

**REMINGTON, VERNICK & BEACH ENGINEERS**

**PUBLIC OUTREACH MEETING MINUTES**

**Client:** East Norriton and West Norriton Twps.

**Date:** 02/22/17

Public Meeting                       Caucus                       Committee

**MINUTES:**

Christopher Fazio, P.E., and Karen Twisler, R.L.A., C.P.R.P., of Remington, Vernick and Beach gave their PowerPoint presentation for two concepts. Concept A had a 0.5-mile trail, a 22-car gravel parking lot, a pollinator garden, a wet meadow, and a 150-foot residential buffer. Concept B featured a 1-mile wood chip trail, 30-car paved parking lot, improved pedestrian connections to the high school, play equipment, adult fitness area and open lawn. Both concepts included pedestrian access from Generals Drive. In addition, both concepts recommended stream stabilization and management of invasive species.

**PUBLIC FEEDBACK:**

The public was allowed 3 minutes each to provide feedback. Once everyone was given an opportunity to speak, those who had previously given comments were permitted to provide additional comments. The meeting ended at 8 p.m. The following comments, paraphrased below, were provided:

- Several residents felt that the concepts reflect a bias. There should be a “do nothing” concept. Parking is an issue on Generals Drive. There are no sidewalks on Generals Drive to foster pedestrian movement. The pedestrian connection from Generals Drive and the Van Landeghem tract should be removed. The parcel is in close proximity to the high school and will lead to vandalism and encourage a “bad element”. Trails are not desired in this open space area. Trails are available at the Farm Park. Environmental improvements are OK.
- Keep the land as a preserve only. I am not in favor of walking trails, Nautilus equipment, or parking. There will be no wildlife left. The schoolchildren are vandalizing houses in the neighborhood. There will be skateboarding at the amphitheater. Keep the parcel as a natural preserve only. Who will pay for these improvements? The addition of plants and stream stabilization is OK.
- What are the costs for each concept? *The RVB response was that costs have not yet been calculated as these are concept plans.* I have concerns with vandalism.
- I would like to have health and fitness opportunities. The spending of tax dollars on this project is a good thing. The ROTC students would use this park and would respect it. This would be a positive impact for the high school.

- Will trees be removed? I am concerned with their removal. The parcel should be left alone. Keep the wildlife. We have the Farm Park. Streambank improvements would be good.
- Why do we need a trail if we have the Farm Park? They have educational components currently and I do not see they need to have this here also.
- Can we have the minutes from this meeting? The proposed environmental improvements are OK. Generals Drive is a concern. There would need to be a parking lot. The final report should include Burnside Oakland Park and Penn Park. I would prefer recorded sessions and more transparency.
- I live on Generals Drive and recommend no improvements. Parking and vehicular traffic are a concern. The linkage invites pedestrian traffic onto Generals Drive and leads nowhere. I have concerns with the safety and security of the neighborhood.
- I am in favor of trails. Ballard Wolffe Park has wood chip trails. I like the idea of gardens and markers along trails. We need to get children more interested in nature.
- I have been a resident since 2007 and my husband has been a teacher of biology for 25 years. Teachers have no time to do anything other than “teach to the test”. Teachers have no time for “kumbaya”. I encourage you all to go to school board meetings and to disavow yourself that biology teachers have the time for extra programming. I have been following this grant since 2014. It’s part of a County-sponsored master plan trail network that’s been around since 2012. There was a January meeting where I saw the Stony Creek-Sawmill Run master plan. PM me at [nextdoor.com](http://nextdoor.com). This bicycle trail network system will link our community to downtown Norristown through Generals Drive and so forth.
- I have been an East Norriton resident for 22 years and my property backs up to the project. This project affects my area. My 3 kids have an arboretum with foxes and snapping turtles. It is beautiful and unblemished. I hate to see this used for anything other than its current pristine condition. I saw the overall plan for The Greenway Trail project and it goes through East Norriton too. This plan is specifically linking trails and has been in the works for some time. I aggressively oppose this. I have concerns with vandalism and noise. The kids are cutting through my yard, leaving beer cans. I hear people in the summer and now that the leaves are gone, I can see where they have strung up a hammock on the other side of the stream and have candles for light.
- I am a new resident and I moved here because of the Farm Park. For the Van Landeghem parcel, there should be no action other than soil stabilization, plants and stream restoration. There should be no paved parking lots. This will be a problem with stormwater run-off. Put this stuff in the Farm Park. We voted to allow a 25% tax increase so that no police officers would be laid off. Where is the maintenance money coming from? The Township has no money. Open space is open space. Respect and value their opinions.

