



## **Big Elk Creek Master Planning Task Force Meeting #7, Part 1 Transcript**

**Meeting Date:** July 31, 2025

**Meeting Time:** 6:00 – 8:00 PM

**Meeting Location:** Microsoft TEAMS

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

*\*\*Task Force members were given the option to join one or both of the Meeting #7 dates in order to accommodate schedules.*

### **Task Force Members Present:**

- 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 36
- 

### **Meeting Minutes:**

1 - I want to thank everyone for your flexibility and allowing us to pivot this afternoon. The weather reports, as I stated earlier, were pretty dire.

I'm glad to hear that things for most of you weren't as bad as predicted. 5 to 8 inches and being at the meeting house at White Clay next to the Creek was a bit disconcerting trying to put everybody there and think about how we may get in and get out if things went south. So I'm glad all of you could be flexible and join us.

I have to state that this meeting is being recorded. And by staying on the call, you're agreeing to that recording. And if you don't, then you have to leave the call.

Most of you, maybe many of you, haven't had the opportunity to meet (name, #38). She's our new manager in the Ridley Creek complex and her duty station is White Clay Creek and Big Elk Creek State Park. She's on the call and I know for all these task force meetings, except for this review of the master plan, we've had (name, #24), but he moved on, I believe it was in the late spring, to take over as manager at the Neshaminy State Park. So welcome, (name, #38).

And with that, I don't think I have anything else unless my staff reminds me that I have something else to say? With that, I'll turn it over to (name, #30) and he'll run us through the summary presentation of the master plan and we'll talk more about the actual draft document in that presentation.

30 - All right, thanks, (name, #1). So (name, #33) and I are going to tag team the presentation tonight, as we have in past presentations and meetings as well. That might be a little less seamless, you know, virtually, but we're going to try to do our best with that and I'll share my screen in a moment.

The presentation is comprehensive, so there's a good deal of information here that you've all seen

before. So we'll try to go through that quickly. If we err on the side of going too quickly and you would like to see something again or talk about something, just let us know. Or we could return to it at the end, whatever seems easiest. But like I said, it's intended to be comprehensive.

It captures the whole process, everything from the very beginning through where we are today, including the sort of outlines of the final plan (name, #1) mentioned. We also have worked on a draft final report that just adds some narrative context and text to the images that you'll see today.

That's 'draft' in the sense that we're going to receive some comments from DCNR, but also if there's any thoughts or information that comes out of these two meetings, you know we would incorporate into the final report as well.

All right, so I'll share my screen here. I also may turn off my camera, not because I don't want to be seen, but just to make sure my bandwidth here supports all the images we're going to share.

All right, everybody see my screen? Give me a thumbs up. OK, great, excellent. All right, this is just the agenda. Again. You've seen something very similar. I'm not gonna talk about that. We'll just sort of dive into things, throughout the whole process, bumps and all.

We've tried to work as design professionals within the mission of the State Park system and work to create something that everyone that's a part of it, this task force, other stakeholders, the design team as well, would be proud of and happy with.

You all are very familiar with the park. So I think I can skip this section, which is essentially, you know, an introduction to the mapping and some images on the park. So I'll give a quick flavor, but I'm going to skip that because you don't need that introduction.

As we've talked about, throughout the incorporation of these areas of land into a State Park additional staff that will eventually be and maybe partially already has been added and allocated, throughout the process and as the park moves forward.

So an outline of our planning process. We started with a pretty intensive kind of information gathering stage where we learned a lot about the region and about the sort of connected and interconnected open spaces that support this area. And of which, Big Elk Creek is a key component and a key sort of connective tissue, both sort of environmentally and ecologically, but also in terms of the people in communities that live here in it and use the park on a daily, weekly or regular basis.

This is the outline of the park. Again, you're all familiar with this, so these portions of the presentation are redundant for you. In the end, the process took about two years and this was sort of the rough outline of things.

You know, this says 'plan completion' in June. That's sort of when we finished these drawings. And then there were some scheduling challenges.

I know it was sort of setting these couple of meetings and what we did as the design team is sort of the top set of bullets here, mapping and data collection, working through various levels of stakeholder engagement, including the task force process, considering alternatives for the plan, and then working through a final plan, this presentation and then a report that will go along with it.

And as I mentioned, the report is very largely the contents— the images and everything that you're seeing tonight. Just with a little bit of narrative that describes things so it's clear what those documents are. I'll skip stakeholder input.

You all have been aware and part of the process, but future activities—things that we didn't do—were not part of this process. We haven't done any planning for specific projects, whether trails, ecological restoration, parking areas—any of those things. That planning and design work is a future, or a series of future tasks. Resource restoration—DCNR is working on things like that.

There are a wealth of future opportunities and tasks around that. And interpretation and education—that's future work. Once the park is up and running, if that makes sense. There will be interpretive and educational work that teaches people about the park and its significance—what we heard through the process. Again, I think you've seen all of these slides before.

There was an initial online survey. This slide summarizes those results. There were a series of stakeholder meetings with five different identified groups. This was about two years ago when we held those. This summarizes who attended. There were additional invitees who didn't attend, but these are the folks who were there. From those stakeholder meetings, there were a handful of key principles. Again, I'm not going to read these because we've talked about them and worked through them in the task force process. I think you're all familiar with those.

Then the task force process itself is summarized here—starting last year, into the beginning of this year, and now the middle of this year—with all of your time, effort, thought, and feedback supporting that process. We had one evening where we did a mapping exercise with all of you, which led to quite a few shared concepts that informed the plan. Some of those were likely informing the plan from the start, but others may not have been. They're listed here.

