



Big Elk Creek Master Planning Task Force Meeting #4 Transcript

Meeting Date: August 27, 2024

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: 6, 7(dialed in remotely), 11 (represented by 35), 20

Meeting Minutes:

2 - Welcome. Thanks everyone for coming out tonight. So I'm going to pick up with some aspects of the agenda that we lost track of at the last meeting that we couldn't get to, which is OK. We had a lot of discussion that was worth the time. Thank you all for coming again. And (name, #25) has sent out the agendas so we also had that beforehand. I still think we're missing quite a few on that first survey; we've only heard from 8 of you. So I would appreciate it if you would go back and complete that survey when we had discussions around managing the resource - from stream banks to wetlands and all that discussion we had at earlier meetings. And I appreciate your comments from those who have already completed the survey before. Just want you to know we haven't forgotten it. We'd like to get at least half or more participants inputs before we summarize and share it. Does anyone have any announcements or anything like that before we get started?

1- Just one note before we get started tonight. (name, #11) is unable to be here tonight but (name, #35) is here tonight in her stead.

2 – Also, (name, #20) at the last minute was unable to attend. So with that, (name, #9) you are up on the agenda first.

9 - Very good. I apologize, I didn't get the agenda, so am I up first?

[Click here](#) to view Representative Lawrence's submitted agenda document.

1- Yes, you are up first.

9 - All right. I had asked (name, #1) if I could add to the agenda tonight and what I want to talk about is redesignating the Big Elk Creek State Park as Big Elk Creek Preserve. So the document that is coming around here is about that. And I want to read very briefly the rationale behind it, the rationale behind the proposal, and I want to solicit feedback from the Task Force about it.

So just very briefly at the top here – summary - redesignating Big Elk Creek as a preserve based on DCNR’s previous statements. And what that looks like now and in the future. I think it’s important to look at where this is coming from. What was the basis for this proposal? And I go back to really what was discussed at the very beginning when the property was acquired.

So just running briefly through the bullet points. DCNR’s, so far, only entry to the Pennsylvania Bulletin, outlines that when the property was acquired, the property was to be used for some form of passive recreation such as hiking, biking, and wildlife watching.

And the words written in the Bulletin were confirmed by multiple folks in multiple different methods. So there were press reports and multiple statements by DCNR prior to the immediate acquisition of property, secondary and privately stated positions to elected officials in the same time frame, various stakeholders who were involved in the acquisition of the property to the federal government in various files sent to the federal government.

And all these sentiments were in keeping with the traditional manner that has been stewarded for over a generation now at the adjacent White Clay Creek Preserve.

So there's a solid foundation and basis of the summary. Then moving on to the bottom of the first, the first page here, the revision of the plan, the revision of what was going to happen was proposed to happen at Big Elk Creek reflected a change. And we've discussed that in this forum here. And it's also to be discussed outside the forum. But there was a change from the top there and from DCNR. And sitting here, I’m trying to be respectful of the way things are done. I'm not trying to be inflammatory and just going through the basics here of what we saw. We’ve discussed both here at this meeting and outside this meeting and then in a broader context right now on a statewide level; DCNR has a number of challenges.

And one of those challenges is that there are capacity issues for certain kind of activities that have traditionally taken part in various state parks across the Commonwealth. People do things like camping, there are state parks nearby – when you think about how large Pennsylvania is – that are satisfying those needs.

They are popular with the general public and there has been increased demand, particularly since the pandemic, and there's been a lot of challenges faced by DCNR. They have stated some basic challenges with personnel, or in some cases a lack of personnel, and the state parks could have reached, you know, maximum capacity.

However, that's fine. They've put signs up saying “the park is closed” or “the park is full”. Basically, go somewhere else, saying that politely. And I think it's important to recognize that. I'm not trying to minimize that or say that it’s not happening.

Moving on, as was proposed particularly in the recent Master Plan for Susquehanna Riverlands, there were some things that came forward in that Master Plan proposed at that site that were very, very similar to what was initially proposed for the Big Elk. They had some very similar elements and offered a lot of the same features. And I’m not saying those things were bad, in particular I’m not

saying camping is bad. There are a lot of state parks that offer camping and it's appropriate for that site.

And it seems to me that the plan that was released for Susquehanna Riverlands has been received a little bit differently in that community and that's fine.

But something that I just noted from the presentation is that there were some almost identical -if I were to have printed it out and passed it around this evening - if you were to take a quick look at it, you might say, oh, this is what was proposed for Big Elk. It's almost identical in the proposal – from some of the catchy little names that are used and more.

And so, I won't say it's kind of a cookie cutter approach, but it seems to me that you know, again, being a statewide organization, there's a statewide approach being taken to some statewide issues that you're seeing across the state parks.

Last bullet point there, Big Elk Creek was removed from the preserve unilaterally because it was designated as a state park and that provided the opportunity for alternative and additional uses to be proposed to the property. On the next page, second page.

So I propose here, again at the top of page 2, DCNR proposed alternate or alternate additional uses for Big Elk Creek. And those are not keeping with the publicly stated commitments that were made prior to and immediately after the acquisition of the Big Elk properties.

So this proposal, and again I realize the proposal has, for now, been set aside, but I think it's still important to recognize the dynamics that led to that proposal.

The proposed significant development there at the Big Elk Creek is outside of what was contemplated in the Pennsylvania Bulletin and in all of the prior public statements made to the long list of stakeholders that I outlined at the beginning of the meeting.

And as I also mentioned and I reiterate here, the second bullet point, the recently proposed Master Plan released for Susquehanna Riverland contains similarities and in some cases identical proposals for those presented by DCNR in November 2020.

And I see this as a pretty clear indication that DCNR kind of changed their view of what was going to happen at Big Elk Creek. They got away from the site-specific commitments that were made on this property. And on a local basis, on a this-property basis, and moving instead to a statewide view of statewide issues and how those statewide issues are going to potentially be addressed.

And then this last bullet point under the first part on the second page, I really want to stress that the alternate and the additional uses that DCNR proposed, they're not inherently incompatible with the State Park, right?

But they are inherently incompatible with this state park, with this area. They are not keeping with the commitments made prior to and subsequently after, and really the whole basis of the acquisition.

So then the last two paragraphs outline the meat of the proposal, excuse me the agenda item, that I submitted to (name, #1). Basically redesignating Big Elk Creek State Park as Big Elk Creek State Preserve. And why we would want to do that? Why do we care?

So DCNR has a long record, for over a generation, of treating White Clay Creek Preserve as a unique asset and I really want to stress that this is a unique and valued asset as part of the state's system. DCNR has recognized the status as a preserve as separate and distinct from other state parks. By redesignating Big Elk Creek as a preserve, that will reassure and proclaim that it's not open to the full gamut of possibilities associated with other state parks across the Commonwealth.

There's something special and unique about this property. One could argue, frankly, there are more special and unique attributes about this property in relation to wilderness and low impact recreation than even White Clay Creek Preserve, to be honest.

But by redesignating it as a preserve, it's a signal both internally and externally that this is not open to the full gamut of possibilities associated with the state park. Instead, it should be managed in keeping the practices of a preserve, particularly White Clay Creek Preserve.

I think it would also go a long way to reassure the general public that DCNR is committed to managing the property as originally outlined to the community, in the Pennsylvania Bulletin, to the landowner who sold the property, officials who were involved at the time, the municipalities and really the stakeholders.

