



## **MORRIS CANAL WORKING GROUP Meeting Minutes**



**Wednesday July 30, 2014**

**Branch Brook Park, Newark**

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### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

Megan Kelly, NJTPA, called the meeting to order and asked all participants to introduce themselves and indicate their agency or organization affiliation.

### **II. Morris Canal Greenway Conference Highlights**

Joe Macasek, Canal Society of New Jersey, conducted a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the March 27, 2014 Morris Canal Greenway Conference, which was held at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum in Morris County.

Macasek highlighted all the conference speakers, Morris Canal Greenway success stories to-date, and potential next steps. He emphasized that, given the varied place-types along the former Canal's 102-mile route across New Jersey, one key Greenway challenge is "we have to make it all work together."

### **III. Featured Speaker**

The meeting's featured speaker was Peter Dolan, New Jersey Program Coordinator with the New York/New Jersey Trails Conference, an organization with thousands of dues-paying members (and 100 affiliated organizations) that maintains 2,000 miles of trails, including 678 miles in New Jersey, in addition to parks and nature preservations.

Dolan said the Trails Conference maintains facilities through a network of trail maintainers and trail crews, each tasked with various patrol, clean-up, maintenance, and repair responsibilities. A regularly updated database helps keep track of work that's needed, ongoing, completed, or scheduled along with helping match up volunteers to available efforts.

Dolan also noted the "Trail U" program, which he described as an outreach effort to bring in and train new volunteers and also engage the public. The program is conducted on weekends in the summer, Dolan said. The Trails Conference also publishes books and maps, which generate revenue, and works to protect open space; Dolan said the organization has helped preserve nearly 4,700 acres of Open Space land.

Dolan next discussed the various "benefits" of trails. He said economic benefits vary but they are "statistically significant" in terms of money spent by trail visitors at businesses located nearby and the potential for economic development. Dolan pointed to environmental benefits of trails including conservation, improved air and water quality, and noise absorption. He said social and health benefits include recreation, public involvement

and education, health and fitness, and appreciation of scenic beauty.

A brief, general question-and-answer period followed Dolan's presentation.

#### **IV. Meetings Structure & Schedule**

Megan Kelly, NJTPA, said volunteers are being sought to serve on two newly created committees of the Morris Canal Working Group. The Planning and Implementation Committee and the Education, Events, and Marketing Committee. Elizabeth Roy (Warren County) and Eric Snyder (Sussex County) are the interim co-chairs of the Planning and Implementation Committee; Andrea Proctor (NJDEP/Waterloo Village) and Joe Macasek (Canal Society of NJ) are the interim co-chairs of the Education, Events, and Marketing Committee. The target membership goal for each committee is 15 members.

Joe Macasek then explained the goals of the Events, Education, and Marketing Committee. He said it's important to bring people and talent together, to engage the public, and to "brand" the Morris Canal Greenway. Macasek said the Committee can "harness talent" to help the Greenway establish its identity.

Kelly explained a "communications strategy" will be developed to integrate and cross-promote efforts by various Greenway stakeholders and also to identify key conferences and other events/meetings where Greenway presentations could be conducted. In addition, Kelly said a two-minute video is being produced by the NJTPA to help further the Morris Canal Greenway effort. Finally, Kelly noted that Passaic County has offered to expand its newsletter to incorporate regional Greenway news and other information, as well as stakeholder activities.

Macasek concluded by emphasizing the need to "organize the work we're doing already" and engage people in the communities along the Morris Canal's route.

Responding to a question, Kelly said the maps displayed at today's meeting would be posted to the project website [www.MorrisCanalGreenway.org](http://www.MorrisCanalGreenway.org) when the meeting minutes are finalized.. Next, Elizabeth Roy spoke about the role of the Planning and Implementation Committee. Roy pointed to "tremendous challenges" regarding many portions of the Canal located in "regulated space." She also indicated challenges involved in locating funding sources. Roy said while it's important to take a regional approach in order to make the Greenway happen, "everything needs to be linked together within regulations (historic and land use)" that can make it difficult to preserve land in many places. Roy also emphasized the importance of increasing awareness about the Greenway in order to make it successful on a regional level.

#### **V. Municipal Outreach Plan**

Megan Kelly noted the Morris Canal's route travels through 6 counties and 37 municipalities. Therefore, she said it's important to know what's going on at the community-level regarding various Greenway projects. Kelly said municipal outreach meetings, organized by county, will be conducted early next year.

Kelly said, so far, one outreach meeting, in Passaic County, has already been held. Michael Lysicatos, Passaic County, discussed the results of that meeting.

Lysicatos said the meeting helped "benchmark" where Passaic County's municipalities stand and "what's being done on a local level" with respect to the Greenway. He said the meeting also served to educate municipalities about the Morris Canal Working Group,

which served as a “centerpiece” of the discussion.

