Mt Penn Preserve
Tuesday, May 3, 2016
6 pm
Stokesay Ballroom

Officials and Staff Attending: Pagoda Foundation, Municipal Officials, Public

Lee Olsen, Pagoda Foundation President, called the meeting to order at approximately 6:20 pm and made some introductory remarks with County Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt. Mr. Olsen explained that this event evolved from the Pagoda Foundation's strategic planning meeting to develop a Mt. Penn master plan and a conversation he had with Mr. Barnhardt.

Mr. Olsen stated that the County Planning Commission did some research and uncovered a 1969 study that suggested further development of recreation resources around Mt. Penn including the Oak Lane area, the Fire Tower and the RHS fields. The study also suggested the creation of a gondola-type lift that would operate similarly to the gravity railroad. The full build out was projected at approximately $1.2M ($7.8M in today's costs). He stated that the impetus for the report was the Save the Pagoda citizen's movement. He also noted the existence of a 2002 Open Space plan reporting the need to preserve various recreation sites. He stated that around 2005 the Pagoda Pennies program began to provide a fundraising vehicle for the Pagoda.

Mr. Olsen stated that a few years ago the City entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Pagoda Foundation for the care and management of the Pagoda. He noted that the City remains the owner of the Pagoda and retains responsibility for the capital maintenance and repairs.

Mr. Olsen described the various facilities and destinations located on Mt. Penn. He noted that these destinations are a mix of commercial and passive recreation opportunities.

Mr. Barnhardt stressed the need for everyone to begin seeing City Park, the Pagoda, Antietam Lake Park stretching over Reading, Alsace and Lower Alsace, in a joint manner. He noted the historic value of this area and the joint opportunity for all municipalities, organizations and citizens to work together to enhance the Mt. Penn experience. He stated that the basic building blocks are in place and that the mission of this group is to create one joint vision to develop and enhance the economic vitality of the area.

Mr. Olsen noted that those who were invited to attend tonight's meeting have been assigned to various subcommittees.

Shannon Rossman, Executive Director of the Berks County Planning Commission, introduced the staff members involved with this project and described the tasks undertaken to date. She encouraged all to review the map located at the front of the room and makes notes on the map. This map will also be added to the Planning Commission website.

Wes Stefanik, Government Affairs Director of the Reading Berks Association of Realtors (RBAR) reported that he has obtained a $15K grant to fund a charrette to develop an action plan. Mr. Olsen noted that the grant requires a $1,500 local match. He expressed hope that the charrette could be held this coming fall.

Ms. Rossman reported that DCED Peer-to-Peer grants are available. These grants would pair the group with a consultant to help the group identify what is in place and the opportunities. (Note: the DCED Peer-to Peer grant was used to form the Rec Commission) She stated that this $15K grant requires a 20% match.

Mr. Barnhardt and Mr. Olen opened the floor for comments, suggestions and questions.

Terry Styer noted the historical value of the stone wall on Skyline Drive (a WPA project). She stated that Lower Alsace reports vehicle accidents that damage the wall to their insurance company so that repair work can occur. She encouraged Reading and Alsace officials to do the same.

Rick Hinnershitz suggested including fishing destinations in the Mt Penn activities.

Jeff Waltman noted the value of Mt. Penn and he agreed with the suggestion for inter-municipal cooperation for management, marketing, and investment to improve and promote the destinations located in the Mt. Penn area.

Cathleen Stephens stated that she is originally from the New England area where the people depend on the area's natural resources. She noted the economic value of natural resources.

Crystal Seitz stated that visitors to Berks County bring in $100K of new revenue per year. She suggested adding ice skating at the Antietam Lake swamp area as an activity.

Daniel Law noted the need to quantify results and sustainability with benchmarks.

An official from Lower Alsace expressed the belief that Berks County residents do not need to leave the area to go on vacation as the area resources already provide that get-away feeling. He stressed the need to preserve and protect these assets wisely acquired by our forefathers.

Mike Reinert stated that he looks forward to the group working cooperatively to market and improve Mt. Penn and its features.

Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the vast number of people who visit the various destinations located on Mt. Penn. She noted the great increase in the number of people who visit the Pagoda. She also noted the wise foresight of those who purchased the assets to create Mt. Penn and how Mt. Penn is similar to the Catskills. She stressed the need to maintain and improve the mountain's infrastructure so the legacy is kept alive. She also reported that visitors from Reading's sister city, Reutlingen Germany are scheduled to visit the area on July 6th. She stated that a six (6) man accordion band is scheduled to play at the Liederkrantz.

Jim Rule, a teacher at 10th and Penn Elementary, described his first experience visiting the Pagoda and taking his students on an orienteering trip up the trails to the Pagoda.

Ann Sellers stated that she is originally from Boyertown and she decided to move to Berks County to increase her family's exposure to diversity. She suggested working to connect the river and the park system with trail ways.

Brett Lynch requested electronic copies of the maps provided by the Berks County Planning Commission. Ms. Rossman stated that the maps will be uploaded on the Commission's website.

Cori Crupi described Pagoda Skyline's work at the Fire Tower and on the Skyline walls.

In response to a question, Mr. Olsen explained that a charrette brings qualified parties together to develop an action and implementation plan.

Rich Rock noted the volunteer work and monetary contribution by those who participate in the annual Duryea Drive Hill Climb. He stated that the group's next cleanup is scheduled for June 18th.

Nancy Sharp described the orienteering trips conducted and she stated that the next trip is scheduled for November 17th. She stated that these trips provide a unique look at the mountain and its features.

Mitch Raczy described his love of mountain biking and the work of BAMBA to improve the trail ways.

Karen Haver announced that the free band shell concerts, organized by the Berks Arts Council will begin on July 8th.

Craig Peiffer reported that the Reading 120 will be held on Saturday, September 10th.

The meeting concluded at approximately 7:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk