

## RAIL TRAIL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Wednesday, September 23, 2009  
Time: 5:00 PM  
Location: Hellertown Borough

Present: Frank Pazzaglia, Steve Labrake, Donna Bristol, Rail Trail Advisory Committee representatives; Jack Cahalan, Lower Saucon Township Manager, Charlie Luthar, Hellertown Borough Manager; Dawn Kresge, Coopersburg Borough Manager.

Jack said the Upper Saucon representatives could not make the meeting.

Other guests were: Joe Hoffman, Barry Isett and Associates; Susan & Joel Katz, Lower Saucon Township; Nancy Jahre, Lower Saucon Township; Gerry Holum, Lower Saucon Township; Roger Jurczak, Lower Saucon Township; Ray Bieak, Ulysses Conner, Jr. and Bob Abbott, Commissioners on the Ironton Rail Trail Oversight Committee.

### Presentation – Ironton Rail Trail Oversight Commission Members:

Jack said this is the second meeting of the unofficial Rail Trail Advisory Committee. Four municipalities, Coopersburg Borough, Upper Saucon Township, Lower Saucon Township and Hellertown Borough have been negotiating with SEPTA on an eight mile rail line that runs through the four communities. It stops in Hellertown just short of the Hellertown - City of Bethlehem line and runs all the way down to the Bucks County line in Coopersburg. We are just about finished with the negotiations. We are happy to report that Lower Saucon Township and Hellertown Borough have approved the lease that we've been negotiating with SEPTA. The lease runs for thirty years, and there is a nominal fee annually of \$1.00 a year for the surface of the track. It was a two track line. We have a thirty foot wide rail bed which gives us substantial room to construct a trail. Parallel to these negotiations, we also wanted to start getting input from residents and from other people who are interested in the trail. That's why we started this Advisory Committee. The Township and the Borough Councils have appointed their representatives to the Advisory Committee. Two are here tonight and two are absent. Hopefully, Coopersburg and Upper Saucon will follow suit shortly and name their representatives. We should have a committee made up of representatives from the four communities. We started meeting to start discussing some of the issues we need to handle. There is an agenda here and we will be working through some of the housekeeping issues that we have. Donna Bristol is a member of the Park and Recreation (P&R) and the P&R Board has been talking about this issue probably before we started negotiating with SEPTA for the trail. Donna is a trail enthusiast. Early on, when we had these discussions, she brought up the Ironton Rail Trail as an example of a really great recreational asset that's operated by several municipalities. We were interested in that and checked out their website, which is very helpful, and got copies of their pamphlet. Donna has been up there several times using the trail. Jack has been up there and Steve, who runs the bike shop in Hellertown, has been there also. We've seen what was up there and were interested in learning how it was started. Jack contacted Bob Abbott and Bob was nice enough to say he would come down and walk us through some of the start-up issues with a Rail Trail.

Bob Abbott said he has two people with him; Ray and Ulysses have been Commissioners for a number of years. Ray has been on since 2000, as has Ulysses. Bob has been on since about 2002. They are made up of three municipalities: North Whitehall Township, the Borough of Coplay, and Whitehall Township. The biggest key to this is cooperation amongst the municipalities. That has been one of the major keys. Even though the majority of the trail is in Whitehall Township, mileage-wise, there's a little section that is the Borough of Coplay. He pointed out on the map what Township each portion of the trail was in. Whitehall Township is the wealthiest of the three communities. They were the catalyst with the Ironton Rail Trail. The Borough of Coplay is the least of the three with only one square mile. They don't have the tax base. North Whitehall Township is primarily a rural township with very few businesses; however, they do have quite a number of subdivisions. Whitehall is famous for its malls and has the population base to go with it. The cooperation is of the utmost importance. We look at each other as equals even though we are obviously not, as far as what we can do. By looking at one another as equals, we are more willing to help each other. If something needs to be done in Coplay, everybody from Whitehall goes out and helps them. We don't look at that as a separate community. We look at it as the Ironton Rail Trail. That's the key to our success. So much so, that all the other organizations in the north central part of the County use us as a model to base their organizations and structures on. We have gotten compliments from organizations such as the