Following Lysicatos’ report, meeting participants were invited to participate in facilitated “break-out” sessions, arranged by county, in different sections of the meeting room. The break-out groups were each asked to identify any or all of the following: Greenway-related municipal activities, benefits, and impediments/constraints; and Greenway “champions” or stakeholders. Each group was then invited to report back what they discussed:

#### Hudson County

- Current municipal activities discussed included: a Subregional Study and signage plan, a TAP application for Berry Lane Park in Jersey City, potential bike lanes along Route 440, and the possible expansion of walking tours and busy tours to sections of Jersey City. In addition, potential redevelopment on the west side of Jersey City could offer Greenway connections and more neighborhood involvement. It was noted that the Morris Canal follows the East Coast Greenway route in Jersey City and this connection is marked with signs.
- Potential Greenway benefits discussed included: an increased demand for bike lanes (Jersey City is now striping new lanes). In addition, the Greenway could create access and connections for traditionally under-served areas.
- Municipal impediments and constraints discussed included: lack of availability of funding and the challenge of long-term Greenway planning given the uncertainty of redevelopment plans.
- Greenway champions/stakeholders suggested by the group included: the Morris Canal Redevelopment Plan, Jersey City Landmarks Conservancy, Bike Jersey City, the Lincoln Highway Association, and the West Side Community Alliance (which could sponsor walking tours). Individuals included: Sue Mack (Bayonne), Massiel Ferrara (Hudson County), and Freeholder John Hallanan. In addition, Megan Massey (Hudson County) said she maintains a list of other potential stakeholders, including a contact in Kearny.

#### Morris County

- Current municipal activities discussed included: Montville’s Greenway park, Wharton’s Canal Day on Aug. 23, and the next phase of restoration of Wharton’s canal lock and lock-tender’s house. In addition, efforts were noted in Roxbury (King Street Bridge, Riggs Park, Shippenport acquisition), Rockaway’s canal section, and in Lake Hopatcong (fountain project).
- Potential Greenway benefits discussed included: meeting the county’s goal of having park facilities within 10 minutes of every resident, plus the Greenway could provide local economic boosts.
- Municipal impediments/constraints discussed included: finances, namely a lack of available funding and the need for improved education and awareness about the Canal and Greenway effort. Potential “pushback” from communities, time constraints, and the need to “brand” the Greenway and tie related activities together

also were mentioned by this group.

- Greenway champions/stakeholders: the Morris County Heritage Commission was identified as one of the key champions/stakeholders.

#### Essex County

- Current municipal activities discussed included: Bloomfield's resolution to designate five miles of the Canal's route as a greenway. Bloomfield also is pursuing funding for Canal/Greenway signage and related historic house restoration and has a hike scheduled for Nov. 8. In addition the group mentioned the potential for Greenway connection on the former Roche site in Belleville, the potential Broad Street connection between Clifton and Bloomfield (there is signage in place), and it was noted that waterfront parks in Newark are completed and marked.
- Potential Greenway benefits discussed included: the potential for recreational, historical, and educational benefits; the enhancement of existing assets (such as Branch Brook Park); and the potential for addressing a significant need for parks in densely populated areas. The Greenway's tourism potential and opportunities for open space preservation also were mentioned.
- Municipal impediments/constraints discussed included: highway and private country club land restrictions/limitations, identifying activity hubs, and planning for concurrent bicycle/pedestrian/inclusive use. The group also noted the the lack of available funding and the need to better share information and involve stakeholders.

#### Warren County

- Current municipal activities discussed included: the ongoing countywide acquisition of Canal/Greenway land and the fact that trail-development plans are already in place. In addition the group noted municipal- and county-level restoration/preservation efforts that are ongoing in various locations.
- Potential Greenway benefits discussed included: the ability of the Greenway to connect existing assets, as well as potential economic and health benefits.
- Municipal impediments/constraints discussed included: the need to emphasize that the Greenway effort is about more than history. Also mentioned: the challenge of engaging people, especially from outside the community; how to educate/energize municipalities about why we need trails; and how to create a places that can be attractive as a "destination for a day."

#### Sussex County

- Current municipal activities discussed included: the potential for a Canal Greenway portion in Stanhope near Route 183 (Old Route 206). No other current preservation activities are known at this time.
- Potential Greenway benefits discussed included: recreational and educational

opportunities, connectivity of the trail system, and improving economic vitality.

- Municipal impediments/constraints discussed included: no available funding, lack of Canal/Greenway awareness by local governments, lack of existing connections to other trails; and public/private land ownership limiting access.
- Greenway champions/stakeholders: the group listed the mayors of Byram and Stanhope, Sussex County Planning staff, state parks superintendent Steve Ellis, as well as Freeholder and NJTPA Board member Richard Vohden

## **VI. Next Steps**

Megan Kelly said the next full Morris Canal Working Group meeting will be held on December 4, 2014, possibly in Warren County. Committee meetings are planned for September 2014 at times and locations to be determined.

