

Mt. Bradford Preserve & Scennelltown Park Open House

July 31, 2011

7:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Notes

All Supervisors were in attendance – Chair Vince Pompo, Vice Chair Tom Egan, and Member John Snook. Other staff in attendance: Township Manager Michael P. Lynch, Assistant Manager Mandie Cantlin, and Public Works Foreman John Carroll. Various members from other Township advisory boards and commissions also were in attendance (including J. Hagens, P. Orr, C. Myhre, D. Scholl, J. Parman). Approximately 60+/- citizens were in attendance.

This was not a meeting of the Board of Supervisors; the following notes are not official minutes.

Introduction & Overview

Board of Supervisors Chair Vince Pompo welcomed attendees and introduced Assistant Manager Mandie Cantlin for the presentation.

The objectives of this open house are to:

- Share information about Scennelltown Park, Mt. Bradford Preserve, and bike/pedestrian transportation planning along the County Seat Corridor.
- Seek input from the community.
- Provide opportunities for neighbor involvement.

Scennelltown Park

Scennelltown Park is approximately 8 acres and is located at the corner of Birmingham and Scennelltown Roads. Of the three projects on this evening's agenda, the Scennelltown Park project is the furthest along. Planning has been completed and the Township is in the engineering/permitting phase of this project.

Ms. Cantlin presented a timeline from the date the Township acquired the property in 1991 to present:

- 1991 – East Bradford Township acquired the land to meet recreational needs.
- 1992 to 2000 –
 - There were cycles of discussion between the Township and neighbors.
 - The park concept began as “active” in nature, but became more “passive” over time.
 - On several occasions, the Township considered selling the property for residential subdivision.
- 2005 – The Supervisors announced their intention to construct a walking trail and parking area.
- 2006 – The Concept plan was presented at a public meeting and received general support. The Supervisors authorized the staff to proceed with engineering.
- 2007 – Engineering and permitting began.
- 2009 – The Township worked with North American Lands Trust to put a conservation easement on the property in an effort to provide additional protections into the future.
- 2010 – Site plans were revised in reaction to the Township's acquisition of the Mt. Bradford Preserve.

- 2011 – The Township “took back” Scennelltown Road from PennDOT.

There have been two changes to the plan since the last public meeting in 2006:

- The parking area was removed. One of the park elements that historically experienced resistance from neighbors was the parking area. When the Township acquired Mt. Bradford, which is right down the road from Scennelltown, the Supervisors discussed the concept of connecting the properties in some fashion so that parking for both sites could be accommodated at Mt. Bradford.
- The concept of connectivity along Scennelltown Road was added. Trail symbols were added to the map to show a general desire to provide connectivity along Scennelltown Road. The symbols are conceptual and are not intended to propose a specified location.

The next steps for the Scennelltown project are:

- Finalize permitting and design
- Update the construction cost estimate
- Adjust capital budgeting
- Construction estimated for 2013-2015

Mt. Bradford Preserve

Mt. Bradford Preserve is approximately 39 acres and is located between Scennelltown Road and Miner Street. This project is not as far along as Scennelltown Park. The Township finished the conceptual master planning last year, but has not yet moved into engineering.

Ms. Cantlin presented a similar timeline:

- 2005 – An application for subdivision/land development was submitted for the tract. The plan showed 24-31 lots and included a public trail. At that time, the site was known as the Schramm property.
- 2007 – The Township began negotiating with the Schramm estate to purchase the property.
- 2008 – The Township acquired the property for \$3,000,000 (\$800,000 in grant funding). The existing house and 6 acres were subdivided off prior to the Township’s acquisition.
- 2009 – The Township worked with North American Lands Trust to put a conservation easement on the property in an effort to provide additional protections into the future.
- 2010 – Natural Lands Trust (NLT) completed a stewardship assessment of the site. The stewardship assessment:
 - Describes the natural areas – plants, animals, soils, water, geology, etc.
 - Discusses land use history and future usage opportunities.
 - Delineates land management issues, opportunities, and recommendations.
 - Describes techniques and procedures to implement report recommendations.
- 2011 – The master plan was completed and the Township “took back” Scennelltown Road from PennDOT.