Environmental Action Committee in Whitehall Township and the Historical Societies, so forth and so on. That's the first key to success. The second key is Park and Recreation Boards. You need support of those organizations because this will be a linear park. That's a park and it's recreation. In addition, theirs happens to be quite a historical and geological attraction. They host historical hikes twice a year and introduce the geology in there because of the iron ore and the cement industry. The other historical structures are a French and Indian war fort and so forth. You take advantage of those things the trail has to offer - take advantage of your historical, geological, nature or whatever assets. There's a big difference between theirs and yours and it comes to the grants. They own the property, all but 2,000 lineal feet along the Lehigh River, which still belongs to the Norfolk & Southern Railroad. You need clear and free title to the property in order to submit and get a majority of the grants from either DCNR, PennDOT or whoever. First thing they are going to ask you, do you have free and clear title? When we started this that was one of the first things they went after was to make sure they had clear and free title. You are a different situation because you are leasing this property, so he doesn't know how you approach that. It's virgin territory for them as far as grants. Joe Hoffman said if there is a long term provision, which means if you have a lease exceeding twenty-five years, they'll accept it. That's why the group went to thirty years. Bob said they have spent over \$1.2 to \$1.3 million on the trail. The majority of that they got through grants. They have a yearly fee that each municipality pays which is \$500 per year. The big item for them for the improvement was at Lehigh Street as there was a railroad bridge and it had to be taken down because of low clearance. Without that bridge, they had steep embankments because the existing railroad frame is about 15 to 18 feet above the surface of the roads. You can't have people going down steep banks. They got grants together and built a bridge. He said let me tell you what you are going to face. Their idea originally was to build a little foot bridge which would cost \$60,000 to \$80,000. Until they got done, it cost them about \$500,000. They had to do a study, and it had to be designed, and had to meet PennDOT specifications because it crossed a PennDOT highway which is Lehigh Street. They got the money, they built the bridge, and they got several awards. The Township of Whitehall went out to Harrisburg with some executive members to get a very, very nice plaque from the PA Dept. of Transportation because of the aesthetics. It's something nice to see and it's a beautiful bridge. As Ray points out, it's strong enough to carry a locomotive engine should we ever want to go back and put the rails in. The bridge is rated at 20 tons and there are no bridges in our vicinity going across the Lehigh River that has that maximum limit. They are all seven to thirteen tons. Those are some things to consider. What we find best is we meet once a month which is the third Tuesday of the month. We rotate between the municipalities. It starts at 7 PM and they run about 1-1/2 to 2 hours. As the Commission, they are responsible for the administration, the operations, and the maintenance of the rail trail. Those three things are key. When we talk about the administration, we get a lot of help and support from the three municipalities. Our finances are run through Whitehall Township. The other two municipalities have no problem whatsoever with that. It's public entity, it's audited, and everything is public. We read our treasurer's report at a public meeting and so forth. We do have our inter-municipal agreement. You can use that as a basis. We have a nice agreement. We do elect a President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer on a yearly basis and we rotate. We keep everything fair and as open as possible.

Bob said most of the work on the trail is volunteers. We have a real good crew of volunteers. We have a work day one Saturday of each month and rotate it to different townships. Charlie said how did you get your volunteers? Bob said just by seeing people on the trail, asking them to help, and we have a kiosk every quarter mile saying "it's your trail; you are always welcome to help, we have this work day, come on out, have some fun", and they show up. We get some people who are passionate. Out of the percentage, you will get five percent who say they will help and out of that five percent, one percent will show up. You'll get the volunteers.

Bob said going back to the operations; we put on several events a year to help with the publicity; to help draw for volunteers for the maintenance and for the fundraising. Our biggest event is every third Saturday in May where we have a 10K race. We hooked up with Finish Line which is a running store in Emmaus and Allentown and we've been getting in the neighborhood of 100 to 150 competitors. There's a lot of competition in these races. In addition, we have an Ironton Rail Trail Historical Trolley Tour. We rent a trolley from over in Forks Township which is a mobile trolley and we promote that with the senior citizens and disabled so they are able to get out and enjoy the trail also. We drive on the trail with the bus. That's the only vehicle allowed on the trail. Their trail is paved. It's just one day out of the year. The only other motorized vehicles which are allowed on the trail are the maintenance vehicles, the Commissioner's vehicles and the police. We have the trolley tour and we reach out to the elderly and the disabled people and they love it. We get people in wheelchairs. There's a lift on the trolley that allows them to board the vehicle. One time there was a 102 year old lady who said she enjoyed the trolley. We had people who worked on the railroad give us information about the history, and they volunteered information we

didn't know about. Another event we hold twice a year is a historical hike for the people who are able to walk. It's about seven miles. Ray does the talking and Bob does the play by play. Ray said he has twenty-three historical sites listed, but there are at least thirty different sites. Bob said the people on the Rail Trail Commission certainly believe that it's the birthplace of the modern industrial revolution because of the advent of the Portland cement industry and the advent of the anthracite coal and iron industry which led to the blast furnaces at Bethlehem Steel. We point all that out. We point out our rich geology. Pointing to the map, he said this area has one of the richest, high calcium deposits of limestone on the planet. That's why this was the birthplace of Portland Cement. We hold several events. They are all publicized. Everyone in the township gets a copy of that through one vehicle or another. We advertise it in the local papers and we have a calendar of events which the township puts out. Those are good vehicles to advertise publicity.

