



Franklin Township Trails Committee **VIRTUAL** Meeting

October 13, 2021

7:00PM

1. Call to Order in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act (N.J.S.A. 10:4-6) 7:10 PM
2. Roll Call James Kuligowski, (JK), Chair, Vanessa Jones (VJ) Vice Chair, Charles Martin, CM (Secretary), Mark Fortin (MF), Anne-Marie Orlusky (AMO), John Herrling (JH), Tom Lewis (TL), Tara Kenyon (TK) Open Space Consultant, Absent: Mayor Philip Kramer
Citizen participants: B. Bowman Franklin Reporter and Advocate
3. Approval of September 2021 Minutes: MF move to approve, TL 2nd. Approved with unanimous vote.
4. Public Comment — CM moved to open TL second. Meeting opened to the public by unanimous vote. (No public comment) MF moved to close, TL second. Comments closed by unanimous vote.
The meeting will be opened to the Public to provide time for comments and/or questions related to the agenda
5. Pathways and Trails Plan (45-minute work session)
 - a. Updated Appendix 2 – comments on details and quality of maps – TK submitted for discussion an edited version of appendix 2 with a focus on proposed township projects. Concerns were expressed about the resolution and information content of maps in the new proposal. Street names were not clearly illustrated, and locations were unclear to the readers. TK noted that the displayed maps were derived from the NJ Conservation Blueprint and that the IT department can convert those map images to GIS data which would give clearer illustrations. Members commented on the larger size of the new maps indicating that they were a great improvement over maps in the original trails plan. Discussions involved whether the new maps would be better displayed as full-page appended illustrations rather than embedded within the text. There were recommendations to remove block-lot designations but to include street names, property boundaries and property colors to illustrate the juxtaposition of public, township, county and state lands within the township. Appropriate legends and compass roses should be included in the map. Committee consensus seemed to be for the use of full-page appended GIS map, however TK indicated that representative maps of different sizes could be produced at the next meeting so that the committee can decide which type to include in the new plan. It was also noted that textual descriptions should include all essential information necessary to interpret each map.
Specific items of discussion within the edited version of Appendix 2 included:
 - 1) removal of outdated plans in the proposal for a North South trail proceeding along east-west rail line routes south of Smith road and realignment of a path along Van Cleef Road.
 - 2) Negri-Nepote trail improvements that should include an ADA accessible trail with an appropriate surface extending from the parking area to and around portions of the vernal pond with construction of

wheelchair accessible observation structures at sites around the pond and on the ridge near the Skillmans lane parking lot. It was noted that the existing blind provides only a partial view of the pond, and that wheelchair accessible observation area (s) on the opposite (west) side should be provided so that a person in a wheelchair could view the marsh area at the north part of the pond.

3) With respect to the proposed Negri-Nepote parking lot of Bennett Lane, TK noted that 1 ADA spot with a hard accessible surface was required for every six spaces. Members noted that the parking lot in the Bennett Lane area could be smaller (4-5 cars) and that the existing wooded trail from that lot would not be suitable for wheelchairs.

4) Discussion about crossing on Manville Causeway/ Weston Canal Road. Members noted that this crossing area continues to be a dangerous site that needs multiple warning devices to avoid potentially fatal accidents in the area.

- b. Visions and Goals – to be discussed at next meeting. (PTP discussions exceeded 45 minutes at this point in the meeting.)

6. New Business

- a. Update – Maintenance Call with Carl Hauck DPW was finishing mowing at both JCM and Negri-Nepote Grasslands. Concerns were expressed about public works marking trails. Committee agreed that members would do a better job of marking the trees. TK noted that National Park Service standards will be used for trail marking, although posts or attached signs might be appropriate for trees too small for NPS type markings. NPS tree markings use either a stencil or 2" wide brush to produce 2"x6" markings.
- b. TK noted that Chuck Martin had been appointed to Open Space Advisory Committee – CM expressed his desire to remain an active member on the Trails Advisory Committee.
- c. Comments on *Somerset County Open Space and Recreation Plan* – TK reviewed farmlands and open space elements of the County plan. The Farmland plan format is strictly regulated and is *pro forma*. Green Acres also has standard applications. The complete proposal draft was published August 4 and open meetings have since been held to discuss the plan. It was noted that the County Plan mentions the impact of open spaces on public health, some discussion of invasive species management issues and stewardship of historic resources found on open spaces. As general comments, TK noted it is an 876-page plan with 192 pages devoted to open spaces. Franklin open space trails are discussed on Page 36; however, JC Griggstown Preserve is missing from the plan. The County used NJ conservation blueprint for many of their maps and they are difficult to read. Relevant Statistics in the plan notes that the total preserved open space areas within the 195,520-acre county comprises 34,170 acres of which 14,701 acres are listed as county, 10,883 acres as municipal and 6334 acres as state open spaces properties. *(See Appended Table 4.2.2 below for comprehensive municipal data. Note: This was extracted from page 16 of the County report).* There are 89 football and soccer fields in county. (What are the # of baseball fields?) Of \$310 million County open space monies collected \$54 M has been used. Franklin Township has 1192 acres of County open space acquisitions for which \$10M was spent from county funds. The report now emphasizes old metrics were based on total acreage, but now new metrics will be used indicating where residential areas are located from 10 – 15-minute to an open space site. Recreation director survey and community needs, events, paddling needs are presented in the plan. References to Franklin Township include: The County wants to preserve an additional 1800 acres of forest within the southern end of the township. (Note: Franklin has 27% of county open space, which makes it one of top 3 townships in the county for open space areas) MF noted that we have ¼ County open space but only 1/10 of the total county appropriations. Negri Nepote is referred to as a birding hotspot and a notable natural area. The County want to preserve an additional 9300 acres by year 2030 to get to the County inventory to 24K preserved acres. Many municipal governments do not have money to manage and restore historic issues. Wildlife management noted as an issue. Hunting is permitted on some county property.

7. Old Business

- a. Prescribed Burn at Grasslands (Winter 2021/2022) –proposals for NN and JCG grasslands approved by the forest fire service.

- b. 2021/2022 Hunting Season – Hunting permits have been withdrawn on newly acquired 518 property due to neighbors’ concerns about access points near homes – CM indicated this may be a prime area to establish trails from a lot constructed in the middle section of the woods on Rt 518.
 - c. Trail walks – Gloria Fidecaro (Parks and Recreation) asked if Trails Committee members would schedule joint trail walks with Parks and Recreation. TK suggested that individuals or committee members should contact Gloria directly to set up Sunday walks. VJ indicated that she is working with Ms. Fidecaro on several walks in November. These guided walks could encompass fitness, educational, or other interests. The goal is to get citizens out on our trails.
 - d. Land Stewardship Roundtable (organized by Middlesex Parks/Rec) met at JCM Griggstown Grasslands. TK, CM and Chris Williams met with the group to discuss Township restoration and land management procedures. Representatives from Middlesex, Somerset, and Mercer Counties attended. Also included were representatives from Duke Farms, Princeton open space, the NJ Invasive Strike Force, and commercial seed applicators.
 - e. Committee Membership/ – No applications have been received by the Township Clerk
8. Adjournment – MF moved to adjourn AMO second, motion passed unanimously 8:51 PM.

Table 4.2.2 Preserved Open Space by Municipality and Ownership

Municipality	Preserved Open Space (acres)	County	Municipal	State	Nonprofit		Total Area (acres)	Percent Preserved Open Space
						Federal		
Bedminster	2,161	469	1,243	77	372		16,833	13%
Bernards	3,270	1,556	1,685	9	20		15,399	21%
Bernardsville	969	117	422		254	176	8,307	12%
Bound Brook	52	5	47				1,085	5%
Branchburg	1,787	930	503	351	3		12,979	14%
Bridgewater	2,970	2,124	796	50			20,806	14%
Far Hills	288	174	50		64		3,124	9%
Franklin	7,962	1,148	2,234	4,479	101		29,981	27%
Green Brook	155	106		49			2,868	5%
Hillsborough	7,524	5,364	1,328	762	23	47	35,201	21%
Manville	217	139	73	5			1,567	14%
Millstone	132	65	41	26			486	27%
Montgomery	4,045	1,636	1,488	736	185		20,787	19%
North Plainfield	84	4	73	7			1,796	5%
Peapack-Gladstone	352	248	70		34		3,746	9%
Raritan	58	22	36				1,304	4%
Rocky Hill	135	103	32				398	34%
Somerville	119	34	85	<1			1,512	8%
South Bound Brook	81			81			483	17%
Warren	1,033	414	581		38		12,572	8%
Watchung	98		96	2			3,875	3%
Total	34,170	14,701	10,883	6,634	1,095	223	195,520†	17.5%

Source: Somerset County Planning Department, December 31, 2018, except for Total Area for individual municipalities, which is from Wikipedia (which draws from official sources), using total area (land and water). Acres are rounded to the nearest whole number.