But that's really the main thrust of it. And then as a corollary, just very briefly there on the bottom of page 2, managing the Big Elk Creek as a preserve in coordination with White Clay Creek. So really a coordinated plan for White Creek Preserve and the Big Elk property.

First of all, that's what was happening until, and in a great sense, really is still happening. The two properties are less than 5 miles apart. And it's not crazy to think one day they might be connected. In fact, that is a goal, right? A goal is to have those properties connected and through efforts of other land owners and municipalities in this area that goal is actually very close to being achieved.

Duplicated facilities and services are a waste of time and money. Coordination of management, both properties in keeping with traditional management of White Clay Creek Preserve, again going back to the very beginning, is keeping with both DCNR and really the public's expectations for it.

I wanted to propose this plan, and I appreciate everyone giving me the latitude to go through that. Thank you very much, (name, #1) for giving me the time to do so. I'm not looking for everyone to now stand up and vote on this. What I'm looking for is to have a dialogue about this concept. I would like to discuss it amongst the committee. And I would like to think maybe this committee might come to the point to put forward "yes, we think this is a good and appropriate idea and we would like to make a recommendation to DCNR" emanating from this discussion.

So with that, I've done a lot of talking, I certainly don't want to monopolize the conversation and I'd like to open it up to hear the thoughts of those around the table.

21 – What, if anything, would change in terms of funding and staffing for ecological conservation efforts between the designation of state park versus the preserve.

1 - So I don't want to revisit the House Republican Policy Hearing because there were similar, I think expressions made during that hearing, including from members of this Task Force. And I'll save it for the 200 plus people who attended that hearing. I was surprised at the number of people who showed up for that meeting at the high school during the day.

But they heard, and I'm almost certainly everyone heard this, is with that redesignation that somehow DCNR would then put a jar over the property and walk away which is, you know completely unrealistic. That doesn't meet our mission and mandate. And we went through the full list of our designations and special designations for state parks during a previous Task Force meeting. But that was the impression I received from that hearing.

So (name, #21)'s question, I think it's important to note that we still need to go through a master planning exercise for Big Elk Creek. We still have core standards in Pennsylvania state parks, be it for a Preserve or a Conservation Area or Environmental Education Center, all of them are state parks. And it's going to require the same resources and effort and staffing to manage this land moving forward.

It doesn't change the sort of calculus on our operational needs to meet our stewardship mission to conserve and protect property in perpetuity and meet the operational demands of visitor services.

I know that during the hearing there were people that were cheering in the audience because when it was stated that it should be a preserve or redesignated as a preserve, that somehow DCNR was washing our hands and walking away from our responsibilities. That couldn't be further from the truth.

9 - So this I would say in response. I can't speak for the several hundred people at the hearing, or the over 1,000 people at this point who came out to the other hearings. What I'd like to focus on right now is the proposal. I might say in answering your question that I don't know what the answer to your question is now. I'm not the one who would make the decision today. That would be (name, #1) and DCNR. I don't know that there will be a requirement that funding and personnel will need to be directed away from this facility, either towards White Clay or anything else, that would be up for further discussion.

But I do think getting back to the proposal that there is a difference both in the public mind, and I think from the DCNR perspective, of how the property will be managed as a preserve versus as a state park. And I think the evidence of that is how we've seen White Clay Creek Preserve managed over the last generation as opposed to how most state parks across the Commonwealth have been managed.

And I think also points that I've tried to make here succinctly, I could have made it a much longer document, is to say that some those concerns are well known.

8 - So, I do think it would calm nerves, which I think is significant and has an added benefit, as somebody that's trying to get volunteers to do good things. It would be great if those nerves were

soothed. Maybe you could help me think through what you feel would change? Just looking through the bill, and you're not mentioning the bill here, but looking at the bill, my understanding is that anything that's been discussed here for this master plan would still be think allowed if it was a preserve.

So it seems to me in practical terms about what would happen is that the change in designation doesn't really change anything concrete in the short term. Now what it would do, I think, which is also maybe significant, is that it would say camping is out for forever. So it's not just out for now, but it's out forever. But in the short term like this master plan and trails, parking lots, bathrooms and stuff. Do you feel there is a difference there?

9 - I think there is. I agree with a lot of what you said there. What I don't think is that it's just semantics, right? I do think it lends a clear signal to everyone who's involved both inside and outside of the government's sphere "this is our intent". And yes, there have been some things that have been put on the table and we're taking them off the table. But you know, just to make it clear, here's what we're looking to do.

And if you've seen what's going on over here, that's going to look a lot like what's going to happen. That would be the real goal.

1 – (name, #9) can you clarify what you mean by “what’s going on over here”?

9 – As someone who has lived within 15 minutes of where we're sitting my entire life - and that doesn't make me any more or less capable of commenting, I want to stress that - I'm very interested in everything going on around here regardless. But as someone who has been around the White Clay Creek Preserve literally before I was born, there is an ethos locally about how the preserve has been managed for a generation. How DCNR - and I think certainly (name, #12) can speak to this much more eloquently than I can - DCNR has managed and put thoughtful consideration towards the preserve as a unique property within the Commonwealth system and a recognition of what the goals are here, what is trying to be accomplished here and what is not trying to be accomplished.

Which again is separate and distinct from what may be happening at Bald Eagle or Poe Paddy or some of these other facilities. Not to suggest that those things are bad or inappropriate. I've stayed at the Nature Inn. I love the Nature Inn. That was not what was proposed at the beginning – and no one is saying it has been proposed now. But again, there was a very clear vision that was laid out not by (name, #9), but by DCNR and all the stakeholders who made this a reality.

And I think again, going back to the proposal, if you guys made it as a preserve, I think it signals to all of those stakeholders and to the broader community “yes, we recognize that that's what the purpose is going to be here and that what you're seeing over at the preserve is what you can expect to see here at Big Elk Creek”.

And what have we expected to see? To answer your question, (name, #1), I apologize. I am bloviating and I apologize, to answer your question. What have we seen over at White Clay Creek Preserve for 40 some years? Low impact recreation, wilderness, walking and hiking, small parking lots, trail maintenance. And these are the same types of activities that you can expect to see at the Big Elk Creek Preserve.

I'm very interested in feedback.

5 - I'm listening to all of this talk but still I'm trying to wrap my head around all that is involved here and figure out where are we going. I think the elephant in the room is overcrowding. We don't want what's happened in other state parks to happen in this one.

That's what the overarching element is in terms of the preserve. And I agree with that. I travel around to state parks and other public lands. And getting to and from the other state parks is very different than getting to and from here. We've got one and a half lane roads and they aren't going to get any wider. So taking a big approach, but leaning more towards what's happened at White Clay is the right thing to do. And I understand that this is a state park, and while residents can travel, I don't know how many travel all across the state to state parks, but the residents that are in this community are residents of the state. And I think the park largely should reflect residents of this region and how they're going to use the park. I don't think we're looking at this state park as being used by people that are 25-50 miles from here the majority of the time.

I've seen this park, being here in this area as a resident and also in terms of work. And we want our school districts and our kids in the school districts to visit. So I think we need to be speaking to that audience and these state residents in this region to ensure the park doesn't become something that we can't control.