Bob said the next item is the maintenance. Most of the maintenance is done by over fifty volunteers with sore backs. We're always looking for volunteers. We do get the help of the Public Works (PW) departments. They do help with their heavy equipment. Most of the work on the trail is done by Junior and Ray. You have your heroes and you need people like that. They are the go getters. Every week they are trimming along the trails, staining fences, and so forth. Junior has a lot of contacts. He's well known in the County, and he's retired. He's a Constable and he works with the parole kids from Lehigh County and gets them up there to help out. Each individual has unique capabilities that we can count on or bring to life. It helps the synergy of the commission. It works. Ray said as far as the projects on the trail, we get the Boy Scouts. There are thirty-five Eagle Scout projects along the trail from building kiosks, bridges, mile posts, you name it. We've had Girl Scout troops out and one Saturday we have fifty-four Girl Scouts and their mother's out. When you saw these little girls come out with the paint and pail, and more paint on them than on the rail, you just have to smile. We had a great time. Bob said you may have to solicit the Girl Scouts, maybe the high school has an environmental group and you can get them involved. We use the Whitehall Environmental group on projects. Around our kiosks, which shows our maps of the trails, the location stadium, we have railroad ties around them and a flower bed and they take care of that. It's beautiful.

Joe Hoffman asked if the master plan was available online or by some other method? Bob said you are welcome to borrow it. In 2003, we got a grant, and spent \$30,000 to do a master plan. We hired a consultant and worked with them. Joe said the second question, besides, DCNR, what other sources of grantsmanship did you use? Bob said we used PennDOT. PennDOT has a grant program for rail trails. With the current economic climate and political climate, some of these programs may be expanded and some may disappear. Those are two main sources. We haven't gotten anything from the Rail Trail Conservancy. They haven't gotten anything from the County either. Whitehall Township Recreation Commission, which is a member, gives out grants to internal township project. We've given ourselves grants. We've gotten grant money through our own township. That's generated through development fees. When a developer comes in and puts a subdivision in your township or borough, you have a choice to take property or give a fee, and we vote on which one we want. We get the fee and build up the cash reserve, and then by law we have to spend that money on recreation. Someone asked what sort of maintenance projects do you do? Bob said once a month, we decided to settle a problem by having a maintenance work party and we meet at the main trailhead and each township rotates; this month it's Whitehall Township's section and the Whitehall Township crew comes up and says we need to trim the brush, we need to clean up and pick up garbage and the next month it'll be the Borough of Coplay. They might say their trail is in good shape, they don't really have anything, but if the other two municipalities do, fine, and if not, we'll cancel it altogether. Donna asked about trash containers. Bob said there are about fifteen of them throughout the whole trail. There is one every quarter of a mile and everyone uses them. The township, in the summer time, every two weeks goes around and empties them. There are runners out there picking up trash and they take ownership of the trail. They are out there running every day and they pick up trash.

Jack said you have property owners, mostly in the Coplay area, along the trail, did you have any issues that arose when you were developing the trail or since then? Ray said before the trail became the Rail Trail, they dumped their grass and debris along that rail bed. It has taken a little bit of coercion to get them out of that habit. There are still a few of them that dump their grass there. Overall, the neighbors have adopted the trail also.

Jack asked if there were any insurance liability issues that arose? Ray said we're protected through the Recreation Committees. Each municipality has its blanket coverage on its recreation facilities and that's how they are covered. Bob said at special events, they get a rider for that day to cover the event. Jack asked if the trail was patrolled by

the municipal police departments? Ray said off and on, the Coplay Police Department and the Whitehall Police Department are on the trails with their cars driving around and checking. Someone asked if they had bike patrols? Bob said they had them, but he doesn't know if the new Chief they have in Whitehall is too set on having the bikes on the trail as he doesn't see any officers on bikes. It may be something they are working out or they might have had problems with the bikes.

