

## RAIL TRAIL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Wednesday, August 12, 2009  
Time: 5:00 PM  
Location: Lower Saucon Township

Present: Jack Cahalan, Frank Pazzaglia, Christopher Stromski, Donna Bristol, Steve LaBrake, Joe Hoffman, Charlie Luthar. Gail Nolf arrived at 5:04 PM.

Jack called the meeting to order at 5:01 PM. He showed a map showing the rail going through the four communities. For the past two years the four communities have been negotiating with SEPTA to lease the rail bed. The lease is an agreement that we will maintain the rail line and use it as a pedestrian/bike trail. SEPTA, if they want to come back with a passenger train during the life of the lease, which is thirty (30) years, has a right to notify us and they can come in and restore it to a train track. When the idea of a rail trail conversion was introduced there was a little bit of outcry from the rail fans, who would like to see the trains still running. There was also a little bit of outcry from them about SEPTA ripping up the rails and ties and turning it into a rail trail. That has died down and people now are more interested in seeing the trail completed. The lease agreement is the big thing. One wrinkle we've been trying to solve is that there are a lot of minor structures such as bridges, culverts, some of them have dates on them that go back to 1917, and SEPTA wanted us to be responsible for those. We said no way. We just want to be concerned about the surface of the trail. We worked on that with the lawyers and we think we finally have it resolved. We are anticipating that the draft of the lease agreement will be given to us and the Councils in LST and Hellertown will review that in September and if they agree to it, and sign off on it, it's \$1.00 a year for each of us for thirty years; we get quite a recreational asset. One of the big things that is going to carry this forward in the future is this Advisory Committee with your input and trail monitoring and your recommendations to the Councils. He and Charlie have been pushing to get the representatives appointed to this committee for awhile. There are no representatives here from Upper Saucon and Coopersburg yet. In Upper Saucon, they have an issue with the Lutron as the trail goes through the middle of the plant. Lutron, SEPTA and Upper Saucon have to resolve that. Coopersburg doesn't have many issues with the trail, but they have been tied up with the Route 309 construction. Charlie said they have a consultant who is working on the comprehensive plan, Glenn Taggart. He thought Glenn might be here tonight as he has a great interest in this. Jack pointed out on the map the section at the Lutron plant that was in question. Charlie said SEPTA is more concerned that Lutron isn't going to maintain their right-of-way and it will be left untended.

Jack handed out binders to each of the members with information on rail trails. Some issues they may not have to deal with and some issues may come up as you have some homeowners who have property abutting the trail and they might come to the board with issues like privacy, trespassing, etc.

Charlie said we want to talk about the rough draft for the by-laws for the group. The committee will have a lot of work to do regarding the design of the rail trail. Upper Saucon, at one point, had an idea that they would pave their rail trail which is something Hellertown wasn't thinking of because of the cost involved. As we got further into it, some people were saying that wasn't typically how trails were constructed. It's a combination of things. Some places are paved, some are not. That's one of the issues we will have to deal with. The by-laws are certainly subject to all kind of changes. He talked to their Solicitor and the cover sheet has some of the questions he has in terms of how votes would be done, what kind of interface you would have with the Councils, etc Jack said this document is what they have to push through to make this committee official. Once all four of the Councils sign off on that, then you are official. We would like to wait until Coopersburg and Upper Saucon got their representatives appointed, but we also wanted to start talking on our end. It's just going to take a little longer for them to get where we are. Hopefully at the next meeting, more of this will be completed. Maybe by the end of the year, we might be able to start operating as a body with a Chair and a meeting schedule. Charlie said he left out language about the terms of the members in the document. Jack said the Township set a term of three (3) years on their appointments, but that's up to each municipality. Charlie said Joe has volunteered to help the committee write grants. He's very knowledgeable and puts things together very nicely.

Frank asked about Growing Greener. Joe said Growing Greener might be in its last years, but there might be a shot with the rail to trail program. He'd like to bring in all that information and say this is where the funds are available

and go after it that way. Frank said he has access to federal grant sources through Lehigh University, so let him know what's going on. These can be related to what you are talking about and that makes it very favorable because it's like a cost sharing. There's no guarantee when you apply for something at the national level that you are going to get it, but if it comes to pass that this body enlarged with Coopersburg and Upper Saucon wanted an educational aspect to be part of this effort, then he thinks we should look into those opportunities. Frank said they walked a large portion of this trail and he takes students there a lot. There's many interesting natural features along the trail that once it's developed as a walking/biking trail can also doubly serve as an educational platform, including things like many of the cuts that are made along the way represent the building materials that a lot of historic buildings in the area came from including some of the quarries, which are adjacent to the trail. Something like that might be of community interest. There are a couple of fossil localities. There are some other interesting natural features so you get students involved in this and highlight those things along the trails, and it becomes interesting for the community. The natural features, the human interest, there's a ton of things that could be brought in.

Joe said there are possible cooperative grants that they've already started looking into relating to the Thomas Iron site, with the blessing of some of the key folks in Hellertown, for opportunities for clean up and development of a true passive park with minimum human involvement but would be available for people to actually see nature. The fact that the trail is right there, offers some possibilities for sharing, which may enable some sections of the trail to be done through an overall Thomas Iron site cleanup.

Charlie said other things that relate to this is High Street. The Bethlehem Comprehensive Plan includes a discussion of the connection to Hellertown going southward. High Street is owned by Norfolk Southern all the way down to Bachman Street at the southern end of Hellertown. Frank asked why isn't it coming under Hellertown's jurisdiction to do something about that bridge? Charlie said the City of Bethlehem is responsible for the bridge but what they would do is ask the Borough to have Public Works work with them to do the approaches. Frank said that's one of the really unique areas and one of the proposals on the table is to actually fill that in. If that is done, it might be a low cost solution for the trail, but you would lose the more interesting natural features. Jack said one of the things that came up on that, after Norfolk Southern applied to the state to take the bridge down and fill in the cut and the berm it, was that he and Charlie received a notice that the matter was going to an administrative hearing they asked that DCNR be a party to that process which means, we hope, that DCNR is going to go in and say don't block the potential for a rail trail going through there. Frank said that's great. Jack said that may be good to have somebody like DCNR involved.

Jack had a copy of Bethlehem's Southside Greenway Plan. Frank said this would connect right to their trail? Jack said correct. The Bethlehem greenway would go down to Saucon Park. He thinks there will be a real push from both sides to convert the section of track that Norfolk Southern has retained. Frank said anything to do to save that cut would be useful. If the cut does get filled in, it introduces another place where a road intersects the trail and it would be nearly as traveled as Water Street.

Jack said as the track was being cleared they were noticing there were some safety issues along there. The biggest one was in LST's area where people were actually driving on the trail. There is no railing on one side of the bridge behind Neighbors. Also, on the bridge at Old Mill Road, some teenagers decided to throw the ties into the water and broke the railing. We have been working with an engineer at SEPTA about the safety issues. The other concern was that there is various hardware that belongs to the railroad like signal and battery boxes along the trail. Charlie said there were two underground oil tanks. Jack said there also are poles with communication wires still on them. We have asked all along to have that removed but we reached a compromise with SEPTA that they would leave the hardware there but would remove all the hazardous material in them. There were a couple of underground storage tanks and battery storage boxes and they have been removed. He hasn't gotten the final sign-off yet that this has all been taken care of. Charlie said there was a question raised about the ladders to the signal boxes. Jack said we do have to take down the communication poles. Some of them are leaning over. Once the trail becomes ours, this group and the Councils will have to decide when we want to get the trail in shape to open it up. From what we understand, SEPTA is going to grade it when they are finished and take a magnet and pick up all the iron and spikes, and then the ballast stones will be rolled and a stone product can be put down. That can be spread and compacted ten feet wide. This trail right of way is 30 feet wide, as it had two tracks. Charlie said some places it's wider. Jack said a ten foot wide trail was something we were thinking about and we got a cost on a stone surface on that. Just for the Township's section, about 3 miles, it was about \$15,000 to \$20,000 for the stone.