10 - I agree with that, and I don't understand why it's one or the other. I don't think it's a state park and that's all. This is the special property. It's different than those state parks. They should be developed differently. It should be opened up to others that don't know it exists and encourage them to come and see. But not the same way that other state parks across the state may be.

So I appreciated (name, #21)'s question about the financing of it because I'm thinking "wonderful, there's been some great appropriations to help out the state parks across the county. Does it have to go right here or maybe can some things be diverted to other areas? So I don't think it's a glass jar, but I don't understand that. I think we're looking to make some improvements, but where's the law? We're not all the same.

16 - It all started because (name, #2) was concerned about trails and funding for improving trails if I understand that correctly.

And I think the (name, #9)'s desire is to couple it back together between Big Elk and White Clay and then managing it as such. Just like you were saying (name, #10), that you wouldn't keep people out, but you would manage it to that trail level.

And having a facility like this within 5 miles of another area begs the question of why we would have to have more infrastructure for that purpose when they can be managed as a unit and monies can be used. The monies that were received from the General Assembly can be used to improve the trail system both here and there.

And then as you said, (name, #10) divert to other areas within the state for much needed improvements across the state and across the system.

15 - I think it's not unheard of to have one visitor Center for two parks that are relatively close together. DCNR has state parks that are close together, if I'm correct and they do this. They have

state parks that are within 20 miles of one another and they have one visitor center or one office location for both parks, not one in each park because they're so close together. And I don't think it's unheard of considering they're only 5 miles away to keep all the facilities in one area.

And yes, divert funds instead of spending it to build new, let's spend it to improve existing and put trails in put pit toilets in over at Big Elk because obviously that would be a need. But not necessarily need to put up another visitor center and another informational hub with buildings when you have something 5 miles away that for, I don't know, decades now has been functioning just fine.

16 - I don't think the funding for education has to go anywhere either. I mean, you are having educational programs here. You would have them over there, but so the money would still be used for that.

13 - Well, I think one thing to keep in mind is that we're also crossing school districts. So it might make sense to have something closer to the Oxford area school districts since this is Avon Grove.

16 - Well, they all go over to Stroud.

13 - Yeah, and that's a long way to go.

15 - And five more miles is too far?

13 - It's not 5 more miles. I mean, if you're going Stroud, it's 15.

15 - Well, no, I mean, from here to Big Elk. It's not like it's a huge jump for them. Five more miles if they were going to Big Elk versus here.

13 - I also think that for a property of this size it would really make a lot of sense to have a maintenance facility.

15 – Build a barn.

13 - I mean that's fine, absolutely. But I don't think it makes sense to want to try and travel from here over to there with tractors.

15 - And I have photos of the barn used to look like this. Nobody's saying don't put maintenance there. It was there where the parking lot currently is.

9 - Any other thoughts on this?

10 – Bringing it back to the preserve. I think that the recognition that this is different than all the other state parks is huge with the community and it's huge towards settling nerves of what will the future bring. And so preserve, that status accomplishes that.

15 - I think that's what you were saying about the hearing and how people were cheering when they heard preserve. Not speaking for all 200 people there but speaking for the people that have come up to me afterwards and talked to me about it. I can say it wasn't that they were thinking you'd put a dome over and not touch it. They're thinking by making it a preserve and designating it that way, that designates it as low impact day use only. The campground is no longer off the table "for now", it's just gone. And it would settle an awful lot of nerves. It would calm a lot down and it sure as heck would probably mean I'd get a lot less emails.

16 - And there'd be a diversity.

15 - And there would, there'd be a diversity, and then you'd have the second state preserve in Pennsylvania. And how wonderful is that?

18 - I would add that when we were discussing this before, we heard "it's not a big deal that, well, if it's off the table and it's not in the management plan, we don't have to worry about scope creep because we just don't see that. It's very rare or it just doesn't happen". So if the argument is "come up with a master plan that's low impact and you don't have to worry about scope creep", then if it's not a worry, why not memorialize it? Why not put it out there and say this is the plan? So I think it's a fantastic goal and I think it's representative of what was represented to the taxpayers when we funded the property.

15 - And you're still getting a campground, just over at Susquehanna Riverlands.

14 - I just want to say one of the things that does trouble me is all the news coverage. There's a lot of history to talk about and about what George Strawbridge is saying in those newspaper articles where he thought it was going to be a preserve. And I find it troubling that no one seems to be bothered that he's bothered by this. This was his property, and his intent was for it to be part of the bigger preserve. And just because he perhaps wasn't as diligent as he might have liked to be in retrospect about the paperwork that was done on his behalf doesn't mean that his desires for his property shouldn't be respected.

And there's a lot of history, a lot of people who are upset about the prospects of more intensive development on the site that has to do with a culture that is imbued. The area is imbued with this understanding that this piece of property is going to be left open in a relatively pristine farmland and so forth. Left in an open low-impact condition, which I think is what means most of us. Particularly when we've talking about "couldn't this or that be done in a preserve", because no it couldn't. DCNR doesn't allow some of those types of things that have been discussed.

So personally, in my interactions with you, certainly my past experiences with Cindy, I view you guys as being honorable people. I'm just kind of surprised that no one ever seems to harken back to what George said he wanted done with the property. And why is that not disturbing us that all of a sudden there's been a change of plans that's different from what he asked for with this property? Different from what he intended to say needed to be done with this property.

8 - Isn't it true that what we're doing now is in line with that? It feels like people may not know what the master plan is producing, but my sense of this group is that we are essentially recommending a preserve. Maybe not by name and maybe the name does matter, but that's essentially what we're doing?

16 - Do you remember (name, #8) though, when we asked "can we see the plan when it's done?" and no offense (name, #1), but you're like, I don't know. So I don't know.

1- We agreed, (name, #16) that's going to be the final stage of the Task Force. You all certainly deserve that and that deeper understanding of the plan before we released it in 2025.

And to your point, I think we're very far away from that intensive recreational development, and even that wasn't necessarily on the table, at the end of the day, we went away and we agreed to remove overnight experiences from this park.

But what we're left with is the basic necessities for park management. Visitor services, which we've been working through now, this is our fourth Task Force meeting, and we're trying to build the other services out with all of your understanding, of what's needed to meet the basics for stewardship of the property as well as public access for use.

So I don't disagree with you and I can't speak to George Strawbridge's thoughts but we, DCNR, and I'm not going to read the quote because I think back to my earlier conversations with you (name, #9). I think expectations were not that. And it goes back to that messaging and communication that's happened along the way in the PA Bulletin and to a quote that was received from one of my staff when the last major parcel was acquired.

And all of that set in expectations I think, including yours (name, #9) of what was going to be or not be on the property.

9 - Something you and some others mentioned, and I just want to bring the thoughts together. If you think it's important to know where we're going, it's hard to know where you're going, what step to take, unless you know the destination. And again, I do think that it's more than simply a semantic designation. I think the designation as a preserve, which it was for years, is important.

But again, coming back to that original expectation amongst the community as expressed both in words and in deeds by the state, for years, were part of the property for over a decade. I think redesignation will lay down a marker for DCNR with the greater public. And it will also help this Task Force in getting to what we're looking to do, what we're looking to recommend for this problem, by giving us a clear destination.

