

Bethlehem Environmental Advisory Council
General Meeting
February 2, 2017

Attendees: Present were Council members Jack Gambino, Lynn Rothman (by phone), John Brunner, Brian Hillard, Kalyna Procyk and Mike Topping. Kristie Fach from the Wildlands Conservancy was also present.

Monocacy Creek Restoration Project: Kristie Fach, Director of Ecological Restoration, described the work to be done including restoring a proper floodplain with riparian buffers where possible along the Monocacy. She noted that the proposed work will help with flooding issues but that most of the potential for flooding is caused by land use practices upstream from the park area. The Monocacy is lucky to have a number of springs, which provide it with high quality water; but inadequate storm water controls can cause problems. Mowing up to the bank of the stream and allowing parking lots to be near the stream can cause harm to the water by raising its temperature and allowing contaminants to enter the stream. Farming practices and the use of fertilizers in lawns can cause harm to the water quality especially if the riparian buffer area, which could help filter any surface water before it enters the stream, is minimal or none existent. Dams cause water to be stagnant, impound sediments and cause water temperatures to rise. This promotes poor water quality and ultimately hurts fish and many other organisms, which rely on good water. Kristie has worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to help farmers to learn and use best practices on their lands next to a stream in an effort to help protect the water there. Sometimes they have been able to provide funding for projects, which the Service and the farmer agree would be beneficial. She noted that all landowners next to a stream can have an impact on the quality of the water in that stream.

The original study design for improving the park, by another consultant, included extensive regrading, tree removal and the placement of dam like structures in the Creek. The tree removal aspect was particularly opposed by many in the community and the overall size and scope of the project was ultimately rejected by the City. Wildlands has procured a grant for a revised and less intrusive design with permits for the project. In an effort to educate as well as advise the public, they plan to erect signage to help describe the proposed changes and why they are appropriate before the start of fishing season. Construction should begin this summer and the proposed plantings, including proper riparian buffer plantings, should be in place later this fall. The plan is to remove the railroad ties in the creek and some of the trees along the creek. Native grasses and wildflowers as well as bushes and trees are proposed to be planted in the buffer areas where possible. A natural meadow type area is also proposed. The pavilion areas will be mowed to provide access. Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) approved structures will replace the existing rock formations in the creek. This will improve fish habitat and help with flooding controls. City Forester, Cindy Smith, has helped to choose the trees to be planted. Wildlands intends to remain in contact with the City to insure that the project is maintained properly, including a contract with instructions about mowing and the protection of natural areas including signage and fencing. Kristie explained that it is important to have the public behind a project like this to insure that it is maintained as designed.

Another project that Kristie is involved with is a stream assessment for the entire Monocacy Creek watershed, which will update information in the Monocacy Creek Management Plan developed in 1999. This studied the stream conditions and made recommendations. This provides prospective to the ongoing concerns for the stream and will help in efforts to justify funding for projects, which have been proposed and recommended previously. They hope to have the plan finished this summer and meet with the various municipalities, which include the stream, for input and ultimately approval of the plan. Another aspect of this effort is an update to the 167 stormwater plan which was required some years ago by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Each municipality in the State is required to implement these regulations when reviewing various kinds of development plans. The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) will be involved with this plan update as well as the City. Both the stream assessment and the stormwater plan update are being funded from a grant from DEP. The stream assessment involves walking the stream and observing its streambed condition, checking the biology, taking water samples and listing any problem areas.

Kristie also gave a short summery of some similar improvements, funded by DCNR, proposed for Saucon Park which including restricted mowing areas and the planting of proper bushes and trees in an improved buffer area along the creek. She offered to keep the EAC informed with any progress made on any of the above projects and emphasized the importance of the EAC and others showing their support for each of the proposed projects.

Approval of the December Minutes: With two minor corrections, Kalyna moved and Lynn seconded approval; approved.

Approval of the January Minutes: Kalyna moved to approve the January minutes; seconded by Lynn; approved.

Chair's Comments: Lynn noted that a PA Land Conservation Conference will be held on 5/5/17. Brian and John will be appointed to the EAC next Tuesday and Brian offered to present a letter from the EAC supporting the resolution to establish a Climate Change Working Group to be signed by Lynn.

Committee Reports: None

External Committee Reports: None

Unfinished Business Recycling: Kalyna explained that the market has collapsed and therefore many objects including Styrofoam and pizza boxes, which had contained food are no longer accepted due to the added cost of dealing with these items.

New Business Climate Action Plan: The EAC supports the establishment of a climate change working group for the City.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM.