

RAIL TRAIL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Monday, December 28, 2009
Time: 7:09 PM
Location: Lower Saucon Township

Present: Jack Cahalan, Lower Saucon Township Manager; Charlie Luthar, Hellertown Borough Manager; Gail Nolf and Steve Labrake representing Hellertown Borough.

Guests: Joel & Susan Katz, Stephanie Brown, Jerry Holum, Roger Jurczak, Joe & Lynn Monek

Jack said Steve LaBrake had taken pictures of the rail trail from Coopersburg all the way up to Hellertown. The pictures were shown on the screen and Steve explained some of the pictures he took. He was looking at road crossings and things they are going to have to deal with. He said this will give us some ideas of what we have to face. He showed a bridge over Bingen Road and said the concrete parapet is about 40 inches high and that would probably need some sort of additional handrail. It seems where the high points are, a split rail fence might be useful. On Passer Road, the intersection was rather interesting. It's wide enough that down the line we'd want to improve on it. The creek right next to Passer Road culvert where the pipe comes across and the creek crosses, if it were to be cleaned up, it would be a nice little rest stop. He took some pictures of what was done on the Ironton Rail Trail. He was looking for problems spots that are going to have to be worked on before the Rail Trail is opened. At the Lutron Plant, by Preston Lane and the library, it's going to be a major problem. We can't safely drop people down to the road, so we might have to excavate it. Jack said he's not sure SEPTA will allow us to do any excavation. Steve said the way the park is set up, there's a baseball field and we could almost have people come around the park. There's actually a tunnel under Preston Road. Someone said at the top, there is an entrance where you can get in and go underneath the tunnel and up the grade, turn left, and get back on the railroad track. Steve said there are alternative ways to get around that spot. Spring Valley Road will also be an interesting road for us. Station Avenue will also be interesting. It has some crossings where it might be crucial. He wants to be more aware of the things that have to be dealt with.

Jack said that was an overview of the trail. Hopefully, in a short period of time, we'll be able to go out and walk on it.

Update on SEPTA Lease:

Jack said we haven't gotten confirmation officially yet, but on December 17, 2009, the lease for Lower and Upper Saucon portion was supposed to have been approved at the SEPTA board meeting in Philadelphia. We had the lease approved and signed by our Council and it was sent down to the SEPTA people and we are expecting the signed document to come back. That will make it official for the Lower and Upper Saucon portion. For some reason, the two leases for Coopersburg and Hellertown Borough are going to be done in January.

Charlie said we need to approve intermunicipal agreement to form a Steering Committee which would oversee the development and the operation of the Rail Trail and the four municipalities came together with a document that is both an agreement and also a set of by-laws that are going to govern the way the committee operates. On top of that, each municipality requires an ordinance to approve the intermunicipal agreement and those ordinances for Hellertown are being advertised. Lower Saucon's was adopted. He doesn't know the status of those documents in Upper Saucon and Coopersburg. We do have the signed agreements and signed by-laws for Hellertown and Lower Saucon. He thought there would be a representative here this evening from the other two communities so they could take it to their Council meeting and get the process started. We'll have to wait on this until next time. For Hellertown and Lower Saucon, we have most of the documentation out of the way and we'll have an ordinance done. The paperwork is done except for the leases for Hellertown and Coopersburg.

Jack said there are no updates. We are just waiting for these documents to get put in place and then we'll be able to get on the trail for inspections and have some discussions amongst the Committee to make recommendations on the issues like surface, signage, crossings, and barriers. Charlie said Frank Pazzaglia, who is a member of the committee is looking at the surfaces. That was one of his tasks from the November meeting. In the case of Upper

Saucon Township and Hellertown, they have to sign a shared use agreement with PennDOT as we are crossing State highways. He doesn't think that applies anywhere in Coopersburg or in Lower Saucon. That will take a little bit of paperwork with the Borough processing it through PennDOT. Hopefully, it won't work as slowly as it normally does so we can make the crossing on Water Street comply with what PennDOT wants. That will apply to some of the roads in Upper Saucon.