Ms. Cantlin displayed the master plan and explained that the plan incorporates and recognizes:

- Deed restrictions associated with grant funding the Township received for acquisition.
- Aspects of the conservation easement.
- Recommendations from the stewardship assessment report.

- Feedback from various Township boards and commissions.

Ms. Cantlin stressed that the master plan is not an “all or nothing” plan – it is more of a “menu” of options and possibilities. It proposes a variety of components for consideration; it is not a construction plan. The plan contemplates the following components:

- Parking area
- Paved thru-trail that connects Miner Street and Sconnelltown Road and includes controlled emergency access at either end
- Some ADA-accessible trails
- Meadow and woodland trails
- Meadow restoration
- Forest management and reforestation
- Connectivity along Sconnelltown Road

Ms. Cantlin highlighted four elements on which the Supervisors are specifically seeking public input:

- Pond area – As shown, the master plan includes the pond, a platform, the spring house, and a picnic lawn. The big question relative to this area is whether or not to keep the pond or convert it to a wetland. Environmentally, the best action to take is to convert it. The pond is exposed to sunlight, which causes algae and duckweed growth and warms the water temperature downstream, which is detrimental to the stream habitat. A wetland would inspire a more enriched and diversified habitat. However, many people like the aesthetics of a pond. There are notable costs with either option. Ultimately the Supervisors will have to make the call, but they want to hear thoughts from the immediate community.
- Community garden – The master plan shows a number of garden plots, which members of the community could reserve and cultivate. The garden concept generated out of discussions about how the Township might make some of its properties more “productive” in terms of agriculture and food production. (For example, the Township leases several properties to farmers for hay production.) Mt. Bradford is one of the few sites that has potential for food production. The Supervisors want to know if there is interest in this type of improvement. If the community garden concept was something that the community was interested in, it would require volunteer involvement and support.
- Restrooms – The master plan shows restroom/composting toilets. Restrooms have pros/cons – they provide an amenity and convenience for park users, but they are not without their maintenance challenges.
- Shed/summer cottage – The Township has debated whether to keep or remove the shed/summer cottage located near the pond. The master plan considers the structure for potential tool storage (possibly associated with trail construction, trail maintenance, or the community garden). Left open and/or unused, these structures have the potential to be an attractive nuisance.

The Township will not progress the plan to engineering/construction all at once. Aspects will be phased. Possible phasing might be:

- Driveway, parking, paved thru-trail
- Meadow trail and tree removal
- Landscaping and restroom
- Community garden
- Woodland trails and boardwalk
- Pond area

- Meadow and woodland restoration

Ms. Cantlin summarized some of the key points relative to Mt. Bradford:

- The Township is seeking neighbor input on the following elements: pond area, community gardens, restrooms, shed/summer cottage.
- Residents are likely to see progress on the following elements in the next few years:
 - Construction of the parking area
 - Improvements to the driveway
 - Construction of trails
 - Select tree removal in the meadow
- There will be a number of opportunities for neighbor involvement in the months and years to come:
 - The Township is tentatively planning to have a stewardship workshop in the fall (September 29). The purpose of the workshop is two-fold – 1) to educate Township staff about how to implement aspects of the stewardship report and 2) to engage and educate area residents on aspects of land management. Possible topics for the workshop include:
 - Invasive species recognition and removal
 - Meadow restoration (removing invasives and planting beneficial grasses)
 - Vine removal

Anyone interested in attending this workshop should contact Ms. Cantlin.

- Assistance in trail construction and maintenance
- Stewardship activities (e.g. vine removal, identifying and removing invasive plants)
- Wildlife enhancement projects (e.g. constructing/monitoring Kestrel houses)
- Opportunities for scouts, school community service programs, clubs, etc.

County Seat Corridor & Connectivity

Of the three topics discussed this evening, the idea of connectivity is the least developed and the most conceptual.

