

Williams Township Land Preservation Board Meeting Minutes

Date of Meeting: September 24, 2024

Time: 7:00 p.m. to 8:25 p.m.

Facilitator: Ken Kodama

Locations: Secondary Building, Williams Township Community Center,
655 Cider Press Road, Williams Township, PA

In Attendance:

Ken Kodama (Board Chairperson), Bob Schmidt (Vice Chairperson), Lorraine Mineo (Board Treasurer), Tom Heilman (Board Member), Nurit Baron (Board Alternate) – serving as Secretary for the evening, and Michael Cortright (Board Alternate).

Also present were Williams Township Board of Supervisors members Michael Bryant and Raymond Abert; Consultant to the Board Matt Babbitt of Heritage Conservancy, Doylestown, PA; and township residents

Introduction:

The board meeting was opened by Board Chair Ken Kodama and began with all rising for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Prior Meeting's Minutes:

A motion to approve the August minutes was made by Vice Chairperson Bob Schmidt and seconded by Board Member Lorraine Mineo, and passed with a unanimous vote

Updates on Preservation Projects, Preservation Applications, Resident Show of interest in Preservation, Preservation Appraisals:

In-Process Parcel Application 2022 (year) - 2 (sequence in year): (“South Parcel”) (2022-2):

Status of the Med-Ed right-of-way title search for this property:

Consultant to the Board Matt Babbitt of Heritage Conservancy updated the board regarding the status of waiting for Med-Ed to update Heritage Foundation of any findings regarding easements it may have on this property that date back prior to 1941.

Matt Babbitt indicated that he has reached out to have a meeting with Met-Ed personnel regarding the search for information on any easements on this property prior to the date of 1941 – for which there is no data available to the public. He said that it has been weeks since Matt reached out to Met-Ed and the company has not responded to his requests for a meeting to discuss the problem that the 1941 data he has uncovered mentions an earlier in time easement(s).

Matt Babbitt has made a full effort to find legal documents regarding a prior easement, but he has exhausted all possible search efforts available in public archives. Matt Babbitt will continue to reach out to Met-Ed. A board member asked Matt Babbitt if we must wait for this meeting and Matt Babbitt replied it is imperative. Ken Kodama indicated that he would speak with Williams Township Manager Melody Ernst to ask her to let the Williams Township Solicitor Jonathon Reiss know that a needed meeting with Met-Ed has been difficult to attain and that perhaps the solicitor can help in this effort.

Updated protection area maps:

Ken Kodama indicated that discussion of new maps is moved to the Old Business section of the agenda.

Northampton County's (NORCO's) New Model Easement:

Ken Kodama indicated that discussion of the model easement is moved to the Old Business section of the agenda

In-Process Parcel Application 2023 (year) - 4 (sequence in year): ("North Parcel") (2023-4):

Status of the Metropolitan Edison (Med-Ed) right-of-way (ROW) title search:

(See above discussion for the South parcel)

Updated protection area maps:

(See above discussion of the South parcel)

Northampton County's (NORCO's) New Model Easement:

(See above discussion of the South parcel)

In-Process Parcel Application 2023 (year) - 3 (sequence in year) (2023-3):

Status of site visit with Northampton County preservation representatives:

This is a property across from a mill. On this date of the Land Preservation Board meeting, the Northampton County Conservation Coordinator Sherry Acevedo had presented a Zoom workshop entitled, "*Northampton County Livable Landscapes Grant Program Land Conservation Grant Workshop*" on the county's status on updating the protocol and documentation for future (and currently in process) land preservation within the county.

Matt Babbitt indicated the next step with this property is to have the Northampton County Parks and Recreation department schedule a site visit to this property. Matt Babbitt further indicated that the preserving of this property will not be possible without both the landowner and Northampton County representatives agreeing to all terms of this new acquisition into preservation (an easement). He further indicated no agreement of land preservation is possible without a prior site visit by members of the county to a property.

A board member noted that this land preservation request by the landowner is now many months old, and it is worrisome that it has been held up in limbo for these many months.

Matt Babbitt said that there is no method of bypassing the county's work on all acquisitions within the township. There are several agreements in other townships within Northampton County also stalled and waiting on the upgraded procedures and upgraded documents the county has been in process of completing for months now.

In addition, there are two years allotted in land preservation contracts to finish any land preservation project, but this two-year period does not begin until the county awards the preservation to a local property. This clock has not started on any of the three open preservation applications which are currently "in process."

