

MORRIS COUNTY TRAILS CONSTRUCTION GRANT PROGRAM

MINUTES FROM Q & A SESSION (OPEN SESSION) 1/23/18 (4-6 PM)

ROLL CALL

Betty Cass-Schmitt (Chairperson)	Barbara Shepard
Julie Baron	Isobel Olcott
Nita Galate	Dick Seabury
Tom Malinousky	Duncan Douglas

NOT PRESENT

Marty Epstein

STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Morris County Counsel John Napolitano, Esq.
Christine Marion, Director, MC Office of Planning & Preservation
Barbara Murray, Coordinator, MC Open Space Program
Denise Chaplick, MCPC, Coordinator, Trails Construction Grant Program

OPEN PUBLIC MEETING

The Committee Chair began the meeting at and requested staff to read the Open Public Meeting Statement, which was done at 4:03 PM.

PUBLIC SESSION

Noting that no members of the public were present, the Chair requested a motion to open and close public portion of the meeting. At 4:05 PM Julie Baron made a motion and Barbara Shepard seconded to close public portion.

The Chair welcomed the return of all Committee members and asked staff to begin their portion of the meeting. Denise gave a brief overview of the agenda and goals of this evening's meeting.

MINUTES

The Chair requested a motion for a combined approve for the meeting minutes from October 12 (Open & Closed Session) and October 30 (Open & Closed Session). Nita Galate recommended correcting a grammatical error in the first paragraph. Minutes were approved with this modification where Isobel passed the motion and Tom seconded.

SCHEDULE

Staff presented the proposed program schedule for 2018 noting that as before we are working backwards to achieve recommendations by the end of the calendar year. The overall schedule is very similar to the previous year (2017), with a Community Workshop in April, Letter of Intent due end of June, and completed applications due end of July. Staff would have 2 months (Aug & Sept) for review. A summary review would take place in early Oct. with Q & A set for Oct. 30, same as last year. We are also holding Nov. 1 for deliberations if needed. Recommendations would be made to the Freeholder Board at their Nov. 19 meeting and final award recommendations announced at the Dec. 12 Freeholder Board Meeting.

Staff requested feedback from the committee about the Q & A Session, namely if it was helpful and should remain as part of the program. The majority of the committee felt it was helpful and insightful to hear directly from the applicants. This aspect should remain part of the program. The timing should be condensed to 10 minutes instead of 15. A project map should be shown during the Q & A Session, not a list of questions. Applicants can select which map to highlight from their already submitted materials. Include a standard question about how/why a project was chosen to initiate dialog, if time permits. Applicants should be instructed to arrive 15 minutes early.

Applicants were previously awarded a grant shall provide certified documentation that the project remains in good standing. Create a form to document with signature line as part of application. This information will tie back to the evaluation criteria.

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2016 PROJECT UPDATE

Staff presented an overview of projects awarded in 2016. Of the 13 grants awarded, 1 is complete, 4 in construction, 5 in design, and 3 were non-responsive. Common findings in reviewing the 2016 projects include construction costs were underestimated, design is being completed after award, and design directly impacts the sustainability of the trail. Harding, Denville, and Florham Park were discussed in more detail. Staff noted that because project design is completed after the grant is awarded, the project becomes more refined to better determine project needs and costs, (i.e. extent of grading, clearing, terminus, fill). Staff also noted that many of the 2016 projects cost estimates were underestimated in comparison to project bids. Staff feels that this may be because the design and construction of trails is a niche expertise and municipalities, professionals, and DPW's need a better understanding of trail construction requirements. A better understanding of design and construction of trails is also required to achieve sustainable design practices. Staff has noted that some designs are not feasible long-term.

Staff gave an overview of the NJ Recreation Trail Program and their forthcoming program changes. The state is revamping their program after a Federal audit. Many of the changes are consistent with the Morris County Trail Program and include a new requirement of applicants to adhere to national trail standards.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Fund Design Phase – The committee has decided to keep the program as is for the 2018 cycle. Design and engineering costs will still be eligible for use as matching funds only. Full funding shall remain. Partial funding of a project is not eligible.

Design Requirements – Modify the application where the applicant must include a reference to which standard the applicant used to develop their project. Consider using a form with a list of resources and signature line. This information will tie back to the evaluation criteria.

Training - The committee agreed that providing training is a good step to educate applicants on the construction and cost estimating details of trails. Target conducting a training / orientation session at the same time as the Community Workshop.

Matching Funds – Is a change needed to clarify what can be used for matching funds? Not at this time. Wait to see how this further develops in coming cycles.

Public Hearing – Public hearings should not be a requirement, but a recommendation to the applicants so all stakeholders are aware of proposed trails.

Cost Estimates – The program will be modified to allow a line item for contingency at a maximum of 10%.

Request for More Funding – Applicants will not be able to return to the program to request additional funding for already awarded projects.

Trail Amenities – Program Rules & Regulations will be modified to include fishing piers and overlooks as examples of amenities. Applicants shall be reminded about this rule, where amenities shall not account for more than the total costs of the trail.

Streambank Stabilization – Each project shall be evaluated on an individual basis as to how streambank stabilization relates to an overall project. Remind applicant of how these elements might be considered during application reviews.

Blue Trails – The committee feels these elements are not true to the original intention of the program and are not eligible.

Staff summarized the next steps as issuing 6 Grant Agreements to the 2017 awardees, revising the rules and program materials in accordance with decisions made today. Staff then recapped the 2018 program schedule.

As a new item, Tom asked about the need to revise the maximum award amount, which allows an applicant to receive 60% of the entire funding available for that funding cycle. The committee suggested waiting to see what happens on this issue.

The Chair requested a motion to adjourn, where Julie moved the motion and Duncan seconded. The meeting adjourned at 6:41 PM.