



Big Elk Creek Master Planning Task Force Meeting #6 Transcript

Meeting Date: January 21, 2025

Meeting Time: 6:00 – 9:00 PM

Meeting Location: The Meeting House at White Clay Creek Preserve

**All Task Force members have been assigned a number in lieu of their names for the purposes of the meeting transcript.*

Task Force Members Present:

- **Absent:** 3 (dialed-in), 4 (dialed-in), 7 (dialed-in), 19, 20
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Meeting Minutes:

2 - Welcome to meeting #6. Thanks again for coming out in the weather tonight. I hope all of you had a chance to open the meeting agenda that was sent out a couple of days ago. As we've discussed several times, many of you in here have a lot of what I would call expertise, scientific talent, knowledge and background on developing properties from plants, environmental aspects and infrastructure of various properties that you may have helped put together over the years.

And we really do appreciate all of the comments. Shout out to (name, #8), who has done a really good job of sharing thoughts with the core team. We talked about the input from the Big Elk Watershed Association a couple of meetings ago from the Big Elk Watershed Association. So any of these comments that you'd like to share, not necessarily tonight in the meeting, feel free to send those along.

We will be recording the meeting. So this is your notice that everything going forward tonight will be recorded. We're going to get started on the agenda. First up, it's going to be we're going to have an introduction, meeting overview, and then we're going to talk about a quick review of what the park core standards are that were reviewed back around meeting 2. And we might seem to rush through the agenda pretty quickly because what we really want to get to is a group exercise because we want to get to these master plan recommendations.

There's going to be a few topics that we may not have discussed prior or maybe some that we did and maybe you didn't get a chance to share some of your thoughts about. And we hope to get to that because really our goal and agenda tonight is to get a little bit more detail and your thoughts around some specific items in the master plan. So when we leave tonight, the consultant team will have as much feedback as possible.

29 - Just real quick before we get started, I don't think this announcement was made yet about the

bathrooms. The pipes are frozen. So you can't use bathrooms over here tonight. You have to use bathrooms over at the office. It's a little chilly in here, the heat is trying but not enough to keep up so sorry about that. Keep your jackets on. Keep warm and we have warm tea back here. Sorry.

2 - No, no, thanks a lot. So the message there is the bathroom's not available outside here, it's over at the other building. So we're planning accordingly. Could take a little bit longer to get there. Who's up next?

1 - Apologies for the frozen pipes and 52° temperatures in this room right now, but it will take us a little bit longer with bathroom breaks to get through. We'll take as much time as we need tonight to cover the topics, particularly as (name, #2), mentioned the master plan recommendations in the breakout sessions.

But I was going to cover a little bit of a recap and I had to think what exactly I needed to recap with this group that's contributed a lot over the last five meetings, now that we're at meeting number six. And the first thing I thought is certainly worth mentioning is where we've come in the five meetings and the field trips and visits that we've conducted and what we've tried to do, our professional staff, the DCNR.

And I think one of the biggest achievements or important points to note is that it's a contact sensitive planning effort. Context sensitive to the ecological values and resources of Big Elk, the importance and significance of not only the landscape, but the cultural landscape that exists there.

The footprint ultimately of what's being proposed for improvements and enhancements is a direct reflection of the work of this task force. I think we've spent, from our Build a Park exercise to discussions leading up to that exercise, hearing from you and making changes.

We've heard 'we don't want a large footprint on the landscape, that we want to be able to meet our core standards and services for safe public access and outdoor recreation at the park, but not at the expense of the resources, the valuable resources and the values that that Big Elk presents'.

I was reflecting over the holidays on everything from the field visits to these meetings and absorbing and understanding how to be contact sensitive in what we plan and put in to the master plan of the park.

But I think again, that's a tribute to the work of this task force and it's greatly appreciated. I know Secretary Dunn expressed that on our call with her last week. And I just wanted to emphasize that it is greatly appreciated. And we learned together, I think, as we were moving through the planning process.

And we've come a long way from those preliminary concepts that the public reacted very negatively to in the fall of 2023, November, I think it was. And again, those were preliminary concepts. But where we've gone with the master planning work is a pretty dramatic departure from those preliminary concepts.

We tried to not only absorb it ourselves, but I think demonstrate and show all of you in working with the task force, the elements and the types of things down to the number of parking lots or parking

spaces to comfort facilities for safe public access, trailhead access to administrative needs and educational needs. They're the same types of facilities we're talking about as far as park development that make up White Clay.

The things that we're proposing within the master plan are modern 21st century design that meet accessibility needs and safe public access. So again, it's a reflection of this task force work that has taken us to be able to say that what is represented in the master plan for Big Elk Creek State Park will be comprised of the same basic elements that make up White Clay Creek Preserve. You know, at the end of the day, just a 21st century version to provide those four core park standards.

(name, #2) mentioned just a recap and I'll be brief because you've heard about core park standards and what we need to provide by mission and mandate in the Bureau of State Parks. But this is about providing safe public access. It's about providing facilities so that we're not impacting the natural resources of the park. And we're minimizing those impacts by the facilities that we're siting on them. Be it public restrooms, be it our service and stewardship needs in a maintenance facility. Modest in size, very modest in size as has been called out and specified by this task force.

So again, these are the same things that exist here, albeit not in the best of shape. One of the commitments that I made to the friends group when we announced Big Elk Creek was the needed investments that need to come to White Clay Creek. And we certainly knew we were lacking and behind on investing and providing the necessary services at this park.

While it's getting some investment, everything from our trail infrastructure to bridges to the small park office. And you know, as we were investing or talking about future investments in Big Elk, we couldn't leave the Preserve here behind. There were plenty of needs here, including in these buildings that we're in.

And the last thing I'll do is talk briefly about the tonight's exercise. (name, #2) talked about the master plan recommendations and to go through those master plan recommendations, we're going to break out into four groups similar to how we did the build a park exercise. And we'll go through a process within those four groups. And then we'll have a recap and a report out from all four of those groups at the end of it.

37 - Today I did some research, you know, I go way back to the county commission, and the open space program and what I wanted to find out, and I talked to our former open space director, and we examined the, as you know, each day we have to put in the declarations of intent and purpose.

And so the question I wanted to ask was this. And I knew the county was very careful about its partnerships and so forth. And we thank, we're very grateful to you for the funds and it helps. But in the declaration it's clear it says that if you have another use of for this part, OK. In other words, if you check the county gave it as a preserve right, preserved.

We can argue that 'preserve' to us meant the same as in our definitions as if it was a natural land. And the declaration says that if for any reason in this first phase, it was the county and you guys said in the second phase, (name, #1), it went through the conservation fund. But what we say is that if you change anything in the scope or the purpose of what the county had declared, and this

was done in 2022, that within 60 days you had to notify the county. The county, when I checked, has not been notified.

And I don't mind going through the exercise, but I wanted to do something your legal department really needs to find to figure out. And what it says here. And if you will please, "in order to monitor compliance with the open space purposes declarant and its successor and assigns an owner of all or a portion of the property".

And they specifically say "including without limitations DGS and DCNR that no less than 60 days prior to the undertaking of any activities that would reasonably be expected that you'll alter the property, you have to inform the county". Now, my concern is we go through this exercise or not that before we go completely forward, we really need to understand if the county's been informed and if the county has, because we're not dealing with some abstract question of language, we're dealing with a legal document that they, and I knew the county had put something in because we always wanted to protect open space program.

And the second thing is why am I bringing this up? What's the purpose? Because as you know, 1/3 of this county is saved its open space in perpetuity. And it's a remarkable thing. I mean, the citizens pay for it. We put \$8 million into this, into the Strawbridge track. And if what you want to do in the park is contrary to this, to the county, to the provisions, the rural provisions in the county open space plan.

And what we're concerned about is if one person or one agency, whether it be a government or whatever, or if it was a developer, it goes contrary to the provisions of the open space plan, then our whole plan of all these years is at stake.

But, the bottom line, that I understand from our open space, former open space people, is that you could not put an amenity or a road or a parking lot on the portion of this property that the county has the declarations on, even if we gave them to the conservation easements. The first are our own because there's only us and, and you guys, without permission from the county. And that permission has to be sought within 60 days of when you declared this to be a State Park, which would have been at the end of Governor Wolf's term.

So we might be spending our time on an issue that until you clearly define or we clearly define what belongs to you and what belongs to us. And maybe you have the match right here and where these amenities go, because I don't see how based on Article 5, which is called 'notice of certain activities', which is signed as a PPP Strawbridge declaration, you can proceed without that. So I just wanted to bring that up because I don't see how you can decide on amenities. You could discuss them, but decide on amenities until it was on the county portion of the land, you have to ask the commissioners and you're 2 years beyond the 60 days.

And also when you declare this, I don't believe it was found in the Pennsylvania Journal. Any changes, and that is a legal document. And in the 2019 Pennsylvania Journal, it says that is for a low impact.

Finally, let me just bring up and so that we can understand this, and again, you might have answers to this. But finally, I have been involved in this since the early 1980s. I'm getting old, man I'm in my 80s.

And the reason that the townships and citizens called me is because they thought someone was listening to them and knew I had the knowledge and background. And you're a good person. I know the good work you've done here. So that's why I can bring these things up that way.

And when this went into the legislature, they did pass the bilateral state Commission and that bilateral state Commission, they have a policy on development and the lowest impact to keep it as a natural environment. It's my understanding that DCNR has ended the bilateral Commission.