16 - So John, what's the limit? What's the hold back in saying it'll be a preserve? We will operate to low impact recreation. We'll focus on trails. Let's move on to the next step in our master plan to achieve that effort, that goal. Like what's stopping DCNR from doing that?

1- First of all, you know, it needs care and consideration and me personally bringing this latest document that (name, #9) has prepared and Task Force facts. Taking this important discussion back to leadership, Secretary Dunn, to have those discussions with her on what we're talking about tonight.

And I'm not disagreeing on the passive recreation. But that's sort of separate than the designation discussion, but it is tied to it, related to the future and what the expectations are. So all of that is to be fresh in my mind while I sit down with Secretary Dunn to have this conversation.

16 - I appreciate that. And that's been a consistent theme for the last four meetings, just FYI. So, you know, I'm excited that you're going to talk to her.

35 – (name, #1) is the Secretary of the ultimate decision maker on this?

1 – Yes, that authority is within Act 18, within the statutory authority of state parks. It is within our statutory authority as we designate, but ultimately the Administration, the Shapiro Administration, that's the Secretary as a Cabinet member, but it's within our court as we designated it a State Park and as we designate new state parks and the various classifications. But yes, it's within the Secretary's authority.

16 - You could do ag easements on it and continue agriculture in certain areas too.

1 - We actually manage our agricultural lands with the new land use agreements because oftentimes with the funding that's used to acquire those properties as a part of the State Park portfolio, we have to keep the ag in place. Commercial agriculture. Or we can maintain them in historic landscapes under certain conditions.

15 - Can I ask just one quick question? According to this lovely letter that I have in my hand from the Department of the Interior and the Land and Water Conservation Fund, if you were to redesignate the property as something other than what was put out in the PA Bulletin and passive recreation. From my understanding with this letter, you would have to redo a brand new environmental assessment and open it back up for public review and comment before you're able to move forward with any plans that take it out of passive recreation. Is that correct? Am I understanding that correctly because you're using it as a replacement property?

1 – Passive recreation to open recreation, it would not be another conversion. And what you're talking about, this came out during House Republican Public Policy meeting as well. They were trying to make a certain point, but it's LWCF and, and what constitutes a conversion is when you move that parcel out of the recreational state of that public land. We only applied it to Big Elk to relieve the oil and gas conversions on state forest land because we knew that it's a state park and many state parks that have an LWCF boundary.

All of the infrastructure that would be supporting that state park or providing a recreational amenity, up to and including intensive recreational public is not a conversion by federal law and LWCF. I can put a swimming pool, or a marina operation, or a maintenance facility just supporting the resource and recreation on that resource without being opposed to LWCF and cost of getting a conversion.

We have minor conversions that take place on state park land surely, but those are usually most often caused by a transportation project. Where we have a LWCF boundary around the park and that state road needs to be widened, or that county bridge needs to realign onto what is LWCF protected land. And then we have small conversions we have to rectify.

15 - So what this is saying is that ultimately if the planned uses significantly deviate from the passive recreation uses provided and evaluated in the environmental assessment in 2019, an additional assessment would need to be completed by DCNR as necessary to address any potential environmental and cultural effects not originally discussed in the original environmental assessment and would also include new public review and comment process.

1 - So we may need to, again depending upon what the amenity is. But anything that we're discussing right now I don't believe deviates from that intended passive use recommendation. Overnight is another topic of discussion because of the intensive infrastructure involved in that accommodation.

16 - So when you speak then to Secretary Dunn and you talk about potentially recoupling this area into the preserve status again, we're assuming we'd have to agree in the future to any kind of change in either status or change in that overnight accommodation. Right?

1 - You're asking me for (name, #16) a hypothetical. So I can't give you an answer on that right now. I just need to have a discussion with the Secretary and update her on this.

9 – Any other thoughts?

10 - Well, I also think that preserve status, besides meeting the interests of the community, sends a message to those visitors about what this place is and what it's not about. And my personal story relating to that was last Sunday when I was out weeding my flowers near the road, this big guy stopped and said, "hey, do you know where you guys have any off-road trails around here?" Like none on this property or in this area. Thanks. So that's the real-world example that I see in here like that. You know, this is what people not from around here think this property is now for. That's what scares the heck out of us. So preserve can mean a lot of things and send a lot of messages to a lot of people.

1 – I think we're going to pivot now because I want to give enough time to the exercise. (Name, #30), I hand the floor to you.

30 - I think that discussion was really good. And now we'd like to ask all of you for really specific thoughts about the plan. So, the title of this slide says state park, but you know, groups can cross that out and say preserve if they'd like to. That is totally fine. But our thought is to divide into four groups. Each group will have large maps. Each group will have this series of analysis mapping that (name, #33) shared at the last meeting. Each group will have this image here which showed all the possible components. Each group doesn't have to use every component. Each group can use, pick and choose from this what they like. Part of this is about just learning and hearing from all of you what you feel would be appropriate here. And part of this is also about allowing you opportunities to give real input. So it might be off of this too. So you can add points of interest that we might not know about. You can add special notes that we should really think about as we do move forward with planning after or sort of in the latter stages of your Task Force work.

So I don't know if I'm describing this clearly enough or not, but we were just going to count around the room, divide into four groups. Two groups can stay here and two groups can go to the office. Just to give you all some more space. We have markers, we have post-its, we have big maps.

We'll have a member of the design team available for each of the four groups, not to participate, but just to answer questions, facilitate, get supplies, whatever is helpful.

33 - So whoever is their group leader will take packet, which has everything you see there, all the cut

outs, all the dots. They will also take a map from us. We will give you all of the markers and post-it notes as (name, #30) said.

30 - And I think each group should nominate one person to take some notes while you guys are working to capture the key points and another person to then report back to the whole group at the conclusion of the exercise.

So you'll work together, then we'll have a short break and then we can report back here, back together as a group, if that makes sense. You'll have 45 minutes for this exercise, then we'll take a 15 minute break before we come back together as a group.

And we're really open to the kinds of things that you all suggest and think about here. We're not intending to constrain this. We're intending to leave it open. So use the material we've provided creatively, go off script, if that makes sense. That's fine.

We're just going to count 1234 around the room. Groups 1 and 2 will be here, and 3 and 4 go to the office. That's how we're going to do it. Each group will have 10 minutes to present their ideas when we come back together.

