



Peter Barnes Wildlife Preserve Commission

216 Amboy Avenue, Metuchen NJ 08840

South Plainfield Public Meeting – March 30, 2023, 7:00 pm

Location: South Plainfield Municipal Building Conference Room

Commissioners: Walter Stochel, Vice Chair; Ken Sammond, Secretary; Tom Walsh, Bob Spiegel, Rob Bencivenga. John Wiley, Legal Counsel

Guests: Peter Fairclough, Emile DeVito, Alice Tempel, Tom Stillman, Maria Orchid.

Walter Stochel asked each commission to introduced him or herself, then presented the slideshow about the Master Plan, then asked if there were any questions or comments.

Walter stated that the towns and the county have been working on extending the Greenway through the edge of the Barnes Preserve for 12 years to provide a good connector.

Rob B pointed out that the railroad company does not want to surrender the ROW due to the possibility of being contracted to cleanup the Woodbrook Superfund site.

Walter state that the Greenway is important as it links all three sections of the preserve. He stated that we are working with the county to blazing trails Coolidge St. to Woodbrook Rd. to Tyler Rd to the Songbird Trail, ending at Nevsky St. County has cleared a spot on Coolidge for a parking and a rustic trailhead. County Conservation Corps will be constructing the trail in the section owned by the county. Soft opening for National Trails Day in June. County will mark it out on the GIS map they have created.

Rob Spiegel stated that they should make the public works structure on Metuchen Road into a nature center and name it after Jane Tousman.

Tom Stillman asked how we monitor the EPA cleanup.

Walter S. stated that the commission will adopt plan in April/May 2023 and then we will notify the EPA.

Bob Spiegel stated that we still have to consider the plan that is being proposed by the EPA so we can work to ensure that they do a complete remediation. An explanation of significant difference is being considered now by the EPA concerning what action will be taken.

Alice Tempel was concerned that the EPA's record of decision may not be for a complete cleanup.

Emile DeVito emphasized that deer management is needed . Get J. Kelly from RVC to do a free survey. Get the vegetation to respond.

Walter S stated that there was a cleanup and walk on the Songbird Trail on March 26 and that he noted that the young sweet gum trees are not being chewed by deer.

Ken S explained that an invasive species strike team (which will also deal with illegal dumping) will take action on dates in April, May and June.

Emile DeVito pointed out that there is a good pilot project behind Cornell Dubilier site in South Plainfield to remediate the Bound Brook. He found the work very impressive, stating that the EPA is removing trees and putting in new plants. They are also lowering the floodplain.

Alice Tempel asked how much money the commission has?

John Wiley stated that \$100,000 has been given of which some has been spent, primarily on the metes and bounds and that there is another \$100,000 waiting to be drawn down.

Ken S. pointed out that most activities are volunteer-driven.

Alice Tempel asked if the commission will have all the powers for a municipal planning board? Do you anticipate any major requests? Will you have professionals vetting the submissions?

Walter state that yes, there will be contractors to do the work.

John W. stated that there will also be fees that can come in from zoning applications to the commission.: He emphasized that we first need a master plan. We need to take the next steps to create the planning board rules.

Alice Tempel commented that the Barnes Commission is similar to the Pine Barrens commission.

Emile DeVito stated that there are private parcels that should be purchased to better protect the preserve and he asked how do you coordinate the trails and the other work with different landowners?

Walter stated that we have to work with the landowners, public and private, as we proceed.

Emile DeVito was concerned that the towns that own the land may want to alter it. He was most interested in South Plainfield and wanted to know if there is a conservation easement.

Rob B. stated that the county owns most of the S. Plainfield land which has a conservation easement.

Emile DeVito argued that if the master plan does not say that forestry is not allowed. Then it is allowed.

John Wiley stated that we can regulate forestry actions once this process is done. Anybody who comes with a development proposal will come to the commission which will have the final say.

Emile DeVito emphasized that the plan should have restrictions in place so that any actions undertaken conform to ecological restoration plans approved by the commission. That way there will be no cutting and selling of timber. He reiterated that forestry plans have to be approved by the commission.

Walter offered thanks to Peter Barnes and his family, Dorothy Rasmussen, and John Wiley.

Rob B made a motion to close the meeting at 8:01. Tom W. seconded. All commissioners voted to close and adjourn the meeting.