

**Parks and Recreation Board**  
**Strategic Planning Meeting to Develop Parks, Trails & Recreation Plan**

**Work Session #1**

**Charlestown Elementary School**

**2060 Charlestown Road**

**Malvern, PA 19355**

**Minutes of February 29, 2012 - DRAFT**

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

**Welcome:**

Bob Jones, Chairman of Parks & Recreation Board, welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. He said the plan to revise the Recreation Plan began about a year ago when the Supervisors asked the Parks & Rec Board to review it and investigate financing options. Mr. Jones said the original Plan was adopted in 1993 and was amended in 2003.

Mr. Jones said a questionnaire was sent to all residents asking for feedback on their recreational needs and wants, and he's very happy with the response.

Kevin Kuhn, member of the Board of Supervisors, echoed Mr. Jones' welcome and said the Board sees a need for a cohesive use plan for the various Township facilities, including the Brightside Farm, Jenkins property, Charlestown Park and several historic parcels. He said the questionnaire provided the residents with an opportunity to voice their concerns so they could be taken into consideration during this process.

Mr. Kuhn then introduced Tom Comitta, who has been the land planner for Charlestown for 39 years.

**Introductions:**

Mr. Comitta asked those present to introduce themselves, and the following people did so.

1. Terry Woodman, Manager at East Whiteland Township
2. Dave Barrett, President of the Great Valley School Board
3. Janet Colleran, Charlestown resident in the Whitehorse @ Charlestown community
4. Chris Galbraith, resident on Sunny Hollow Lane and member of the Trails Committee
5. John Mikowychok, director of the County Parks & Recreation Department, who has a garden plot at the Brightside Farm
6. Tony Wirtel, resident tenant at the Brightside Farm house for six years with his family
7. Alix Coleman, resident and Manager of the Brightside Farm
8. Don Vymazal, from Sen. Andy Dinniman's office
9. Chuck McQuiston, President of the Phoenixville Marian Youth Club (PMYC)
10. Jeff Bodo, civil engineer who's active in the PMYC and designed one of the athletic fields at Charlestown Park
11. Jim Thompson, Township Roadmaster and resident of Union Hill Road
12. Brian Wilchusky, President of the Phoenixville Area Soccer Club (PASC)
13. Jay Jackomin, Facilities Director of the PASC
14. Pat Dowd, Treasurer of the PASC
15. Chuck Isaacs, resident next to the Jenkins Property on Valley Hill Road

16. Jim Quay, resident on Raven Hill Road and member of the Township Parks & Rec Board
17. Mike Hoga (sp?), resident of East Vincent Township
18. Meryl Seth, resident of Charlestown Meadows
19. Josh Seth, resident of Charlestown Meadows
20. Barbara DeWilde, resident on Valley Hill Road since 1976, member of the Charlestown Historical Society. She announced she's selling CHS calendars and books this evening for those interested.
21. Debbie Kuhn, resident on Whitehorse Road
22. Kevin Kuhn, Township Supervisor, resident on Whitehorse Road. He congratulated Mr. Jones on the excellent cross section of individuals he brought in to the meeting this evening.
23. Courtney Leidicker, resident on Union Hill Road
24. Susan Saunders, resident of East Pikeland Township. She said she recently purchased a property at Union Hill and Aldham Roads and plans to build a house there.
25. Dave Saunders, resident of East Pikeland Township
26. Walt Underhill, resident on Valley Hill Road near the Jenkins property
27. Esther Underhill, resident on Valley Hill Road
28. Rich Berry, resident
29. Brian Pyle, resident on Valley Hill Road
30. Claire Dukes, resident on Yellow Springs Road, who has a garden plot at the Brightside Farm
31. Marguerite Buck, resident on Valley Hill Road, Manager for the Garden Plots at

Brightside

32. Sid Buck, resident on Valley Hill Road, Manager for the Garden Plots at Brightside

33. Mark Connolly, resident on Broadwater Lane

34. Jeremy Leidicker, resident on Union Hill Road at Stinson Markley House, Trail Committee Member

35. Matt Finlay, resident on Foster Road and member of the Parks & Rec Board

Others attending were:

36. David \_\_\_\_\_

37. Marcia Solda, resident on Merlin Road

38. Linda Csete, Township Manager

39. Tom Comitta, Thomas Comitta Associates

40. Bob Jones, Chairman, Parks & Recreation Board

### **Overview on Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Trails Plan:**

Mr. Comitta started with an anecdote of his first day covering a meeting for Charlestown in 1973 when he was called to substitute for a member of his firm for a review of the Comprehensive Plan with the Planning Commission.