Public Works (PW) in the Township and the Borough could spread that, roll it and compact it. You'd basically have a surface pretty soon.

Steve said the Lehigh trail in Jim Thorpe is compacted with stone. Steve said along a lot of the canal paths, they use screenings, which is a very fine stone. It's almost a dirt and stone. Once it's compacted, it's pretty much near asphalt. Frank said that's what you are going to need.

Donna said when the Borough of Hellertown and LST do their oil and chip thing, when they sweep up what's left over, couldn't that be recycled into the trail every year? Jack said he thinks it's similar to that. Donna said screenings are a little bit finer. Charlie said one thing they heard was when the environmental guy was there and we were generally talking about this, he said the finer material would penetrate and go into the big ballast. Jack said the Jersey barriers are up at the access points and on the bridges. There has to be a permanent kind of railing system or fencing that has to go on the bridges.

Steve said there's an Eagle Scout in LST looking for an Eagle Scout project and this would be a great project. We could tap into the local communities looking for kids to do the railings over the bridges. Jack said Donna has gone up to the Ironton Rail Trail meetings. The group up there, who we've been in contact with, indicated they wanted to come to the first couple of meetings and assist you with startup issues. Every one of their bridges has a little plaque indicating that it was done as an Eagle Scout project, and they really did a nice job. Donna said the Eagle Scouts up there did all of their signs and did beautiful work. They have Community Days where people come out and help clear brush. Their thought is when the community is working on this project, and they kind of monitor it also when they are out hiking, etc. They keep other people from throwing stuff down and the trails are very clean. They have events going on all the time and they have a really great website. They have maps showing the trails and where historical sites are. We have a lot of historical sites along our trail. Jack handed out brochures on the Ironton Rail Trail. He said this is one of the things you'll probably be looking to put at the trail heads, where people will be looking for maps and other information about the trail. About a year or so ago, we talked about a name for the trail, but haven't gotten that far. That's something your group is going to have to deal with. That's important as everything needs to be named for the project. Jack handed out a list of potential names for the trail.

Gail said how can we generate some excitement between the two municipalities? Donna said do the other municipalities have a Parks and Rec board? Jack said Upper Saucon Township does, he doesn't know about Coopersburg. Donna said she can go and attend some of the meetings to motivate Coopersburg and Upper Saucon and talk to their Council.

Gail said in terms of getting started on the paperwork, you have four municipalities, but she's hoping they could start soon on our end of it, and then encourage the other two municipalities. She'd hate to see the project be stalled. She asked who drafted the documents? Charlie said Jack created the intergovernmental agreement. Gail said is there a way to get a buy-in for the Hellertown and LST Councils, and then add in Upper Saucon and Coopersburg? Jack said sure, we can start that. That way we can give them a document with two signatures on it.

Charlie said in Upper Saucon there were some issues where people had put things on the right-of-way. Chris said there was a fire pit down the way on the trail. Donna said there are a lot of people who live along the trail that have fences up already. Jack said they were able to talk to the people in our township who had concerns and were able to allay most of those concerns. They felt that they were actually safer with a trail going through their back yard than previously when it was used by people who were fleeing and disappearing into the brush. It will actually now be patrolled by the Police Departments. When it is embraced by the homeowner, it's one of the first things that gets mentioned in real estate sale advertisements. There are also studies that show that home values increase if they are adjacent to rail trails.

Charlie said we can work on the documents and they can be altered. Gail said can we communicate with Upper Saucon and Coopersburg and say that we understand they have issues they have to deal with, but the Committee is being organized and we'd like to have them hop on. Charlie said this should go before the SEPTA board and lawyers in September.

