

Lower Paxton Township Community Engagement Committee

Meeting Minutes July 19, 2023

Members in Attendance

Jim Seidler
Pat Crawford
Stan Smith
Denise Hussar

Members Absent

Bob MacIntyre

Also in Attendance

Rachelle Scott, Staff Liaison
Michelle Thompson, PES

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Seidler called the meeting to order at 4:03 pm on the above date in Room 174 of the Lower Paxton Township Municipal Center, 425 Prince Street, Harrisburg.

MINUTES

The minutes of the May 17, 2023 meeting were approved with a motion by Ms. Crawford, a second from Ms. Hussar, and a unanimous vote.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

9th ANNUAL ARTS & PARKS 5K 2023

Cancellation

Ms. Scott announced that the race has been canceled. She commended Mr. Seidler for the amount of work he put into planning and organizing the race and all of the fine details. She explained that the participation was too low and there were only two sponsors.

The timing company agreed to waive any fees if the cancellation was 30 days or more prior to the race. Upcoming costs would have been for banners, t-shirts, awards. There may be an expense for the awards since they were ordered already.

There are many factors contributing to the low numbers besides just the lack of marketing; so many 5Ks in the area, covid, heat, poor air quality, and others.

Sound Garden at Brightbill Park

Ms. Scott stated that since the goal for this year's race was to raise funds for the Soundgarden, both Highway Equipment and HRG have asked that their sponsorship money be put towards the playground. Members agreed that was very generous.

The playground project was approved by the Supervisors at their meeting last night so the demolition of the old equipment will begin as soon as Summer Camp ends on August 18th. August 28th is when the

construction will start, and substantial completion is expected by early November. The playground was designed with the help of an ADA consultant and a Parks and Rec Board member who has a disabled child, so the input from an expert and an experienced parent helped the manufacturer design the product. She shared sketches and diagrams of the playground, and sample photos of the equipment.

Ms. Crawford stated she has noticed that playgrounds with sound gardens and they are used by all ages, not just children. They seem to be engineered in a way that the sound is not harsh, it has a gentle sound no matter how they are played.

Valerie Pritchett from ABC27 was scheduled to MC the race but has agreed to come to the groundbreaking for the playground.

CEC BUDGET

Ms. Scott provided a summary of the yearly expenses and revenues, showing a balance of \$13,794 at the end of 2022. Revenues in 2023 would only be for the two sponsors and that money has been earmarked for the Soundgarden at Brightbill. As the final expenses for the 2023 are paid, the budget can be updated and distributed to the members.

A list of grants given over the years was also reviewed by members. The earmarked money is accounted for in both lists, so the balance shown is current.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Ms. Scott noted that the CEC has been raising money to be able to contribute to the community and the race was always the fundraising event. There are additional opportunities to provide or enhance recreation for the community and Ms. Thompson has been working on ideas for ways to get the community involved.

Sponsorship Package

In order to get participation and to get donors, Ms. Thompson stated there needs to be an elevated outreach and consistent connection to the groups in the area. She explained she has been working on a sponsorship package which can convey all of the things we are doing and the ways we are connected. This is a consolidated guide to highlight the activities and it presents levels of sponsorships to potential partners. This will be used Township wide, so it can include the things the other departments are involved in.

Expanding Memberships

Ms. Thompson wants the Community Engagement Committee to invite organizations to share about their group and what they do in the community. Then the CEC could discuss if and how the Township can partner with them via events, social media and monthly newsletters. CEC has always been very parks focused, but she suggested broadening the CEC to allow members from the other committees such as Shade Tree Committee and Historical Commission.

History of CEC's Role

Mr. Seidler asked if the purpose or mission needs to be updated since it started out basically supporting the Friendship Center, Arts Council, Greenway Committee and Parks and Rec Board. The FC had the biggest needs, so it was the focus for several years. Mr. Smith agreed and noted that the CEC was to coordinate those groups' fundraising efforts. Each group was supposed to submit proposals then the group

would coordinate the fundraising, but none of the groups brought proposals for some time and the fundraising still went on. The Soundgarden is the first real project since replacing the frog in the FC pool. Ms. Crawford stated that they included the first responders when the CEC was struggling to identify a mission for the race.

