Tookany Creek Trail Public Meeting #2

Date: June 30th, 2020

Presenters & Moderators:

- Julie Slavet, Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed Partnership, Inc.
- Patrick Starr & Zhenya Nalywayko, Pennsylvania Environmental Council

Meeting Summary:

Introduction & Presentation

- Julie kicks the meeting off by giving a background of the project, providing some background on TTF and its mission to protect the TTF watershed, and explains how the TCT feasibility study fits into TTF’s mission (i.e., getting people on trails close to the water to get them interested in and excited about protecting the watershed). She then introduces key members of the community and introduces Patrick.
- Patrick introduces himself, Zhenya, and PEC, and then informs people that the meeting will be recorded. He gives people a background on Zoom and reminds people that, since meeting virtually is new for us (and likely everyone else) there may be some snags along the way. Patrick then gives some background on his role at PEC, and provides a bit more context for this project and the public meeting.
- Patrick introduces Bob and Doug, who give an overview of the project and the presentation (refer to Bob and Doug’s PowerPoint for details)
  - Bob and Doug pass things off to Z to discuss our Public Outreach efforts thus far (again, refer to PowerPoint)
- Bob and Doug then pass things back to Patrick, who informs people that they will be broken into breakout rooms to discuss the presentation thus far, and to offer feedback on the project and presentation (and specifically, to discuss the “Guiding Questions” slide – see this slide for details)

Breakout Groups

- Patrick then asks Rita to split everyone into breakout rooms, and conversation ensues
- Once the breakout room sessions have ended and everyone has rejoined the larger group (roughly 20 mins), Patrick asks the reporters from each breakout group to discuss their group’s major topics of conversation
  - This is discussed in greater detail under Lessons Learned below
Wrap-Up/Conclusion/Discussion

- Patrick responds to a comment that Scott Lempert put in the chat box about diversity in this trail engagement/development process (the comment was that, looking at the attendees of this meeting, there were very few BIPOC):
  - Patrick notes that using Zoom for public outreach creates an additional barrier to entry for those who don’t have access to computers/internet/etc. (typically Black and Brown people and those in lower-income groups)
  - To combat this, Patrick suggests checking out the Inclusionary Planning Toolkit that Zhenya posted in the chat. Patrick also discusses the importance of bringing BIPOC people into this trail planning process that may not already be included or feel welcome by:
    ▪ giving them a call or speaking to them about this project, and
    ▪ inviting them to get involved by contacting our team.
- Patrick asks if Bob or Doug have any comments based on the breakout group feedback:
  - Bob talks about how he kept hearing residents’ desire to link to areas of the Township together and to better link the Township to itself
  - Bob says that, if you look at the map of the TCT, it almost acts as a “main highway.” He compares it to York Road, which only works as a main highway because the rest of the street grid feeds into it and benefits from it
    ▪ For example, at the Ashbourne Meadows development site, we have pushed for spur off the main TCT trail into the community
    ▪ These “connectors” are facilities and techniques that are not full-blown “Circuit Trails,” but are ways for people to get around some of the bigger streets and intersections that are currently (or could be) barriers to accessing the trail (i.e., having to ride on New 2nd Street to access the trail)
  - Bob goes on to say that, while the aim of this feasibility study is not to plan the entire Township, the idea is to use some of these lower-impact, lower-cost methods of connecting various areas of the Township into the TCT “main highway”
    ▪ Bob notes that our efforts in Cheltenham should be similar to Montgomery County’s plan to increase bike/ped access throughout the County through “main highway” trails and smaller connectors into those main highways
- Doug says that it’s great we heard from people from all over the region—Cheltenham, Jenkintown, Philly, etc.—as this is a trail that will be part of a regional trail network
- Patrick brings up a question re: next steps:
  - A report with a set of recommendations is forthcoming. Patrick asks Bob and Doug to speak to this timeline, but also notes that this process is not about making a decision to build a trail. Rather, it is to envision what a trail could be/could look like in Cheltenham. Once this report has been completed, the community can decide whether or not they want to move forward with it, whether or not to obtain funding for engineering/design, etc.
  - Patrick notes that trails take a while to build, and that it will probably be close to 3-5 years before construction even begins, if the decision to move forward with this trail is made
- Bob then discusses next steps:
  - First is to review public feedback thus far, which will give Bob and Doug a basis, along with on-the-ground observations of what’s out there (i.e., existing
conditions, ROW, etc.) to begin making detailed recommendations in the report, such as which properties owners to talk to, and which segments of the trail to prioritize

