

**WARREN COUNTY
MUNICIPAL AND CHARITABLE CONSERVANCY TRUST FUND COMMITTEE**
500 Mt. Pisgah Avenue
Oxford, NJ 07863

**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF
OCTOBER 2, 2023**

CALL TO ORDER: Walter Orcutt called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M., read the Open Public Meetings Notice.

Members Present: Randy Piazza, Jeff Herb, Ethel Conry, Jean Smolha, Walter Orcutt, Charles Fineran, Terry Urfer, Jason Menegus, Mark Young, Diane Medcraft

Staff Present: Corey Tierney, Jennifer Correa-Kruegel, Kim Barnes

Minutes: The August 7, 2023 minutes were reviewed. Mr. Fineran motioned, seconded by Ms. Conry to approve the minutes as with correction noted by Mr. Young for page 2, first paragraph it should read, "January 2024". Motion carried.

PRESENTATIONS OF APPLICANTS:

Alpha Rails to Trails:

Mayor Craig Dunwell discussed the application for rails to trails in Alpha that will hopefully connect to the rails to trails in Phillipsburg. The fundamental question is, "will NJ Transit give up the right of way?" In discussions, planning with NJ Transit is typically done as long range timeframes. Mr. Dunwell looked into the past practice of the area with NJ Transit and argued that it will never be used as a right of way railroad again because the track would need to be brought 8-10 feet over I-78 and then back down again which is not feasible nor is there anything in the area to justify reactivation of the railroad.

Tim Obrien explained that Alpha was seeking funds to acquire land not for construction. Looking to match \$75,000 from the committee to match the borough. They are looking to acquire 17.2 acres that crosses through residential and industrial areas. If they do not preserve the property, NJ Transit may purchase the land for development. The borough wants to make it into a public rails to trails that supports the region and state. The various potential connections of the trail system that could benefit from tourism for economic development and make it accessible to all.

Ms. Medcraft inquired as to how they priced out \$150,000? Discussions with NJ Transit for other projects said that railroad operators for mileage costs pre-Covid for 1 mile of track line would be about \$75,000 to \$85,000. It would be double the line so they doubled the fee.

Ms. Medcraft asked if they received an actual appraisal for this specific project. They have not received an appraisal yet for the property or executed any agreement with NJ Transit to purchase the property.

Mr. Orcutt inquired how they will deal with NJ transit communications. Mr. Dunwell feels it will need to come top down from the governor's office. Mr. Obrien explains they have a process depending on the how many properties can be built in the area. With the MCCT commitment to support the project will give the town leverage with NJ Transit to show that there is regional support for the endeavor.

Blairstown Footbridge Restoration:

Christine Beegle presented the application for the Blairstown Footbridge Restoration project. The footbridge was presented as a gift in 1893 by John I Blair to the community in honor of his 91st birthday. The footbridge is made of steel with cast iron end posts. It is of the pony lattice truss design indicative of the style of the second industrial revolution. It was manufactured in Paterson NJ. Once installed it became the vital pedestrian link between the NY Susquehanna and Western Train station and the downtown business and residential area. The footbridge has survived 11 major floods, a shortening of the length to make room for the state highway, and in 1916 the wooden slap deck was replaced with concrete but the bridge was not built to sustain the weight of the new decking. In 1967, a partial collapse took place which was restored with the addition of a third pier. The train station burned in 1973. Blairstown Township purchased the land around the bridge and in 1976 converted the space to Footbridge Park as it is known today. In 1992 the rail lines were removed and Paulinskill Valley trail was established. Footbridge Park is now used daily by local visitors and annually for 6 major events. They are applying for a historic preservation grant to address the many restoration needs for the 130 year old footbridge.

Ms. Beegle reviewed a report done by an engineer in 2021 regarding the specific issues that need to be addressed with the footbridge and was submitted with their application. The engineer's recommendations for repair focused on the priority of the piers, the span 14 trusses, the concrete deck, and paint mitigation.

Ms. Beegle reported that the restoration cost estimate is over \$2 million dollars for a full restoration of the footbridge. It will be a multiphase process with the plan to create the design development and architectural plans along with the contract documents no physical work will take place, other than the plaque. Phase 1 will begin restoration with the intent to restore the piers and spans.

The grant request for Warren County is \$70,189 of the total cost of \$93, 586.

Ms. Medcraft clarified that the money given would be given for professional fees only right now. Ms. Beegle confirmed it would be all soft costs.

Mr. Menegus inquired as to where else they would be looking to get the rest of the estimated \$2 million dollars. Ms. Beegle explained they would be continuing to look to additional grant funding opportunities in addition to MCCT and listed multiple sources.

Mr. Menegus asked if the DOT could contribute and Ms. Beegle said it is a possibility.

Mount Bethel Community Center

The Mayor of Mansfield Township, Joe Ward introduced himself and CFO Judith Curran. Ms. Curran requested funds for a generator and septic system to serve as a cooling/ warming center for the community. They have received funds in the past and this will be the last phase of this project.