Ms. Cantlin explained that the County Seat Corridor is one of 24 regional recreation corridors identified by Chester County. A regional recreation corridor is a conceptual planning zone that the County has identified as a prime location for recreational use and bike/pedestrian improvements (e.g. multi-use trails, road improvements). The general planning area for a recreation corridor is a width of 2,000 feet.

The County Seat Corridor extends from the East Branch Brandywine Creek, along PA Route 842 east into West Chester Borough, from there northeast along an abandoned railroad through Immacualta College, and from there to the Chester Valley Trail in East Whiteland Township. The primary purpose of the corridor is to provide the communities in the West Chester region with access to the East Branch Brandywine Valley (and Trail) and the Chester Valley Trail.

In East Bradford Township, the County Seat Corridor encompasses both park sites, Sconnelltown Road, Route 842, Price Street, and more. Various plans (regional, County, local) visualize various improvements within this

corridor, including existing/proposed bike routes and existing/proposed trails and sidewalks. Various roads within the corridor have been designated with beginner or intermediate cycling classifications.

The Township is interested in facilitating bike and pedestrian connections along Scanneltown Road, Price Street, and other areas within the corridor for several reasons:

- Scanneltown Road and Price Street are identified as a desired bike and pedestrian route in a number of planning documents – ranging from regional level plans, to county plans, to local plans. (Creek Road and Rt 842, have similar designations.) So, there's an overall movement at various levels to make these roads more bike/pedestrian friendly.
- Connectivity would give the Township the ability to eliminate the Scanneltown Park parking area.
- With two park facilities on the same road, it would be preferable for nearby residents to be able to walk or bike to the facilities, rather than get in their car and drive a very short distance because they don't feel safe on the road.
- Finally, the West Chester School District has to make a lot of stops along Scanneltown Road because it's not safe to ask kids to walk to one or two bus stop locations. The school district would be favorable of facilities that would enable them to make their transportation routes more efficient by having kids gather at a few stops.

The Township's next steps for improvements within this corridor include:

- Improvements to Price Street. The Township is hoping to coordinate some bike/pedestrian improvements with the Aqua PA project that is underway. More specific information will be available in August.
- The Township started investigating connectivity options along Scanneltown Road in 2009. However, at that time, PennDOT owned the road, which limited options. In 2011, the Township took the road back from PennDOT in order to make the process a little less complex. Staff has not revisited design options since the Township took the road back. Staff will be giving more attention to this effort in the next year or so and will be reaching out to residents along Scanneltown Road. Residents that live along this corridor and want to participate in shaping this project going forward should contact Ms. Cantlin.

Summary & Conclusion

Residents are encouraged to share their comments with Assistant Manager Mandie Cantlin at mcantlin@eastbradford.org. Residents should also contact Ms. Cantlin:

- If they have questions.
- If they want to receive periodic information and updates about particular parks or projects.
- If they are interested in getting more involved or volunteering.
- If they are interested in learning more about the stewardship workshop.

Discussion

The notes below represent selected comments/questions from citizens in attendance and may also include responses from Supervisors or staff.

Budget and financial

What is the budget for Sconnelltown Park? Approximately \$250K is budgeted for Sconnelltown via the capital reserve fund.

What is the budget for Mt. Bradford Preserve? \$35K is budgeted for 2013+ for planning and access improvements at Mt. Bradford Preserve. At this point, the Township is seeking input on the menu of possibilities shown on the master plan. Once the desired elements are identified, cost estimates will be prepared. Chair Pompo clarified that the Township is not proposing to build the master plan – the master plan is not a construction plan.

The Supervisors are very interested in both capital costs and operational long term maintenance costs. Chair Pompo discussed how the Township uses different funds (e.g. general fund, capital reserve fund, open space fund) to support different efforts.

How are open space funds used? Can open space funds be used to develop the parks? Supervisor Snook explained that Act 153 (which regulates the use of open space funds) limits the use of funds to acquisition related costs. Open space funds may not be used for maintenance or development. He noted that there's a bill under consideration in Harrisburg that reevaluates these restrictions. Dr. Hagens commented on the extent to which the open space funds have been expended and there was discussion about the Township's current debt obligations. The Supervisors had the foresight to leverage the ¼% tax receipt at a critical time – Supervisor Snook commented that the way East Bradford looks today did not happen by accident. He also clarified that a substantial portion of the open space preservation in East Bradford is a result of private conservation easements.