And so the other legal question that I hope our legislative delegation will look at is whether it was an act or a resolution one could debate. But the fact of the matter is it is from the legislature. There's a legislative intent and being the legislature, you know how touchy we are about legislative intents. And so the question is... I think we have to come to this because if it's the old management philosophy by the Bilateral Commission, that's what we thought we were putting the money into a preserve and that's what we assumed. And you know, I have the documentation, you see this in the paper. We have the letters from DCNR for over 15 years telling us that's going to be connected to the White Clay Creek Preserve.

So all I'm trying to say is we can do a breakout session, that's fine. And we came all the way here. But I don't think that we can proceed any further. Or you can ask us to do recommendations on the master plan until your legal staff can affirm that the county was notified 60 days after. And that you've defined this as a state park and your ability to put things on it.

We believe in the county that you can't put anything on it and it specifically says DCNR, we did this to protect our open space program because you're violating the open space program as well as local ordinances and we need that get that all resolved. That's all I'm saying. And it's not resolved in this moment in time. And I asked the committee, I asked Commissioner Muskwitz has the county received it. She was there in 2022. She's still there now. She said no. So that's where we go.

I just wanted to make that statement.

1 – Understanding you're coming into the last and final working task force meeting, but we've covered a lot of ground, including the protective covenants associated with the acquisition and we covered it in detail.

And our lawyers, trust me, you know Commonwealth government, we have a fleet of lawyers that have explored all that needed to be explored as it relates to our planning effort. What we're doing here is creating a plan. At the end of the day, we're not design engineering to initiate a project on X acre of Big Elk Creek. We're coming through a master planning process about the needs of improvements and enhancements at that park, both for safe public access and recreational use trail systems, some exist now, social trails, lots of them.

But all of those things, you know, we've gone through 5 very detailed long task force meetings to sort of bring us at this point without moving towards design engineering, without moving towards, 'we're going to execute a project on this location after it's been fully vetted and permitted and engineered in design'. This is a planning exercise.

But again, you're coming in at the very last one where we've been through a cumulative process.

37 - I'm simply saying that the process, and what you're suggesting in terms of amenities on pieces of land owned by the county, our legal people might have a very different interpretation as well as the interpretation of whether you have a right and a bilateral agreement passed by the legislature.

So go ahead with the planning process. I just wanted to make sure everyone here was aware that we were protecting the county's open space program. And we did it through the specific declarations that were put in, and in fact, we went one step further when they were given to the Conservation Fund, we added the language that if they gave it to you, because that's what they were going to do, not you, but DCNR, that DCNR and DGS still had to get back to us. And if you haven't got back to us, whatever the result of the planning process is can't be questioned. And because if the county says no to what you want to do and the declarations are there, then it's up to the lawyers to find it out. But I just want you to know there's several legal issues that I did not.

And as I say, my final comment, I just want to say is, you know, I've worked on this since, since the early ages. And the reason I'm so speaking out and joining with the citizens in this sense is this is a mission. And not only is this county astounding to say 1/3 of its land has open space thus far. And the land ethic is at the very soul of who we are as Chester County, this has to be respected and it has to be discussed.

And while we can talk about a master planning process, in the end, the resistance is not because of the dislike of DCNR. It's just simply because of what the land means to us and the efforts we put into protecting it. And if we have \$8 million in the pot here, then we have a right to protect that \$8 million is what I'm saying. And so proceed, I just wanted to say that to everyone.

1 - You have the history, certainly. And you've lived it. And (name, #2) was saying just before the meeting started that this past summer, it's the forty year anniversary for White Clay Creek. And you know this too, that under our stewardship, DCNR, it was DER for part of that time and then DCNR starting in 1995, didn't always bring forth the resources and the attention that White Clay deserved.

And I don't know if you caught my comments at the beginning, but part of the resources that were received for Big Elk were also promised resources for White Clay because we couldn't lift one up without lifting the other.

37 - Well, that's why we want to just make sure we're all on the same wavelength as we combine the two. And that's not going to be an easy task. And we're all committed to the same thing, the land. And the question is camping, is other buildings. One of the suggestions I might make to you as you go forward in the planning process, you know, I'm on board of Lincoln University, and \$500,000

was given to Lincoln to create a version of the Harriet Tubman Trail that goes through Maryland. And the Maryland portion is, as you know, it's part of the natural resource area.

And so Lincoln just got another grant to restore one of its old buildings and to create a visitor center of sorts there. And they have created the new center of the study of the Underground Railroad. But the question is, let's see what partnerships might be out there as you do this.

It might be that the best place for your visitor center is at Lincoln. They already have state money so we can put it together. The second thing you might want to look at is the county itself. And I'm not sure whether maybe DCNR is very familiar with this, but there is the concept in state government in what we call agility.

So, for example, in Westchester, if it's easier for a municipal snow plow to plow the streets than PennDOT, the state gives them the money and they plow. So are there some opportunities for agility here with what the county has. The county has seven parks.

And finally, I want you to keep in mind in your planning, we just opened a new preserve, the Oxford Area Foundation of 600 acres. So how does that fit in? All I'm saying is we are partners and if we can figure out how to put all this together, we might be able to end up with both what you want and what we want. And my plea is that you figure out how we can do this in partnership with the county and how we could do this in partnership with the private sector.

And the only reason I asked you about the London Honeybrook track is because I couldn't figure out why you were taking down a place for RV's and you want to put them here. There may be very good reasons, but we have to do this planning process in the larger thing if we can, John.

And again, thank you for letting me talk and I have deep respect for you and the work that you've done. I want to tell you you're one of the really good state employees. And I know you get caught in the middle because you have to do the check on the box. So we understand that. Everyone does that.

1 - Thank you. (Name, #16) You had a question?

16 – It's funny because I feel like this whole time that we have been, I don't want to say herded, but I'm going to say that for lack of a better term, to look at things, to go through exercises to identify what we want, what we don't want. Safe public access being one of those of which I consider safe public access a parking lot that I'm not going to get killed if I'm coming out of my car, you know, somebody else envisions a building there.

So, I still think that there's a lot of diversity in our thoughts as to what should or should not be there. I'd like to think there's a majority that think less is more on that property or not. But this whole exercise, even this exercise tonight, it's like, we know what we want. We know how we can kind of steer people to get there and we will end up with what we wanted all along.

And I know you're saying, well, you know, what we were envisioning was much different than what we're actually looking at right now. But in all reality, I feel like we're being pushed into these exercises where I don't even agree with the first exercise we did 5 meetings ago.

And so what (name, #37), you know, talked about a little bit. I understand those are legal questions we have to look at. But at the same time, I'm frustrated with this exercise that we're going to do tonight because I don't want the public access if that means a building. And the only people that were talking about buildings were parks and (name, #19).

So, you know, it's like, at what point do we put things out the window and not worry about that anymore. And so anyway, this will be an interesting exercise. I feel like we're going to end up where you wanted us to end up. You know, I worked at state government for since 2005 and every time I went to a Department of Transportation meeting and they were looking at all these different road projects, the one they wanted was always in green. And I feel that this is the same kind of thing.

And the one you guys want will be it. It doesn't matter if it's A or B because A, we can manipulate to B and B, we can manipulate to A. So ultimately, it's going to be this. So I find this somewhat futile and frustrating.

1 - Well, I'll just respond to that. And I knew when we were going through earlier exercises, some were going to be in disagreement about, you know, an Education Center.

We all knew though, from the very beginning of this work that we were not debating overnight occupancy in any shape or form, be it cabins or a campground or even organized group tenting for church groups and Boy Scout troops. That was off the table.

I said this earlier in the meeting, but where we were with preliminary concepts in November 2023 and what was presented, is the possibilities of, of what could go here, including that campground. We've done a pretty dramatic departure from that. And I think the Secretary on the call noted that footprints have been minimized significantly. And that was us listening to all of you and the community at the onset of our task force work.

14 – (name, #1), that's the question that comes up. I'm not clear what you're saying, because on one hand, I think you just said that when we started out, we started talking about some concepts as part of your planning process and the camping was off the table. And I think that's the big hang on. That's the elephant in the room. So I mean, is it or isn't it? Because you just said that it was off the table. But by the same token, you or Cindy said last week, you'll never take it off the table. So I mean, is it or isn't it?

1 - I said I can't. It would be disingenuous of me to state that. At some point, in the next generation, if there was public demand and community support to place organized group tenting into the mix, we would consider it. And I think what the secretary stated on the conference call when (name, #3) asked that question is by statute, as we managed White Clay Creek Preserve for the last 40 plus years now by policy and by management directive.

But there isn't anything legally that would stop if there were a proposal 15 years from now and a demand locally to set up a small organized group tenting to allow for that. So I think for me to say that they'll never be camping here like that, I can't do that legally.

14 - I think that's exactly the rub, but because when you describe it as small organized group tenting, you know, I kind of envisioned this kind of Boy Scout experience...

1 – Like they have down at Fairhill.

14 - Yeah, exactly. You have a space that's designated or supposed to temporarily throw out some tents. Which is one thing. I don't think there's resistance to that.

1 – But there is resistance to that. We heard that from (name, #9).

14 - But even if we isolated it to that question, that would be one thing. But it's not clear to me that something different is off the table, something different that entails, you know, more hardware, sort of building, like what you see at French Creek. You know, like there's paved spaces...

1 – Yes, like a typical campground that you see at many state parks across the system.

14 – But big RVs with no shoulders going down Stricklersville Rd and things like that. Those are two very different things in my mind.

