation of community facilities was broken down by each park as well as non-township facilities, and 73% agree there are an adequate number of parks, natural areas, and trails in close proximity. Rankings of how well each type of recreational activity is provided for showed that cultural, educational, and historic opportunities ranked poorly as compared to youth sports ranking much higher, and we are in the process of benchmarking the Township's facilities per the National Recreation Association as well as other townships.

Playground facilities used by a certain age group were surveyed noting that schoolyards are a critical part of the community; active recreation ranked high and sports league participation showed that younger children play soccer as compared to older children who play baseball.

Passive recreation was surveyed with walking/running ranking the highest as well as open lawn play and sitting/people watching. Trail use and how they are used showed that walking/jogging ranked the highest, and library programs and special events of the Township had the most participation.

Rankings on how well each age group is being provided for showed that the teenage group ranked the lowest as parents want a safe place for their teens to hangout.

Non-township destinations for recreation ranked 28% with 21% paying for recreational programs in other municipalities.

Access to recreation – most respondents indicated they live close to parks and recreation facilities, although encouraged better connectivity such as additional sidewalks, connecting existing sidewalks to parks, and off-road trails. Respondents also indicated that they do not feel safe biking within the Township and suggested improving routes from neighborhoods to parks; routes from neighborhoods to community centers as well as trails connecting to destinations beyond Abington Township. 76% agree that the Township should consider development of a community center with suggested amenities as presented.

66% of respondents felt that recreational and open space needs are being met; however, there is a need for more natural areas and open space in Abington. Also, the need for new facilities such as an inclusive playground, a destination playground as well as improving existing facilities including accessibility ranked the highest.

Focus group meetings were held with organized sports groups and senior citizens, and there will be meetings with young families, ecology groups, and tweens and teens in November. Key person interviews are targeted for December/January.

Township Parks Overview - general recommendations include standardized terms for parks versus preserve/open space; update park branding/signage; coordinate branding with watersheds education; create standardized park/preserve entry signage-park/map/trails/facilities/emergency contacts.

Playgrounds – ¼ mile radius to playgrounds; Township facility; nature base play; school district; and the neighborhood gaps are in Roychester, Noble, Fox Chase, Hollywood, Meadowbrook, Huntingdon Valley, and Elkins Park. General observation – improve crosswalk/curb ramp connections into parks; accessible route from park entrance to playground; consider nature base play areas in open space areas; and partnership with the County for a playground at Lorimer Park.

Commissioner Vahey commented that playground equipment is not very diverse, and although he likes the recommendation to improve accessibility to the parks, a general overhaul of some of the existing structures should be part of the to-do list.

Mr. Stevens commented that shade is critical for playgrounds.

Mr. Sacavage suggested traffic calming measures near parks especially Baederwood Park.

Mr. Scotese suggested a trail system that utilizes public/private land for walkers/bicyclists.

Neighborhood parks/open space – ½ mile radius to passive recreation facilities; not all offer trails or sitting areas; and the neighborhood gaps are in Willow Grove, Crestmont, North Hills, Elkins Park, Meadowbrook, and the Huntingdon Valley area should have access to Pennypack Trail and Lorimer Park.

General observation for neighborhood parks – improve trail opportunities and sitting areas within parks geared towards teens and adults; general observation for open space areas – access canopy coverage and edges; develop stewardship plans; focus on waterway health; formalize and blaze trails; pursue parcels to buffer open space – priority on waterway health; protect large institutional lands; pursue conservation/trail easements with private landowners; explore acquisition of properties in the streambank corridor and floodplains; and consider how open space could be integrated into redeveloped commercial centers.

Community and Regional Parks – general opportunities – access improvements; accessible route to facilities; provide meaningful loop trails within parks and develop stewardship plans.

Athletic Facilities Feedback – all fields serve as multipurpose; soccer fields are overused at the older level, which leads to injuries and there is a need for one to two, 90-degree baseball fields with modern lighting and unobstructed outfields; field drainage is an issue throughout all parks and modernized lighting is needed.

Commissioner Vahey asked for any public comment.

Ross Able, resident, suggested tweaking the language in the survey regarding bicycling such as “protected bike lanes” are different than “painted bike lanes.” Also, there is a gap in the Noble neighborhood and families in the area have been trying to organize and support a park/playground/open space area that was recommended in the transit-oriented development plan for Noble about 10 years ago. Also, he would like to see a Noble to Fairway to Valley protected route to get to the Pennypack.

Patricia Gallagher, Chair of the Abington Shade Tree Commission, agreed that connectivity to the Pennypack would be awesome. When this (RPOS) plan is recommended, it should include a townshipwide invasive management plan, which needs to be addressed.

The Urban Tree Canopy Study showed that we have lost one in eight trees between 2004 and 2017, and it is important to try to regain that canopy on private land as well as open space, which is something that could dovetail into providing shade for playgrounds.

Also, she likes the idea of converting large lawns into meadows to provide more habitat for the wildlife and to connect greenways and requiring developers to provide meaningful open space and tree canopy as properties are being redeveloped.

Lora Lehmann, resident, suggested small community centers with pools that are accessible by all quadrants of the Township; also, an ordinance requiring businesses to provide more green space.

Anna Nicholaides, Associate with the Shade Tree Commission, said she would like to see Hallowell Park be a distinct separation between the industrial and residential area that would involve planting trees and building the riparian buffer between the stream and the parking lot, and see whether SPS would allow it.

Nora Salzman, resident, agreed that there is a clear need for a park and green space in the Noble area and suggested implementing recommendations of the TOD plan to repurpose the bleak and desolate heat-island, which is the Noble Station into green space and a park. She would also like to see increased pedestrian/bicyclist connections to the Pennpack.

Mike Narcowich, County Planner, MCPC, said the work on this plan and the comprehensive planning process seems to be reinforcing one another. An official map has been discussed using the Fairway as a bike route consistent with the Abington Master Bicycle Plan.

Also, more green space at Noble has been recommended in various plans noting that residents want the Township to demand from developers to provide more green and open space as part of the land development process for purposes of stormwater management, shade tree canopy and gathering space. And the SALDO and Master Tree Canopy Plan can be used to implement some of the ideas of the comprehensive recreation, parks, and open space planning process.

The survey from the Comp Plan indicated that residents value Abington as a community, a place to raise their children as well as retire and having cross generational contact is important for happiness and well-being.

James Stevens, resident, said the large barrier is the Noble Train Station between the residential neighborhoods, and the residents want a park with shade trees along with drainage, rain gardens and invasive management along the SEPTA line.

Hammam Aldouri, resident, agreed with his neighbors about the Noble area. Also, he did not see anything in the survey about suggestions for posting opening/closing times of parks and trails.

ADJOURNMENT: 9:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary