

**UPPER MORELAND TOWNSHIP
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

September 17, 2007

CALL TO ORDER – Comm. Efkwitz called a meeting of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting to order at 8:35 p.m.

ROLL CALL – Comm. Efkwitz, Chairperson took roll call. Present: Commissioners Lisa Romaniello and Richard Booth.

Others: David Dodies, Township Manager, Dick Watt, Township Solicitor, and Patrick Stasio, Director of Parks & Recreation Dept.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Comm. Efkwitz accepted the minutes of the July 9, 2007 Parks & Recreation Committee meeting into the record as submitted.

REPORTS:

Parks & Recreation Monthly Dept. Report:

Comm. Efkwitz asked who is the new Parks Foreman?

Mr. Stasio replied Jim Murphy is the new Parks & Recreation Foreman, and he started at the end of August. He has strong leadership skills and will be an asset to our department.

Comm. Efkwitz noted that our 2007 Fall Recreation News is out and we have many adult enrichment programs.

Parks & Recreation Advisory Minutes:

Comm. Efkwitz said the PRAC is exploring the idea of Dogs on Leashes in Upper Moreland and the Upper Moreland Soccer Club is a new item of business they have been discussing.

OLD BUSINESS:

Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Final Plan:

Comm. Efkowitz said the PRAC recommends approval of the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Final Plan and she would like to remove it from the agenda and move it for action at our October Regular Board meeting.

Comm. Booth said the Comprehensive Plan was well done and is a wish list for the community. The big question facing the Board will be how to fund it and we probably wouldn't be able to fund these projects even over the next 5-10 years. Additional parkland for playing fields and other facilities is included in the plan and the land that is designated on the map appears to be commercial property. So in order to fulfill the needs of the athletic clubs for additional fields, it will be difficult and not cost effective to buy those lands. The only way to do it is to build synthetic fields. He suggested looking into user fees for the sports groups that will play on these fields in order to make it fair to the taxpayers. We need to look at whether we can afford a recreation center, which was estimated at \$3 million dollars.

Mr. Stasio replied the Steering Committee did not take funding into consideration. They were going after what the community wants and needs. Synthetic fields are a popular trend and we could turn a profit by charging user fees. We have the right sources to make them work in Upper Moreland Township. One synthetic field is worth three fields, but we don't have the space right now.

Comm. Booth suggested moving up the timing for the master trail study so we can tie into the county trails.

Mr. Stasio replied that is our number one priority and he will request that in next year's budget.

Comm. Booth suggested placing special emphasis on the War Memorial Park trail because that connects with the county trail and might help our revitalization efforts.

Comm. Romaniello agreed with the master trail system, and she would like to see the focus of implementing the plans that already have been adopted by the former Board of Commissioners for War Memorial Park, Boileau, Bonnet Lane, Dog Park, trail systems and a community center. There was an 81% response from the phone/mail surveys that were in favor of walking, hiking, biking activities. How will we maintain the fields once we build them? We need to meet the needs of the majority of the community with the funds that we have. The School Board is moving forward with putting in new fields at Cold Springs and suggested that the Township work with the School Board on implementing synthetic fields.

Mr. Stasio agreed. He thanked the Steering Committee for nine months of hard work of creating the Comprehensive Plan. He asked the Committee to move it forward.

Comm. Efkowitz asked for any public comments. There were none.

Comm. Efkowitz said we will move this for action at our next Regular Board meeting.

Acquisition of Open Space – Application to Montgomery County Open Space Program for Grant:

Comm. Efkowitz said this is still pending and asked that it be removed from the agenda.

NEW BUSINESS:

Consideration of murals or other similar paintings to cover graffiti at War Memorial Park:

Comm. Efkowitz asked was this discussed at the PRAC meeting?

Mr. Stasio replied no. He spoke to people who paint murals, and they indicated that it is the wrong time of year to do a mural. Late spring or early summer is the best time and also it is best to paint it on a south facing wall. There are two methods to murals, one can be painted directly on the surface and the other is painted on rolled paper where they paint the mural in a facility and bring it out and apply it to a building. Both methods are not cheap. They start at \$7,000, which is a basic mural with not too much detail. We haven't investigated the schools yet.

Comm. Efkowitz said she would like to see an opportunity be available to the High School Art students, who do senior projects.

Comm. Romaniello asked if it was done on private property; would the Township be the facilitator?

Comm. Efkowitz replied the Parks & Recreation Department would be, yes.

Comm. Booth suggested holding this matter for another month.

Comm. Efkowitz said safety and security in all of our parks is an issue, but she does not feel it should be on the agenda unless we have a plan.