Jack provided a folder with a map that Roger Jurczak prepared showing the fifteen (15) roads that the trail crosses over state and local roads from Coopersburg up to High Street in Hellertown. Also in the folder is a neat little map with some captions on it from another rail trail that identifies all of the development issues. When we go and inspect the trail, if we could put something like this together with the Committee and the Engineers from the municipalities, we'll be able to work on them as we go along. Steve said he went to Google Maps and printed out ten pages, so it would be easy to do. Jack said we should start making a list. On the issue of the barriers going across the bridge crossing, one of the things we do have is the Jersey barriers. What we are looking at now as a temporary measure would be fencing attached to the Jersey barriers. Jack showed a photograph of this type of barrier. This is not a permanent solution. The permanent solution is a wood type of fence railing. He's trying to see if we can get the trail open in 2010 using the barriers that had been left there by SEPTA. We may have to pick up a few more. We have Public Works from the Township and the Borough looking into this. This type of fencing can be attached by our own people to the barriers and it can act as a safety barrier on the crossings like Old Mill, Saucon Creek, behind Neighbors, and also the Bingen Crossing, if that's needed. The idea would be after we determined the surface and the width, as you go over those crossings, it narrows down from the 30 foot width and would keep the walkers/riders from the edges of the bridges. The next document is from a town in Massachusetts which is a really neat idea for a website for a rail trail. It has a lot of good information on the mission of the Rail Trail Advisory Committee. It has some questions and answers, FAQs, about issues residents might ask if they live next to the trail. It has some maps, photos, and a little about the committee and a page where people can contact the committee or subscribe to receive notifications and updates. The next thing is information about trail signage. That's something we need to look into and come up with a uniform list of signage that is needed along the trail. Hopefully, it will all look uniform from Coopersburg up to Hellertown. There are several drawings about the trail design. The reason he made the copies is because the drawing on the top shows that it's a shared use by both people walking, biking and also riding horses. It shows a 30 foot width which is what we are dealing with and they are suggesting a gravel surface for the walkers and the bikers and then the equestrian section of it would be a separate trail with a wood chip surface. Steve said are wood chips pretty available? Jack said yes. The second one has a paved trail which we are not going to get into. It shows an example of the distances for shared uses on the corridor. The next one is a double track trail for equestrians, bikers, and hikers. The last two pictures get into designs for the rail beds. This was the one we picked up out of Ironton Rail Trail Master Plan and is what we are looking for. It's a gravel trail section, and it has screenings, and a compacted sub grade. We're going to have a good sub grade with the existing ballast, and the screenings we will be able to put down with our Public Works department. That should not be a problem. The next couple of sheets deal with the crossings. It gives you a typical road and road trail intersection with areas of signage that is needed with painted pedestrian crosswalks. The next one is a rural road and then there is a drawing for a rural intersection and one for an urban intersection. They will be working on this with the Engineers. The next series of sheets have to do with gates. There are a couple of ideas for a gate system which would involve several bollards, which the hikers and walkers and horses could get through, and the gate would block off and be locked and would be opened if emergency access or access for maintenance was needed. There are two different variations for that. The next sheet provides some information on railing design guidelines. It gives you some height and some other types of features that are needed. It shows what a typical wood rail system is going to cost. On the back it gives the railing height requirements and also gives the trail design use. It goes from hiker, pedestrian, mountain bike, pack and saddle, cross country skiing. The last one is a typical trail kiosk which is something we need to look at. This is information for the committee to consider as we move along and start to make some recommendations on the various issues. We have to do it all together and identify what the issues are and discuss how they are going to be addressed. The trail development map gets into a little bit more than the amenities that we are going to put out there. It gets into the safety issues and bigger things like installing culverts. Gail said this would be a good checklist and an outline of what needs to be done and when it's done, you can check it off and do it in conjunction with the other municipalities. Steve said on the front page is a picture of the small handrail, what are the requirements for the small handrail? Jack said that looks like a typical handrail crossing. There is some information about the required heights for bicycles; for horses, it would be higher. Charlie said its 42" which is the minimum OSHA standard. Its 54" if you are talking mountain biking and pack and saddle. Jack said we would have to meet that. Steve said with typical handrail, you can have only so much gap so

people don't get their head stuck in there. He was curious on this type of wood rail. Do we still have certain criteria we have to follow? Jack said he will have to check into that. Charlie said his personal preference would not be to go to wood. A fence of some sort, galvanized, would have longer life. Steve said TREX is a nice product and is maintenance free. Jack said the only thing on the wood is that the bikers like to stop on the bridges and lean on the edges. He doesn't know if you could do that with a galvanized steel fencing. Charlie said he's thinking to get the system up and running. Jack said this is to just get it up and running? He thought he was talking about long term maintenance. Charlie said the wood would concern him as it has to be maintained. TREX is a different story except for the cost. Steve said it is expensive, but it pays for itself in the long run. Charlie said that's something the committee has to work through. The first thing is to get it safe. Steve said these projects could be something the Eagle Scouts could work on.