Joe said the other thing that might help in moving this along, is that some of the grant applications are Fall 2009 grant applications so if we all are going to try to fold in the trail along with the Thomas project, that will be two or three months away where we are writing grants already. It would be helpful if you guys were officially formed, then he'd have a place to go for advanced feedback for the application that is written rather than response feedback afterwards. Jack said we probably have the rest of this year to think about having the trail open officially in Spring 2010. Charlie asked what would be the next step? We can work on communicating with the other municipalities. Jack said if we had another meeting, we could get the Ironton Trail folks down here. We could set a date and invite them.

Gail said that's a good idea. She has three issues. One is settling on a meeting date and inviting the Ironton people. Two is to communicate with Coopersburg and Upper Saucon. The third is moving forward to having Hellertown and Lower Saucon come to an official agreement so that Joe can tie into what needs to be done with the grant process.

Jack said the Ironton Trail group is made up of three communities: Whitehall Township, Coplay Borough and North Whitehall Township. Donna said they own the track. They had to get people together and take the track up. They had to do the whole thing themselves. We are lucky in comparison. Frank said but SEPTA could take the track anytime from us.

Jack said this is an overview of all the issues. We will be working at this end on the legal documents. Frank said on the legal documents, who assumes liability? Jack said we are assuming liability for only the surface we put down. Any liability for anything that is already there is SEPTA's as they are still the owner. Charlie said any environmental issues have to go back to SEPTA. Jack said if a tree falls down, we'll clear it. The only other issue is the trailheads, and the Township is looking into securing a trailhead along the trail. The Borough has Water Street Park and Thomas Iron site eventually. Upper Saucon and Coopersburg also have access to a trailhead.

Someone asked where the trail ended? Jack said it ends right before the Bucks County line, going up the hill out of Coopersburg, there's a nursing home on the right side.

Steve said eventually there would be a map with the towns, things like sandwich shops, etc. Whether it's a map of the town with numbers, and a kiosk could hold the pamphlets. Jack said the Historical Groups have been talking to us about similar things as the trail goes by some historical sites like the Grist Mill and the Heller Homestead Park. For gates at the road crossings we need something that we can get a bike through but can be opened for emergency access. Someone said on the actual roads, you would have to put "pedestrian crossing" signs. Chris said he been to races on the Ironton Trail and they have a couple of road crossings on a couple of major roads and he doesn't remember them having barriers up. Joe said it probably depends on the road you are dealing with. Gail said at Jacobsburg, they don't have signs on the roads itself, but they do have them on the trails which cross the roads. Jack said they will bring the consultants, engineering, Public Works in to talk to the committee about these items.

The group came up with the next meeting date of September 23, 2009 at 5:00 PM. Jack will put the invitation out to the Ironton group to come to the next meeting. Frank said in addition to having the Ironton folks come down, is there anything we need to do in the meantime? Should we walk the trail? Charlie said we don't have the right of entry yet. Some ideas on the signage could be a homework assignment. Jack said most of them are a standard type of sign. If we sign the lease in September, you will have the rest of the year to work on this. Charlie suggested going out on other trails and taking pictures of signs, etc. Donna said nobody has been taking pictures when it was overgrown, etc. Jack said we do have pictures of that. Donna said we need news releases for people who want to contribute. We need to take pictures of other trails and email them to Jack and he could put together a slide show. Donna said if people could take a list of what sites can be seen when you walk along a trail, that would be a good start and wherever there is a trail crossing, what's available for people there. Frank said along the 8 mile stretch, we could have some really great 5K races. You'd have to get the local police to come out and stop traffic on the roads when a race is being held. Jack said some people have asked about horses, and he doesn't have an answer for that. Donna said basically with any animals, horses, dogs, they have a policy called "Leave No Trace". That should be signage also.

The meeting adjourned. The time was 6:00 PM.