And so, even if we were able to say when we talked about camping, we're talking about this kind of organized group tenting versus, you know, big RV park, that in and of itself would be a definition that would be helpful. I think for us in terms of feedback that we think would be meaningful.

Because as you said, a lot of things that you guys have asked us to participate in in terms of planning is context sensitive. From my perspective, I'm pleased that you're looking and trying to make sure that trails don't tread over, you know, sensitive sites and things like that. But to put an RV park, that changes the whole flavor. It's a completely different conversation. And that's why that looms over this whole discussion. It's such a big deal that everything else seems like minutia in comparison with that, to me anyway. And so if you could even just narrow that down, it would be somewhat helpful.

But that's why I get confused when you say well we took camping off the table, then when I'm listening to the conversation last week with the Secretary, it's like she was adamant that she wasn't going to take that off because she wasn't going to affect her successor because she said she's in the in the forever business, which is not true. You guys are in the four-year business. You're in the four-year business. That's what you're in. I've been in the forever business. I've written conservation easements that are in perpetuity. Switching administrations changes everything, right.

So you're not in the forever business, but what you do to the extent that you have, as has been mentioned, can have a long term impact on sensitive species and so forth, but you can't affect things forever. But that's not really what we're talking about. You're talking about is a plan that will last for some limited period of time and it can change with the winds, with the political winds, just like everything else.

1 - I'll just respond to you on the overnight option because it has been recently contentious and all the letters that have come into Governor Shapiro's office as well as the DCNR secretary's office. There's been this very strong, clear message regarding no campgrounds, and you all have been through again, 5 task force meetings and we spoke intentionally. I didn't go into any detail about the spectrum of overnight opportunities with the Pennsylvania State Parks because it is vast.

It's everything from that small remote backpacking experience to an organized group tenting area for Boy Scouts, very low impact in a small space in the park to a large, 400-site campground with full-service hookups. And then there's the roofed overnight as well. We have cabin colonies and we have an inns. We have the Bald Eagle Nature Inn and I think that Lawrence mentioned that at one point and what I can definitely say is within this master plan, there will not be any type of overnight, even if it was for a Boy Scout troop to set up an organized group tenting area for a one night stay, there will be no overnight options in this master plan.

And you all have this insider's view of this as well on the practical side of things, just as we finished a master plan for Susquehanna Riverlands, we have, we have only finite resources to advance the improvements that are specifically called out within our master plans. And there's only two new master plans for the three new state parks. We have a facilities development plan for Vosburg now.

And we have to advance them beyond the sort of theoretical in this blueprint for the park and move on to design engineering and that is years in the making. And we're just starting that process for Susquehanna Riverlands.

37 - That's good to hear. But you have a very difficult task here because the way the Secretary answered that... We as a county would answer it differently because when we say something is a 'preserve', we mean it can never be changed. The whole idea is to put it as a gift to the next generation to give something in its wild state. So here you have land that the county has paid for and the county says, well, this is a preserve. We would give such a different answer, our commissioners, than the Secretary did because derived by statute, you could change things in a State Park. And so what you're really dealing with is something very different to Susquehanna Riverlands or many other parks, is that this was paid for by several different sources.

1 - I know the law (name, #37)

37 - And you know that this was all done before 2020, when the last declaration was put in. So we can't say in 2022 that, hey, we're creating another State Park. I understand Governor Wolf wanted to have three parks, but the truth of the matter is this was already a park. And the other problem that I think you're faced with, and we have to understand as well, is this whole movement of base, you know, coming from Josh, the Shapiro Administration, of creating mass sums of money from tourists.

So, you know, outdoor recreation, you have a new director, a new department, you have a partnership with DCED. The only problem is, the people who need the money and who need the people to come isn't here. The tourism has to go to the Wilds, it has to go to Seven springs, it has to go to those areas that are more rural. So in the end, I have no objections to these processes, but this is going to be a long process because each part of the state is so different. And that's why down

here you have to find your partners and up there that are not partners. And it's a whole different process. And I'm glad you understand and appreciate it.

1 - I do. And I think again that there's a tremendous amount of diversity and expertise in this Task Force. And all political jurisdictions are represented from all three townships that touch the park to the county, and our state lawmakers are represented with their public designees. And I think that's the strength of this task force.

And again, what we've come to, and we're going to get to this exercise here momentarily, is something that is, I don't want to say it again and again, but I think it's context sensitive and it's respectful to the input that this task force has brought forward over the last five meetings and field visits.

37 - Is there a pressure, final question I promise, is there a pressure from outdoor recreation now? Is that the reason we're seeing this notion of camping and so forth. I mean sincerely and honestly, is this a new pressure that you guys face?

1 - Camping in the southeast is still few and far between and (name, #14) mentioned French Creek. That's the only option in the entire portfolio of State Park offerings in the southeast at French Creek. And again, I don't want to get into a campground discussion because we're not putting that in the master plan.

And I guess, back to your point, (name, #14), we're putting a master plan forward that has an extremely light footprint on the park that is context sensitive and without overnight.

And the next steps in that, and we'll talk about next steps later on in the evening, would be for us to move forward with design engineering to create that parking lot that's safe to get in and out of, a vault toilet that isn't requiring a massive sewage and wastewater system to service the public, things like that.

And I truly believe this, when we look at what we're going to look at tonight, we haven't designed or come up with a master plan that's meant for high volume recreation and heavy tourism. I think it's very similar in many ways to White Clay Creek and the amenities that exist here.

16 - Are you still going to put in a park office and an Education Center?

1 - Yes

16 - See that to me is not what we wanted or at least a majority.

1 - And I would say even to the point where it is a reduction in footprint both in the parking associated with it and the square footage, aiming on the smaller side versus the larger side. Because some of you that have traveled around other state parks, they're large education centers, they're providing tremendous service. We have the largest complement of environmental education specialists in the Commonwealth. It's part and parcel of our mission, in our DNA.

16 – I get that, (name, #1) but at the same time, that's going against what the Township zoning even allows for. And this is where it's just so frustrating that you say the same things over and over and over and over and it just doesn't matter. So this exercise is frustrating because the conservation values of the property are being trumped by the recreational requirements.

They are in that you're still requiring an office, an Education Center, when that was not what a majority and you know, other people wanted to see or not see.

1 - I don't think the majority in here expressed that. I think you and maybe a few others said no buildings.

16 - You know what would be great is if we had to raise our hands and really see who exactly wants this and who doesn't.

1 - So we went through at the very beginning the core standards of what we need, what is provided for. And the facilities that exist in White Clay are the similar type facilities that we need to adequately manage and steward the property at Big Elk. And that was where we spent a good portion of our time, laying that foundational work out there. What needs to be there now, the size and the scope and the footprint, I mean, all of that certainly has come down in scale and size and the removal of the overnight accommodations.

37 - The only thing that I think we can start to think about, and that's why I mentioned the Lincoln aspect, is there a way to really create an Education Center that's broader that talks about the Underground Railroad, that we had put in a proposal, in fact, to do exactly that. In fact there were 260 proposals for 2026 and the Senate went all over the state to get these proposals. In the end, the House and the Senate, and they're unfortunate wisdom said they're not giving them the millions for it. So what I'm saying is that there are possibilities here for us to create something that is more than what we might see at the park, a real type of Education Center, and do it in conjunction with what we're trying to do in 2026. And that is to finally recognize what freedom means and what the aspirational values of this nation are.

So I would hope in the groups that you have that you would at least allow people to. One option is Education Center is there and everyone knows the value of the Education Center. Another option is there a type of Education Center for both of these areas that could be something bigger, something special, something unique and fit into the struggles we're trying to address in this nation, trying to figure out what equity means and how it can include everyone. So I would hope you would allow that at least to be mentioned as we move forward into discussion.

1 - I just want to touch briefly on the concerns expressed, and they're duly noted, regarding our core requirements and an administrative facility and an Education Center is a core requirement for us. And it has been from the beginning for Big Elk. But to your point about the importance of the cultural landscape and partnerships, we will certainly be moving forward. And in 2025, we're going to advance a cultural heritage plan that's meant to dive deeply into the untold stories and the

significance of the landscape and the partnerships that that we need to have with Lincoln University and others to tell that story.

18 – You mentioned the core requirements. Where again does that come from exactly?

1 - It's our State Park Management Plans and what state parks provide within Act 18. We're given the authority to manage park lands. That's our statutory authority, our enabling legislation, and from that how we manage and what services we provide are born from the individual park plans. And as you guys have heard from me, not every park is designed the same. It can't be. It's predicated on the resources that exist, what we're trying to conserve and protect. And at the same time, again, what we need to provide the sort of minimum for public access and recreation.

And what that public access and recreation is again, park centric and determined by our park plans, by DCNR, not by the Legislature. The act provides the authority, but the broad brush strokes for what parks are for, which is outdoor recreation, which is environmental education

18 – But does that act actually define requiring physical buildings to accomplish a particular goal?

1 - It's always been the rub. It's like, how do you do the work or provide the service without the physical plant and the infrastructure? We're in a very imperfect meeting space here, but this is physical infrastructure that we're required to maintain. Historic, which makes it even more challenging and difficult.

We're looking at footprints at Big Elk, and you guys were part of is, that aren't, to avoid your creep, (name, #16), that aren't, 400 meters down a newly created blacktop road to a parking lot that's right on the edge of sensitive ecological values in the park. But are instead in previously disturbed areas, in some cases in the one location we're going to look at tonight, an area where there was a farmhouse just 12 years ago, and a barn, an active farm and agricultural fields.