He displayed slides as follows to provide background on the Recreation Plan:

1. Map of Open Space and Recreational Resources, rev. 7/29/11, which highlights Charlestown Park, the Pickering Preserve, Brightside Farm, Jenkins property, the private open spaces owned by various Homeowners' Associations, the Horseshoe Trail, conservation easements, developed land, and smaller Township owned property.
2. Map of Trails rev. 7/29/11.

## **Overview on the First Visioning Workshop:**

Mr. Comitta referred to his proposal to the Township to prepare the amended Recreation Plan, the cover memo of which is included as an addendum to the minutes.

## **Questionnaire Results to date:**

Chris Galbraith presented a PowerPoint outlining the compiled results of the questionnaire sent to all residents last month. 126 residents responded but there are several more responses to be tabulated. People owning more than three acres of property comprised the largest group, and townhouse owners were the second largest. Nearly all the respondents who identified themselves also provided email addresses, but about half of the responses were “anonymous”. A copy of the PowerPoint is attached to the minutes.

Ms. Galbraith noted that late responses will be added to the data as they are received.

She said the responses gave a good indication of what people want, and gave some highlights of the responses as follows:

- Slide 2: The 36-59 year demographic was the most common group, which she noted affects the type of recreation they are interested in. Townhouse residents responded more than single home owners.
- Slide 3: Those who responded they never use the recreational facilities, or are unaware of them, is too high.
- Slide 4: Use of the Great Valley Nature Center was strong compared to many regional parks and facilities. She noted this group can be learned from.
- Slide 5: Residents' opinions were overwhelmingly in favor of the Township's recreational and open space efforts.
- Slide 6: The activities residents engage in are diverse, with walking the #1 activity.
- Slide 7: The response to the question of the top five requested activities will help drive this planning process. They included nature trails, biking trails, hiking trails and fitness

trails. Also mentioned were dog parks, picnic areas, and a theater/concert venue.

- Slide 8: There was strong support from residents interested in attending a community day and the Parks & Recreation Board meetings.
- Slide 9: Comments were positive overall, but negative comments included concerns over taxes, conditions at Charlestown Park, need for security, signage and defined parking areas. Some felt money would be better spent on snow removal, police services and traffic control. A Rails to Trails line was suggested to run from Phoenixville to Devault.
- Slide 10: The next steps were outlined to lead to the long term plan, including more detailed analysis of the questionnaires and feedback from this evening, additional meetings, and posting information on the Township Website.

Mr. Comitta asked for the deadline to return the questionnaires, and Ms. Galbraith said would be the end of this week, March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Mr. Connolly asked if the Township could communicate with all residents via email. Ms. Galbraith said most of the respondents to the questionnaire did provide their email address, and Mr. Jones said the questionnaire and a follow up postcard were mailed to all households, as well as information on this project in the recent newsletter.

Mr. Comitta congratulated Ms. Galbraith on the lavishly done PowerPoint presentation, and those in attendance applauded.

### **Questions and Responses on Your Vision:**

Mr. Comitta then circulated a brief questionnaire to be completed by all present, and gave them a few minutes to do so. That form is attached to the minutes.

Mr. Comitta led a discussion of the comments and asked everyone to turn in their forms and, before leaving this evening, to place a blue dot on the displayed map to indicate where they live.

Mr. Comitta asked Brian Pyle how he answered question #1 on what type of facility Charlestown needs most. Mr. Pyle answered, picnic pavilions as they reach out to the most people and are used by all ages. Many others agreed.

Esther Underhill suggested more tot lots and short trails for children.

Barbara DeWilde suggested tennis courts at Brightside Farm, and activities such as art classes or book clubs. She said the Grange building has parking and a stage for concerts and plays.