Joel said his house is located very close to the trail, and in the process of clearing the trail, machines came along the road, which was temporary. What they did was destroy a lot of the tree cover which had grown up in the middle of the track. Bob said the way they have addressed it, they address the property owner's issues. They want to have the good neighbor policy. On their trail, most or almost all of the properties, it's the very back portion of the property. They have done their part in trying to appease the homeowners if they have to do some plantings or delineate the trail from their property, the split rail fence, or something like that; they've tried to do that. He thinks they've been successful. There's a cost to do that, but they've always found financial resources to get that done. They put up split rail fences and it's a great delineator. Joel said everyone knows where the trail is, and in their case, people look down into their property and they like to go in their hot tub and now don't have their privacy. Bob said some neighbors don't want a fence; they mow the grass right up to the trail. Some others want a wooden fence. It's up to the neighbors. Ray said some neighbors, they clear the area out, knock the trees down, cut the grass down and you look at it and it's like its part of their yard now. They have people with signs up, ring this bell, related to the Rail Trail. We still have people throwing grass and cuttings over the bank. Donna said before SEPTA came in and cleared the brush, didn't they give the homeowners tape they could put around whatever trees they didn't want taken down so if you wanted your privacy. Joel said they did that, but now PPL came along and knocked down a lot of the other trees. Susan said they only cleared the brush within the 30-foot span and they could only save the vegetation outside that 30-foot span, and a lot of the brush was inside that 30 foot span. They love the trees, but it was the shrubs. They loved that density. They will work with Lower Saucon and come to an agreement. Bob said you have a choice, either work with them or not. Working with them, you can take ownership, and you become the Rail Trail. That's how you win. Susan said she doesn't want kids to take short cuts.

Ray said they give out certificates of appreciation for neighbors who have property abutting to the Rail Trail and keep their property nice. Bob said getting back to the master plan, the one reason they spent the money was its well worth it. That was their vehicle for getting the grants. When they submit the grants, they submit their master plan. Then the people who were 80 miles away in Harrisburg know what we're doing and what we're about. The money they grant to us will theoretically go to what's in their master plan. What they had done was invite the local politicians as it was their tenth anniversary and took them on a tour, showed them where the money went.

Bob said there is also accountability to the public. They did the master plan post acquisition before the development. The development had already started before they did their master plan. Jack asked if port-a-johns are planned at the North Whitehall terminus of the trail? Ray said he thinks they are going to build a rest room soon. Ray said they had their share of vandalism. There are two ways to solve that. You go out and fix it right away, and then you get the proper authorities involved. In Whitehall Township, they have one police officer assigned to the P&R, and he does investigation work. The graffiti writing is like a finger print, and he knows which gang it is, they know where to concentrate their investigative work. They've put in a tree; they've cut the tree down. It happens and it's frustrating. You grin and bear it and go out and put another one in.

Jack said do you plow if it snows or leave it down for cross country skiing? Bob said from their experience, they took notice with the freezing and thawing, they were getting a lot of icing conditions and people were falling. They keep the snow on for a day or two, depending what the snow is like. This way the cross country skiers can use it and then as soon as it starts melting, they plow it so it doesn't get icy. Jack asked how it works on the non-paved areas? Bob said if it's a deep snow, they just plow it. When it melts, they just let it absorb. Jack asked if they have any problems with the abandoned buildings along the trail? Ray said surprisingly no. Bob said he thinks there's enough of a physical presence there. Ray said you talked about security, there's enough people using it now, and if they see anything that is damaged or suspicious, they call 911 right away. The Police from one of the communities will be there right away. Someone said you have a policeman dedicated to the Rail Trail? Bob said to the Township parks. One of the officers in the Whitehall Township PD, Paul Davies, is assigned the task of recording and investigating any crimes located with the parks, the Rail Trail, the swimming pools. He's the contact. If they see a crime, they have a name, a contact, a face, a friend they can go to. Jerry Holum asked what is the out-of-

pocket expense to a taxpayer in Whitehall? What is the actual cost for the maintenance and all the upkeep of the trail? Bob said very little, almost nothing as it's done by volunteers. Jerry asked if they had grants. Bob said the grant money is different than the taxpayer money. The grant money comes from different revenue sources. The grant that the Whitehall Recreation Department gives to the Rail Trail comes from developers who are developing in the township. The DCNR comes from the state. The Department of Transportation, there's a user fee that comes from the gasoline tax. Whitehall Township writes one check for \$500 a year, so it costs the taxpayers \$500 a year. They do get a couple of hours of donations from Whitehall Public Works employees coming out on a Saturday morning driving a truck with a chipper and they do the work, which is about two or three times a year. They do sweep it regularly. They do patrol it with police. He's not including those costs in that figure. It's just part of those duties they do have. It's additional work for staff. There is an extra workload for the township, but it's minimal. It's part of the park system. A lot of people use it in the community, and that's a good justification.

Someone asked if the trails were fully paved? Bob said the loop, except for 2,000 feet, which they don't own, is paved from the junction at the spur route at MacArthur Road over to Whitehall Township. The loop is paved with asphalt. He showed a section on the map that would never be paved because it's part of ecology of the Whitehall Parkway. The loop they pave so they have access for roller bladers and wheel chairs. Jack asked what the width of the paved section was? Bob said it was ten feet. Someone asked if millings do not work well for walking? Bob said it gets lumpy. You actually put it down with a paver and then roll it with a roller. Each trail is a little different. You each have your own circumstances and parameters that you have to work with, but inter-municipal cooperation is the key for success. North Whitehall had a problem with a local sportsmen's club, they more or less squatted on the railroad right-of-way and the owner threatened to take them to court. We can't afford one-half million dollars in legal fees to win, it's not worth it. We've been working with them over the years, and North Whitehall's section of the trail isn't finished. We've over there pushing them, and that's what you have to do.