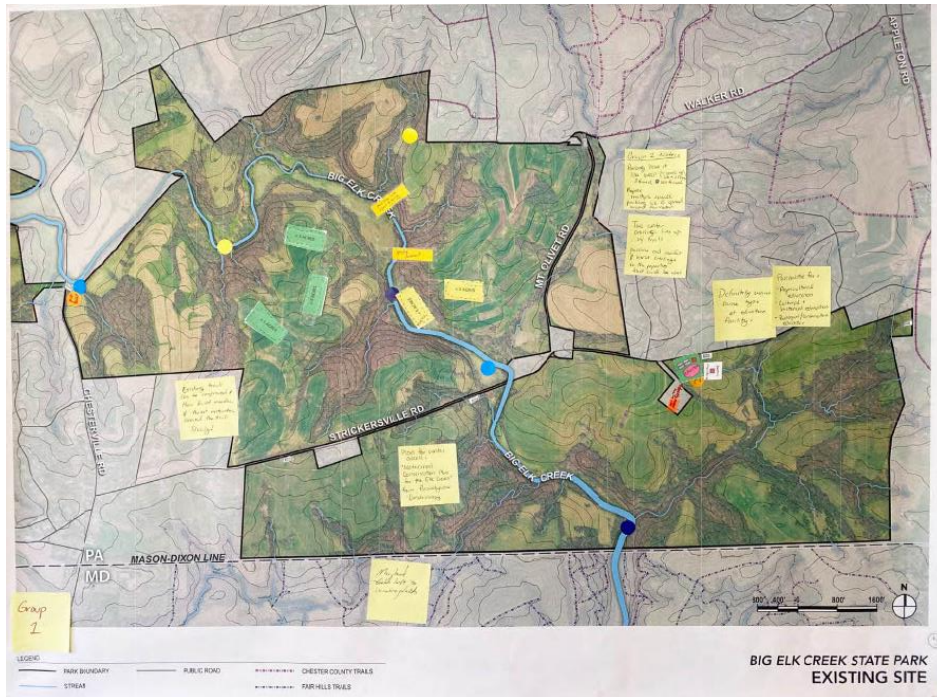
-GROUP EXERCISE AND BREAK-

30 - So everyone will come in, we'll reconvene and each group is going to have 10 minutes, only 10 minutes, to present their thoughts to the big group. (name, #23) is going to keep time and he's going to be strict with it, so 10 minutes maximum. Why don't group one start with the presentation?

[Click here](#) to view a larger version of the group maps.

Group 1:

- Members: 2, 12, 14, 17, 21



12 - All right, so we started with some observations about the parking in White Clay. So it's my belief, having been coming to White Clay for years, is one of the reasons it has the feel that it has is that we don't have some big central parking where everything congregates, right? You get overuse and then 100 facilities and stuff. It's very distributed. So I took the time to look it up. We actually have 11 different places in White Clay that you can park, but the biggest lot is the one spread out here. Almost everything else is small and it adds up to about 115 cars comfortably.

So what that does is it distributes the use and the feel and the experience. We've probably all done this, you go to any of these and I might see a couple of people, but what I don't ever experience is a mob. So with that concept in mind, our thoughts on parking lots will do the same thing to distribute it out.

So our little parking things we put in as many far-flung places as we thought we could distribute them for that same concept so that you didn't have a concentration wherever you were, probably never alone, but you also might walk half an hour before you saw another person. So we just put some parking on Appleton Rd. I think that's a great spot, but there's some great trails here. We have parking there. We have this little pull over that holds 2 or 3 cars, something up here. We already have the parking up here. We've definitely got to get something up here. Right now today, there's no legal parking anywhere from this spot. And, and you should probably have two, one there and there's also an access route here. We had more, I think we had another dot here, for example.

So, but it's, it's not about the spot, it's about the concept of spreading out the parking in a very diffused fashion. So then that also diffuses all sorts of things, right? So now you have the trails that have been adapted to fit that and everything else. So that's our concept there.

We didn't draw any trails on per se. There's a lot of trails on there. The map that is in the one overlay maybe has 1/4 of the trails that are there. It missed a lot. There are way more trails out here and there's a lot of them overgrown. And then we could easily reclaim those overgrown things and tie things together.

So other things. We thought the barn idea- we stole your barn idea- for a maintenance area was a good one. We think that's correct. So we had that. We thought that was a good spot for that.

We had a long discussion about education and how and what that could do. I think the group felt and (name, #2) made a great pitch on this that we can really educate the community in ways that we're not doing it.

And this building, for example, was way underutilized. And so just recently with (Environmental Educator's name) programs and now we have busloads of kids coming. That's great. I think that's what we do.

Other aspects here. We had potentially some water crossings. We said probably something around here and probably something around here. It's not about the spot, it's about the concept that there's loops and things that could go in and find where those are. This light blue was water access. Again, it's not about the spot, it's about the concept. But there are some places for water access.

Talk about parking, talk about water crossings. Oh yeah, there's the horse crossings. I think those stars were wrong in the overlay by the way, there there's one here and one here, not one here. So there's some corrections on those, but take advantage of those and tie them together. I think there's some really, really good things.

We, we had a long discussion about the fields and where we thought that should go. I think the consensus in our group was that that would be a slow thoughtful process with that over many, many, many years and see how that played out. And we still down here is an example of how not to do it. Just go on this stretch of Maryland. They just let it go and it's all invasives and it's a mess. It's not good, doesn't feel good. So do it slowly.

So we have some things about forest here. Again, it's not about the exact spot, but about the concept that you definitely need to think about reforestation. I think the group too, they acknowledge that there are a lot of trails in here. And as you lay things out, you may end up going to a forested part because you want to have some shade for the trail, for example. And that would inform some of the choices that you would make on that.

This is some bridges potentially. These are two spots we thought were also candidates for bridges. We had of course, the same down here.

We have bathroom facility here. Bathroom facility here. Just the Precast. Something simple, waterless, just exactly what you guys described. We liked that concept.

14 - So I'm just going to jump in (name, #12). So there isn't total consensus in our group about some of the things we're talking about here. Some of the other things that we mentioned were that we would like you guys, DCNR, to think about was that we've noted that major parking spot on Strickersville Road as being a potential candidate for some place for a maintenance facility, make it look like a barn or something like that.

But I think our group, there was consensus that everybody liked the idea of would it be possible to acquire George's house that's being rented out right now. Well, whether it could happen, I don't know. But we like that idea. We'd like to float that as something to think about because the location of that, it seems really nice. It's kind of out of view. It's out of the view shed and so forth. And everything's still standing up, so you wouldn't have to do that much work. So that was one of the things we talked about.

We also talked about from an educational standpoint, this property has a lot to offer, obviously from a geological view point, but we also talked about potentially using and not reforesting everything. Not necessarily turning everything back to a natural meadow, but maybe to retain some of those agricultural uses and using the property for agricultural education as well. Again, not every stitch of ground that's used for agricultural purposes at this point, but perhaps a demonstration plot or two in some of the areas that aren't necessarily where they lend themselves to a quick conversion, you know, retaining that for agricultural use.

There's a great need for a new category of farmers to learn how to farm, to learn and appreciate farming. Average age of a farmer is something in their 60s nowadays. We really need to teach people and get them excited about going back to farming. And we've got all this property. We don't have to do anything to it, but it's already in an agricultural use and some of the conversions that have been done have been harmful because just by putting a bunch of tree tubes out there now you've got invasives and an invasive problem that wasn't there before with this farm.