Public Comments:

Sam Valenza suggested leaving the lights on in the parks from dawn to dusk.

Mr. Stasio replied the problem is after midnight.

Comm. Efkowitz said we have cameras in certain areas, and suggested that Mr. Stasio work with the police department on next year's budget for getting more cameras.

Alex Levy, Police Officer, said that as soon as we cover up the graffiti the better. There are other municipalities who experience this and Abington Township has an ordinance. Catching them on cameras is not easy because most of the kids who graffiti disguise themselves for the cameras so it is difficult to identify them, and if there are gangs in the area, they graffiti to identify their turf. One option that does work is to make the property owner clean up their property within a certain amount of time.

Comm. Efkowitz asked do we have an ordinance like that in place?

Officer Levy replied no.

Kevin Spearing asked could a protective coating be put on buildings instead of a mural?

Mr. Stasio replied he does not know what the cost for that would be.

Comm. Efkowitz said the graffiti is being put on private property not park property.

Mr. Stasio said once the graffiti is removed, we have to reapply the coating.

Comm. Efkowitz said we will remove this item from the agenda.

Review an evaluation of parking needs at the Ramsey Tract:

Comm. Efkowitz said the Ramsey Tract is now called Pioneer Woods. Pioneer Woods was purchased with open space funds and grant money from the County. It was always the intent to keep Pioneer Woods to be just woods.

Mr. Stasio said there are no trails in Pioneer Woods now except for natural trails. One of the difficulties in putting a park there is elevation. There is ample parking on the street for this area and we have no plans for that tract at this time.

Comm. Romaniello asked have we met our obligations to the County?

Mr. Dodies replied yes.

Public Comments:

Barbara Piron, resident, asked what are the chances of this area being thinned out because it is a very dense area?

Mr. Stasio replied each winter, we clear out any dead trees and evasive plant material in our parks. We don't get to every park each winter, but he will put Ramsey on the list.

Comm. Efkowitz said we will remove this item from the agenda.

Maintenance of structures at Boileau Park:

Comm. Efkowitz asked for an update of the activities of the Friends of Boileau.

Mr. Scull gave a copy of his report to the Board, and said that he is a volunteer and this is a volunteer organization. He is a taxpayer and a citizen and he does not have to meet any benchmarks or be accountable to the Board. It is the other way around. The Township owns these buildings. The Friends of Boileau is an organization formed to try to preserve and save those buildings. The way these organizations work is groups and government bodies work together and get money from the State, private donors and foundations and part of that is the Township is asked to match it. We received money from Tom Murt, Senator Greenleaf, and possibly from Allison Schwartz and the question is always, "What is your Township doing?" These buildings are part of our culture and priceless and we will lose them. If the Board is going to put him in the position where if Boileau doesn't raise the money we will tear it down; then he does not want to be part of that.

Comm. Efkowitz said we had Friends of Boileau on the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting agenda to report their activities. The Township owns the property and the buildings, but unfortunately it seems that Mr. Scull has been misled as to what his duties are. We do expect a report from the Friends of Boileau on their activities. The Township bought the property as a recreational conservation property. It is parkland and there happens to be an historic home on it. The Historic Association lobbied the Board to save the historic home. Promises were made and the Friends of Boileau was formed, and they asked to be given a chance. At that time, the Board had an opportunity to sell the farmstead portion to someone using their own funds to rehabilitate that historic home. It would have been renovated in perfect preservation and opened it up to the Township on certain days. We decided against it because the rally in the community at that time was that, "These are our buildings and we want to save and preserve them," and the Board agreed. The decision was made not to spend taxpayers' dollars to spend millions of dollars to renovate the buildings and it was decided that the Friends of Boileau would take this on. That is when the Friends of Boileau made it to the agenda.

She is willing to follow Mr. Scull's lead and help when we can. There are two issues to be addressed, one was dropping the Friends of Boileau report from the agenda so Mr. Scull does not have to come here each month and present their activities.

Mr. Scull replied, "You cannot make me come here and speak to you. You can't put it on your agenda if I don't want to come."

Comm. Efkowitz said the taxpayers and this Board of Commissioners deserve to know what the group, which has promised to renovate and rehabilitate these buildings, is doing.

Comm. Booth said he has never seen anyone who wants money from the Township, who acts the way Mr. Scull does. The Friends of Boileau are at fault for not maintaining those buildings and accomplishing nothing. He is concerned about taxpayers' dollars and the Friends of Boileau has not proven that they are good stewards.