So those are the things that I think we've listened to, down to the number of parking lots we need for adequate and safe trail access, which is going to be the hallmark of this park, just like White Clay is about trails and access to the resource.

16 - I want to ask this one question and I know I shouldn't though, I should just be quiet. So I'm just letting you know I'm going to be quiet because I know (name, #9) specifically emailed me and said he has recommendations for the plan tonight. So I want to be able to get to that element of our work tonight.

1 - Go ahead.

16 - No, I've said I'm going to be quiet.

1 – OK. So we need to take a break and then we'll start the work.

23 - I think we need to talk about the work and then take a break on our way over. Some of us are going to go over to the office.

37 - Is it warmer over there?

23 – Maybe

1 – It is. There's a 20° temperature difference between that whole building there and this old building.

23 – So I think to try and regain the time, because we need to get into some of those granular details that you're asking about, because it's always been on the roofed structures, that's what we've been arguing and talking about for the last five meetings. We need to get into the details about other things we haven't talked about yet, resource considerations, accessibility, recreation, environmental education, like specifics that some yeas and nays. So instead of me going over the core standards again, we can go over them in our groups. (name, #30), if you want to just talk about what the goal is?

30 - OK, so we're going to break into four groups, I think because of the numbers. So no more than five people. You can pick your 4 folks that you want to work with. We're going to have two groups in here like we did a couple weeks ago when we had the big maps. The other two will be over at the park office.

23 – (name, #30), (name, #33), (name, #31) and I will each facilitate a group. We're going to be talking about some of those core standard items and resource management, accessibility and recreation, environmental education areas. (name, #33) has packets of the maps that were shared at a prior meeting. So we know where flood plains are, wetlands, other ecological sensitive areas. The whole series of maps is going to be provided to you again.

We're not looking for where should we put a building. Like we're going to focus on, I believe (name, #12) suggested, you know, a bunch of small parking lots across the perimeter. So one question I'm going to ask is, and this was brought up in one of the site visits, are we going to allow for horse trailers or school bus parking? Don't want an answer now, but those are some of the topics we're going to ask because we've been so focused on the roofed structures. We haven't gotten into some of those other details which could have more or less of an impact than the roof structure itself.

And I think that's all important for us to get to the bottom of some of those things so we can make those recommendations within the master plan. So we're going to take a 10-minute break after you guys pick four groups. So do that and I need a leader and I'll tell you which way you're going. Take 10 minutes and then you'll meet with your group. We're going to work for 45 minutes.

Then we're going to take another quick break and then we're going to reconvene here and go over everything as a group. Yes, (name, #12)?

12 – Let's number off.

(general audience agreement)

23 - All right, so (name, #21) you start.

(task force counts off 1-4 in groups)

23 - Good job everyone. Take 10-minutes, then split into your groups and head to your meeting spots.

(1-hour transcript break, during which there was a 10-minute break, then 50-minutes of group exercise)

30 – In the hopes of wrapping up on time, let's do our reporting back and then I think there's some next steps to discuss. So maybe we should give each group 8 minutes or so to report back and then we'll talk about next steps. (name, #8), are you are you prepared to talk for Group 1?

8 - So in no particular order on the resource management stuff, we generally were in favor of pretty much all that. Parking areas, you know, we said yeah, to the extent that, porous and permeable may be tricky, but some version of porous if possible. And parking areas for any buildings, consider solar and particularly if you're able to do off-grid with battery and that was able to save running power lines so that it could be more self-contained. For trail use, we agreed yes on all the ones that were horses and hiking and cycling, just no motorized vehicles. Horses off trail, I think it'd be hard to stop anyway.

Accessibility, at least one parking lot should be ADA. On horse trailers we thought for parking, no, I think it was discussed already that Fairhill kind of wanted to protect that anyway, and that people can park horse trailers at Fairhill just 2-3 miles down the road. That seems like it's close enough and they can just access the trails on the trails.

For buses, we thought it'd be a good idea to have maybe one of the lots big enough for a bus. They don't probably don't all have to be big enough for that, but seems like a reasonable thing to have at least one of them that was big enough for that.

In terms of ADA trails, we thought not a ton of it, but we weren't against some limited trails being ADA accessible. I don't know if the one mile is the right length, but something shortish like that, with most trails being more rugged and challenging.

Obviously the trails already connect, but they should consider the connection to Maryland and maybe even coordinating with Fairhill so that there's something like their orange trail and we have our own orange trail that connects or something so that you get these longer loops you can already piece together by yourself, but would make it more, you know, it'd be a nice thing for somebody to know that there was an 8 mile loop they could take.

On the building, an office slash any kind of education in it, I'd say we weren't totally aligned. The feeling was either none at all or something small on the previously disturbed land such as is near that big inholding that we've talked about.

A maintenance shed, kind of small barn, seems to make sense, particularly on that previously disturbed land that was, you know, a farm not that long ago.

On hunting, we thought the mix of weaponry seemed appropriate, but to put some thought into where and what zones would be allowed and some more structure. My understanding is that Fair Hill and White Clay, Delaware and White Clay, Pennsylvania all manage it different ways, but it seems fairly unmanaged now, or at least as historically. And so probably a little more organization is probably going to be helpful there. Make sure that it's labeled clearly for hikers so they know what to avoid. And consider the fact that the rules are going to be different when you cross into Maryland or Maryland people cross into PA. And how are we going to kind of let people know that you're in Maryland, you don't think there's hunting this weekend, but you crossed over and now you actually are in a hunting area.

Stargazing – we thought, probably can't be all the time because it's going to close at dusk, but having some Ranger-led events take advantage of it. They're not really dark skies, but they're darker than most of our developments.

Nesting boxes seem like a good idea, particularly called out kestrel boxes. People are trying to put up a lot of them.

For picnic tables, we see no issue in putting some of them near other infrastructure, wherever parking lots wind up being.

For fishing, we noted that stocking happens currently upstream and downstream. It's currently not super popular because you're really only getting the trout that happened to, you know, find their way up or downstream from whatever stocking points. Didn't see a need for a pier. You know, it's not a very big creek.

We thought it'd be good to have some, limited but public access to the Martin property so that people aren't trying to find, non-legal ways in. That just means to build a little footbridge essentially. And we thought there should be no camping.

30 - Can I ask one question? That was a lot of notes from (name, #8) in Group 1. And we don't want to rehash every one of them. But is there anything anybody sort of has a strong feeling about or strong negative reaction to or kind of wants to take on.

10 – As Group 4, we can almost say ditto. Great job.

25 – Can I just ask one thing? I think I missed it – horses off trails, was that a yes or a no?

8 – I think we talked about it and it seems like it's going to be a hard thing to stop. The question would be on sensitive areas, how do you keep them out of sensitive areas?

13 - Signage, fencing?

8 – Yeah

14 - But we talked a little bit about the fox hunting, right? And there should be some kind of corralling, so we speak, you know, the fox hunting maybe.

8 - It's just with the history, I think we need to respect the equestrian history. But how do you do that in the least damaging way?

25 - Thank you.

30 - All right, so then I guess we're going to Group 3.

12 – That's me. And (name, #15), (name, #9), and (name, #6). Oh and expertly facilitated by (name, #23).

So we're close in line with the concepts that you guys had, (name, #8). On trails, there was a discussion about the two Township trails, Mount Olivet and Spring Lawn, that at the moment townships don't want to be connected with the rest of the system. I don't think I actually understood that until we had more discussion. So that was a component of that. We, we felt it was a mix of multi use and single use.

The observation was if you're hiking, that you're not going to get run over by a horse or by mountain bikes, especially when I've got my little grandson with me. That's just not a good mix. And vice versa. So if it's single track, it would be good if it was split out. But otherwise, multiuse. And I know we talked about if you go to Spring Lawn, and head south of Stricklersville Rd, there's a real obvious way to tie in. And a long time ago we actually walked that with the resource management folks. It was (name, #31), and they came up with a general concept, but that effort kind of faded away. But there's some real obvious ways to get some tie ins with multiple use trails. It makes sense.

There's already some trails that are mostly used for bikes, but actually built by some mountain bikers and then ones that were fundamentally hikers. Then there's a lot of places where either small bridges or maybe some elevated pathways through sensitive areas that would make a big difference for a lot of that.

On the ADA discussion, we pretty much mirrored where you guys landed on that, so I won't reiterate it, but just that there's some places to do that on. (Name, #15) shared that some member of the community wanted us to know that he's in a wheelchair, he gets around everywhere fine, if I'm quoting that correctly.

So he felt that a lot of those trails were there now are already accessible. As far as ADA on things like the stream and fishing. We questioned 'does that make sense'? And the answer is probably not because it's just too shallow, there's UV holes, but if you build something there, first high water will blow it out. It just doesn't seem to make a lot of sense.

Talking about parking, we agree with no horse trailers, it doesn't make sense. If we offered horse trailer parking, everyone would come up here because it's free and it would totally impact us which just doesn't make sense. Fox hunting came up, where if you had a scouting group want to go out and do something and was going to have large numbers, to have some kind of overflow area just like we did after the 4th anniversary, parking in a field kind of thing, and by permit or the

authorization or something but right, supervised. Related to that was the idea of the educational piece and one of the things came out of our discussion...

And we talked about picnicking. And my personal bias is that we not rely on picnic tables, but if we had a pavilion that had picnic tables in it. And maybe the pavilion has a kiosk in there or displays or something, but it's all educational focused, kind of like what we do with this at times, except it would be an outside pavilion.