Jack said the Ironton Rail Trail is beautiful. If you have a chance to try it out, just go up McArthur Road and there are signs leading right to the trail head. Bob and Ray will give Joe a copy of the master plan.

#### **Status of SEPTA Lease:**

Jack said he mentioned before the status of the lease. Lower Saucon Council agreed to sign the lease. There are a couple of minor corrections that need to be made to the document. It's down at the SEPTA office now. Those changes are being made. He's not sure whether they are going to approve it at their board meeting which is in September, and once it comes back, it'll be signed off by the township. Charlie said the Borough approved the authorization and the Council President signed the lease on Monday night. Dawn said they are waiting to hear back from Linc Treadwell on a couple of the changes. Jack said in the lease, one of the reasons it took so long, was there were issues about the maintenance of the structures along the rail line. SEPTA wanted us to be responsible for all of the bridges and culverts and a lot of them are old. They are not in disrepair, but they need some attention. Structurally, they are in good shape. He's not sure they could hold a train again, but for walking, they are fine. We said all we want to be responsible for is the surface for biking and walking and all those activities. It took time to work out the legal language that we could be comfortable with so that all we are responsible for is if a tree falls on the trail, we'll clear it. If there's a waterway that's blocked, we'll clear any debris out of that. That's basically it. We're accepting the surface as it is. We are not going to disturb the surface. We are just going to level it, roll it and put down some sort of surface material and that should be it.

#### **Status of Signal/Electrical Equipment; Safety Barriers:**

Jack said there is some signal equipment at the road crossings. They are cabinet boxes which had electrical type equipment in them. There are some signals along the track and also battery boxes, which was the backup system in case the electric went out for the signals, they are concrete boxes with a metal top on it. The batteries should all be removed as of now. The concrete will stay. Ray said you can finish them up. Jack said the equipment will remain. SEPTA advised us that they were going to leave them, but they cleaned out the hazardous materials. We don't have a final closure on that. The equipment should not be hazardous to anyone. Charlie said they did remove an underground oil tank and a propane tank in Hellertown. All environmental hazards were removed. The utility poles are still standing. Some are not quite upright anymore, which will be taken down.

#### **Intergovernmental Agreement & Rail Trail By-Laws:**

Jack said we're not taking any action as we are still an informal body. In order to formalize this group, we need to have each of the entities adopt an intergovernmental agreement, which is what Bob mentioned. It would be signed

off by each of the four municipalities. We'd also put together some by-laws which describe how the Advisory Committee would work, how they would meet, the membership, financial issues, etc. Those are here. We sent them out, so the members of the Advisory Committee can take a look at them. Dawn can look at them, because at some point, when Coopersburg and Upper Saucon appoints their representatives, we can take these back to our government bodies and get these adopted. At that point, we'd be official and be able to start putting out notices of the public meetings. We're trying to keep it informal for now. A couple of residents contacted him already. We'll do email notices and let everyone know of any future meetings. We will be meeting on a rotational basis, which is one of the things we wanted to do. The next meeting would be in Coopersburg.

Donna said in the emails that came out, it said we would meet four times a year and she thinks we need to meet more. Jack said we can say we'll meet a minimum of four times. Charlie said we have to really look at the documents. Donna said there is so much that needs to be done, that four times a year is not enough. We need to do it maybe once a month. Maybe at some point, when we're set up, it can be four times a year. Charlie said we want to get around to all the municipalities at least once, but you're right, it has to be more than four times a year. Donna said you could do a sequence and do one after the other, and then start over again. Bob said nothing will be done if you only meet four times a year. This way if you have it every month, something is going to be done. It will be a couple of years until things are done.

Donna asked how Ironton set up their website? Was it part of one of the municipality's websites? How did you go about doing that so you could let everybody know? Bob said they started theirs individually, but he does take notice, some other rail trails are tied in with the municipality websites. Donna said the Ironton Rail Trail website is really easy to get to. You just type the name and it comes up, which is great. Ray said you have to have someone on your commission who is a little bit of a nerd, or an IT guy. Bob said they only have six pages on their website.

