

Chapter 2: Riverfront Tour Summary

To give all participants in the planning process a current or refreshed familiarity with the riverfront area, a walking tour was arranged by the Township. The following information summarizes that tour and the observations that the participants came away with.

Date of Tour: Saturday, October 31, 2009

Attendees:

Doug Knauss, Director of Parks and Recreation
Leslie Richards, Board of Supervisors
Hugh Moulten, Open Space Committee
Scott Quitel, Environmental Advisory Board & Planning Commission
Dave Shula, Planning Commission
Dick Leonard, Planning Commission
Kevin Kissling, Parks and Recreation Board

Charlie Guttenplan, WPG Project Manager
Pattie Guttenplan, WPG Design Supervisor

Summary:

The group toured from the Spring Mill Park and train station area, north/west to the Conshohocken Borough border, walking the existing County trail. The group then traveled along Washington Street back to the Finnaren and Haley property. The group toured the Whitemarsh Boat Club site and met briefly with its owner and a board member.



SEPTA's Spring Mill Station

Developments which have been proposed for this stretch of the river were discussed. A proposed continuing care retirement community at 501 Washington Street (Lepore property) was mentioned; it would require an amendment to the RDD zoning district. A proposal for an office complex on the Finnaren and Haley property (901 Washington Street) was also discussed; it was in sketch plan phase and was presented once to the Planning Commission. The status of both of these projects is not certain. A proposal which had received preliminary plan approval at the Reilly Foam property

adjacent to the Spring Mill Station (1101 E. Hector Street), was discussed. It had been proposed by JPI, Inc., but due to current economic conditions, it is no longer a viable project. It had been the first proposal under the RDD designation and would have been a primarily multi-family residential project, with a very small retail component (to be located in an existing historic building). Finally, some very preliminary plans for improvements at the Whitemarsh Boat Club property, were mentioned. This might include the

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renovation and re-use of an existing building close to Washington Street at the site's eastern edge to provide rental revenue for the Boat Club, and also, the possibility of development of "boathouse condominiums" facing the river.

There was some discussion concerning the riverfront trail required of future development in accordance with the Riverfront Development District. Initially, during the stakeholder meeting held with the Whitemarsh Boat Club, the Club indicated concern with it traversing their site due to security issues and the fact that a trail in this location could conflict with events held by the Club and become a safety concern. Attendees of the tour understood these concerns after touring the Club's site and looked at a couple of options, one along Washington Street in this area and one where it could cross the Club's property behind the building storing the boats and where the Club's primary activities take place (at some location between Washington Street and the building).

A number of other points were raised during the tour. One concerned the provision of emergency services along the river with the potential for more activity. This issue had previously been raised at a joint meeting of various Township boards held in September. Doug Knauss and Charlie Guttenplan will be meeting with the police chief, fire personnel, and others involved, to discuss this issue further. Another point raised was the desirability to create a safe crossing of the R-6 tracks from the existing County trail to Washington Street to avoid the need to go down to Cherry Street to go from Washington



Property of Whitemarsh Boat Club, LLC (801 Washington Street)

Street to the trail, or visa versa. Maintaining and enhancing views to the river, in general, was discussed, during the tour. The formation of public/private partnerships was also discussed. Some already exist such as between SEPTA and Montgomery County at Spring Mill for joint use of parking at the train station; possible public/private partnerships with the Whitemarsh Boat Club and other entities, was also raised.

During the tour, it was noted that signage to alert users along the existing county trail and the river, are necessary to help users locate nearby comfort and commercial facilities. This observation had been made during some of the stakeholder meetings.

An existing new, paved boat launch was observed by WPG staff and discussed with the group. It appears to be part of the Riverwalk at Millennium apartment complex (O'Neill development) which is primarily in Conshohocken with a small portion in the Township. It appears that the boat launch would physically be in the Township. Perhaps there would be an opportunity to create a public/private partnership to allow public access to this launch. Some parking appears to be available but its adequacy would have to be explored. (It was later learned that it is Borough-owned, and physically located in the Borough; any future partnership would be between the two municipalities.)

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Finally, the possibility of a riverfront tour from the water, possibly using rowboats from the Whitemarsh Boat Club, was discussed and will be pursued separately.

Separately, WPG staff toured the Miquon (southern) end of the study area. There is a boat launch already there which could possibly be improved for general usage. The ownership needs to be verified. Additional safety measures may need to be put in place for crossing of the R-6 SEPTA train tracks. Parking is readily available at the River Park office complex. Arrangements to allow public use of a portion of this parking would have to be made through negotiation by the Township.