

SAUCON RAIL TRAIL OVERSIGHT COMMISSION MEETING

Date: Monday, January 27, 2014
Time: 6:14 PM
Location: Lower Saucon Township Council Meeting Room

I. Opening

- A. **Call to Order:** Roger Jurczak welcomed everyone
- B. **Roll Call:** Lower Saucon Township: Roger Jurczak, Jerry Holum
Hellertown Borough: Steve LaBrake
Coopersburg Borough: Linda Minarik
Upper Saucon Township: Joseph Geib, Peter Jarrett

II. Reorganization

- A. **Election of President** – Peter Jarrett was elected President by acclamation
- B. **Election of Vice President** – Roger Jurczak was elected Vice President by acclamation
- C. **Election of Secretary** – Steve La Brake was elected Secretary by acclamation

III. Information Items

- A. **List of 2014 Saucon Rail Trail Oversight Commission Representatives** – Joe Geib distributed the current list reflecting the changes to the Hellertown Borough representatives. It will be revised to add Linda Minarik as a Coopersburg Borough representative.
- B. **2014 Saucon Rail Trail Oversight Commission Meeting Schedule** – The schedule was distributed. Jack advised that the meeting dates were advertised. There will be no meetings again in May and December.

IV. Public Comment –None

V. Presentations/Trail Business

- A. **Rail Trail Vision** – Steve said the original idea was to do the mapping of areas of the trail for wildflowers or not and then that got into the focus on the invasives. He felt that we should still keep the mapping as a goal to show where we want to keep natural areas or plant wildflowers. Peter said that would be good if a Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop came to us and said they wanted to plant flowers we would have something to point them to. Roger said that the focus moved from the level of invasives to the environmental trail at the Township trailhead and the idea was to use that for a training foundation that could be used for a guide for the rest of the trail.
- B. **Website Updates** – Steve said that he has the calendar updated. He said he wanted to briefly discuss the Facebook page. It has over 1,500 “likes” and he wondered if it could be used to spur Bethlehem to connect their greenway to the SRT. He understands that they are going to construct the High Street Bridge in 2014 and they are not planning on extending their greenway down to the SRT until 2015. He wanted the opinion of the members about creating a Facebook page that could be used to put some pressure on Bethlehem to make this connection in 2014. From where they have stopped to the SRT is less than a mile and it won’t take long to clear this section of trees and lay a surface down. The page would gather “likes” to show Bethlehem the number of people who want this done and would have a comments section so that people can say why they want this done. The bike shop in South Bethlehem would help us promote this page. It would basically be like an on-line petition. Jack said that Steve should speak to Darlene Heller and get information from her about their timeline. Their plan as he understands it is to connect to Saucon Park in 2014. The remaining section is subject to their negotiations with Norfolk Southern and for the little piece that with SEPTA owns above Bachman Street in Hellertown. Peter questioned whether it was appropriate for a government organization like the SRTOC to do something like that to another government? Roger said if it was put into a question like “when is the SRT going to be connected to the Bethlehem Greenway?” like the Patch does from time to time, that would not reflect back on the municipalities. Jack said he could contact Darlene and get an update so if you do put something out it’s accurate. Joe said he was a little apprehensive about

doing a PR push against another municipality because we all know that there are a lot of things like budgets, grant cycles, etc., that have to fall into place. Jack said that putting out accurate information about where the project stands would be helpful. Putting out a question might bring all kinds of wacky opinions about who's responsible for holding it up. Jerry has a question about them blending with our trail when they do open; would they have the same rules, etc.? The members said that the rules are similar to ours, the surface may be different.

- C. **Trail Etiquette** – Jack handed out the Trail Etiquette sheet and said that this had been discussed at a previous meeting. The members reviewed the form. Once it's adopted it would be put on the kiosks, the website and the Facebook page. Jerry asked how this differs from the rules? Jack said it a lighter version of the rules – there is no enforcement. It basically is asking people to “be nice.” Jerry asked why it did not mention anything about keeping off private property. Jack said that it is more concerned with the traffic on the trail. The commissioners asked that the bulleted item for “when stopped, step off the trail” be changed to “when stopped, step to trail edge.” Jack said he will make that change and send that around tomorrow. The commissioners voted to adopt the trail etiquette with that minor change.
- D. **Trail Vegetation Planning/Mapping** – Peter said we covered this with the previous discussion under Rail trail Vision.