Roger Jurczak asked what kind of stone will be put down on the trail? Jack said they will put down a No. 9 stone on the Rail Trail. They can put it down, spread it and roll it. It gets packed down pretty hard and it's a good surface. The one surface they are not sure about is for the equestrian use. What we are thinking, but are not totally there, is to make the equestrian track separate. With a separate track the horse feces would not be an issue to walkers and bikers. Jerry Holum said how would the horse people deal with that? Jack said a woman from one of the horse organizations was at several previous meetings and she said they kick the stuff to the side of the trail and leave no trace.

Joel Katz asked about the wood chips and the cost of No. 9 stone. Jack said there is a cost for the No. 9 stone and with the wood chips, when we chop up stuff; we have piles of the chips up at the compost center. Those are readily available. He doesn't have a figure on what the cost would be, but it would have to be factored in. They have been trying to get all four of the municipalities to the table to discuss these issues and then make recommendations to the elected officials. We need to put a plan together like what we are talking about here. Steve said we can't do it until all the leases are signed. Jack said we have heard from a resident, Carolyn Lidie who was here from Upper Saucon Township, but we haven't heard from any residents from Coopersburg. Nancy Jahre from the horse organization and Donna Bristol, who is our Township representative, are horse persons and equestrian use for the trail was suggested. The only thing we agreed was there would be no motorized vehicles. Joel Katz asked about dogs? Jack said leashed dogs are fine. Regarding the horses, Jack said that the trail is 30 feet wide, so there shouldn't be a problem whereas on other smaller trails they have to share one track. Jerry Holum said where does the stuff from the horses go? Steve said he's been at Jacobsburg State Park and there are a lot of horses on that trail. The policy for mountain biking and horses is you should stop and walk your bike and hopefully everything is cool with the horse. At Jacobsburg, there is a "no trace left behind policy", and there's no problem. It does wash away. It's a very organic material. If you have a separate mulched path, it will degrade into the mulched bed easier than off the gravel. He likes the idea of having a mulched path next to the gravel. If you have the mulched bed, and keep all animals primarily on the mulched bed, that would be an ideal situation. Susan Katz said she's seen people walking dogs and then the person quick whips out their bag. Steve said there are going to be some dog people and some horse people that are going to leave the droppings lay. Once the committee is in place, this will be an in-depth discussion. It will be a big topic of discussion. Jack said it will be a group recommendation and hopefully all four communities will agree and then it has to go to the Councils and Supervisors. Steve said we can do it as a "No Trace Left Behind" policy, but if it turns into an issue, we are going to have to deal with it. Jack said our goal here in the beginning was to all speak as one - the Saucon Rail Trail, - from Hellertown to Coopersburg, everything would be the same.

Steve said when the Ironton people came in to speak to us, they are working with three municipalities, and it is working out very nicely. Jack said that's what we're trying to do with this committee - get everybody here. We need to hear from Coopersburg and Upper Saucon to see what they want to do. Hopefully they'll be on board and this will be one trail with one set of rules for everybody. It would be difficult - enforcement wise - if you are allowed on a horse in one community, but had to turn around before you get to another municipality where it wasn't allowed. This is recommendation that needs to be made to each of the governing bodies for a decision.

Grants

Charlie said in terms of the grants, Joe Hoffman, who has been at a couple of our meetings, said the deadline for DCNR grants is April 22. We'd have to pull something together very quickly. What he'd like to see is maybe a sub-committee of some folks to get together and talk about grants. Steve could pull together Frank and Joe and talk

about grants and have some concept on where we would want to go at the January meeting. The key is if we get a grant, we probably won't see the money until 2011, so we can't think of grant money for the track surface. Joe is talking about other sources of money for possibly doing the surface and for the crossings. Steve said how much does Joe want out of that grant, does he keep a certain percentage? Charlie said he wants nothing. He does not get reimbursed. He doesn't get a salary. If there is any engineering work, Joe does mention you can hire his firm, but you don't have to. He would also look for foundation grants.