So yes, could somebody go and have a picnic there? Of course, but you're not talking grills, you're not talking the little CCC, you know, chimney, fireplace and talking none of that. Just, you know, occasional table focused on the education.

15 - So it's an outdoor educational space instead of an actual educational building.

12 - That was just what we were kicking around. So that's what we did. And as far as other amenities, a question of like playgrounds and some paved trails. Every Township here just spent a lot of money. I happen to be on the London Britain Parks Community Commission, where I think we just got \$300K or \$350K recently through accounting programs and federal programs. So we're going to upgrade playground, all sorts of things. So we have plenty of soccer fields, plenty of baseball fields, plenty of playground equipment, plenty of paved paths.

And literally London Britain is between White Clay and Big Elk and Franklin's just around the corner, and there's lots of others. On the other end of White Clay, of course, is new gardens, massive facilities. So we as a community have plenty of outlets for that. What we don't have is these more natural areas, the trails and the more.. wilderness isn't the word I'm looking for here, but outdoor nature experience and all that.

As far as watercraft, apparently, we have all tried to canoe and kayak and it was not successful. So no, it doesn't make sense to add that. I already touched an ADA.

So for hunting, I think we're saying yes with a little common sense on it. I think maybe things got a little out of hand at times. So I heard some stories I think that'll be self-correcting over time. But whatever the normal, you know, common sense constraints are should be used. More safety. It was really safety driven. Yes, we want to hunt deer, but let's be safe.

We pretty much covered the outdoor education thing, which we landed on of the pavilion concept. Of course, that probably makes it mostly seasonal, probably three seasons. We understand that. But when you get to the park, you still have room that you can pull a school bus in.

37 - You said something that's important for us to consider. Is that in the county open space plan? As you know, almost every Township has a park and all of a sudden every Township has a baseball field and has swings and has all that. So there's no need. And you're also close together. There's no need.

And I think you're absolutely right to duplicate that in the same way that we have a county trail system and up in the more central part. And so, but what I'm trying to say is we need a clear understanding of the infrastructure that's been created by the county so we're not duplicating anything. And this is special because the county doesn't have this vast of a wild area. We have preserves, but maybe there's 600 acres like the new one in West Nottingham. And I'm glad to hear that we're not going to have overnight camping, but again, what does the county have?

The county has a huge lake and we have the camping there so we don't have to duplicate it. And you also have Wolf's Hollow now, which isn't that far up the road. I don't know if any of you going there.

But this is a beautiful piece along the Susquehanna River and perhaps that's where we might want to have more of the camping and it already has the infrastructure.

12 - So last wrap up with the parking thing, I feel very strongly that part of the secret sauce of White Clay is that we have small parking lots spread all over the place and that we really, really want that to be our starting point. To me that's like the highest order decision. Once you make that, then a lot of our things fall in the line because that distributes the use, limits the major impact in any one spot and it, pardon the pun, but preserves that preserve feel.

30 - Thank you. That was great. Any major concerns or objections or challenges to Group 3?

14 - Only that I think our group would fall in line with the notion that we might not need the paved or cinder path or something. Given what these guys just said about that ADA need being met with the local parks instead. I don't know if we didn't want to retract that idea that we had.

1 - Just one comment for everyone's knowledge. We have ADA paths and they need to be meet an ADA trail spec for them to be truly accessible by the law. But we have them and they meet spec and their requirements for ADA without them being paved. We can use ashtone #10 you know, crushed limestone dust, which has a certain specification that once it's rolled in place provides that accessibility.

16 - So you have to provide that accessibility? Like what you were saying is maybe we don't have to provide that at all. Are you saying that? Saying no no, state parks, we will try?

1 - I'm saying this just practice for building a trail system that there's some accessibility. And that was a long standing goal. At Jennings Environmental Education Center, this just popped into my head, that there'd be one small, short environmental education trail in the entirety of the trail system that provides that accessibility so that we can be inclusive to all. Because not everybody, I mean the gentleman you may be referencing...

15 - The gentleman I'm referencing did come to me and say that he doesn't have, you know, one of those big wheelchairs for off roading. It's a standard wheelchair. But the way that a lot of those trails are cut, a lot of them are hard pack. And now there's now dirt and grass over the top of them. But at one point they were like, used for carriages through the fields. And that's what he uses. And he says it's a clear delineated path.

But because of how it's been packed over time, he has no problem with his wheelchair getting through those grassy areas because they are already maintained as a trail. So I think the whole point was he just doesn't want to see a bunch of people.

23 - We talked in our group that, you know, one mile, maybe that's not necessary, maybe it's a quarter mile segment and may only be one or 2/10 of a mile adjacent to the Education Center there. But what that means, we should offer that. That's the right thing to do. It's not just an ADA thing, but think about kids in strollers and whatnot, but what that means to various different people. And it doesn't have to be this huge infrastructure. We're not saying that.

1 - I just want to say like 10 feet, 8 feet crushed limestone dust over top of an existing cartway to provide that new tread, right. Can get us to ADA accessibility.

30 - So thank you, Group 3. We should go to Group 4.

36 - Looking at our notes, it's largely a Ditto. I mean, so far everything we're hearing generally we agreed with. References to previous trails and parking. We like the idea of small parking lots. We want to try and deter the influx of out of state horse trailers coming in. We like the idea of possibly expanding some of the historic buildings already here. Which would give more deference to the historic nature of the area.

We liked the idea of agility. And I know the townships around here, they contract out all their work. But if you have to hire people, try to hire local businesses or local employees that work here if possible. That helps the townships.

And we also would like you guys to keep in mind that when you're looking at infrastructure and where you place it between the two townships, Elk and Franklin, that Elk is a Township with a much smaller budget. And the group agreed in general, even though we're from both sides, but when you put buildings on one side, that gets weighed into the assessed value of the entire Township, which directly translates to the bills that we get for coverage and protection of that requirement.

So right, they would value your property even though you're tax exempt and then they pass that right to the residents. So for us, those costs for next year, close to 1/4 of our entire budget for Franklin, it's a smaller percentage, but they've got a much bigger budget.

15 - Not that much smaller.

36 - No, but the impact would be much smaller for your Township to have these buildings, you know what I'm saying?

15 - Yeah.

36 - So same with the EMS. You've got a consideration there. That's a third of the property value. And that's not a cost that goes to DCNR. It's just a direct cost to residents.

10 - And going pavilions instead of visitor centers, surely that wouldn't impact either side. You're minimizing, correct. You're minimizing the effect on the Township.

36 – Yes, but when it comes to Township residents too, some of these, the two plans that are out there, one does loop a lot closer to some of the Amish farms and some of the other residential spots. And I think that might not be a great idea long term either.

And I think that could be an issue for safety of your patrons and also problematic for the townships as far as how the residents feel impacted by it.

And you had commented about applying for exceptional stream status. Did you want to talk about exceptional stream status?

37 - Yeah. One of the things that I talked to Kevin about today is to see as you put your infrastructure in and even the other planning, to see how this would fit into assisting in the application, which is the DEP for exceptional stream status. The townships would be involved in this.

We did this on the French Creek, the Pickering Creek and so the question of what you do and where you put trails and so forth. Look at the application, understand it and then see, or the consultants, and then see how this might impact and help get that exceptional stream status. And once you get it on this part of the Big Elk Creek, then that pressures Maryland a little as you go further downstream.

It's just a possibility I think. And on the agility aspect of it, all we're trying to say is see what we have here, see if there's a way to make it less expensive by sharing some things like say in snow removal or in some types of maintenance. The Township would get some money from DCNR, but in turn, DCNR might need one less plow truck to take care of it or one less person to plow the roads.

We just started with PennDOT. It started about two decades ago. And we're talking about reinventing government and it's not privatization, but it's between levels of government where everyone comes out in the winter. So saying let's just think of infrastructure that might go through.

36 - And then one last thing is that the townships would like to be included.

14 – (name, #25) for your minutes when they're talking about exception streams, in DEP terms it's exceptional value, it's called key.

25 - Thank you.

36 – OK. We're hoping that we're included more along the lines of trailhead locations. And so we can hopefully minimize how close they are to residential areas and provide input down the road.

I haven't been to every meeting, but from what (name, #10) said, he thought that we hadn't really covered that as much as he would have liked. And from what I understand, I agree. That's it.

10 - Well, in that comment, I enjoyed tonight's activity. I wish we did a lot more of this, right? And what I've heard everybody say so far tonight has been kind of what excited me in this process. I'm sorry we spent so much time fighting about visitor centers and camping, but I still want that gone. (laughter)

30 - I think this was said before, but if there are comments that didn't come out tonight or if you

have more detailed comments, trailhead locations relative to residential properties, that sort of thing, feel free to send them by e-mail because we can factor all that in.

10 - When you guys are talking about expanding storage structures, you're talking about expanding the ones over here or what are you talking about?

30 - Yeah, I was wondering too, actually what structures we're talking about.

37 - We're talking about White Clay and the reason it came up is because, as I said, we were trying to do a great deal to maintain the structures so they don't all fall down. And we thought if you added something like this that maybe restored it or expanded it a little in size of the historic parameters, then what you're doing is you're doing two things at the same time. You're preserving a very historic village here while gaining here. So it was how do you do that, and then there's less resistance. This village exists and everyone wants it to be saved. Parts of it have fallen down. The state is probably giving some money.