E. **Trail Improvements Projects**

- i. **Clean-up of Rock Structures** – Roger advised that he has been in touch with Frank Pazzaglia who is the geology professor at Lehigh about him bringing his students out sometime this year to clean up the rock outcroppings that are in several locations along the trail. He feels that if they could be cleaned up they could be feature points to show the geologic formation of the trail. What he has in mind is to bring out a group of his students prior to the greening up of the trail this spring to take out small shrubs and trees that have grown up on the rocks and power wash the rocks to eliminate dirt and mold, etc. The area he is looking to do initially is between the Old Mill and Bingen Road crossings. There is a cut there where there is a low stone wall. He would be able to use the new Township owned mobile water tank that has a pressure washer. Jerry said he was concerned if we clear away the vegetation and downed trees from these locations are we creating an attraction for kids to start climbing up and scaling the walls? Steve said that if there was signage put up explaining the significance of the formations that should keep down this type of activity. Jack advised that if there are problems of this type the Township could consider putting up fencing around these areas to keep people from going off the trail. Roger will get in touch with Frank and get more details and a schedule for this project for our next meeting.
- ii. **Nature Path at Reading Drive Trailhead** – Peter said the handout from the LST Planner indicates that there were some concerns with the plan proposed by Terry and the women such as ADA surface, location, width of the path. Jack said the trail starts in the picnic area which is also a concern. Roger said he understands that they wanted to start it at the edge of the picnic area. Jack said he can give a little background on this. After Terry and the women presented their plan to the SRTOC they went to a meeting of the Township EAC with the drawing and a list of the plant species they had identified and had a discussion with the EAC about the proposal. Jack said that he would have preferred that they sent the proposed plan to him first so that he could have it reviewed by the Township Planner before it went to the EAC. The EAC did not have this report when Terry discussed his plan at their meeting. Jack said that he has since discussed this with the EAC Chair and she agrees with him that this should go back to the EAC for further discussion. That is scheduled for their February meeting. The other issue that needs to be discussed is the ongoing maintenance of this project as it is on Township property. Jack said that they have had experience with other trails and gardens that get built as Girl Scout/Boy Scout projects and there is a lot of initial enthusiasm and then they fade away and the Township is left with the problem. Jerry asked if we could set up something like the Adopt-a-Road program to supervise it? Jack said that that would work if you have an organization with a strong membership that replenishes its volunteers. You also need a maintenance program that spells out everyone's responsibility. Roger said he understands that there may be a conflict that the SCWA and Master Gardeners have on February 11th so they may have to do this at the March 11th EAC meeting.