Mr. Comitta asked for responses to question #2, on where the Township should locate these resources, such as a picnic area. Ms. Galbraith suggested Jenkins Park.

Jeremy Leidicker said more variety of trails is needed, and agreed there should be shorter ones for children. Mr. Underhill said he'd like to see more bike trails.

David \_\_\_\_\_ said a lot of the roads are already good for biking, but bike lanes should be delineated on the side of the roads, though he noted this could take too much land.

Jim Thompson said he'd like to see more hiking and horseback trails.

Mark Connolly said by acquiring additional open space, links can be reserved for trails in the future. He said a bike path may work along Hollow Road and a good connection would be from the Brightside Farm to the Nature Center.

Mr. Comitta asked if anyone named an area other than the Ice Dam area, Charlestown Park, Jenkins Tract, or the Township's 6.2 acres in Devault to add a resource, and the response was no.

For Question #3, which listed 14 resources and asked the participants to divide a hypothetical \$100.00 among them to demonstrate how funds should be allocated, he asked who put \$50.00 or more in one category.

Ms. Coleman said she put this amount under item 3.7, to acquire land for open space. Eleven others did also. Ms. Coleman said open space is quickly disappearing and will be gone forever, and acquiring more keeps the Township nice.

Mr. Kuhn said he put \$100.00 under item 3.14, "other" and listed easement acquisitions. He said that instead of fee simple real estate purchases by the Township, it can leverage the protection of much more space using this process. Open space locked up through easements is preserved permanently.

Mrs. DeWilde asked for some history on the Jenkins parcel, which Mr. Kuhn provided. He said the Township bought the 16 acres and is subdividing half of it into four lots, which will be sold to finance an 8 acre park in the front along Valley Hill Road. The subdivision process has been delayed due to the recent economy. Mrs. DeWilde asked if the inclusion of item 3.7, to acquire more land for open space, indicates the Township intends to do this. Mr. Comitta responded this is just a brainstorming exercise and tonight they're thinking more of general open space preservation concepts.

Mr. Comitta asked if anyone gave no dollars for open space and about 3 people raised their hands. Mr. Wirtel was among them, and said a lot of the Township facilities are already in a state of decay, and they should be repaired before acquiring more.

Mr. Pyle said he allotted most funds to item 3.1, improving/rehabilitating existing parks & rec areas. He said the open space campaign is not transparent, particularly its funding. The Township promotes that preserving open space keeps taxes down, yet residents pay a lot to fund the program.

Mr. Comitta asked who put \$50.00 or more in a category unrelated to open space acquisition. Jim Quay said he put \$60.00 under item 3.1 to improve existing facilities. 9 others did as well.

Janet Colleran said she'd like to add sports fields in another area. Mrs. Underhill said the buildings at Brightside Farm need to be repaired.

Chuck McQuiston said he allotted funds for upgrading Charlestown Park's lighting and parking.

Mr. Comitta asked if there were any other write-in suggestions under item 3.14. Mrs. DeWilde said she wrote in tennis courts, and Mr. Comitta determined 9 others did as well. He asked for a suggested location, and Mrs. DeWilde said Brightside Farm. More disagreed than



agreed with this idea. Mrs. Dukes said she lives near the Farm and wants it to remain natural. Mrs. Coleman suggested courts at the Jenkins property, and about 6 agreed and 6 disagreed.

Ms. Galbraith said she sees the Jenkins property as a potential family park and there would be no space for tennis courts. Mr. McQuiston added that courts would require more parking too. Mr. Finlay said this would be too much impervious coverage, and Mr. Isaacs agreed he would be against this. The tract is too small, is heavily wooded and the trees should be preserved. He doesn't want lighting at this location after dark.

Mr. Kuhn said with the Traditional Neighborhood Development plan for the Devault area, tennis courts and playing fields might belong on the township's 6.2 acre tract. Mr. Comitta explained the TND plans for Spring Oak and Pickering Grant (Tyler Griffin), which will have such features as village greens, basketball courts, community gardens, tot lots.

Mr. Comitta asked if anyone put \$45.00 on a category not yet discussed. Mrs. DeWilde responded with item 3.5, protection of historic resources. She said some structures in Charlestown Village from the 1700's are falling apart, such as the blacksmith shop and wheelwright shop. Mr. Comitta ascertained that 12 others allotted funds for this category.