I believe (name, #2) told me you have some money now for stabilization to make sure it didn't fall that flat on its face. So you're doing two things at once. And that's what agility means as well. It's trying to figure out how you create partnerships. Some might be with private business, but it's with townships too. So everyone comes out a winner. And if people think they're winners, you're going to get much more support for this, for what you want to do and achieve. I want you to win on the exceptional stream. You know what I'm saying? I feel strongly about it. But how do we do both?

And (name, #2), we talked about the buildings here. You know, I'm coming back here four or five years ago where we really tried to save things and you were one of the heroes in that. And how do we do it How do we put it together? It's a simple matter of yes. And then no one gets insulted because everyone becomes part of it. You know, the whole idea of politics or even this task force is how do you take individual needs and bring them into a higher order. So everyone has something. No one walks away completely happy, but everyone somewhat happy. And that's all I'm saying.

30- Maybe we should go to the next group. Group 2.

11 - So we started with accessibility. I think like everyone, we felt that the smaller considered parking locations on Stricklersville was best. We thought maybe it'd be worth exploring that area in the northern boundary. Which meets, I think, 841. Because a lot of the parking points we've been talking about are along Stricklersville and just as an alternate function thought that could be worth a look.

16 - It may be inappropriate. We're just saying everything else is along Strickersville.

30 - You have to cross the street and that's the downside, right? If you park up there.

16 - That's fine, if it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

30 - I'm just, I don't know. We'd have to look. That could be the negative.

11 - And then in terms of trails, we agreed with having the ADA trail perhaps centered around whatever kind of buildings go in and that would be a half mile or a mile, whatever was decided for that. And yeah, specifically around the building. So you're not putting it in nowhere, you already know that.

We felt benches, bird boxes, all of those kind of like minimal impact things seemed very positive. We felt good about that. We didn't feel that the bird blind or fishing pier were really necessary for a lot of the reasons that were already said. We felt that the current hunting setup was fine and there wasn't necessarily a need for expanding it, but we weren't opposed to getting rid of it.

So we kind of jumped around a little bit, which is why some of these might overlap some. Then recreation and environmental education. We made a couple of points about programming So thinking about programming that considers density in relation to the resources, so not scheduling like a migration walk in the middle of summer or something, just like pulling out the animals during the mating season when is just wrong. So thinking about that in terms of the programming side of things. To (name, #37)'s point as well on partnerships, we thought maybe offering or exploring local partnerships for educational programs like with Stroud could be a good option that would also minimize like fuel costs and thinly spread staff already.

And then wow, we really went everywhere. OK, then going back to trails, permeable and semi permeable pavements only. Oh, parking. We did have some support in our group for maybe having horse trailer parking, although of course we didn't all agree. Also note that the trails can be accessed from the north parking lot of Fair Hill as well.

Using existing building footprints. People have already talked about that. One idea we did have as it relates to this is that if there was concerns about the South side of Strickersville being an area of impact.

Maybe that existing footprint from the old farmhouse can be used as the maintenance building and then the smaller separate education building could be put down towards 841.

So it'd be like separating out the two required buildings in a way that concentrated the visitors in one location and then maintenance in another location.

16 – And no overnight camping just in case you haven't got that yet.

11 - All right, then resource management. We looked at this through three lenses. So sustainability, we were really pro being creative about ideas like green gardens, green roofs, using solar panels in a way that makes sense, like covering cars and parking. All of these ideas that I think you've already implemented in their different state parks already. Then cultural and historic, we were all in support of sharing the uniqueness of the site and we suggested developing kiosks or waysides on local history, Indigenous history, and also as was already mentioned, in partnership with Lincoln University. And one idea we had was that you can have kiosks with like QR codes that connect you to the educational program or visitor center at the in university, which would give you the kind of educational background, but minimize the impact on site here. That's one idea.

And then restoration, so evaluate the appropriateness of natural area designation South of

Stricklersville. That comes back to that core area that (name, #31) was talking about. We wanted to minimize the impacts of the South side of Stricklersville because it may have high species diversity, species of consideration, maybe that's something that could be evaluated as a natural area for increased protection of that property.

There was also a really important point to me about basically proactively preventing degradation, habitat degradation by sort of evaluating sites and the impact of visitors. And then restoration. (name, #16) and I both felt pretty strongly about asking what the goal is of the restoration. So is this species driven? Is it acreage driven? Is it aesthetics driven before saying like wanted X amount of grasslands or something? And so thinking about whether that would be site or area restoration.

And then lastly, we had a really interesting discussion towards the end about if the kind of mindset of preservation or restorations at the Big Elk Creek is kind of similar to the mindset of restoration here, then why is there not an interest to align the naming of the two locations? It'll be able to reflect the natural resource management mindset so that you'd have the word preserve at the end.

30 - Any questions?

23 - You mentioned about the maintenance area, it could still be on the Stricklersville area. If you're proposing putting any other infrastructure out to the west, was any consideration to parking for trailhead use there or were you saying get rid of that as well in the maintenance area? Did you get that far?

11 - We didn't really get into that, but I guess I'll need to speak for myself. I feel like the parking that exists on Stricklersville, that small gravel parking that's already there.

23 - But not an expansion of that.

11 - Not expanding that, leaving that as it is and then using the old footprint of the farmhouse as a maintenance.

16 - Yeah, the thought was that people that we had it all together, which I was always a proponent of, having all the building together. That's where people converge, that's where people start. And if we're doing that, and it was (name, #31) that indicated, look, everything South of Stricklersville is, you know, PNDI land, then why are we encouraging the central activity to start there and then expand from there?

And then we just thought, well, maybe using that open area where the farmhouse was just for maintenance where staff would go to, but really not directing people to start there and then expanding South and then maintaining people activity in the areas that were not as sensitive for PNDI, you know, but I'm not a proponent of going all the way back either.

23 - Right.

16 - But I don't want any buildings.

1 - Related to these two options. And again, tonight is the first I've heard that sort of separated out. We talked about maybe 2 locations in that option in the past, but then we agreed, I thought the discussion led us towards minimal development in one location versus 2. But I just want to make

sure I'm capturing what (name, #36) said. You mentioned one location being more impactful potentially for the Amish in the area.

Is that the western side?

11 - Well, there's families on either side.

36 - But Concept A would be less of an issue for us.

15 - Concept B puts all the infrastructure in Elk Township

36 - And that's closer to the Amish farm. It's like right on top of the farm.

1 - And we came out of our field trip...

15 - Yes, they were right there that fence line is the Amish family.

16 - In reality, (name, #1) John, the maintenance shed across from Crawson (?) and leave it at that because any other place it's going to have an impact either on the Amish or on resources to the South.

15 - Well, I think if we go back to, you know, the maintenance shed and the bathroom being at that parking area where the house was, where the Crawson farm was, and not needing the visitor center if you have your educational pavilion that's set up as an outdoor classroom, then you don't necessarily need to have a visitor center, right? You can still set up kiosks along trails for history and nature discussion.

And you have your outdoor classroom. So the kids have some place to go and sit undercover to learn because you're teaching them about nature, you want them to actually be in nature and not be sitting in a classroom. Because if you're going to be sitting in a classroom, then you guys should go to the school and be in their classroom. There's no reason for there to be an indoor classroom on the property.

16 - So we have to be really careful of what we do in that regard.

15 - Right, you don't necessarily have to put the pavilion right there where the maintenance and all that is.

16 - No, no, what I'm trying to say is if you're going to direct people to the South of Stricklersville, if we were having this conversation, it is opening them up to expand in that area. It's really a problem.

15 - But you're only expanding into the area where you're putting like... they're not going to go traipsing off trail or you hope they don't, right? So you direct the trails into an area that's less PNDI sensitive, because they're going to have to put trails over there anyway, because that's how you tie into Fair Hill.

1 - There's going to be trails there.

15 - Exactly.

1 - So it's well designed, permitted trails that are taking into account that we're in, you know, ecologically sensitive areas. That's part and parcel of trail design in the future.

15 - And you can already assume that that location where the Crossen farm was is not a PNDI sensitive area because in the past 12 years, I don't think a rare plant has popped up. You can make the assumption that that footprint where the farm was wouldn't be in the PNDI zone and then you can feed off from there being very sensitive to where the PNDI areas are.

1 - And I just want to get this because I heard from (name, #36)'s group, you articulated concerns from a transportation and public safety standpoint on these sites. But the other groups was, there a preference or stronger thoughts or ideas on any of these concepts? Concept A or B?

8 - When we were talking about the office, we thought, to the extent that there are buildings that that homestead site seemed like the best choice. Concept A.

15 - But again, being sensitive to how large those are, because that does affect what the townships pay as far as fire and EMS and all that. And if that cost goes up, it goes to the Township residents in the form of higher taxes. It doesn't go to DCNR. So we're the ones that get hit with that price.

16 - So they liked A, but on a small scale

15 - Yes, but on a small scale, so it's not increasing...

2 - So I have a question. Several of you all mentioned a pavilion. What was your discussion around a building, an enclosed building versus a pavilion? Why would one of those be favorable over the other?

15 - So small pavilion or just, you know, like a little covered area where the kids can sit and learn. You're out in nature and everything. It does not impact as far as fire and EMS, so it's less of a cost to the Township because it's not considered like a housing structure. So the cost has diminished there. It's not as destructive as far as, visually impacting things. I also think it lessens the footprint because you're not going to have a pavilion that's as big as say a farmhouse. It's just not going to be that way. And you know, if you're bringing the kids to learn about nature, they should be outside.