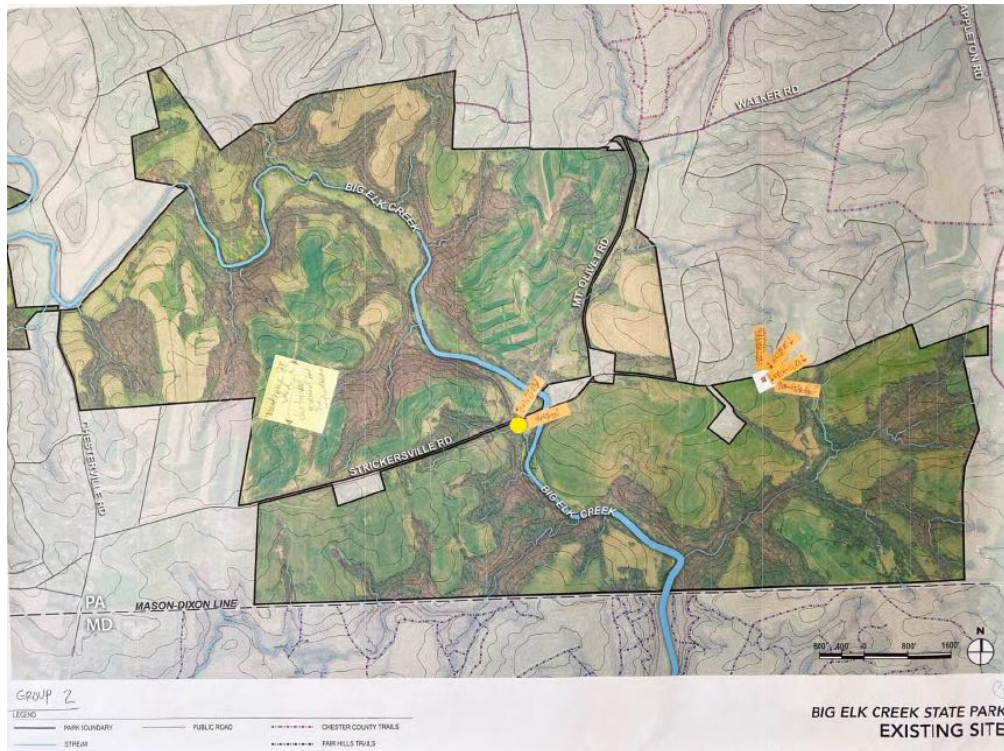
So those are some of the other concepts that we talked about as well. Some of the things we said when we look at converting to meadows, we can't suggest 'convert this to a meadow' or something like this because you guys should be making those decisions, being aware of what the current uses are, what species use, what area is best for it and so on. We didn't have that kind of knowledge available to us, you know, trying to stick things on the map.

But we think that those concepts would be important for somebody to think about and be thoughtful about, kind of like Fair Hill's got that field where they have a mowing schedule that specifically accommodates that species of bird. And that's the kind of planning that needs to be done in a more thoughtful, knowledgeable fashion.

30 - All right, now we'll go to group 2.

Group 2:

- Members: 1, 3, 10, 16, 19



19 – For Group 2, we had a good bit of conversation around sighting. We didn't go through every category in a systematic way, but I feel like we had some good conversations.

One thing that I feel kept coming up was questions about (name, #16) rightly pointed out, like what are our goals? What's our main value in placing stickers? What we're doing - should it be, you know, this was the maintenance facility for example. So there is a sticker here - noise regarding the neighbors, the number of vehicle. Should this also be a comfort station potentially if we're already going to site a maintenance facility, something of that nature. And thinking about what's the pre-existing value of perhaps citing the maintenance facility here, if you will?

There's already a foundation, right? And so trying to think through those trade-offs, logistics, such as this is already disturbed ground. And so there's a potential site in this area, a potential site in this area for, let's say, an education center or potentially a maintenance center. What would be the trade off there? Again, large parking lot. Do we actually need an education center?

And again, then another potential area that we thought could be of interest, at least (name, #10) raised this was the existence of a culvert. Because we were thinking about what are some historical sites? What are things we don't know or maybe things that don't appear on the map. He pointed out, like sidewalks, like if people are already using this, is that a place where we could then build upon that?

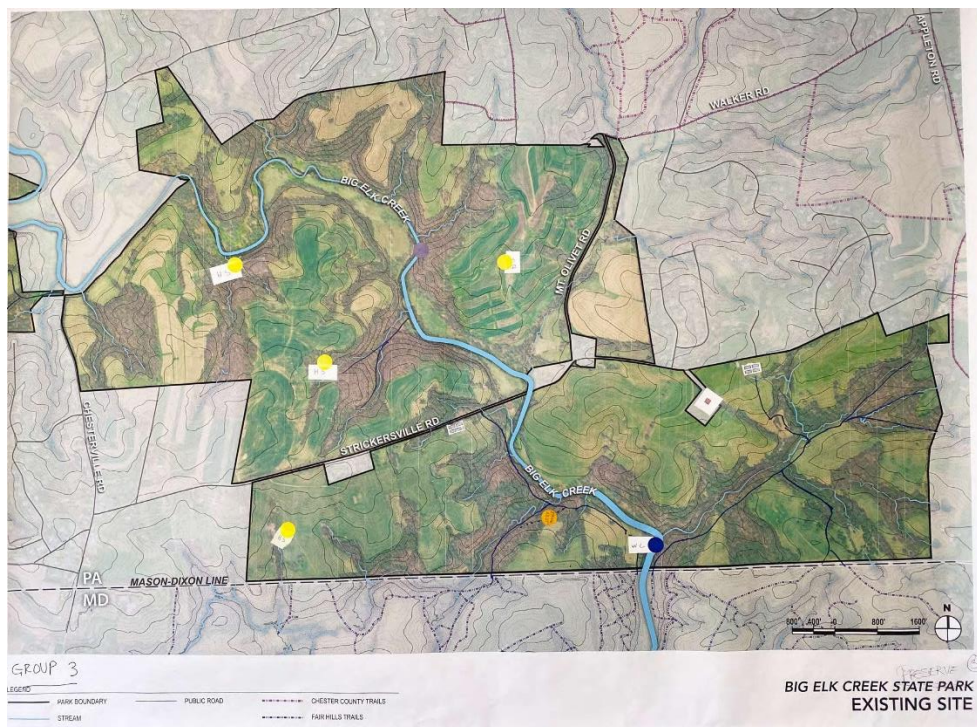
And we asked certain questions like, is there a sweet spot that would be conducive to multiple trail heads? If we were going to do, as opposed to Group 1, just rely on multiple pre-existing and then the ones that are kind of burgeoning in an ad hoc way because maybe there's a need there.

Well, where again, what would be the benefits, detriments? And then what are the competing values? And then also questioning - going back to some things we discussed last time - is it a competing value?

So we didn't have a consensus, but we did put places on the map that we found helpful to think about and the reasons for putting them there. So anyone want to add anything else or elaborate? That was short.

Group 3:

- Members: 4, 8, 15, 35



15 - So we spent quite a bit of time talking about a lot of different aspects of this. There's already parking here, right? Parking is OK in our mind, having it here. If you were to move it over here, which I think was maybe one of the plans at one point, there's a problem with the neighborhood coming out here and this is a blind hill. It's dangerous. So keeping the parking this way is fine.

And then it ties you in to all the trails over here and also feeds you down to Fair Hill. And then, we marked historical sites that we already are aware of. They're ruins. That may not be something that you want people hiking up to because they may not be safe, but they're just spots that we marked saying they're here. Be aware that they're here. And there's a bunch of them along Spring Lawn that we didn't bother to mark because you can see them from the trail.

If we were going to put a maintenance facility in, we all agreed that the barn is a great plan. And then maybe if we don't want it right here where it's in view of the neighbors here and whatnot, you could give it a buffer by tucking it over this way where there's more trees, tucking it behind the

trees. That'll help with the noise reduction. It'll help with the line of sight for the neighbors and give you your maintenance facility. So we did that there.