- Elementary kids need to be reached for nature appreciation. These are high school kids. The Farm Park land is leased and will expire in 2020. Is this meeting being recorded? Will this information be available? *RVB response information will be posted on the Township website tomorrow.*
- What are the hours of operation? *RVB response was like all parks, this would be closed at dusk.* How would you close it? Would there be a gate?
- I am an East Norriton resident and I have been here for 24 years. In that time, we have gone from 13 traffic lights to 27. You need to have a plan for the disruption and displacement of wildlife.
- I am an East Norriton resident. I have a concern with my children, one of which is special needs, and traffic. The animals will come onto my property. How will our voices be heard? We want a vote and we need it to be black and white.
- I want my input reflected in these concepts. There should be another meeting. What is the end product? Who makes the final decisions? *RVB response was the final document will be a report and the project will ultimately be decided by the supervisors of the Townships.*
- I was at some of the previous meetings and East and West Norriton residents \*did\* say that they were ok with trails as long as they weren't paved and that a buffer was provided. I want to remind you that this is public land, not private land. Did the homeowners buy it? No, the County did. You already have vandalism if you have kids in your yard. Encourage families to come and use the space. If parking is an issue, you may be able to use a decal for free parking or people could park at the high school. These opinions don't reflect everyone. Try to keep an open mind.
- I was at the first meeting but I was not invited to the other two. There was a consensus at the first meeting not to do anything. Where is Concept C? I am in favor of the environmental portion only, the stream banks and the invasives. Leave it alone. Governments love to get money. It burns a hole in their pocket. Send the money back. Our taxes are too high. Why do something no one wants? Post the minutes on the West Norriton website.
- Are there any plans to include regulations in the code of conduct for the high school? They are revamping their policies and updating the legal ramifications for misbehaving students. The site is isolated from public roads. How will the police patrol it? ATVs? Cameras? We have homeless and people walking away from the hospitals. One lady just died unfortunately. I am opposed to any improvements beyond watershed protection. Stop the dumping and do the upstream improvements. These concepts create a public nuisance. The students don't walk to school. If they wanted to, they could walk through the Farm Park.
- The proposed trails are just "tokens" and very short in length. I do 4 miles. This concept was shoehorned into this space. Why? I have watched development encroach. We need to be responsible. Don't destroy the habitat. Projects start small

and wind up big. This is all nature has left and now we want to take that away. Where does it stop?

- I have spent 32 years in the military and I know how these things work. When Einstein Hospital wanted to expand, we said no and they built it anyway. I have been keeping track of the comments. There are 35 people here. Two people are in favor of the project, 1 person is open-minded and 32 people are opposed to the project.
- I am an East Norriton resident and frankly I did not know this existed. I like the trails but I am concerned with grading. The site is high on both sides and low in the middle. Avoid disturbing the trees. *RVB response was the maximum disturbance is estimated to be 15 feet in width assuming that a 10 foot wide trail is ultimately envisioned for the trail.* I am a bicyclist and want to avoid traffic.
- Fifteen feet is very wide for a trail. Can't it be more narrow? No runners will use it. It's not worth it.
- You said the park would be closed at night. What if people show up with alcohol? What are you going to do? *RVB response was that generally speaking Townships do not permit persons to drink in the parks.* (Audience laughs). Ordinances don't keep people out.
- What were the results of the last poll? *RVB response was that those statistics were not available at the time.*
- My husband found 200 beer cans behind White Hall Road in preparation for some Audubon work. These are 8<sup>th</sup> graders. We found zip lines and illegal hunting. Why isn't the County trail shown on the western side? The County supersedes the Township. The citizens don't know what's going on. The County is expanding the trail system. Stony Creek, Kepner Creek and Saw Mill Run off-shoots are proposed. Bike routes and riparian trails will link to Norristown. I spoke to the Deputy Solicitor. There were no meetings in East or West Norriton. I have lived here since I was 7. They have plans to run us out.
- I have concerns with parking, particularly the curve and grade of the road. A safety study should be done. You looked me in the eye and told me there would be no connection to Generals Drive. *Mr. Fazio responded that at the time of the conversation we were not aware of this easement and inference to provide linkages to Generals until after that meeting was conducted.*
- What is the purpose of the proposed linkage? There are only 12 residents on the street. People will park in front of our houses to access the park. I have been a resident here for 31 years and there's been much overbuilding. You have the Farm Park and Valley Forge. Why come here? It's not worth the gas. It is much more likely that someone is going to walk into Wawa, get a 6-pack and drink in the park. The school has problems with truancy and absenteeism. We live in a real world and it's becoming more dangerous. We wanted to live in a rural, isolated neighborhood. The

police chief is reminding us to be safe and keep our doors locked. This project will attract an “unsavory element”.