Comm. Romaniello said the problem was there was no communication between the Board of Commissioners, who adopted the Boileau plan and the historic organization. At that time, if there were any expectations by the Board, they would have been in writing. Those buildings are to be used for community purposes. We have created an historic preservation overlay; a historic commission is in place and we have an open space plan, which talks about protecting our historic sites. This Board should take some responsibility because there is a full park plan that the Board adopted. The Friends of Boileau doesn't have the support of its local Township. She sat as the President of the Historical Commission and no one ever said she was fully responsible for these buildings.

Comm. Efkowitz said the Friends of Boileau was created to be the stewards to guide the renovations and restoration of those buildings. The only thing she wants to know tonight is do we take the Friends of Boileau report off of the agenda.

Comm. Romaniello said it is important that the Board and committee have information as to what is going on, but the local government needs to decide whether they are committed to the plan that was adopted a few years ago or toss it to the wind. The report is necessary, but could be given quarterly.

Comm. Booth said we purchased the Malloy Tract in May, 2000 for \$800,000 with Township funds so we can do what we want with it. We bought the tract because it was the last 10 open acres in the Township and decided we needed to buy it, and it was bought for recreation purposes and park purposes. The plans were to demo the buildings and we were surprised to know they were historical buildings. We solicited a proposal for the Malloy tract to be redeveloped and we used a firm who had an historic background in development. We did this because he thought at that time we had commitments from the Historic Commission, who morphed into Friends of Boileau to support it and takeover.

He referred to letters from the Historical Commission to the Malloy Tract Steering Committee that said, "The Historical Commission has received inquiries from private sources interested in donating to the preservation of the Boileau/Malloy structure." Referring to a letter dated August, 2003 and written by Historical Commission to Simone, Jaffe, Collins that said, "This is a letter of intent concerning the Historical Commission and commitment to help organize and guide a non-profit Friends of Malloy organization."

Since the Township purchased the property, we have been approached by several individuals and organizations who have indicated their desire to pledge significant amounts of funds for this intended purpose. In addition to raising funds, this organization would include developing a timetable for actions; oversee maintenance and renovations as approved by the Commissioners.

On March, 2004, the Historical Commission presented to the Board of Commissioners a five page document that says, "The organization will assume major responsibilities for the rehabilitation of the historic site allowing the Township to assume a more passive role while maintaining overall control. Rehabilitation of structures will be completed with externally generated funds, and grant contributions." They talked about having a five – year lease agreement and never came forth with it. They had a suggested action plan that said, "Depending on funds raised at any given time, multiple projects may be undertaken to run concurrently. Much consideration must be given to bring the structures up to code with special regard for handicap, smoke alarm security, etc." They said they would accomplish in year one, the security structural and environmental study. "Also the carriage house would be the structure most economically feasible to rehabilitate and put into uses; an income producing part of the historical site. Year two – the main house would take a year or more to restore and make habitable. Once restored, a decision will be made as to the future of the home. Year two – contingent upon the amount of funds raised, rehabilitating the barn may be undertaken simultaneously with the main house beginning with making the exterior structurally safe and secure from vandalism. Year three – complete the renovation of the farm and begin the work on the Spring House. Year four – complete work on the Spring House."

Comm. Efkowitz said this is what we were led to believe.

Comm. Romaniello said we are in year one.

Comm. Booth said the Friends of Boileau has failed us and they are a failed organization. The study said it will cost over \$2 million for rehabilitation and that kind of money has not been raised for it. The Township will end up spending hundreds of thousands of dollars and it is not fair to the taxpayers of Upper Moreland. We should take the suggestion in the Friends of Boileau proposal, which says, "Final consideration – in the unlikely event that the Friends Corporation is unsuccessful in rehabilitating the site, it is offered for consideration that rather than demolish the historical site, offer the area containing the structure for sale with easements controlling the future historic integrity the same." They are saying if they can't do it, don't bulldoze it, sell it and let them rehabilitate it. If we can find a buyer, we would generate a little money that can be used for the rest of the park and restore the old house to private ownership like so many other houses in this town. It is not the Township's mission to spend a lot of money on historic houses.

Comm. Romaniello said those buildings are community assets and should be reused for other purposes. She feels this group is still capable and the Township needs to give the group time to form and create bylaws, etc. Since Mr. Scull has taken over, they have a 501C3 account, which gives them leverage to raise funds.

Comm. Efkowitz asked Mr. Scull to understand the skepticism that we have and asked the committee what should we do with this property? Should we reaccept the proposal presented by the Friends of Boileau and reaccept the timeline or should the Township spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to tackle these critical issues? Does the Friends of Boileau report remain on the agenda? She asked Mr. Scull if he is comfortable giving quarterly reports?