Jack said that brings another issue and nobody is going to be in competition for this, but you need a name for the trail. It's something we've been bringing up way back when we started. We need to call it something. We did put down some suggestions and he handed them out. Donna said the Township Park and Recreation board met this month and talked about the fact that we needed a name. The Board talked about it and voted on it. They recommend that it be called the "Saucon Trail" as they figured it would cover all the municipalities. Jack said that's a recommendation from the Township. What we would do is come up with a main name for the website and reserve the domain name. It costs \$25, and someday we will hopefully have a website. The goal we are looking for with the trail is to get the lease signed by all the municipalities sometime within the next month or two. Then we'd like to get the full Advisory Committee up and formally running. At that point the Advisory Committee can start making recommendations as far as what the surface is going to look like, the safety barriers, the crossings, that type of thing, and then look toward the possibly of opening all of the trails or sections of the trail next spring. People are going to be clamoring to get on to the trail. They already are. That's why we put the Jersey barriers up at certain sections as people were driving down in their automobiles. Right now the only way you can get on is if you are walking. Jack said someone came into the Township and told him that they rode their bikes on it and it was really hard to pedal. Jack told them it's just ballast stone from the railroad.

### **Grant Opportunities:**

Jack said the objective would be to get the facilities, this linear park opened in all the communities by next spring. We need money to do that and Joe Hoffman from Barry Isett is our man as far as grant opportunities. Steve said they just set up a website, and all the bike shops in the valley were involved. It's called the LVBike.com. It's all information about bikes in the Lehigh Valley. They can also put a link on the website about the trail.

Joe said grants are never guaranteed. You can apply, but you aren't guaranteed acceptance. He's dealing with four communities, and every community might have a different engineer, a different grants person, different individuals that want to get involved, so he's not trying to force Barry Isett for four different communities. What he's trying to do is help you out with information and however you decide to proceed, he'd like to be a part of your committee and try to help you get along. If you want Barry Isett, they are certainly happy to do it, but he is aware of the fact with four different communities comes multiple sets of possibilities. The single page he gave you tonight is for your ability to go back yourselves and look on the internet under the DCNR and see the range of opportunities they have for rail trails. He printed out one of three as a sample. If you do have any supplemental acquisitions, they have grants for that and they have rail trail development grants, which is the one we ultimately want to get to because that's the grant for the actual improvements to the trail site itself. The way DCNR has it structured is if

you do a plan, that's all they'll ask for. They'll allow you to build in the actual design of the trail as part of the development process, so that saves you a step, which is good news. The not so good news is that DCNR funds this through a program called "Growing Greener". It was a program you all voted on in the fall election of 2003. It was a statewide referendum and it passed 70% to 30%, and that was what enabled the state to float the bonds to make a program that was supposed to last from 2004 to 2012. Unfortunately, the government has not done a very good job at monitoring its spending and it overspent, so we have received news that next year, 2010, is probably going to be the end for Growing Greener. This is the last shot of getting in to this program. He is going to look at the possibility of combing the whole design and implementation into one single grant knowing it's the last year of operation. The DCNR grants require a 50% match. That match can be in-kind services, so particularly when you get to the development side, volunteer time and man-hours spent on projects, use of municipal work crews counts, you do not necessarily have to put tax money as a match for the grant. They will allow you to use in-kind services. This grant program is timed a little different than the expectations you were mentioning here. This will probably come up in February 2010. It will have an April deadline for submission of the application. You'll probably not hear about an award, until between Labor Day and Election Day of 2010. If his guess is correct, and it has been in the past, you'll get a contract to begin the work at the end of 2010 which would mean in realistic terms, in New Year's of 2011 would you be able to start doing things. If you want to move faster sooner, there will have to be another funding source in addition to DCNR. PennDOT does have some funding available. They have changed the names of the grants since the time you applied for them, but they are all still there. We will try to pursue that because there's a chance that program may come up yet by November. If we get that one in and we get awarded, then you are talking about going by late spring or early summer, which is a lot closer to what you were talking about as a timeframe. He is also looking very hard at foundations who are sponsoring this as well as corporate sponsors. He wants to see if they are at least out there, and if they are, he will come back and talk as a group on whether we want to do it, and if so, how. Also, there are a group of people we have been in contact with at Barry Isett which we call "angel investors" who are looking to take monies and invest them for tax benefits in non-profit, private projects. One of the examples they are using to do that right now is a sports facility that will hopefully be built up at the intersection of Routes 33 and 209 up near the Poconos. What these folks try to do is when they realize capital gains on some other projects, they take those gains, invest them in a project like this, and then they can get a tax benefit off of them which helps them with other income. It's a little more complicated than your average grant, but it is available to do and he is looking into all those other areas as possible sources because DCNR is not going to be dependable after next year, and even if everything went great and you got exactly what you wanted, it really wouldn't help you until the 2011 season. As of now, that's what he has on grants. With each subsequent meeting, he will have more information on what to do. He applies for a lot of grants and he gets a lot of them, but he misses some. You cannot count on you are going to get a grant just because you apply for them. With four communities involved, he is very aware of the fact that everyone has their own way of doing things. Rather than trying to force a way on to that, however you would like him to work with you, he's willing to work with you from actually doing grant applications to advising and helping somebody else to do them or however you see fit. Jack said thank you.

Donna said is there anything we should be doing now in terms of preparing for grants? Jack said the biggest thing we can do is to try to formalize this group. Joe will not be able to go to the state on behalf of the four of us unless we are together. Joe said when Bob was talking about the need for ownership versus easement, you have to prove to the state now that you actually own it outright or that you have a long term interest, which they define as a lease or easement in excess of twenty-five years, and that has to be processed. In order for you to apply for a grant, the communities involved are going to have to have their arrangement in place because otherwise how would you apply for it. Who would you apply for it on behalf of if the four weren't together? That's the whole point of the grant and the only way you are going to get a "yes" from the state if you can show them the lease and show them all four are on board. This will get you in the door. Those two steps have to happen. Jack asked Bob if they have 501c3 status or have you applied for any grants on behalf of the Ironton Rail Trail Commission? Bob said they have done them primarily through the municipal section of the trails. Jack said that's why it is important to get all the communities to join together. We need that support. What we would do, once we have this in place, if we come up with an idea here at one of these meetings and say we want to go after some sort of funding, this body would make a recommendation and it would go back to each of the municipalities and they would sign off on it. Joe said whoever provided the application would have to show that all four communities formally passed a resolution separately in their respective places authorizing whoever is going to do the application, to do it. Those are all things that have to be done. Jack said one of the municipal finance departments would have to get the check and disburse the funds, fill out all the reports you have to do for the state. Bob said hopefully someone in your

municipalities has experienced writing grants. Jack said they've done it, but we're not as good as Joe. Bob said they really have a great grant writer, their former retired Recreation Director, Mary Ann Seagreaves from Whitehall Township along with the former Township Executive, Jack Myers. They do a great job. Jack said that's something we are going to have to do.

### **Trail Head Issues:**

Jack said the trail head issues relate more to the Township. He asked Dawn if there were areas in Coopersburg where people can park and get onto the trail? Dawn said they have the park by the Giant. Jack said Upper Saucon has part of that park also and their own community park off of Preston Lane by DeSales University. Hellertown Borough has Water Street Park as an access point. The Township has an issue with access to the trail and what they are trying to avoid is people coming down and parking in front of resident's houses and then taking their bike and getting on the trail. They are working on that. One of the things they'd like to do is acquire a piece of property which is accessible to the trail, where people could park like you do at your trail head in Coplay. They have a really wonderful facility up there. You can pull off and there's a pavilion there and a picnic area. There's a port-a-john. It gives people information where the trail goes, the distance, what direction, the events, that type of thing. He thinks they are going to ask for support from this group and from Parks and Rec to see if they could move ahead with that. It would involve some cost from the Township to get an easement or to acquire it outright. Jack asked Bob if could talk about how important the trail heads are. Bob said this goes back to your question, how much does it cost the township. Our VFW donated \$10,000 to the Ironton Rail Trail to help build that pavilion. That's a \$10,000 savings to all of us. Your members of these different private clubs, talk to them, it's a marketing gimmick and you'd be surprised how some people might come forward. Jack said on the trail head issues, there are two other things. Steve has been talking about kiosks with information about services in each of the municipalities ranging from places to eat to bike shops. Frank has some information about the historical, environmental and geological resources along the trail. Steve had some pictures he took. Steve said one of goals is for people to get off the trail, hit the different coffee shops, try to have people come to his business, etc. The Borough can benefit greatly from this. There will be a lot of people coming into town to ride or walk this trail. It's a great opportunity for the businesses in the Boroughs to really benefit from this by having some nice kiosks with a map of the town, business pamphlets and so on. Steve asked if the Ironton trail was paved right away? Bob said no, we did it in phases over a period of about five to six years. Steve asked how long was it cindered before it was paved? Bob said the first part was 7/10<sup>th</sup> of a mile between Center and Lehigh Streets. That was the busiest part of the trail which was done in 2001, 2002. The trail opened in 1997. It was four or five years before they made the first section. Steve said he can see it happening here like that. Get people on it and as time progresses, you can see certain sections getting paved. Bob said there is a preference on most trails for using screenings rather than being paved. Our area is such a high density area in the community, it was decided that paving would be best. Steve said he could see it being paved in the Boroughs. Maybe there are some areas of Lower Saucon and Upper Saucon that are more active than others. Steve said screening is nice stuff, it just packs nicely.

