

**East Pikeland Township
PARK & RECREATION BOARD**

May 21, 2020

Minutes

Present: Andrew Batten, Al Koons, Bruce Wunderley, Sean McShane, Joanne Jones, Jerry Miller & Heidi Ferry

Staff: Michelle Rubin & Kim Moretti

Chairman Jerry Miller called the meeting to order at 7pm. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the May monthly meeting was duly advertised and held electronically through the Zoom application via telephone and the internet.

Al Koons motioned, seconded by Bruce Wunderley to approve the April meeting minutes. Minutes were approved unanimously without changes.

New Business

1. June Events

- Michelle reported that the PA Recreation & Park Society (PRPS) has distributed guidelines for community events, including that even when the County is in the “green zone” that gatherings should be limited to less than 100 people. Based on the guidance, the P&R Board made the recommendation to cancel all June and July events at Kimberton Park. Other summer events will be discussed at the June meeting.
- Al Koons suggested that Michelle inform KYAL of the township’s decision, since they have not yet cancelled their season. Michelle will send the PRPC flyer to her KYAL contact.
- It was also recommended that Michelle suspend planning for the Kimberton Arts & Music Festival at the end of September and perhaps consider a live music event only that would not require as much advance planning. Michelle reported that she already has a few corporate sponsors for summer events and she will reach out to the sponsors about keeping their funds for next year’s events.

2. French Creek Trail User Survey

- Michelle reported that the survey is available online until June 30. The survey has been advertised on the Township website, social media, Township newsletter, and on posters along the trail.

3. Little Food Pantry

- John Colarusso reported that with permission from the Township he converted the Little Library at the Rapps Dam trailhead into a temporary food pantry to address needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pantry is seeing a lot of activity and John encouraged the public in on the call to contribute items to the box

Old Business

1. Kimberton Park & French Creek Trail Maintenance
 - Michelle reported that Kimberton Park remains closed and that Public Works had to remove the nets from the tennis, hockey and basketball courts to prohibit use. Public Works has been working on the French Creek Trail to address wet spots. They are proposing boardwalk type structures in the some of the muddier spots. Michelle presented a photo of a sample boardwalk.
2. Hidden River Park & Preserve
 - Michelle reported that the plan is on hold for now while the township waits for the PA Historic and Museum Commission to respond to the archaeological survey results. No other updates at this time.
3. 2020 Events
 - Kimberton Arts & Music Festival: The Board discussed whether to cancel the event. The chance of cancellation based on state guidelines is high; with all the time required to plan the event it was discussed that it wouldn't be worth it for staff to continue with planning efforts. Consideration will be given to replacing this event with one that will be easier to plan; i.e. a music event only.
 - Moon Walk: this event may still be possible with social distancing, it will stay on the schedule for October 30.
 - Scavenger Hunt: Michelle presented the idea of conducting a scavenger hunt as a summer activity, perhaps in conjunction with the Phoenixville Recreation Dept. The P&R Board members agreed and will submit "hunt" ideas to Michelle.
 - Meditation and Yoga on the French Creek Trail: Sheila Keating was planning to hold this workshop at different parks in the community during the summer, Kimberton Park was slated for July. Andrew asked how it would allow for social distancing. Michelle will obtain additional information from Sheila and report at the June meeting.
4. Ridge Rd. Park Update
 - Recently there has been a number of questions and concerns raised about the park project planned for Ridge Rd., mostly from neighbors of the property. In order to answer questions and explain the Board's process, two statements were read. First, Al Koons read a statement from the Park and Recreation Board, and then Michelle Rubin read a document that provided answers to previously submitted questions. Both documents can be found as addendums to the minutes.

Public Comment

- Jonathan Gayl of Charolles Valley Lane asked whether the township would be waiting for green zone designation before allowing summer events.
 - Michelle responded that the township will follow State regulations relative to park and recreation programs.
- Lisa Verel, East Pikeland resident, expressed concerns about the proposed dog park/community garden. She would like the land to remain as open space, has concerns about safety, traffic, privacy, and that non-Kimberton Meadows residents will park in her neighborhood to use the trail. She also commented that the township should not have submitted a grant application without public input.

- Al Koons responded that there will be a parking lot at the dog park/community garden with no need to anyone park in the neighborhood. Andrew Batten responded that the township needs grant funds for this project before moving forward and an application was submitted in April so that we did not miss a grant opportunity.
- Annie Weden of Ridge Road expressed concerns about wildlife impact of the proposed dog park/community garden, including that lighting would need to be installed at the site and this would effect bird migration and that dogs will scare wildlife. She stated that there is no information on this project on the township website and that as a neighbor she is concerned about the impact.
 - Michelle Rubin explained that open space can be different things and that the current vegetation on the property is not beneficial to the land or the wildlife. She also stated that there is no plan yet for lighting the site, but it is likely that only minimal lighting will be installed for security at night. Lastly, the project is still in the planning stages, which is why it is not on the website yet.
 - Al Koons further responded that the Park & Rec Board has been discussing this project for a year and it is documented in the meeting minutes on the website.
 - Andrew Batten responded that the township is lacking in sidewalks. This dog park is an opportunity to provide safe places to exercise dogs, which was the driving factor for this project.
- Bob Stevenson of Ridge Road feels this project will devalue his property and that of his neighbors, and ruin the farm-like setting and historic significance of his property. He referred to the Upper Providence dog park on Longford Road and pointed out that it is not near residences, which is what East Pikeland Township should aim for. He also feels the fencing and water retention proposed will be an eyesore. Lastly, he has concerns about traffic, health and security risks. He asked whether DEP has approved these plans.
 - Al Koons responded that it is not an option to do nothing with this property. The Park & Rec Board has been tasked by the Board of Supervisors to make a recommendation on how to make this a “public” space. The original plan for this property was to place ballfields here; a much needed use in the township. This proposal is much less invasive. Additionally, the existing trail does not meet current township trail standards and will be upgraded on the property. Lastly, if an archaeological study was required for the historic farm, it would have been conducted at the time the original subdivision plan was presented.
 - Michelle Rubin responded that the location of wetlands was taken into consideration in the site plan.
- Ron Hoinowski of St. Ann’s Circle explained that he lives right on the French Creek Trail, next to township open space, and that the walking trail access has been a great asset. There is no problem with security, litter or noise and there are lots of dogs on the trail. It has had no impact on his property value and having a property with walkability actually increases property value.
- John Schott of Beacon Drive East introduced himself as a member of the Planning Commission and Open Space Committee. He explained that open space is also defined as that with active/passive recreation. He was on the Planning Commission when the Kimberton Meadows Subdivision was approved and this land was always intended to be used for public recreation.
- Barry Hallman of Clover Lane asked about the source of the survey that talked about dog parks not being noisy. He also feels the township is trying to steamroll this project and that

the voice of the people needs to be heard. He also expressed concerns about the speed of traffic on Ridge Road.

- Michelle Rubin responded that there was not a survey, but that she reached out to other municipalities with dog parks to discuss how they are used and they all stated that noise is not a concern. She further reminded the Kimberton Meadows residents that there is a 39-acre buffer between this proposed use and their homes.
- Al Koons responded that the speed of traffic on Ridge Road is a concern; but that is a police problem. He said he visited a dog park along the Schuylkill River Trail in Phoenixville and talked to people there and they all explained that noise is not a factor.
- Glen Bielecki of Verdant Drive asked if there had been any discussion with the Phoenixville Area School District about using the site for educational purposes. He further stated that he hears concerns that people do not have enough information about the proposed use. He asked if the township had done an “alternatives, criteria and risk” analysis. Michelle Rubin stated that in addition to holding an environmental education Master’s degree that she is also responsible for the township’s Environmental Advisory Council and that environmental education is opportunity they want to include on this property. And, while a specific analysis has not been done as Glen explained, the Park & Rec Board has thoroughly discussed alternatives for this property.
- Mike DiCicco of Ridge Road in East Vincent Township stated that he feels this proposed use would create a negative impact on his property. He plans to open a farm market on his property and a community garden will have a negative impact. He asked if the township has other open space that borders neighboring townships.
 - Andrew Batten responded that the Park & Rec Board understands that a lot of people are upset about the process, but the township did not want to miss a grant opportunity. He explained that with the Crouse property a community visioning process was held and that the Park & Rec Board will hold a public meeting to gather input on this project.
- Chris Brignola of John Glen Drive commented that the township survey referenced several times was available on the township website and other sources and was not just about this property or just about dog parks. He stated that as the township continues to grow, there will be a demand for additional infrastructure and recreation. He reminded the callers from Kimberton Meadows that their subdivision was a farm before they moved there and it would have been nice if that were kept as open space also.
- Andrew Batten stated that the overall plan of the township is to redevelop the Rt. 724 corridor and eliminate properties that are in poor condition and attract good development. Park and recreation amenities, such as the one proposed, can spur redevelopment.
- Michelle Rubin added that the new school will make this area of the township an essential destination.

At the conclusion of the public comment period, Michelle Rubin made a statement to remind all participants that the Board’s initial goal, which was to create a plan for this property and share that plan with a public meeting in April. This meeting would have been advertised widely and all neighbors and stakeholders would have been invited. Unfortunately, the execution of this project became sidetracked by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Township decided to move forward with the grant application, with the plan still being flexible and open to discussion. Sadly, there are some residents who have misinterpreted our intent. What the Township will do from this point forward is

work to get back to our original goal, which is to connect with the community about this project to hear people's interests and concerns. It was designed with the entire East Pikeland community in mind, and we would like to have the opportunity to hear as many voices as possible. We are hoping that an in-person public meeting this summer is still a possibility; if not we will be providing a virtual opportunity for all Township residents to see the draft plan and provide comments.

The purpose of this project is to continue to enhance the quality and strength of our community. During this time we need more resources than ever, and as we move forward it will become increasingly important for people to have safe spaces to recreate, grow their own food, and create community.

There are been some valid concerns voiced at this meeting, as well as voices of support. We appreciate everyone sharing your thoughts. Our next step is to take this plan to the broader community and listen to the voices of all East Pikeland residents.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:05pm.

The next Park & Recreation meeting is scheduled for June 18, 2020.