- Second will be a draft plan in the Fall to be reviewed by SAC, public, community reps, and others
- Then, a final, implementable plan showing where the trail will actually go, what it will cost, who will get the funding to build it, who will maintain it, etc. will be completed
  - This will mean another meeting in the Fall to go over these recommendations

Lessons Learned

Group 1 – Alexandria Khalil (most of group from outside of Cheltenham), Reporter:

- **Hopes & Dreams**
  - Group 1 would love to see:
    - walking marathons along the trail;
    - the trail connect more people and places to each other;
    - renovated benches along the trail;
    - an improved economy in the Township (i.e., through new businesses along the trail); and
    - outdoor gatherings, beer gardens, and ice cream trucks at nodes along the trail.
  - The Beer Runners group would love beer gardens especially
  - This group also noted that an expansion of artwork on the trail would be greatly appreciated, as existing art along the trail is much loved

- **Concerns**
  - This group had concerns about water issues, and was worried that people would pollute more/dump more trash if they had more access to more “remote” parts of the Township through this trail, especially considering how trashcans have been removed along existing trails in the Township
  - This group also had concerns about crossing Crescentville Road and Adams Ave. – “these crossings must be addressed”
  - Bathrooms were a big issue – there need to be bathrooms, otherwise people will do their business outside
  - There were concerns about children being left alone on the trail, as is happening now
  - There were concerns about safety – especially for women and children
  - This group was also worried about riparian destruction as a result of trail construction

- **Ideas/Suggestions/Misc.**
  - Group 1 was really interested in seeing connections to the Jenkintown Train Station, as well as seeing the trail extended further west to Arcadia University (“this would be great!”)
  - Alexandria gave a “quick kudos” to TTF – “the more trails are used, the less dumping there is in stream corridors and natural areas”
This group did not want people on ATVs and dirt bikes to use the trail (as they are now), because they rip up grass and dirt areas and make pedestrians and cyclists feel unsafe. Would like to see CSO improvements – especially because of the fear that bringing more people near the creek would bring more trash and decrease water quality.

Group 2 – Julie Slavet (Jenkintown/Cheltenham), Reporter:

- **Hopes & Dreams**
  - Group 2 has interest in getting to Center City Philly by trail
  - Group 2 wants the trail to connect to Jenkintown Train Station and “that (north?) side of the Township”

- **Concerns**
  - This group spoke about how dangerous crossing New 2nd Street can be

- **Ideas/Suggestions/Misc.**
  - This group also spoke about connecting history – linking into some of the amazing historic sites in Cheltenham, specifically the LaMott (?) neighborhood and getting people to these sites
  - Additionally, this group spoke about how people should not have to drive to get to a hiking/biking trail, they should be able to access them by bike or on foot

Group 3 – Dottie Baumgarten (Glenside/Elkins Park), Reporter:

- **Hopes & Dreams**
  - This group expressed lots of support for and interest in trails
  - This group also had a lot of interest in connecting to other natural/recreational areas, such as the Pennypack Trail. They did have questions, though:
    - Are there plans to connect the trail to Myers Elementary School?
    - Are there plans to connect to the Jenkintown train Station? If so, how would that connection be made?

- **Concerns**
  - There was some concern from this group about what kind of maintenance would happen in the future, and about who would maintain the trail
  - There was concern about the crossing at New 2nd Street, as that is a very dangerous intersection in the middle of some high-speed roads
  - This group also had questions about bike safety – would there be areas along the trail for people to lock up their bikes?