High Street Bridge Issue

Charlie said the High Street Bridge is really in the City of Bethlehem and abuts Hellertown right down the street from the Crossroads Restaurant. The bridge is in bad physical condition. It's been inspected by PennDOT. The City of Bethlehem has found it to be lacking in certain areas. Norfolk Southern owns the bridge and wants to abolish it. They want to tear the bridge down and fill the gap in with stone or some material within 12" of the surface where the two sides of the road comes to the bridge, and have the City of Bethlehem build a bridge connecting the two sides. This is being opposed by the City of Bethlehem and the Borough. DCNR is in it and recognizes that it would cause an impediment for the route when the connection to the Greenway in Bethlehem becomes a possibility. The city definitely has that in its comprehensive plan. They are looking at a court challenge, a PUC challenge to have Norfolk Southern actually replace the bridge so it can be used for traffic and make it wider as it's currently only a one lane bridge. There was a preliminary hearing at Harrisburg on December 2 and they have been told that representatives from this committee, Hellertown and from the City of Bethlehem will be called to testify for the City in that future hearing. It's at least 180 days from December 2. There will be testimony from Norfolk Southern and the PUC, DCNR, and PennDOT. There is a great interest in a lot of parties to retain the bridge. It's better to not fill in the path so this rail trail can continue all the way into Bethlehem and create a 12 mile long trail. That's pending and he assumes they are going to announce the hearing sometime in the future.

Minutes from October 26, 2009 and November 19, 2009 Minutes

Jack said if the minutes are okay, they will post them on the Lower Saucon Township website.

Proposed Meeting Schedule

Jack said he has the proposed meeting schedule for 2010. They are continuing to rotate the meetings between the four municipalities. This is the fourth Monday of the month and they proposed a 5:00 PM time. They made this a 7:00 PM time as there was a discussion at the last meeting. If and when the Committee is formalized they'd have to advertise the meetings, but for now, they can get this out and get it posted in the various communities. They will put it on the website at Lower Saucon Township and the location and time can be put on there also. He asked if we wanted to do 5 PM or 7 PM. Charlie said the later meeting times at 7:00 PM could be a problem in terms of municipal meetings. Gail said she heard what the people were talking about at the last meeting regarding the 5:00 PM start. It would be nice if we could rotate to 7:00 PM, maybe the third meeting to give them an opportunity to come. Jack said we can do the change now. Steve said if we do a 5 and 7 mix, it would work out well. We could have the March, June, September and December meetings at 7:00 PM. The rest would be at 5:00 PM. They would be at rotating communities. Jack said he'll post this and will send it to Coopersburg and Upper Saucon Township. The next meeting would be January 25, 2010 at Hellertown Borough at 5:00 PM.

Jack said in the back of the room are the plans that SEPTA gave us. They are the actual drawings for the North Penn Railroad that go back to about 1919. We each have one set. If you want to come in anytime during the week and look at them, just ask him. Charlie has a set in the borough also. They might be interesting.

Stephanie Brown asked what will happen to the trail when it snows – will it be plowed? Jack said the Ironton folks told us there would be some people, when it snows, that would want to do cross country skiing on the trail. What they did, and this is something that the committee will work out, they waited a day or two, to let those people get out there, and then they cleared it at some point. They worked with the various uses of the trail. They want to encourage that type of use. The rest of the maintenance, they will try to enlist the scouts and also community members and volunteers to show up for clean up days in certain sections. Charlie said Ironton made a point of that with the volunteers. Jack said for any of the heavy stuff that needs equipment; we will utilize the Public Works Departments. Steve said he and Roger Jurczak were talking one day and he suggested that being as we have a 30