Mr. Smith agreed that redefining the focus is a good idea at this time because the original intent never worked without a reason to raise money. There was no need to expand since there was no purpose. He noted that the intent, focus and expansion discussion is timely and Ms. Crawford agreed. Ms. Hussar added that the membership criteria was amended last year and would need to be amended again when this change takes place. Ms. Scott added that it was not opened to the public yet because the Supervisors wanted the CEC to first have two members from each supporting committee, and those committees still struggle to get a full membership. She further explained that Ms. Thompson would like to collaborate more so that the networking is more effective.

Mr. Seidler noted the CEC is called an engagement committee but only really performs as a fundraising committee and has been strictly a race committee for the majority of the time. And while he is good at organizing a race, he is not much of a fundraiser. He doesn't feel he should oversee a fundraising committee when he could focus elsewhere. Ms. Crawford stated that just because this year's race was cancelled, it shouldn't be assumed that it isn't a viable instrument for doing some good for the community. She noted that there are so many things going through some sort of transformation, be it socially, politically, or otherwise, that it is worth riding it out and his leadership is very valuable. The members of the CEC are proud of their accomplishments, but they need to work on reestablishing and creating a strong identity.

Community Groups

Ms. Thompson stated that there are groups that attend the Township events who also host their own events and she is interested in finding out how to work with them more. One place to start is by inviting them to the CEC meeting where they can share their mission and ideas, and the CEC can evaluate how they can help the Township and the Parks. Ms. Scott stated that Bike a Better Path is an example of a group that started an initiative, and we could have helped them host their bike pick-up if we had known and scheduled it before the pavilion was booked. We could also have a table at their event, or help volunteer, or share their info on our social media, or what other ways can we be involved with their efforts. Bicycling and bike paths is an easy connection to park related efforts.

Mr. Smith stated that some groups have come to the Parks and Rec Board with things they wanted to do in the parks, so he asked how to differentiate whether a group goes to CEC or to the parent boards (Arts, PRB GW). Ms. Scott suggested that if they are trying to put a specific thing in a park, such as a girl scout with a bird box or a boy scout with a flagpole, those go to Parks and Recreation; a group that wants to market and network or partner with the Township, it should go to CEC to be vetted and evaluated for partnership. Ms. Thompson agreed it would be a broader service to the community.

Ms. Hussar cautioned that the groups could see the Township as a funding source. Ms. Scott didn't think it should involve money or contributions. The CEC funds should be a separate topic for the CEC to decide what to do with it. Ms. Thompson agreed it would be for promotional purposes and sharing resources.

If the CEC included additional committees, the collaborative group could have tables at events, and not everyone has to go and do separate things – there could be one table and volunteers from any of the committees could take shifts to share info from all the groups.

Lower Paxton Community Foundation

Ms. Crawford stated that the description of the Lower Paxton Community Foundation sounds exactly like what the CEC was intended for. The coverage of their event for Independence Day event at Heroes Grove was very well done and attention grabbing. She noted they seem to be duplicating the CEC's mission so how could they relate to this discussion and would they be one of the committees or one of the outside organizations. They seem to be executing very well.

Ms. Hussar is involved in the Foundation and the mission, purpose, accomplishments are listed on the back of the Christkindlmarkt postcard, one of which is to help the Parks and Recreation. Mr. Seidler asked where the money goes that they raise. Ms. Scott stated they act as a fiscal sponsor, meaning they are a funding tool not a funding source. For example, the boy scouts working on an Eagle project can go to the Foundation to "borrow" their 510(C)(3) status to solicit for donations for their project. The donations can be sent to the Foundation who will pay the bills incurred with the project and distribute the funds back to the scout. Ms. Thompson has encountered issues as she has been soliciting for sponsors. The businesses want a 510(C)(3) organization and it doesn't matter that the Township is still a tax-exempt organization, it is not 510(C)(3). She has talked with John Hanks and Chris Lunden who both seem open to working collaboratively.

Ms. Hussar stated they organize Christkindlmarkt, Spooky Stories in the Park, and the Independence Day Celebration.

Ms. Thompson spoke with John Hanks about partnering and he is open to it, and she noted the Township was willing to support their event and did provide space, support, and coverage of the event. This raised the question whether the Foundation is a part of the Township or another independent organization. There are organizations that use the parks for tournaments and other events, and so establishing basic parameters for what the Township is willing to contribute for the different types of groups will be important. We are putting the Foundations information and events in our newsletters and recreation guides, and we are promoting them on social media, so they are willing to reciprocate that for us.