1 - I don't want to jump back into what we feel we need with our core standards. But one of the things we can talk about, and I agree with you on the pavilion. We have one actually that jumped right into my mind as you were talking about it at the Boyd Conservation area, the Boyd Big Tree Conservation Area, where it is a coverage structure.

It's not a traditional pavilion that could be on the reservation system with grills surrounding it and then picnic groves further out. It is a covered outdoor teaching space. There's benches in there, but not picnic tables, so to speak. And that's where environmental education and interpretation that's

program led by our staff happens. But it doesn't necessarily, again, exclude the need for indoor teaching space and meeting room space. It doesn't.

15- Devil's advocate, right? Most of the, I looked this up, a lot of the state parks in Pennsylvania that are within 20 miles of one another have one visitor center. They don't have two. They don't have one in each park. They have 1 visitor center. You have a visitor center and Education Center here. You're less than 5 miles away. So I don't see duplicating the resources financially, it doesn't make sense when you can do what you need to do here as far as needing a visitor center or a classroom, if you need a physical classroom, I don't see needing that 5 miles away. I mean you're less than 5 minutes driving time. So why would we duplicate the resource when you don't even do that at all the other state parks?

37 - You also, with the agility concept, have the ability to use something inside a Township building, which might not be used except for, you know, the big evening meetings. And some townships have meeting halls. But what happens is you have a place for the classroom during the day when it's not being used. The Township gets some money on it. Again, I'm not saying that's a great idea. I'm simply saying that's an example of agility infrastructure that's already there. You can use it on weekends. Or there might be a church that's in the area. Our old church with a very small congregation that would welcome this. I'm just trying to get us to think of ways and partnerships, that's all.

15 – Can I ask another question. If you're bringing school students inside, and that's what you're saying, that you need to have somewhere to bring people inside.

1 - It's a combination. And, I think I used Nescopeck as an example. It's an Environmental Education Center. And we went down that path and that larger massing of infrastructure specific to that type of environmental education is different than the footprint and the proposal for a park office administrative center that provides public service, public orientation and the ability to provide that indoor environmental education space on a much smaller scale than our environmental education centers do.

Visitor center, we've used this loosely, but we've talked about it and I think (name, #30) provided examples. We're not talking about inside interpretive space and education space and square footage that's comparable to Hickory Run State Park and the new visitor center there and the services that they provide there. But it's the sort of basic services that we need to provide from the administrative side as well as an indoor public education side.

15 – But how are you doing that in parks where you have two state parks within a complex?

1 - If you go across the system, 124, the majority have park offices even within park complexes like Ridley, we have other parks with a complex, there's still a park office there, even if that's a satellite park of the primary headquarters location for the complex.

So it exists across our system.

15 – So building a maintenance shed, I'm not going to call it a maintenance shed, but a maintenance barn. But if you have a maintenance barn, right, that fits in with the area, why can a section of that not also be your park office? Why does it need to be more than one structure?

1 - We have maintenance facilities attached to the park offices in certain parks across the state. At the end of the day, it's ultimately our design decision. But again, understanding the sort of goals of what this task force has put forth, minimizing our footprint, less is more, that's why I thought we were sort of focused, in a previous build a park exercise, on placing those necessary elements in one location in a smaller footprint versus spreading that out. And then one of those other locations, maybe on the West side of Stricklersville Rd, which is trailhead parking only, which is going to impact the neighbors that live right there to a lesser extent.

18 - I think that that's the underlying assumption right there. That the teams, it was assumed that we would be placing these required structures, whereas there's a number of us on the teams that don't agree with them being required. So therein lies again, the problem.

16 - But if they were going to happen, it would be all together. So they weren't spread out.

15 - Well, that's why I said if you can combine the barn and have a section of the barn be your park office and then it's one building, it's one barn, your maintenance and your park office are all in one.

And then you have your bathroom. And then that's it. Because now you've got an outdoor classroom. And we've minimized the footprint, we've minimized the impact on the townships and the buildings that they have to pay for, even though they're not theirs.

1 – So that's a design recommendation.

16 - Do you hear that though?

1 - I hear that. And we can certainly take that as a design consideration. But then, the first thing you need to decide though, is, you know, per the master plan, where is that going? On concept A on the previously disturbed site?

16 - Yeah, I think that's what most people are saying. I mean, I think that's what each group indicated.

11 - We were the only group that was like, “ah!” because of the core habitat. Sorry, (name, #31), I'm throwing everyone under the bus, but I'm excited about (name, #31)'s idea. I didn't even think about an Education Center. I thought last time we did this exercise, “I'm doing the maintenance building and toilets”, which is why I was like, well, if we're having this education center on the list of options again, maybe we minimize the group by separating those things. That's partly where the idea I think within, within what you stressed as well.

31 - So I genuinely did not mean to blow anything up. With the first caveat of 'I am not interjecting

myself here', the question that was asked was related to a comment that was made about infrastructure creep. If you put one thing here and then you get another thing and then you get another thing and another thing. And my question was relevant to, if that's a concern and we are looking at a structure south of Stricklersville, this is all the core habitat. And then I shut my mouth and went straight back to facilitation.

15 – But you wouldn't have infrastructure creep, because if all of that is PNDI.

1 - We're not going to build where we shouldn't build. And you guys listened to the tutorial by the natural natural heritage representative.

16 - So we're back to the beginning though, (name, #1), a lot of people have said 'this is what we want'. Park's has said 'this is what we want. Even though really what we wanted was this, we came down to here' and we're still saying, 'maintenance shed, park office, if you have to have it with the maintenance shed'.

1 – So park office. What we're talking about is a park office. That's not what we're calling, you know, a modern State Park, in Pennsylvania, visitor center. What we're talking about here is a park office with some multipurpose space in the building so that we can accommodate our indoor education needs.

It's not the Nescopeck model where we're able to host hundreds of people for education.

16 - You're right. Make it look like a farmhouse and a barn.

1 – Yes, that's a design consideration.

30 - It's debatable whether one larger building is actually better than two smaller buildings. Now, I don't pretend to know the impact on the townships and the taxes, but traditional farmsteads are not one big building. They're smaller buildings, right.

16 - I know it's getting late, so we should probably be cognizant of that. But I just go back to, if we are going to be managing Big Elk Creek the way we manage White Clay Creek, then let's put that word 'preserve' on the end of Big Elk Creek. And that gives the same mindset of how we're going to manage it, how it's going to look and how we're going to maintain it like we do at White Clay.

37 - And that's what the county would be quite happy with because it fills our open space requirements.

15 - If anybody's interested, I have all the letters from the county and townships and all that, I've packed here.

37 - It was really the fear of as, I said to you, (name, #1), the fear is that after working on open space, which started in 1992, and actually the first initial developed landscape, that if it would get overruled on what we define this area to be, is a threat to the whole plan. And it was developed as a partnership. We didn't tell the Township what to do. We did it in partnership.

And so now the next level of partnership would be with DCNR and so the more we think in those terms the better that it will be. And that's why I think it'd really be good for the design staff and for some of the DCNR to review the county's open space plans, to review it that we're now in landscapes 3. We went through one, two and three and to see exactly what we call for in this area. So as you do the infrastructure, you are not taking something that the plan says you're not supposed to do. I think there's a way to work it within the plan.

And then maybe we don't have to do all this legal stuff because the county is relaxed and says we fulfilled the declaration that's in there. So I would urge you to read it and remember, and it's important DCNR and the consultants to remember, there's no other suburban type county, actually, there's no county that can say it has saved over 30% of its land in open space in perpetuity. This is the absolute soul and land ethic here.

And the resistance you'll get is if anything seems to threaten this, you see? So look at it, see how you can fit into it, and you'll have a much easier time there. And the word preserve will make it a hell of a lot easier for you, I'll tell you that.

23 – (name, #1), do you want to wrap up with the next steps?

9 – (name, #1)? Before you do that, I did want to throw in something.

1 - Yes, (name, #9), go ahead. This is plan recommendations?

9 – Yes, the email I sent. This document is being passed around here. So what we've done this evening, this group, right? And really, I think part of probably DCNR's main goal of this task force, was to get input for the master plan for Big Elk.

And what's being passed around here is an attempt by myself to put into words some of the thoughts and concerns that have been consistently expressed over the past five or six meetings. I recognize and respect that there are a diversity of views in this room on the details.

But after carefully listening, my sense is, that the majority of the committee, the task force, would agree on what is outlined on this piece of paper. I'd like to just read it briefly. It's not long.

It says January 21st, 2025. Statement from members of the Big Elk Creek State Park Task Force. We, the other side, members of the Big Elk Creek State Park Task Force, appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the inception of the Master Plan for this treasured place. We believe the master plan must include the following: state redesignation from Big Elk Creek State Park to Big Elk Creek Preserve. The clear recognition that DCNR will honor their commitments made to the federal government, state officials, county officials, township officials, nonprofit organizations, and the public at large over the previous 15 years, to steward Big Elk Creek Preserve solely as a wilderness area limited to low intensity, passive recreational opportunities in keeping with DCNR's management of the White Clay Creek Preserve since 1986.

A clear recognition that significant infrastructure, including overnight accommodations and concessions are inappropriate given the commitment to low intensity passive recreation opportunities within a wilderness area.

And a clear recognition that DCNR will consult with Elk and Franklin townships prior to constructing any infrastructure and honor both townships zoning codes.