foot wide path, if SEPTA ever wanted to put a single rail back in, would we want to keep the path to one side or another, hoping that SEPTA chooses the other side as their line? Would there be any way to ask SEPTA, what's the likelihood of that happening, and if they do, what side would they primarily use. It would be nice if we didn't have to tear something out that we did just to move it over ten feet. Jack said the likelihood of a rail going back in there is pretty slim unless there's a gigantic infusion of federal funding, and then even if the thing is built, he doesn't know what the ridership would be there to support it, maybe from New Jersey, but not to and from Philadelphia. Steve said a lot of people work in Philadelphia. Jack said he doesn't think they envision doing that in the near future. Charlie said the other problem in working on the lease with the SEPTA attorneys you wouldn't get an answer from them for many years. Steve said if we do keep it on the east side, the telephone poles are on the west side, just a thought, and it makes sense in the long term. Maybe something we'll never have to deal with. Now we're talking ten feet of gravel and four feet of mulch, let's just keep the gravel to the east side. Jack said that is something we can consider. As Charlie said, don't look to SEPTA for any direction. Roger said if we can't bring this on line all at once, because of the funding, labor issues, would it make sense, to open it up in the Hellertown area for a couple of blocks near Water Street; maybe that area with the housing complexes on the hill, it would be faster to get that section open and focus there. Jack said once the whole group decides on the surface, we could have it put down in the Hellertown and Lower Saucon area in a matter of days. There is no problem getting the equipment out there, putting the stone down and getting it rolled. The biggest concern is the safety issues if we open any section of the trail. If you open it up in the Hellertown section, all we have blocking it off is two Jersey barriers, so you are going to have people on the trail. They are not going to stop at the barriers; they are going to keep going and will be walking over bridges and crossings which are not safe for pedestrians. If we can come up with a temporary solution for the bridges, the surface is not a problem, and we need to agree on the crossings. We can do that. His goal is to open up the Lower Saucon section in 2010. He thinks it's the same with the Borough. That ballast that is down already is a perfect sub base. It just has to be graded. We have the equipment. We have to decide if we want No. 9 stone. We can put that down and use a roller and we'll have a pretty good surface right away. We are not expecting to have a perfect trail. Steve said at the last meeting, we came to the conclusion that as soon as we put that surface down, people will be using the trail, so we have to deal with the bridges and crossings before we put that surface down. Otherwise, it's going to be a free for all. People will be using it as soon as the surface is down. Charlie said we have to gain access to where the problem areas are. Jack said the Engineers from the Borough and the Township are working on that. We need some input from the traffic engineers and the other people who can tell us what the requirements are, signage and things like that. Gail said she sees that as a near term task to identify, on paper, crossings and what needs to be done comes next. Jack said as soon as the lease is signed, he will have the engineer and planner from the Township on the trail. They will be gathering information. That part of it should be handled by the consultants, then come to this committee, and be blessed and go to the Councils for final approval. Charlie said the biggest concern is they haven't seen Coopersburg or Upper Saucon representatives at any of the meetings. We really need to get them involved. Gail said maybe we want to talk with Coopersburg. Jack said they have been working through Dawn Kresge, the Borough Manager, and she said she has some ideas for representatives. Charlie said he heard that Upper Saucon Township signed the lease. They need to really start identifying someone who is going to start working with this committee. Gail said that is key to start making things happen. Charlie said from the standpoint of what Hellertown can do, as soon as that lease is delivered to us, and Council gets a chance to look at it and approve it in January, we can start working right away. We have already done bridge inspections on the two bridges in Hellertown. Jack said we are planning on doing this all together. If for whatever reason it doesn't happen, our fallback will be that each of us will treat it as an individual municipal park and will try to get that recreation facility open. Charlie said when the weather clears, people are going to start going on it, and then we're liable. Once the lease is signed, we are liable. Roger asked if the Public Works Directors are involved in this? Jack stated that the Public Works Directors from Hellertown and Lower Saucon work under Jack and Charlie. They are talking to each other also. They are deciding how they are going to do it. The Public Works Director in Hellertown does use Rail Trails and bikes, so he's familiar with it. Jack said the Public Works Directors, Engineers and Planners are all feeding him and Charlie information. Once we get on that trail, they are going to be pointing out things, storm water issues, and those types of issues and they will have answers. Charlie said there is a project in Hellertown, which is the Grist Mill culvert, which is currently blocked with something. They have pipe on hand to start working on that in anticipation that they want to get that done before they do anything to the surface. Hopefully, they get their lease signed in Hellertown in January. Water Street and Friedensville will need signage. We have to have Council sign a resolution from PennDOT saying we will follow all of PennDOT's guidelines, how we are going to do the crossings, how you have to protect the public crossing the roads, etc. There's a whole series of papers which have to be exchanged among our engineers and

PennDOT's engineers to make sure things are proper. There are a number of steps. The paperwork might be as much as a problem as this other stuff.

Jerry Holum asked if in Lower Saucon, is the Rail Trail a line item in the budget, will we start to budget it under recreation? Jack said we put funding for the rail trail in the capital budget for this year, and eventually, it will show up as a separate park project. As a recreation facility, we'll fund it for maintenance and that type of thing. It will be under recreation. Jack said everything will be on the Township website. Go to Parks & Recreation, and click Saucon Rail Trail, it will have a page on there with the information. Hopefully, we can have someone help us get a website and put on things like the pictures Steve just took.

The meeting adjourned. The time was 8:22 PM.