We talked about some trails that we already know exist here in blue. There's an eagle's nest down here that we figured was important to note. Water crossings here and up here to give you access to different trails that are already there. And there are areas where I think were being used for water crossings already.

And then we talked about over here to access Spring Lawn. There's a little pull out on the side of the road. That maybe two cars can fit in. It's dangerous. And then you have to walk down Stricklersville and crossover to get to Spring Lawn. And people are actually parking in front of the Spring Lawn Trail where the gate is, which is illegal. They're not supposed to be there. They're blocking. If they needed EMS or fire or anything to get down, they're going to be in the way.

So by putting a small, small parking lot in over here with maybe a pedestrian crossing sign or something like that, gives people the parking where they can still access this half of the parking into Fair Hill or they can go this way and access Spring Lawn and all of these trails. But do it in a safe manner, right? So they're not parked right off the road. There's a pedestrian crossing that people will have to be aware of to keep that line of sight, make sure nobody is getting hit. So we did discuss that.

We talked about parking up here. There already is parking on this side for Spring Lawn Trail, but it's owned by Elk Township, so I don't know that we necessarily need more parking over there. But if you did, it would have to be something further down from where Elk has their parking.

And then to answer the question about parking over here, yes, there used to be parking and it was taken away because that property was actually privately owned and there were problems with people parking there overnight and overdoses and things of that nature that were causing issues. So the parking was taken away for a very good reason over here because it's a much more quiet, private area and they don't necessarily need the parking here.

We didn't note it on the map that there are tunnels that go under the road that are utilized now for, I know the horseback riders use it a lot to cross. So there is access from one side to the other without necessarily needing to touch Stricklersville.

So that's pretty much what we talked about and we did talk about reforestation and all of that. At this point, I think the consensus was we've already planted 74,000 trees, let's see what happens. Let's wait, let's not go crazy with planting more trees. Let's see how that planting goes and maybe, you know, go back historically and look at maps as to where the trees were and where we need to maybe fill in here and there. If the tree didn't take or if, you know, there's an area on the map that makes sense to fill in a little bit, do that. And very thoughtful, considered changes from ag to meadows and all of that and keeping some ag if we could. If it's not, you know, in violation of the LWCF or anything like that.

So I think did I, did I get all that? Did I miss anything?

8 - I think it would be good to have a 50-year plan, that is definitely worth doing. You know, we're saying that it's going to take time. It's good to have that vision, but obviously there's not money to do it, you know, tomorrow.

16 – You mean the plantings and such?

8 - Yeah, just gradually, you know, going from 50:50 forest to ag to overall more forest. Going from row crops hay, then hay to meadow, you know, just trying to go up the value chain.

31 – Could I ask a clarifying question? You say keep some ag - in your mind, do you mean specifically row crops like corn and soy or would, a hay meadow-ish, but farmed for such, count?

15 – We didn't really go that deep into it. But I do like the idea that (name, #14) talked about. If you want to worry about the historical aspect of the property and you want to promote the historic value of the property, if you kept some of that ag and was able to use that as a teaching tool. Teach people how the land has been farmed, show them what it looks like, show them why it was done the way it was done, or maybe even start using it as something for regenerative agriculture and as a teaching tool for regenerative agriculture. I think that would be helpful.

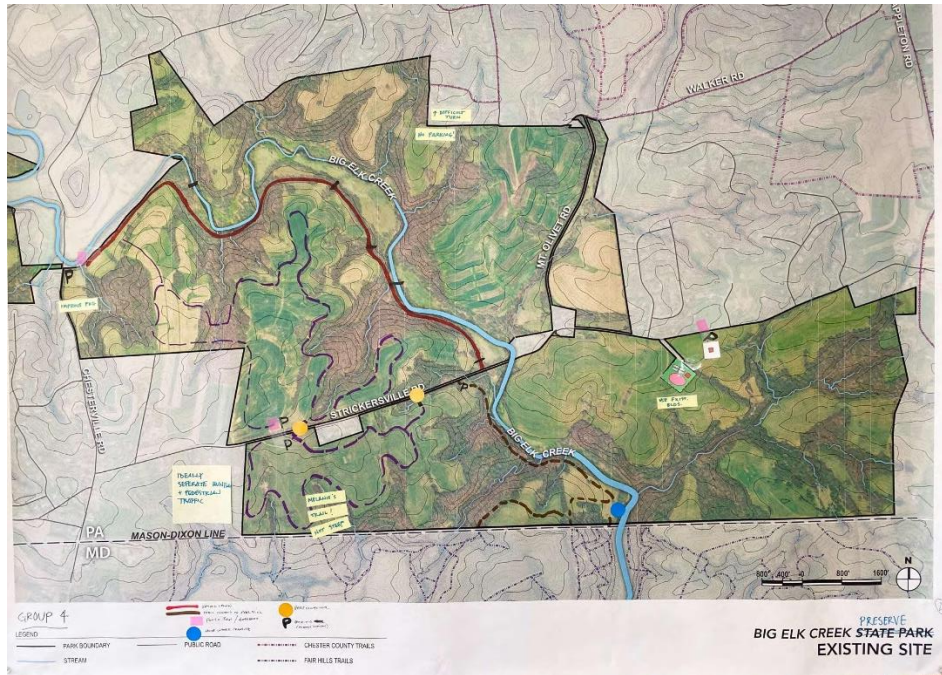
31 - Appreciate the clarification.

35 - Did you have specific thoughts or did (name, #8), on investing into the trail? But did you guys specifically get anything?

15 - Yeah, so we did say like diverting most of the money. We actually never even talked about bathrooms, but I think it would make sense if the bathrooms were relatively close to where this parking lot was or something like that. You know, pit toilets again, no water, no electricity. But putting most of the money into developing the trails, maintaining the trails that are here, repairing any trails that need to be repaired, using the money both in Big Elk and White Clay to repair the trail systems, to repair bridges that may need to be repaired, things of that nature, rather than building more infrastructure that may not necessarily be needed.

Group 4:

- Members: 5, 9, 13, 18



13 - My group decided to call it Big Elk Creek Preserve, let's start off there. And we agreed that the state should look into acquiring the Strawbridge out parcel to locate their park office there.

And we located some parking areas - the existing parking over here and I also agree that we should pull parking off of Stricklersville and maybe put a little parking lot in there for people that are parking along the road.

We laid out some trails. I have a desire for a 70-year-old lady bike trail that's fairly easy and so we were pulling that and we wanted to connect the trails to existing trails in there and the underpasses. We tried to locate where the underpasses are.

Yeah, crossings, parking, potties, we have a potty there and one over here. And yeah, we didn't really talk about any new change in land use as far as reforestation or farming. We figured that what's been going on is enough for now and it will evolve over time. So we decided not to put parking up there because of the narrowness of the road and the lack of access.

We talked a little bit about deer hunting and I guess that will be resolved over time, but is there anything else really I missed?

5 – On hunting, what we talked about was considering where deer hunting is situated and making sure that is not within the area where the pedestrian use is, basically where the trails may be.

13 - Yeah, I don't know what's going on over here and then up here is fairly open as far as use is concerned.

18 - So in the absence of acquiring the extra piece...

13 - Oh right. We decided that (name, #15)'s idea about putting the facility over here was good.

16 – The maintenance facility?

13 - Yes.

33 – Can I ask a question on the deer hunting? Did you talk about that at all in relation to the ecology of the site?