- iii. **Visually-Appealing Wire Fencing along Bridges over Saucon Creek** – Peter said that they have a report from the Township planner on the proposal that we made and from what he read they are saying that the existing fence is not strong enough to hold the fence sections that we proposed and that in order for it to be safe new footers would have to be placed. Jack said that there are concerns about whether it would compromise the stability of the existing fence; there are safety concerns about the barbed top and bottom of the fence; they also pointed out that the sections of the bridge would have to be specially made at the factory and would be very expensive. Roger said that the fencing idea was proposed to address the question of how we could make it easier to see the creek at the two crossing points that we have. The problem is that the top part of the existing fencing is at the level of someone’s eyes and if you want to see the creek you have to step up on one of the rungs to look over the fence. Roger said that he and Jerry looked at chain link fence and didn’t think it was appealing. This fencing is used at Steel Stacks and goes all the way down to the ground. There is a cost factor involved. Jerry said that the planner is saying that we have to put in additional posts and asked why can’t we use the existing posts? Jack said he could not answer his question, that’s why he gave it to the engineers to review. Jack said that the existing fences that were put up there were done based on the recommendation of the engineers and if we are proposing a change to them he has to be able to tell the Council that the public will be just as safe with it as the previous fencing. Jack said that we need to decide how you want to proceed with this. He could authorize the planner and engineer to meet with you and look into this further but he would want the Council to okay that and to authorize any spending on this. To do that he would have to take it to a Council meeting for discussion and to see if they like the idea. Linda asked if there currently was a problem with the existing fencing? She was advised that there was no problem with them – this has to do with visibility. The feeling is that the fencing is blocking the view of the Saucon Creek. Linda asked are people complaining about the view? Jack said that he has not heard one complaint from anyone since the fencing went up about this. That is a question that the Council might ask. Steve said his opinion is that he hates the wire fencing. He doesn’t see how you would be able to take any pictures through the fence. There’s no reason someone couldn’t bend over two inches now to take a photo. He doesn’t have an issue with the height of the fence rails. Linda said that she is going to have to go there and look at the bridge fencing. Peter said his concern is the cost benefit ratio of this proposal. If you really want to see the creek you can do it now. Peter said that on almost every rail trail he has been on the fencing looks the same as what we have. Jerry said that he had been in touch with Lehigh Valley Fence and asked them to give him an estimate and for one section on one side they said it would cost approximately \$1,600. If we just bought the fence sections ourselves they would cost only \$100 a piece and Public Works could do all of the bridges for under \$1,000. Peter said that we have used donations from the public to cover other items on the trail. Maybe that’s the way to pay for this. Peter said what’s the next step with this? Jack said that if you want to go to the next step and bring in the engineers, you have to go to the Council and get their blessing for this idea so you can move ahead with the design and cost issues. Linda said that her concern for the Council would be, since there have been no complaints, do you really want to propose the next step for engineering, etc. Linda said that she really can’t make any recommendation because she hasn’t seen what you are talking about. Jerry said wouldn’t Hellertown have to approve this too? Jack said yes and they would have to agree to pay for the section on their side of the bridge. Peter asked how you want to proceed? Jack said that since we have a new member here tonight who hasn’t had a chance yet to see the bridges and the Hellertown representatives are not all here tonight, he suggests that we put this back on the agenda for the February meeting for more discussion. Jerry said he may consider doing a petition and gathering signatures from people who are in favor of this proposal. Peter said that the bridges on the Perkiomen Trail uses wire cables for their railings

VI. Miscellaneous Business Items

- A. **Previous Meeting Minutes, November 25, 2013** – Roger motioned and Steve seconded that the minutes be approved. All in favor.

- B. **December Financial Report** – Jack said that the balance in the treasury at the end of December was \$10,341.20. The report shows the running total of receipts for 2013 and the only expenses we had were for the water fountain and the website updates. Roger made a motion and Linda seconded to accept the Financial Report. All in favor.
 - i. **2014 Municipal Dues** – Jack said that he spoke with the other Managers and based on the intergovernmental agreement we signed we all are supposed to kick in \$1,000 annually. If we were to do that in 2014, we would have a balance of almost \$15,000 and you can see by the 2013 Treasurer’s report that we only had expenses totaling approximately \$225 for the entire year. They agreed with him that it was appropriate for us to take a 1-year break on paying the dues for 2014. There was a short discussion about what expenses the dues payments were intended to cover.
- C. **Bills to pay (if any)** - None
- D. **Other** – Peter said that we should send a letter to Joe Pampanin thanking him for his service as the SRTOC Secretary. Steve said he would take care of that.

VII. Public Comment / Citizen Non-agenda

VIII. Commissioner Individual Statements & Updates

- A. Linda said that the Coopersburg Borough Council doesn’t feel it would enhance the Borough’s image to continue the trail down from Living Memorial Park and end it on Station Avenue at this time because there is no parking and because of the business establishment located there. They would prefer to wait until the rail trail is opened on the Springfield Township, Bucks County end and then they can connect our trail to the southern portion. Joe said that there is a small Upper Saucon Township portion before it goes into Bucks County. Joe said that UST also has a 200’ section past Landis Street that they don’t intend on finishing until the rail opens in Springfield Township. There was a discussion about the AMC & John Brunner’s efforts to work with SEPTA open the trail in Bucks County down to Quakertown.
- B. Joe said the UST obtained an ATV for trail maintenance.

IX. Adjournment – The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.