Matt said, However, a property's appraisal is only valid for one year and one of the properties "in process" in Williams Township will come up on its one-year anniversary this November. If we would need a new appraisal due to not having signed an agreement between the county and the landowner within the expected one year, the board may have to return to the township supervisors with a request for a higher dollar amount for the township's 50 percent cost of the preserved land if a new appraisal became necessary and if it appraises the land to be preserved at a higher dollar amount. Matt indicated that he would ask for an extension providing the lapse is only a few days.

New Landowner Show of Interest in Land Preservation:

Ken Kodama said that he sent individual letters to two landowners. Ken Kodama indicated that he "sent individual letters to both landowners of the same piece of land, one of whom had earlier expressed an interest in preservation of their jointly owned property. The letters simply said that I would be happy to further discuss with them the potential for preserving their property."

Ken Kodama said he has not yet heard back from either of these two landowners.

Consultant Matt Babbitt said there is a third landowner who has reached out, but there is nothing new to report to the board regarding the third landowner.

Old Business:

Block style map for the township building:

Matt Babbitt indicated that Heritage Conservancy will be able to enlarge the map of the most current land preservation within the township and that what is needed is a 5' by 7' map since the size of the older version.

A board member asked Matt Babbitt what the cost of the new map would be and Matt Babbitt said that he was unsure but would find out. Board members agreed that it would be good to have three such maps – one in the current room in the secondary building at the township complex because this is where the Land Preservation Board meets, one in the main building of the township and one at Stouts Valley Park in the township.

Northampton County's New Model Easement

Earlier in the day of this Land Preservation Board meeting, the county's land conservation coordinator presented the upcoming revisions to the Northampton County's Livable Landscapes grant program guidelines. Several board members attended the Zoom workshop, and indicated a high-level overview of grant program procedures was presented, but all board members who attended had difficulty understanding the details of the changes and indicated it was difficult to see the presenter's PowerPoint slides.

A county representative indicated that the new details will soon be on the county's portal, however, this was not on the portal prior to the night's meeting. Some indicated they were informed that the new documentation with the details would not be on the portal until November 1, 2024.

Revised Williams Township Land Preservation Board Procedures:

All board members have received the new procedures for the board. They are placed in these minutes as received by the township:

1. All communication between Northampton County (NORCO) and Williams Township is to go through Matt Babbitt of Heritage Conservancy. Babbitt will copy the Township Solicitor and Manager on everything.
2. Once the LPB has inspected a prospective property, scored the property, spoken with the property owners, and everything is good to move forward, then a title search will be ordered. Once the title search is back and everything is clear, an appraisal will be ordered.
3. Once there is sufficient information to complete NORCO's application and all of the title issues, if any, are resolved but before the application is fully completed and submitted to NORCO, Sherry Acevedo will be notified and asked to do a site visit.
4. There should be no discussing properties while other property owners are present at the LPB meetings. It is recommended that if the property owners have questions, they should be answered at the end of the meeting by the Chair and Babbitt. If Babbitt is not in attendance at the meeting, then the Chair and another member can meet with the owners.
5. After the LPB has received approval from the BOS for the appraisal and survey, Heritage Conservancy will order both. The appraisals and surveys will come to the Township Manager and then the Township Manager will distribute the same to Heritage Conservancy and the LPB.
6. A copy of the draft minutes should be sent to Babbitt so that he is in the loop as to what is happening.

Open Space Tax Referendum:

A board member said that the township has 3500 acres that can still be potentially preserved. These are within about 100 different properties.

Ken Kodama will speak with Melody Ernst with a request that the township attorney Jonathon Reiss give the board direction on both the legal process of beginning to canvas the township citizens prior to a resolution to raise taxes to increase the Land Preservation Board's funding and the legal process of placing such a referendum on the ballot in 2025.

New Business:

The only new business was the day's Zoom workshop given by the county's Parks and Recreation department. Please see above for details.

Treasurer's Report – Board Treasurer Lorraine Mineo:

Lorraine Mineo gave the current treasurer's report for all balances as of the ending of August 2024. The board has a savings account, a checking account and two 6-month CDs. Lorraine reported that the CDs are for 6 months only because it was thought that the money would be needed soon. This was prior to the county's hold on the land preservation process within the county. Lorraine Mineo will tell the board at the next meeting when the two 6-month CDs mature.

- Checking account balance: \$10,379.50
- Savings account balance: \$104,888.59
- Certificate of Deposit: \$1,085,461.21
- Certificate of Deposit: \$316,474.26

Total: \$1,517,203.56

Meeting Adjournment:

Tom Heilman motioned to adjourn the meeting. Lorraine Mineo seconded the motion which was passed unanimously.

Our Next Meeting – October 22, 2024

The next meeting will be held in the same location – the secondary building in the township's community complex.