- **Ideas/Suggestions/Misc.**
  - This group issued a positive statement about sidewalks near Myers Elementary providing an opportunity for easy connections between the school and the trail, but wondered if signage would be put up to help people see/use these connections?
Group 4 – John Raisch (Jenkintown/Wynnewe), Reporter:

- Hopes & Dreams
  - This group had the following hopes and dreams:
    - Safety – safe places to run and walk
    - A connected trail – John discusses that at the end of 2017, Township Commissioners signed the Circuit Trails Resolution, meaning “we want trails in the Township because residents want them and we want our trails connected to the larger network!”
    - During the pandemic, people feel they’ve been driving to other trailheads (like the Wissahickon and Pennypack) to hike/bike/run. They want more trails in Cheltenham connected to the larger network so they can leave their houses and run/bike/hike and not need to drive somewhere to do these things

- Concerns
  - This group had questions about trail connections:
    - How could we create more of a trail along Jenkintown Creek up toward Township Line and the Hospital in that area
    - There was talk of connecting to a small library (Rowland Library?)
    - Opportunities to connect with Kol Ami?

- Ideas/Suggestions/Misc.
  - Group 4 was a mixed group from Cheltenham and Philly – mostly Lawndale/Lawncrest

Group 5 – Robin Irizarry (Cheltenham Village), Reporter:

- Hopes & Dreams
  - This group talked about how the trail could be really helpful for alleviating traffic, especially if it could help kids walk/bike to school. Traffic can be really bad in Cheltenham Village specifically, and there was the feeling that by providing ways for students to walks to schools, friends’ houses, recreation centers and areas, etc., it could help alleviate parents having to drive their kids everywhere.

- Concerns
  - Safety was a big theme for this group, which also discussed the safety of crossing the New 2nd Street intersection
    - How to get people across safely? Narrowing the gap, signals, bridge to cross the street?
    - Safety for kids getting to schools, as well as pedestrians in general.

- Ideas/Suggestions/Misc.
  - This group discussed “positive connections,” including access to amenities in the community like libraries and pools
Specifically, Group 5 spoke about how to connect Rowland Library to the trail given the steepness of the slope behind the library – switchbacks? Stairs? Ramps?

Group 6 – JoAnne D’Alessandro (Cheltenham Village), Reporter:

- **Hopes & Dreams**
  - This group felt that the connector to Gimbel Field would be very important, as it would create connections to businesses in Elkins Park and to the Elkins Park Train Station, which would be great for the community. “Focus on this first.”

- **Concerns**
  - Group 6 was worried about this project’s time frame: there have been plans for and discussions about this trail in Cheltenham over the years, and they wondered what the time frame is on this plan – “how long until something is put into place?”
  - Vegetation was a concern for Group 6: with COVID, a lot more people are walking the trails, and as a result they are using both sides of the Parkway (to keep a safe social distance). When they use the side of the Parkway where there is no trail, the vegetation is overgrown, and it forces them to walk into the fast-moving street to go around the vegetation, which is a safety concern
    - Who is responsible for keeping this vegetation under control?

- **Ideas/Suggestions/Misc.**
  - This group felt that bathrooms along the trail would be a major benefit and very important to ensure its use
  - This group encouraged connections to Ashbourne Road near the Shovel Works and to Levick Street near the Melrose CC, as the Parkway is not very wide in these areas and there have recently been some bad accidents along this stretch (i.e., it is not currently a very usable path)

Group 7 – Chris Corbran (Western PA), Reporter:

- **Hopes & Dreams**
  - The conversation about flooding near Gimbel Field led to a conversation about how these two issues could potentially be mutually beneficial (i.e. stream restoration/stormwater management could be a part of a trail project)
  - This group felt that it would be great to see the trail comes to fruition as long as the concerns of nearby residents are acknowledged/addressed

- **Concerns**
  - Group 7 had concerns with routing the trail too close to the Creek, and specifically around the bend in the creek near Gimbel Field – this part of the creek/Township is especially susceptible to flooding currently, and at this point stream restoration may be more of a priority than putting in a new trail
  - This group had some major concerns around trail routing, such as how to cross at New 2nd Street – “a dangerous intersection.”
This group had concerns about people using the trail to hang out and party at night rather than for fitness/etc. – this touches on safety, privacy, and cleanliness issues
  • Chris noted that the increase in legitimate trail use in Western PA has led to a decline in illicit activities along the trail

• Ideas/Suggestions/Misc.
  o This group spoke a lot about how opportunities can grow out of concerns and vice versa
  o This group thought that lighting would be particularly helpful for trail users, however with the understanding that lights could be undesirable to nearby residents