- We all live here. These are our kids we’re talking about. What were the requirements of the open space grant? Do we have to do anything? How much was the grant? *RVB response was that the grant was approximately \$60,000 and we are approximately halfway through it. We will include all comments in the final document.* Couldn’t we use the grant money elsewhere? To improve the existing facilities and parks? East Norriton has a hard time getting grants. I find this surprising that we got this one.
- How did our forefathers consider easements? There are easements on my property and the work that was done off-site caused run-off that killed my 100-year-old trees. This is unreasonable.
- I have been an East Norriton resident for 22 years. I have a nice backyard with a stone wall and a pond. My observation has been that when the creek is dry, there are more people walking through the tract. They sometimes end up in my backyard, causing a noisy ruckus and occasionally throwing beer cans. Mostly sophomores and juniors from the high school. I prefer the peace and quiet. If you build trails, there’s just going to be more people.
- What happens down the road? You can’t guarantee results. If this is used the wrong way, all hell will break loose.
- You said asset and value to all. There has been rampant overdevelopment. Historic buildings have been demolished for yet another Wawa or Walgreens. I think it’s beautiful that they bought this parcel. Wildlife is being squeezed into smaller spaces. The value is in the preservation, not the improvements. A 15-foot-wide trail is excessive.
- You can look for salamanders and crayfish in the Farm Park. My house was broken into at 10:45 in the morning. The door was kicked in. There is crime near us. We can’t be responsible for other people’s children who are coming in from other places. Within 18 months, the hospital will be reducing beds for patients with special needs that they can’t accommodate. They will expand the forensic unit and create a stepdown facility that will be less secure. There’s a homeless shelter at Building 53. All these people are all over the place. We’ve tried to place a homeless person 3 times but couldn’t because their personality was too combative. This will vastly affect us.
- I had a similar experience to Judy’s and spent long days outside doing dangerous, dirty things. We looked for tadpoles and salamanders too, but that’s why they have the enrichment program at Ballard Wolfe Park. It’s flat. It’s close to elementary schools. The steep, deep banks would make it difficult for trails. What about the liability of unsupervised kids? This area has been identified on the County plan as having the densest tree canopy in Montgomery County. There is much tree fall. If a path is made and trees fall, who will clear the path? If it’s constructed of wood chips,

it will be muddy and wet. Who will pay someone to clear the trees? If a kid fall and hurts himself when he fell 8 feet down, who is liable?

- I am opposed to this project and have concerns with vandalism. These concepts make no sense.
- Are you aware of how high the creek can get during storms? It gets very high and wide. You will need a concrete bridge to cross and that will be very expensive.
- Has anyone walked the site? I mowed the field for my father-in-law and there are wet areas you need to be careful of.
- When the property was purchased, it was meant for a reserve, not for improvements.
- There should be additional studies. Like a business standpoint. Showing there is a need for the improvements.

## **PUBLIC POLL:**

There were approximately 40 attendees. Approximately three people left the meeting prior to the poll being taken and it should be noted that those three people has stated during the meeting that they were in favor of a park with the amenities shown in the concepts.

Thirty-seven (37) attendees were polled on the following questions:

- How many people want nothing at all? We leave this meeting and the parcel is not touched. **34**
- How many people don't want trails of any kind? **36**
- How many people would like to see a trail? **1**
- How many people would like to see a pollinator garden or wet meadow? **1**
- How many people would like to see a parking area? **1**
- How many people would like to see an adult exercise area? **0**
- How many people would like to see open lawn? **0**
- How many people would like to see an overlook area? **1**
- How many people would like to see the management of invasive species? **23**
- How many people would like to see streambank stabilization? **25**
- How many people would like to see linkages to the neighborhoods? **0**
- How many people here are from W. Norriton? **4**
- How many people here are from E. Norriton? **33**

**NEXT STEPS:**

Submission of Revised Documents	March 2017
Public Outreach Meeting #3	April 2017
Preparation of Final Documents	June 2017
Final Public Outreach Meeting	July 2017
Project Completion	August 2017