Mr. Menegus inquired if the township has Open Space tax. Mr. Ward confirmed they do and that phase 5 of this project used a large chunk of those funds.

Mr. Urfer inquired about taking a tour inside. Mr. Ward and Ms. Curran said that they would be happy to once the scaffolding has been taken down.

Mr. Orcutt confirmed with Mr. Tierney that funding a generator and septic would be ok for the MCCT grant. Mr. Tierney said it would be ok to fund when it is part of an overall preservation project like this one is.

Phillipsburg Rails to Trails

Matthew Hall introduced himself as the Business Administrator for the town of Phillipsburg. The proposed rails to trails project will create a premier trail network within the town of Phillipsburg and connect other communities, towns, counties and states. They have received a \$1.3 million transportation alternatives tap grant from NJ DOT. The project has been in concept for the past 20 years. They do have a . \$02 Open Space tax in the town of Phillipsburg which generates about \$145,000 a year. Some of those funds would be dedicated to this project. There has been discussion with Green Acres who is very excited about this project. There is a plan to obtain further TAP grants and funding from Green Acres.

Engineer, Tim O'Brian, explained that Phillipsburg is seeking a grant for land acquisition and will match with \$150,000 from town local funding. Over the last 20 years the town has received more community partners such as the Downtown Business Association and federal programs like the National Preservation Program (NPP) which ties into NORWESCAP who also supports the project along with surrounding areas. They are looking to purchase 29 acres of land- some of which is developable in residential areas and some of it is in industrial areas. If the town of Phillipsburg does not purchase the land, it could be sold as development. The vision is to establish a trail connection from the Morris Canal that will parallel an existing park system with new parking areas with ADA accessibility. It will go through disadvantaged communities and historical properties. It will aid in tourism for local businesses. The tax assessment is where they came up with the number. Trying to construct a trail system over 4 miles in Phillipsburg and this grant would aid in land acquisition.

Mr. Menegus inquired about South Main Street with the double bridges if they were structurally sound. Mr. O'Brian said there were no issues he was aware of but was meant to support a railroad. For pedestrians we would need to do some clearing of the vegetation and safety railing. It may need some upkeep but that will be part of the town's project budget.

The abandoned pier is that part of the third bridge or is that part of the purchase or part of the active line? Just using the existing structure that still has the old rail bed on it but the ties and iron has been removed.

Mr. Fineran inquired about the arch along the Morris Canal and if that was going to be part of the project. Mr. O'Brian explained that that property was currently owned by the state and they are simply trying to make it safer. There were some environmental issues on the permitting side that prevented them from doing more so it is not currently part of the project.

Phillipsburg Union Station Restoration

Aaron Coleman a board member for the Friends of the NJ Transportation Heritage Center, a resident of Phillipsburg, and a platinum certified/ EF Funded restoration. They are seeking funding for the final demo of the downstairs of the train station which would be the mezzanine level as a back floor and to complete restoration of the upstairs. Mr. Coleman reviewed what they were able to accomplish over the last year, such as a slate roof replacement and ticket windows. They have met with a preservation company called Preservation Works to redo the façade of the building. They have received \$29,000 in donations and \$23,000 from NORWESCAP. Volunteers also provided 10,500 labor hours in Phase 3. The scope of the work includes restoring the ticket office to the building specifications, including the

dispatcher desk and cork flooring. Acquiring period hardware and light fixtures as well as striping the green paint and return the building to the original period color. The building has been used for storing artifacts, events and the community being open during festivals. Many non-profit organizations in the community use it for meeting spaces and events. Restoration would allow for more events and provide for the community.

Mr. Orcutt reminded Mr. Coleman that this project was returned last year because the committee wanted them to appeal to the town to be more involved. Mr. Coleman explained that they did receive \$14,000 more from NORWESCAP for the molding. They went over budget on the project and which the friends assisted with. They requested more funds but were denied.

Mr. Urfer inquired about who was designing the project and if they were a historic architect. Mr. Coleman said that it was historically accurate with the use of the original blueprints.

Mr. Herb inquired about the connection with the Phillipsburg Rails-to-Trails application. Mr. O'Brian responded that their projects do not conflict as they are separate parcels of land. Mr. Coleman would love to work with the town and all the organizations in town on expanding the project.

Mr. Hall wasn't there for the last request by the Phillipsburg Union Station project. They are in between Executive Directors but supports the project and hopes to use UEZ money for funding. All these projects are tied together and serve to bring people into town to support small businesses.

Roseberry House

Bonnie Lynn Nadzeika introduced herself as a Grant Writer for Phillipsburg Historical Society. She geared her presentation to address questions from Saturday's visit. The grant request amount was for \$37,990. This includes two projects at the Roseberry House: the cedar shake roof replacement at \$39,500 and the window repair with six windows at \$1,925 per window for a total of \$11,550. They will be using historic materials that were found in the building for part of the window repair. The total cost of the project is \$51,050. \$8,000 will be coming from municipal funds. She demonstrated how the project was done on other parts of the building.

Ms. Nadzeika addressed confusion with the roofing renovations and the State Historic Preservation Office. She presented two letters from State Historic Preservation Office that were after the deadlines for the grant applications that approved them to replace the roof.

The HVAC system that was put in showed weaknesses in the windows which is why they are part of the project to be redone.

The Phillipsburg Historical Society demonstrated the extensive restoration already done to the Roseberry house. They have engaged the community with events and projects throughout their time in managing the property. They have worked with students in the engineering program from Lafayette College to construct a fire-pit. They have Christmas events, reenactments, and archaeological digs with middle school students.

Mr. Orcutt requested the long-term plans for the inside of the building. Ms. Nadzeika said that the next plan is to do a study on the original 18th century decorative stenciling on the walls in the parlor. They would like to bring in an expert to come in and document to determine the next steps.

Mr. Orcutt concluded the presentations and introduced Commissioner Liaison, James Kern.

Commissioner Kern thanked the applicants and the committee for their recommendations.

Discussion:

The committee decided to vote this evening.

Discussion was determined as to what to fund fully and what to fund partially.

It was proposed that they deduct \$50,000 from Phillipsburg Rails to Trails and deduct \$50,000 from Union Station.

Mr. Hall from Phillipsburg Rails to Trails recommended to just deduct \$100,000 from their application.

Roll Call: Alpha Rails to Trails receives their full request of \$75,000 motioned first by Mr. Urfer, seconded by Ms. Conry.

Randy Piazza	Yes	Walter Orcutt	Yes	Mark Young	Yes
Jeff Herb	Yes	Jason Menegus	Yes	Jean Smolha	Yes
Ethel Conry	Yes	Charles Fineran	Yes		
Diane Medcraft	Yes	Terry Urfer	Yes		

Totals: Full: 10 Abstain:

Roll Call: Blairstown Footbridge receives their full request of \$70,189.00 motioned first by Mr. Urfer, seconded by Mr. Piazza.

Randy Piazza	Yes	Walter Orcutt	Abstain	Mark Young	Yes
Jeff Herb	Yes	Jason Menegus	Yes	Jean Smolha	Yes
Ethel Conry	Yes	Charles Fineran	Yes		
Diane Medcraft	Yes	Terry Urfer	Yes		

Totals: Full: 9 Abstain: 1

Roll Call: Mount Bethel Community Center receives their full request of \$95,199.00 motioned first by Mr. Menegus, seconded by Ms. Conry.

Randy Piazza	Yes	Walter Orcutt	Yes	Mark Young	Yes
Jeff Herb	Yes	Jason Menegus	Yes	Jean Smolha	Yes
Ethel Conry	Yes	Charles Fineran	Yes		
Diane Medcraft	Yes	Terry Urfer	Yes		

Totals: Full: 10 Abstain:

Roll Call: Phillipsburg Rails to Trails receives their partial request of \$50,000 motioned first by Mr. Herb and seconded by Ms. Conry.

Randy Piazza	Abstain	Walter Orcutt	Yes	Mark Young	Yes
Jeff Herb	Yes	Jason Menegus	Yes	Jean Smolha	Yes
Ethel Conry	Yes	Charles Fineran	Yes		
Diane Medcraft	Yes	Terry Urfer	Yes		

Totals: Full: 9 Abstain: 1

Roll Call: Phillipsburg Union Station Restoration receives their full request of \$172,099.00 motioned first by Mr. Urfer, seconded by Mr. Young.

Randy Piazza	Yes	Walter Orcutt	Yes	Mark Young	Yes
Jeff Herb	Yes	Jason Menegus	Yes	Jean Smolha	Yes
Ethel Conry	Yes	Charles Fineran	Yes		
Diane Medcraft	Yes	Terry Urfer	Yes		

Totals: Full: 10 Abstain:

Roll Call: Roseberry House receives their full request of \$37,990.00 motioned first by Ms. Conry, seconded by Mr. Herb.

Randy Piazza	Abstain	Walter Orcutt	Yes	Mark Young	Yes
Jeff Herb	Yes	Jason Menegus	Yes	Jean Smolha	Yes
Ethel Conry	Yes	Charles Fineran	Yes		
Diane Medcraft	Yes	Terry Urfer	Yes		

Totals: Full: 9 Abstain: 1

Mr. Urfer made a recommendation to provide more funds to the MCCT budget for future grants due to inflation.

Mr. Orcutt expressed his appreciation to the committee and staff.

Mr. Herb and Mr. Fineran complimented the applicants on their presentations and serving the Warren County community.

Mr. Urfer motioned to adjourn, 9:23 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Correa-Kruegel
Park Naturalist