5 - No, we didn't talk about that. But I also wanted to talk about the consideration of the agricultural use, could also be used for deer management.

But in terms of the consideration of the type of crops that are planted there, not just for inside of the park, but also the impact that, you know, may be able to contribute to the neighbouring residents as well as the neighboring farms.

9 - We talked a little bit about, has a census been done? We don't know if you're privy to that information, but has a census been done on the deer population on the property? But just the general sense is that there's a significant overpopulation of deer, it's very significant. And that's probably certainly impacting the ecology of the land today.

8 - Well, in fact, the botanical survey called out that deer overgraze was the single biggest issue.

5 – That was more towards potential using of the ag fields for deer management as opposed to, you know, other uses.

9 - To jump in and highlight two things that (name, #13) did a great job highlighting. Walker Road there along the top where that L is up top is a one lane road. It's a two-lane road, but it's only one lane wide. So it would be, I think, challenging to have a lot of additional traffic up there. With that outtake up there, the extent that existing property and structures can be reutilized, I think that would be very well received by the community. Much like the fact that we're sitting in a building that's been utilized right here as opposed to new construction.

30 - That was sort of a theme of the group, I think. Trying to reuse as much existing things.

9 - Yeah, that was the theme. And there's something that several of the other groups highlighted, you know, the underpasses are already being used and it is something that's of interest in this area and we think this would be something to consider using as letting out trails.

30 - All right, I want to ask one sort of open-ended question and then I know you want to talk a little bit about the next meeting. But without repeating the concepts or the thoughts that we just talked about, that each group just shared, as people were listening, is there anything that was missed? Is there any, like concept or idea or thought or issue that wasn't discussed or that we didn't ask about and that nobody mentioned? Anything popping into anybody's mind? Oh, my goodness, we should be talking about this.

18 – Oh, yes please. I had put on one of the charts earlier that whatever lighting would be involved, if any improvements needed lighting, it should be dark sky.

30 - Yeah. Makes sense. Anything else? OK, I think that's the end of the exercise then.

16 - So anything we do, obviously we have to make sure we're not going to have issues. We need a PDNI. PDNI, PDNI, PDNI. Anything we do, obviously anything, you know, we have to go back and make sure we're not going to have any impacts to rare or endangered plants or animals.

30 - OK. And that is that is one of the maps actually, any specific project we do a much closer look at PDNI.

23 - And that includes existing trails. Like there are places where there are trails now where they probably shouldn't be. So we've got to be open minded about that.

1 - So that's the end of the agenda for the evening.

2 - Who's got a thought about the next meeting? What would you like to see on the next agenda based on where we are right now?

16 - I'd like to know the results of the conversation that (name, #1) is going to have with the Secretary. And I think at some point we need to talk about what are our goals and priorities. Once that conversation is done.

8 - There's some consistency in where people are placing things on the maps. Is it possible to go ahead and run those detailed PDNI surveys on those locations and just get that, you know, issue out of the way.

2 - That's an option. I'm going to assume that you guys are going to kind of nail this together. Is that a fair assumption?

30 - I was, I stood up when (name, #8) started to ask that question. I was just going to say that we can take these and sort of synthesize and come back. But like here were the commonalities and here's sort of what you all, you know what you all generated together. We can also share the individual images that I think (name, #25) you could then share with the minutes and such. But we can like, you know, compile things so we could see where the commonalities were.

2 - So if we can do that, then I'm going to hound on you all about the survey again. So it would be great if we had participation in that survey that we sent out a couple of months ago and we could pull that together and share that. Anybody else got a thought on what you'd like to see at the next meeting?

10 - I'll just reiterate what you said about the survey because I missed it the first time. There was a link that was with the agenda, right (name, #25)?

25 - Yes, the link was sent back in June.

10 - I honestly missed it the first time and after the last meeting and I went back and reread the e-mail and said, oh, there's the link.

2 – We'll resend it, not a problem. And one thing that jumped out at me, to go back to your questions a couple minutes ago, (name, #14) brought up some good points about this agricultural reforestation and meadow management. I think we really need to study that a lot before we get too much further down the road because there's different views around agricultural use versus reforestation and the value to the resource.

So I think there's a lot of opinions around that and thanks (name, #14) for bringing it up. So I think we definitely need to highlight that and maybe there's been a lot of study around plant species that are on the site and the value to grazing or not grazing and what current site species are using the row crop lands or not. Or could that half acre be more beneficial forest species that we're trying to provide a food source to or habitat. I think we definitely need to research what we know about that. And I'm not saying for the next meeting, but I think that jumped out at me during tonight's meeting where there was a lot of discussion.

Anybody else have a thought about what you want to see next meeting? So you can't complain or complain about the agenda. Now here's your time. Let's get it out.

1 – I am going to ask (name, #30). In addition to the commonalities, for both the divisions and the differences. I thank everyone again for their input tonight.

16 – With the full understanding that not everyone in the groups agreed on everything.

30 – Yes, sure. And have that for the record, the input, but also so we can get us on that road map in the right direction. We never expected everybody to agree or agree even within each individual group, but start really trying to get as many issues out there as possible start a plan. So yes, we can put a summary together.

1 - Yes, that commonality will help us narrow things.

16 - And then maybe we can talk about goals.

18 - What's the probability of getting that acquisition of the new property?

15 – I'm sorry, I'm not trying to be negative Nancy, but it's in a trust.

1 - So everyone knows, it's managed in a trust out of Philadelphia. It's approximately 8 acres. It has a sort of farmhouse on it as well as out buildings. It's been in use for more than a century. It's nicely tucked, as everyone noticed off the main road. So as far as eyesight aesthetics, they are optimal neighbors. There's lots of pluses to that property. We haven't explored or made contact with or assessed the viability of that acquisition.

16 - You know, maybe if you went back to preserve status and had very limited impact in footprints on here, go back to that trust and say why you want to use that property for reuse instead of building.

1 - That's what it would be used for in that hypothetical scenario. Adaptive reuse both for maintenance as well as visitor contact and park office. I said this to someone who's asking about the park office and we have these new, obviously 21st century visitor centers, education centers on park properties, but we have a lot of experience with adaptive reuses of farmhouses and barns too.

And it is was noted here where we're sitting that this is an adaptive reuse and you've experienced it every time you've been here for a meeting.

16 - So that really could be the answer to the issue and an olive branch.

25 - So for logistic purposes, meeting 5 was to be about accessibility. I think we're beyond that, right? Yes? Just so we're on the same page. The next meeting will be in three weeks from tonight, where we can review the new mapping based on the information provided tonight. And hopefully (name, #1) is able to have those conversations. And essentially we're back now to master planning.

1 - I'm looking to (name, #30) here. Can we do a turn around on the synthesis of the work here and have that ready in 3 weeks?

30 - I think so. I think it might not be a whole bunch of new drawings, but I think we can certainly synthesize the information and have a discussion around what we pulled out from there. For sure. Might not be 3-hour discussion. So hopefully there's some other attend items too.

15 – Would anyone be interested to see photos of the barn that was there?

1- Yeah, absolutely.

15 - If anybody here wants to see them, I do have the photos.

2 - Any other thoughts? We're wrapping up so final thoughts. OK, good. Thank you all for your participation tonight. Appreciate it a lot.