Mr. Comitta said when the Parks & Rec Board toured the Township on December 3, 2011, he was impressed with the historical interpretative signage and felt historic resources deserved consideration in this plan.

Mr. Comitta asked if there any other items to comment on, and Ms. Colleran said regarding trails, is there any way to connect to the Schuylkill River Trail or Chester Valley Trail. Mr. Mikowychok from the County said there's clearly potential to the south of Charlestown but a network of local trails connecting to them through corporate parks and residential areas is critical. Mr. Quay said with Rails to Trails they could connect to either trail.

Mr. Connolly referred to the "Candy Line" which is a Rails to Trails vision for the Devault Line to connect to the Schuylkill River Trail and down to the Chester Valley Trail. He said Phoenixville Borough is moving forward with this and the Schuylkill River Trail will go through Phoenixville this year.

Mr. Connolly referred to Swiss Pines, which he described as a Mecca for visitors in the 1970's and 1980's. He'd like to extend the horticultural side of recreation in the plan.

**Ideas for path Forward:**

Mr. Comitta remarked that at the time of working on the 1976 Comprehensive Plan, Charlestown was known as a "green agricultural wedge" in the regional plan. He displayed a new plan of Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails prepared today, 2/29/12, which shows "Character Areas".

He then showed a slide of common open space areas, their types and character, ranging from buffers, parks, village greens, squares and plazas, and the type of area they belong in, such as neutral, rural, suburban, general urban, urban center or urban core zone. He said at the next regular Parks & Rec meeting they'll prepare for the second workshop, looking at a 30 year plan and try to envision where certain types of facilities should be located. He said the Parks & Rec Board wants a mini-master plan for each park.

**Other Comments and Questions:**

Mr. Comitta asked for any other comments or questions.

Ms. Saunders suggested creating a disk golf course, which is easy on the environment. Six others were in agreement.

Mrs. Underhill asked if the features in the Devault TNDs are open to outsiders. Mr. Comitta said they aren't gated communities but are maintained by the developers and HOAs and are meant to be walkable. He said at Pickering Grant, they're proposing a small commercial building, and between that and Spring Oak will be a communal area that makes the midsection of Devault more accessible.

Mr. Isaacs said he echoes Mr. Connolly's suggested for garden recreation at the Jenkins property.

Mrs. DeWilde said the questionnaire responses indicate that people don't know where the trails or parks are. She said yesterday the Historical Society met with members of the Parks & Rec Board and Brightside Farm Manager Alix Coleman at the Rapp House to start planning a community day. They propose May 5<sup>th</sup> for the event to be called "Celebrate Charlestown Day" that would conduct a tour of the recreational areas. Their next meeting will be on March 13<sup>th</sup> from 2 pm to 5 pm at the Rapp House. They'll include information in the next newsletter as well.

Mr. Comitta asked Josh Seth if he could provide feedback as a teen. Mr. Seth said he doesn't go to the park but would like to use a basketball court.

Mr. Connolly said he's a Tree Tender with the Tree Vitalize program, and noted he'd like support for a bee sanctuary garden as well.

Mr. Comitta asked for more comments, and there being none, encouraged those present to email Mr. Jones if they think of anything else.

Chuck McQuiston said the meeting discussion tonight is too general and questioned what they expect to accomplish, if it's a master plan. If so, he said they'll never achieve it.

Mrs. DeWilde asked if Ms. Galbraith's PowerPoint presentation would be included in the next newsletter, and Mr. Jones said no, but it'll be posted on the website.

Mr. Mikowychok suggested that some aspects of the plan look beyond the Township borders. For example, tennis courts may be available for residents at nearby schools. Mr. Comitta asked about the mapping the County Planning Commission was doing a few years ago, and took note of the information provided by Mr. Mikowychok.

**Next Steps:**

Mr. Jones thanked the participants for coming this evening. Mr. Comitta said the second work session will be held at the Elementary School on March 29<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. and the final work session at the Great Valley Middle School on April 30<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m.

**Adjournment:**

Mr. Comitta adjourned the meeting at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda M. Csete

Township Manager