We believe that these commitments, recognizing the unique resources of the area and respecting the similar nature of the adjoining Fair Hill Natural Resources Area, White Clay Creek Preserve, Peacedale Preserve and other locally preserved property, will best serve the environment, the community and the state for generations to come.

So with that, I have a copy of this which everyone that I've handed it to, you can keep that. But if you're inclined, if you'd like to put your name to that, I have a copy here that you can sign this evening if you decide to sign on, just make sure your name is legible so I can read it.

And then (name, #1), I'll send this to you tomorrow by email. OK?

18 - I'd like to thank you, (name, #9) for bringing this forth, because I think it articulates very well my personal goals of being here and being part of this process to see this level of commitment from DCNR to steward this property.

37 - I think it certainly fits into the county open space plan, which I have to talk about all the time.

8 – Can any of you clarify to me what's allowed under the Township zoning codes for the area?

15 - It depends on Franklin or Elk. So it will depend on the zoning codes for both of the townships.

36 – The zoning wouldn't look at most of this. On the original plan it might...

12 - So you wouldn't expect that the zoning would affect really anything here.

36 – Concept A, I don't think that would be a conflict at all, B might be though.

1 - I think we talked about zoning at one point or another in time and we are exempt as the owners of the land. And yet we historically work with our township partners and honor the intent of their zoning, even though we're legally not bound by it. Local zoning does not preempt Commonwealth ownership and authority.

16 – Where does it say that? In what analysis?

1 - It's been provided by to the townships, specifically. And, and I'll say this though. We work with, as Pennsylvania's blessed with the number of townships and municipalities that we have, we work with them in all of our 124 state parks. We're talking about setbacks, those types of things. And we're doing business and operating in places as dense as New Hope in Bucks County. In communicating and interacting and gaining acceptance of our plans, particularly when we get to the design engineering phase, which is when all of this sort of kicks in. And again, we're master planning. But I think it was before the last meeting, (name, #23) and I were meeting with the municipality, a Township in Bucks County, precisely on a State Park office and visitor center project.

And we're very much keeping the entire leadership of the township involved. That's our commitment and how we work with townships across the state. And we wouldn't be good neighbors if we didn't. And we would face, you know, the types of setbacks that we're hoping to avoid here as we move forward with the improvements at the park. So design and engineering for a piece of infrastructure in this park is not done in a vacuum. It's done in consultation with the townships.

36 - Just for your own knowledge, when our attorney tried to engage with DCNR's attorneys, it was difficult.

1 - I think we all have difficult times at times when we're dealing with attorneys.

36 - So that's true.

16 - But actually, this would be not be at odds with what's up there.

15 - So you're saying it's not at odds?

16 - It's not.

37 - It's a sensitivity. Everyone has to compromise. And when Cindy has to, and I can't understand why she needs the name 'state park', but there is sometimes, to get something done, the big guy, which is in this case DCNR, has to, you know, understand what the little guy thinks. And you're trying, (name, #1). I know that. And so much just ends up being in the name simply because we have different definitions of what preserve is. And she told me every county has a different definition than I do. But we know what we mean.

1 - I know the people of Chester County know what they mean, I've learned that in detail.

16 - Then talking about working with the townships and your recognition of that...

1 - I'm not weighing in on this. This is a decision for the for individual...

16 - But (name, #14) said is true and what (name, #9) is saying is what we would like to see does not conflict with what you're suggesting you would like to do. That's all.

37 - And perhaps it should have one name. The way this was done is the Strawbridge property was done in phrases, as you know, and even Part 2 and the declarations were done in phases even to 2020. And so one thing perhaps to help DCNR, we look upon this and this county has one movement, one history starting in 1984 with the DuPont building here because they couldn't get through building a dam because the citizens resisted it.

Going to 1992 when the county created this open space program, going to 2006 when we had the first phase of George Strawbridge's phase that was finally done in 2009, always as an addition to White Clay Creek. Going to 2000 and the second phase when Blaine Phillips came to see me and then he too, because you needed one and a half million more dollars to get this deal done. The county saddled up with some money, you guys found some more money, and then going in 2020 where everyone just assumed that this was going to be connected. And then everything collapsing in 2022 when this announcement was made that this was the state park. And you could do certain things with a State Park.

As I read the minutes, (name, #1), you said that you treat a preserve a little differently than you would treat a traditional State Park.

1 - By policy and by management.

37 - And there is only one preserve in the State Park system of your 124 parks. You can do whatever you want with the other 123, but what we're saying is that this was a preserve, it started in a long history with the DuPont money, approved by the legislature.

1 - And I'm on the record and I can be corrected tonight if there's dissent. But I'm on the record expressing to the secretary and DCNR leaders, which I'm included in, in recognizing the task force is in favor of the redesignation. And there is no dissent. And that's duly noted.

15 – Thank you.

37 - And what will occur in the next several months is to be various appeals to the Secretary. And already there has been a reservation for the Capitol Rotunda to take place to, again, nothing contrary to what is being presented here, but to make it clear about the preserve based on the history we just said and to have further testimony at the appropriations hearings. And it might well be that you'll see the Senate's going to do an appropriation hearing with DCNR as well as the House.

And so a lot of this can be avoided by the change of names. If you get that message back to Cindy, not as a threat, but just as an appeal that we can do this together. But this name is so important here. And then we don't have to have the rally in the Rotunda. And then it doesn't come up as an issue in your appropriation hearing because the other problem is that you have areas begging for money. And so this gets to be very complicated. I'm just trying to be honest and trying to get that resolution.

1 - Thank you.

16 – (name, #9), did you want to say anything else?

9 - If anyone didn't get a chance to sign on to this that wants to sign on, please do. Just see me before you go.

1 – You'll communicate that to me tomorrow, (name, #9)?

9 – Yes, I will email it to you tomorrow.

15 - Can you also note that we don't have a full task force here this evening, so not all the members are present to sign.

37 - Maybe notify them and ask.

1 – Ok. Whenever you're satisfied that you've given everyone the opportunity to sign on or not, then please pass it my way. I have to talk about next steps because you guys aren't done yet.

So this was an important park exercise tonight regarding the recommendations for the master plan. But, and I can't recall exactly what meeting it was brought up, but it certainly resonated with me and it was understood by DCNR and by our professional staff present that this task force and all the work that has gone into creating a master plan for the park needs to be reviewed in detail by all of you.

And so for our next step, our next meeting, because there is a next meeting, we would like to convene this task force and review the draft master plan, which is the culmination of all the recommendations that have occurred in the past meetings, but a lot that got down into details specific to tonight.

16 – (name, #1), once we review it, will you take comment and go back and fix it or this is it?

1 - It depends on the comment. If there's something in there that is noted in the review that is really problematic, then certainly we need to make a record of that and address it if we can. We came armed with a date, March 6th. And if there's a problem with that date, please notify me because we're not setting that in stone. That's the one and only chance this task force will get to review the document. But we want to do it collectively because we want to go through it and have everyone have the same exposure to the recommendations in that draft document.

And then again, if there's any issues, consent, things that you like, things that you don't like, we want to have that.

And again, afford you the opportunity of what you've been working on now for six meetings and over a year, not a not quite a year.

16 – So when you present this plan ultimately to your folks back in Parks and Cindy...

1 -Right, they haven't seen it because we're still building it.

16 – Right, will you say things like ‘the advisory task force liked this, they didn't like that’. Or is it like we're not going to be putting our stamp of approval on that, right? It's going to be kind of a summary of how we received it?

1 - My communications with the Secretary will be, again, communicating the preferences, the things that we weren't in agreement on 100%, the things that we agreed on. And that includes that reduction in footprint and scale and the types and number of amenities and improvements that are in the draft. I mean, because that's where we've come.

And Secretary Dunn has been getting briefed by me, obviously, and particularly on the preserve discussion that we had to have. But yes, she's going to see that draft and review it and then it'll be reviewed by all of you.

8 – (name, #1) I don't know if there's a standard way you do this, but I'm on the state Climate Change Advisory Board. And one of the things they do is, there's a plan, but it's a very... there's a coal representative, a gas representative, so there's never going to be consensus on that

committee. And the plan comes out, but then basically everybody has an opportunity to write a little letter that's appended.

And so the coal representative can say, 'this is all terrible for all these reasons' and other people can use it as a thing to say, 'hey, this is why I think it's terrific'. But rather than presenting it as a consensus document, it gives an opportunity for individuals if they want to say their issue or their addendum or their dislike of a particular provision, right? The goal is to be on the record. So I think have that built into this review plan.

37 - The other thing you're trying to do is restore the trust, which always existed previously in this county until 2022 between DCNR and Chester County.

But one of the one, but I say, Gary, you said it well for the secretary that that just has disappeared and and and so, you know, all this figure out a way that can do this and the secretary realized so restore it.

14 - This is a good discussion. It's good to do this. I mean, I don't think that was something that you originally said we were going to do and that we're going to get a chance to see the final outcome.

1 - I didn't say, which would surprise me if I didn't say it...

16 - You did

1 - I thought I did because you all are the ones that have contributed to what we're looking at versus what could have been, right.

15 - My only question was would we be able to get a copy of that emailed to us before the meeting so we can review it before we get in here. So we have a chance to...

1 - I'd like you all to review it collectively, at the same time here. And we'll have the time built into our meeting to go through it.

16 - That makes sense.

1 - OK, let me know again, send me an e-mail. We'll send out a 'hold the day' on this but let me know as soon as you can if you have a problem with March 6th. Thank you. You take care.