Several citizens expressed a desire for more financial details. And some residents urged the Township to provide updates and conduct follow-up meetings as the park concept plans progress. Township officials responded that this dialog is an important part of the planning process.

Concept and site

Some citizens expressed concern with the disruption of wildlife habitat and implications of site development (e.g. pushing deer onto residential properties). Several residents expressed a preference for minimal improvements that are natural (e.g. natural grass trails instead of pavement, no restrooms). Mr. Pompo expressed that the Board's intent is to improve the parks as minimally as possible and practicable.

Paul Hoffecker commented that he originally pushed back against Sconnelltown Park. Today he supports keeping it green and installing improvements as Township funds permit.

Several Sconnelltown neighbors indicated that additional landscape buffering is needed; some of the trees that were initially planted have died. The Township will ensure an adequate buffer.

How much parking is planned for Mt. Bradford Preserve? The design has not been finalized but staff anticipates between 12-20 spaces. The lot will most likely be gravel.

One resident asked whether the Township considered locating the Mt. Bradford parking area on Miner Street (as opposed to Sconnelltown Road). The Township did consider this possibility but did not feel it was the preferred option based on sight distance, grading, preserve setting, PennDOT permitting, etc.

Mt. Bradford neighbor Joseph Brion commended East Bradford Township for purchasing the Mt. Bradford property. He believes the trails are an asset. He has concern with Lyme disease and noted that trails need to be developed and improved to a certain degree to ensure safe public use.

Leslie Spangler noted that many Township residents do not have large properties and she thanked the Township for its public open spaces. She prefers passive use and would like to be able to walk safely to the park sites. Safe walking/biking access will help keep parking at a minimum.

Roads and connectivity

Is the County Trail Corridor a mandate? No.

Some residents questioned why the Township wanted to provide a connection to the Borough and others expressed safety concerns about providing connections along Scennelltown Road. Supervisor Pompo stressed that safety is the Township's first priority when planning this type of improvement. One citizen commented that they would appreciate the ability to safely walk to/from the Township's parks and open spaces and to/from the Borough.

A number of residents voiced that traffic calming needs to be considered for Scennelltown Road. Several people complained of speeding and indicated a need for more police presence. Mr. Pompo echoed the residents' concern and indicated that Scennelltown Road has been on the Traffic Committee's agenda. Mr. Snook added that one reason the Township took the road back from PennDOT was to have more local control over traffic. After taking the road back, the Township lowered the speed limit to 25 mph.

Some attendees questioned the feasibility of a corridor along the road noting the presence of mature trees, banks, etc. These challenges will all be considered as the staff investigates feasibility. This person voiced support for measures to improve traffic safety.

Need and impact

Have the citizens been asking for additional parks? Mr. Pompo referred to prior surveys that were sent to all households as part of the Comprehensive Plan update process. The survey responses indicated a need for more passive parks and facilities. There is an especial need in the southern portion of the Township, which is the most developed.

One citizen commented that he likes East Bradford and its open spaces just the way they are. He further believes that this is not the time to spend taxpayer dollars on improvements.

Several residents questioned why the Township has to provide public access to its open space and why in some cases ADA accessible improvements are needed. It is the Township's policy to provide public access whenever possible to eased/owned public open space. In addition, public access is a condition of grant funds. ADA access is sometimes a condition of grant funding (depending on the nature of the funding).

One resident asked how parks impact neighboring property values. Ms. Cantlin referred to a recent report – Return on Environment – that found that homes in the growing suburb region of the Delaware Valley area that are in close proximity to open space experience an added value of roughly \$10,000+/- . The closer a home is to a park or open space, the more value that home captures. This correlation is reinforced via real estate listings – listings often use proximity to parks, trails, and open space as a selling point.