Mr. Seidler asked how the Foundation decides how to allocate or distribute its funds. Ms. Hussar stated that the Christkindlmarkt doesn't net much of an income, it basically covers costs. Mr. Smith suggested it is just the funding mechanism for others, that it isn't trying to raise its own money, it is the tool that others use to do their fundraising. Ms. Hussar noted they might support with volunteers or with small seed money, but it is not a place to go to get funds.

Mr. Seidler questioned the need for the CEC when the Foundation is already doing all of the things the CEC wants to do. Mr. Smith agreed that the original CEC parameters are redundant, but refocusing on the new direction creates new purpose.

Mr. Seidler stated that the CEC needs to be discontinued or redefined, otherwise it would be more beneficial to join and support the Foundation. Mr. Smith agreed that currently the CEC doesn't have a function, and he suggested each CEC member talk with their other committees and discuss the needs that have been identified, and brainstorm ideas for structure for the CEC. He asked if staff could talk to Shade Tree and Historical Commissions.

Redefinition Brainstorming

Mr. Smith stated that if each committee is marketing for themselves it is overwhelming. Mr. Smith questioned when this is a staff activity or when it is a committee task. The broader advocacy for Township services is a new concept. The distinction of tasks for the PRB and CEC, putting something in a park versus a fostering broader community involvement, makes him feel there is a need to start from scratch and define realistic tasks that are useful in a bigger picture. There could be a subcommittee for the race, but it shouldn't be the sole purpose for the CEC.

Ms. Thompson stated that the members of the CEC are community members and represent voices for the community. The fundraising tool is the sponsorship guide that includes all that we do. If there is a new event or activity it needs to be added to the sponsorship guide. If each committee is having an event and asking for sponsors for that event, it is duplicating efforts and wasting resources. To avoid that, each committee and its members should use that sponsorship guide when soliciting or working within their existing network. This can create volunteers, not just financial support. Volunteers are needed for small things too, not just for the big events. Things like trail maintenance and park clean-up should have more interest than just Jim and Mike, and Lisa. Community members would participate and have a feeling of ownership with these things if they knew about them.

Mr. Smith understood this to mean the CEC could come away from a fundraising focus and go to an engagement advocacy for the community. CEC can be ambassadors for and make citizens aware of what is available and offered for them and help them appreciate/celebrate/participate in it. He cautioned that some things in the sponsorship packet are within the Township's budget, but fundraising efforts should clearly be for things outside of the budget. The other thing to avoid is asking the same businesses for help all the time. Ms. Thompson agreed there needs to be clarity. She also noted that there is a dependence on the Township to provide things, and there isn't a sense of "how can my business contribute time or effort to the citizens and community". The Township would like her to work to create those mutually beneficial relationships, and help businesses understand why participating or investing in our programs and services has a broader benefit helping them see the bigger picture.

Ms. Thompson has been asked to find out why some of the Township's events are so poorly attended or not thriving. She is working on a mini questionnaire so people can share their thoughts. It will be accessed through a QR code so it is quick and convenient. Public relations, engagement, and awareness are all potential reasons that the events aren't well attended.

Mr. Smith stated that the major hurdle has always been the Township's hesitancy and lack of infrastructure to do marketing. So much so that the email address for the Arts Council was created by a member on their personal email account. The offerings are worthwhile and enjoyable, and with the marketing that is forthcoming, they should gain momentum. Ms. Thompson will be working on improving the communications and availability of information.

Ms. Thompson has been going to the schools, churches, HOAs, nonprofit groups, community groups, and creating contacts with them. She would benefit greatly from having the CEC to assist with different outreach tasks. Over the next month, she and Ms. Scott will continue working on things and report back at the August meeting. Mr. Smith suggested inviting the other committees to get together including the Foundation.

OTHER BUSINESS

Possibility Place

Ms. Scott stated that the Possibility Place playground is in need of major renovations. The original champion/advocate for the playground was Janis Creason. The way she was able to rally volunteers and raise funding is unprecedented. There is a need to find another champion and it is hoped that through the networking we are establishing, we can find someone who is just as passionate as she was. They could also use the Foundation as their fundraising mechanism and save themselves the work of setting up the 510(C)(3). People don't want to give money to something they expect to be paid for by tax dollars, but Possibility Place was able to achieve it, and Ms. Scott is hoping to recreate that excitement. Ms. Thompson stated she has been doing research and there are many municipalities seeking business involvement and support in order to elevate from the basic services provided.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting ended at 5:25 pm. The next meeting of the Community Engagement Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, August 16, 2023, at 4:00 pm in Room 174 of the Municipal Center.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michelle Hiner,
Recording Secretary