

Comments and Requests Submitted at Public Workshop - May 19, 2008

Meeting held at Upper Merion Township building

Notes issued for review May 22, 2008 by Campbell Thomas & Co. to Lower Merion Township

(It is the consulting team's understanding that a video tape was made of this workshop. While we have made every effort to accurately summarize our understanding of the workshop, we would be pleased to compare any such tape with our hand-written notes. CTC's replies are given here to answer the questions raised by the public, and were not necessary given at the meeting.)

Introductory Activities:

- Dan Russell welcomed those in attendance (14 signed in). Most attendees indicated they live in Upper Merion Township, although there were also attendees from Bridgeport, West Conshohocken, and Lower Merion Township.
- Bob Thomas presented a digital slide show showing the proposed trail corridor from Valley Forge National Historical Park to the Falls Bridge, and related the consulting team's work including field views, interviews, field trips, mapping and historical and cultural resource inventory.

Comments received at the public meeting were generally as follows, shown in chronological order:

- Esther Pulver, director of sales and marketing for Pulver, stated that her tenants' main concern is that of security. She said that, counting tenants on both sides of the river, four thousand people work in Pulver's buildings, and that the employers require the wearing of identification badges. She said that while the public is not banned from utilizing Pulver's riverfront trail, people leave behind too much litter, dog waste, etc. She said "I would like to trust the public, but you can't." She indicated that she is very distressed by this. She opined that bicyclists on the Schuylkill River Trail ride at unsafe speeds. She said that her tenants object to bicyclists that stop to rest, reclining uninvited on Pulver's lawns.
 - She said that Pulver does allow patrons of West Conshohocken's restaurants to utilize Pulver's parking facilities after business hours.
 - In response to the concern that some residents have expressed, that they must drive to the Schuylkill River Trail, she declared that those people should simply move closer to the trail.
- When a photograph depicting the worker's houses on River Road just inside Lower Merion was shown, a River Road resident stated that a developer has proposed building new condominiums at that location.
- Harry Olson said that he has been asked if the trail will be lit at night, and if it will be handicap accessible.
- A trail user said that he prefers trails that include pavement for bikes and gravel for walking, and hoped that this trail would have both, because some bicycles are too fast. He enjoys the Perkiomen trail and feels safe due to the frequent patrols by rangers.
 - He urged that a new pedestrian bridge over the Schuylkill River be considered.
- A River Road resident followed up by recommending that a new bridge over the Schuylkill River carry the trail across to the east side, so that no trail would need to be built between Waverly Road and Mill Creek. The resident wanted to know if this option is being explored as part of this study. RT replied that rather than a matter of options, it may be a matter of phasing. The entire trail will not be constructed and opened all at once. However, RT noted that one objective of the feasibility study is to see how all the communities and points of interest such as Riverbend could be linked by the Schuylkill River West Trail for its entire length.
 - Harry Olson pointed out that diverting the trail to the east side of the river denies access to some Lower Merion residents.

- RT said that the study will explore the possible use of part of the Bridlewild trail system. Two apparent drawbacks, however, are that portions of the Bridlewild system are on private property and not open to the public, and that bicycles cannot use the Bridlewild trails.

Questions received from the public, shown in chronological order

- Will the trail be wide enough for both bikers and walkers? RT replied that the feasibility study will recommend that the trail would be wide enough where possible, and that handicap accessibility will be one of the recommended design criteria.
- Who owns the silt basins? RT replied that Upper Merion Township appears to own all but one. Norfolk Southern owns the basin at Abrams, and has expressed an interest in developing that property.
- A River Road resident asked, “Are you, at this meeting, stating for the first time that the trail is to be placed up on the slope between the railroad and the expressway, between Waverly Road and Mill Creek?” RT replied that trail alignment has not been finalized, but is still under study. Bicycles and pedestrians might be split between alignments.
- When might this trail open? RT replied that this has not yet been determined, but noted that the Schuylkill River trail on the east side opened in sections over a fifteen year period. Simpler portions could be built sooner; more complex or expensive portions later.
- I live near City Avenue and am concerned about security. How will security be accomplished? RT pointed out that similar trails in the area are patrolled by police, and by county park rangers.
- Does this project have a web presence? Can I look at maps on-line? Lower Merion Township has placed a description of the project, and maps of the study area, on their web site. When the draft study is ready for public review, it will be made available on-line.
- Can you estimate how long the Upper Merion portion of this trail might take? RT says that when the draft report is completed, probably in September, estimates will be given. As a ball park: easier trails might require three to four years to complete; harder to implement trails an additional three to four years.
- When will the feasibility study be completed? RT replied that the draft could be completed in September, which would be followed by a 30-day public comment period. The final report might be issued in October or November of this year.
- What strategy has been used in the past, to get successful trails built? RT said that one successful strategy has been the involvement of “friends” groups.
- An Upper Merion resident asked if he could scan a copy of the 3000-scale Tentative Alignment Alternatives map, marked “For Comment Only,” and post it on the internet. He was asked not to do so, as this could be confusing without proper explanation. Follow-up email and voicemail messages to him reiterated that the Tentative Alignment Alternatives map, at this point in time, is for comment only and is not to be reproduced nor distributed.