Frank said he went through Google earth and quickly identified places directly on the trail or within a very close walking distance from the trail, historical places and places of particular natural interest or geological interest. He's guessing this is just a snapshot of all of the total number of things and he's not aware of many. Bob said with the four historical societies in the four communities, you could get a wealth of information. Frank said he's been a big proponent that once the trail has been established, he would like to make it an educational venue for the people that walk it. They really like the idea that Ironton does that and leads the walk. If you have Google earth, just click on it and it will fly you through from site to site.

### **Track Surface, Signage, Crossings, Barriers, Etc.:**

Jack said we talked a little bit about the surface. What Steve was referring to about using the screenings, that might be a quick way to get the surface resolved because we do have the equipment. We can have that laid down and it could be done pretty quickly. That is not a big issue. Upper Saucon is looking to pave their section, so as you go south, you are going to hit a paved section down there. Some of that might be because of the issue where they had a plant down there and they are bypassing it, and the business is helping to pay for the paving. Donna said there are mixed feelings from the residents. Some want the paving and some still want something like a softer surface. Jack said the township will probably be using the screenings and be packing it down. Donna said it's a good surface for people running. It's easy to fix also. Jack said how do you handle getting the bikers or walkers across the road

crossings? Bob said they have stop signs at each one of their crossings. There are design standards for crosswalks. They have signs on the roads themselves as you approach the trail. There are pedestrian crossing signs on the road coming up to those crossings. The warning signs are diamond shaped yellow with the icon of the walker on it. Frank said how many of the roads that you cross would you consider really busy traffic roads. We have that challenge here on Water Street. Bob said they have at least six which are really busy. One is a real danger because it's on a curve. They don't have gates. It's been recommended you have gates at the crossings to slow bicycles down, but if you make a wrong judgment, then you have accidents. Frank said for this committee to consider, you actually would have township access in addition to developing the rails to trails, you develop a connection to Reservoir Park along Polk Valley Road. That would really be a good facility and give you Lower Saucon access, but it requires spurs to the existing rails to trails to make that happen, and it requires a crossing on Main Street, which would probably be the most challenging. Jack said he thinks that is something the Borough and the Township are looking ahead to. The comprehensive plan spoke about that connectivity so people can walk and bike between the parks. Frank said kids biking to school could take the rail trail and cross 412 by McDonald's or where that spur would go up to, it would be a great opportunity for an actual safe route to school. Jack said there will be a traffic light at Polk Valley Road at some point. Frank said that would be great and actually help solve the problem. Jack said the Borough was also looking at Tuminello property which isn't a park yet. Charlie said Tom Henshaw suggested that be a trail head. Jack said that has access down by Neighbors. We need to come back with more information about the crossings. The Borough and Upper Saucon are crossing PennDOT roads and need paperwork agreements on that. The Engineers are working on that.

Nancy said she has horses and would any of the sections be available for equestrians? There is nowhere in Lower Saucon to ride except on the roads, and that's not that safe and ideal. The type of surface you are talking about is ideal and they would not harm it. Jack asked the Ironton representatives how do you handle that? Ray said their experience, they had fine screenings on it and the horses used, but in wet weather, it was difficult for people walking, so they banned horses on the trail. He and Junior had gone on other trails and they had a side trail for horses, and that works out great. Your trail is two tracks wide and you do have the capability of having a rail trail for people and a horse path. Nancy said you can also limit the horses to a walk or trot. That's something that is enforceable. She's a member of the LV Horse Council which is the oldest continuously operating horse council in the state of PA. They do a lot of trail work. They maintain the horse trails. They are now working at the Trexler Preserve. They all have chain saws and pruners for the volunteers to help out. She'd think it would be a privilege to at least use part of the trail. She understands the objections about the municipalities because if it's paved, it's not an appropriate use. They can certainly share the trail with bicycles, walkers, even dogs. They are good volunteers. Jack said that's great. Nancy said the Wildlife Federation has their backyard habitat, but also has listings of plants along the trails, and it will be a wonderful nature trail. It provides nice plants along the trail and also provides privacy. Steve asked about the horse manure on the trail. Nancy said you get off the horse and kick it off the trail. Donna said that's what "Leave No Trace" means. Steve said he's all too familiar with Jacobsburg State Park where no one does it. He rides through a lot of horse manure there. Nancy said when you share with hikers, you clean up. Most of those are horse trails. Frank said he's seen in parades where the horses have some kind of poop catcher. Jack said it's called a horse diaper. Donna listed a number of parks designated for horses, and it's all working for them. Horses don't throw trash on the trail, they don't throw water bottles on the trail, and what you need is a lot of conscious people who care.

The next meeting will be Monday, October 26, 2009 at 5:00 PM at Coopersburg.

The meeting adjourned. The time was 6:40 PM.