Mr. Scull asked for a written letter of when the reports are due.

Comm. Efkowitz said if it is quarterly, we will see you in December and then in April. She asked about maintenance of structures at Boileau.

Mr. Scull replied Phase I of the plan was to stabilize the buildings and all of the wrong things were done. The heat was turned off and all of the pipes froze, all the windows were boarded up so the house was filled with mold. It should have been ventilated and plexi-glass installed. The chimney wasn't capped so the animals got in; the tenants were kicked out so vandalism occurred. Maybe the Township should have looked at it, but instead the place was abandoned and boarded up. The Township decided to have their insurance inspector go through the building and they said the barn was in danger of falling down and nothing has been done about it. He spoke to Mr. Stasio, Mr. Dodies and an architect about it.

He apologized to Comm. Booth for being arrogant towards him and he remembers the controversy over the buildings although the decision was to save it. The Federal Government lost our 501C3 application and we had to reapply. The bottom line is that all of the buildings are in tact. The barn has a problem with the shed area and the roof is rotting, which needs to be sealed before winter. Two builders he spoke to estimate the cost to be \$15,000-\$20,000 to deconstruct the shed portion of the barn and seal it and make it weather tight. He wants to apply to the Historic and Museum Commission next year to get money to do all of the necessary stabilization so those buildings can sit for 10 years and not deteriorate. We need to spend the money to keep it from falling down and preserve it as is. It has been there for 200 years; it would be a shame if it fell down now.

Comm. Efkowitz said before we commit to \$15,000-\$20,000 for stabilization; do we want to rethink the plot?

Mr. Scull replied the long term dream has not changed.

Comm. Efkowitz asked should we move forward with this mission, and can the Board have a reasonable expectation that this organization will continue to do as they have proposed, which means raising the funds.

Mr. Scull replied he is looking for support and cooperation from the Township.

Comm. Crilly said we agreed to the restoration of the property without any governmental input. The best solution would be to reconstruct the shed and stabilize the barn and enter into discussions with the Friends of Boileau about what their plan is for the next five years that is acceptable to Mr. Scull and also give him the ability to have a lease as long as we can agree on the terms of the lease with a provision to terminate in the event that it does not work out. A lease would give the ability to raise their own funds and explore the possibility of a loan and offset it with rental payments. We need to have a plan that everyone is happy with and small amounts of money for stabilization may be possible from the Township, but we have to look at next year's budget and his goal is to not raise taxes next year. We are depending on the Friends of Boileau to do some of the things that were promised.

Comm. Efkowitz said we will place the report on our agenda quarterly and consider an amount not to exceed \$20,000 to deconstruct the shed portion of the barn and weather seal the barn.

Mr. Stasio noted that if it is over \$10,000, we need go out for bid on the project.

Solicitor Watt said this is for emergency repairs.

Comm. Efkowitz asked who will make the repairs?

Mr. Scull replied he has two contractors in mind.

Comm. Efkowitz asked Mr. Scull to get the bids in writing from both contractors.

Mr. Dodies suggested that Mr. Scull solicit a proposal of the items that has been discussed and the scope of work to be done and our Solicitor should review it to determine if it needs to go out for bid and, if not, the Board needs to decide how much they want to spend and where do we want to spend it from.

Comm. Hotchkiss suggested that Mr. Purtell be consulted on any repairs that are made.

Mr. Scull noted the plan was devised by Arthur Hall Adams, Architect.

Mr. Dodies added he is not so sure that Mr. Purtell could identify everything that should be done. A \$20,000 investment will not make those structures habitable.

Comm. Booth said he feels Arthur Adams, who is an architect could make the determination of what needs to be done.

Comm. Efkowitz asked that Mr. Adams provide the two contractors with the specs and have that forwarded to Mr. Dodies.

Requests from Historical Association:

Comm. Efkowitz said we have a request from the Historical Association to establish a Trail of History in Willow Grove. The Historical Association received a grant, part of which will be to expand the trail, and one of the spots they would like to place a historic marker is the Boileau Farm. The Historical Association has been approved for a grant from the State to install security lighting in the historic area of Boileau Park. They want to install the lighting and it will not impede grounds care or future work to be done to restore the structures.

Mr. Stasio commented he would like to be there when the lights are installed. This project should go out for bid and we will need specs before we can advertise.

Comm. Efkowitz agreed the security lighting should be put out to bid because it is in excess of \$10,000.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Comm. Booth asked for a trash can to be placed at the end of the trail at the Masons Mill Park.

Mr. Stasio replied it is Pennypack's property, but he will supply a can there.

ADJOURNMENT: 10:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. Elizabeth Vile