I hate to just read through these, but some important ones include co-locating elements for easy access—like restrooms near parking—and maintaining or formalizing creek crossings to reduce environmental damage at informal crossings. Also, understanding land use transitions, managing for them, planning for them, and how they'll manifest in the future. There was one area where, at least in our interpretation, there wasn't complete agreement or consensus. That had to do with whether to build some sort of structure on-site, small or not. Visitor and education office space, for example.

Clearly, having an existing building to reinhabit would be ideal, but that doesn't really exist on-site. That was an area where task force members didn't agree across the board. I don't know, (name, #33), is there any shared concept you'd like to highlight?

You can say no, but if you'd like to, please do.

**33-** I don't think so right yet.

**30** - OK. A number of other ideas came up—not necessarily mentioned by all groups or individuals, but still helpful in shaping the plan, even if they weren't fully consensus-driven. A couple of interesting ones include incorporating the existing underpasses and maintaining them so they're passable under Strickersville Road.

Providing water access for educational opportunities—and maybe recreation. Then the question of creek crossings. You'll see there's a diagram that talks about hunting on the property, which has obviously been an important part of its history.

Site Analysis: We did quite a bit of mapping of the existing site. Our full team—including (name, #33) and her office, Meridian, and Meliora Design, a civil engineering firm—supported these efforts. We really tried to understand: What do we have here? What exists, and how can we support it? Again, I don't want to belabor these maps. You've seen them all before.

I will note one update on our maps, though. This map shows a 150-foot buffer at the streams and watercourses throughout the park, based on an updated understanding of stream quality. Another map I'll highlight—this last one—is infrastructure. We added more detail here based on your input, group discussions, and the identification of particular points of interest within the park. So this map has more information now than it did before. Maybe more than the last time you saw it.

I know it's probably too small for many of you to see here, but I imagine we can share all of this as well. So you can see it at a later time.

This map also changed slightly. It looks at suitable sites for potential - I hate the word “development” because I don't feel like that's what we're doing here - but potential construction or improvements, I'll say. You'll see the area we'll focus on is in one of those yellow bubbles.

All right, potential park amenities: This was a catalog of potential improvements that might eventually be suitable for the park. That doesn't mean everything shown in these slides would be constructed exactly as in the examples. They wouldn't be. And it's also not to say everything would happen at once - It definitely wouldn't. But we wanted to fully catalog the outcomes of the planning process—ideas that *might* be here.

So we definitely are - We talked about a series of trail typologies, depending on what's appropriate in specific areas of the park, zones, distances, and levels of accessibility. That doesn't mean these options would be evenly distributed across the park - just that they can be considered where appropriate.

Trail planning in particular - we've shown initial ideas, but any actual trail improvements or construction would need to be studied in more detail, on the ground, by people skilled in trail design and construction. They'd get that right.

As for structures - we've talked about a small visitor center and park office. The primary role of that building would be educational use. And again, this is just an example building. It's not to say this is

exactly what would be built there - or the exact size or footprint - but it's a visual to describe the potential. So, office space, teaching space, and a maintenance structure.

The example on the left is actually from White Clay Creek—it's currently in use there. The upper right is another example of a maintenance structure. On this site, if it's visible and depending on its placement, a barn-inspired design—even if it's new construction—feels more than appropriate, as we've mentioned. There's also the potential for restrooms or comfort stations co-located with parking in the future, depending on how the space is used and the need for restroom facilities.

Some site elements: examples of crossings—larger ones if needed in some areas, or smaller, less formal ones—as long as they're safe, stable, and maintainable. Parking areas—looking at how they can be integrated into the park design. potential for porous paving to manage stormwater in a way that's environmentally responsible and avoids runoff into other areas of the park.

Ideas for day use—very much passive use types. Creek access, bird watching - things with low impact on the property. And then restoration of the various ecotypes throughout the park. We have a map we'll show in a moment that (name, #33) will talk about. It's been refined and updated to include more criteria and to better define the potential meadow and forest restoration areas.

So that was pretty quick. That brings us to where we are with the plan. And I think probably here is where I turn it over - (name, #33) will jump in.

33 - This is the existing - we showed that before. And again, I don't think the plan will surprise anyone - but here is the plan as it exists. Then we have a series of images to share, including overlays that describe features and some enlargements.

So the general outlines of the plan show the park office and maintenance area—and maybe (name, #30), you could gesture for me since I'm gesturing wildly, but can't actually do it.

30 - I could do that—if people can see my cursor.

33 - Can everybody—can you see that? Great. So that is the area we all landed on for the park office and maintenance. We have two iterations of that area to share, but that's where there used to be a house and some other small structures. We've also noted in the big purple triangles the trail connections, including the one from Fair Hill and others going east and north of the site. Of course, we've kept Mount Olivet Road in the yellow dots, and Spring Lawn Trail, which are staying.

We've also layered in ideas for potential new trails. Todd already noted these are rough placements. Typically, you take a rough alignment like this and walk the site to refine it in the field. That takes some skill and finesse. What we wanted to capture here is the short loop from the park office/classroom area—shown in yellow. And the longer 3.5-mile loop, which is in the pink color. The idea is to create trail experiences that move through different ecosystems.

But it's also important to note we were careful to refine trail alignments, so they didn't cut through sensitive ecosystems. For example, in the pale yellow area near Mount Olivet Road, we really focused on protecting grassland habitat and nesting birds—ensuring trails didn't disturb those areas or degrade the ecosystem. A lot of care went into that and even more will be taken as the trails are developed.

There was also some trail cleanup—meaning we'd remove some existing trails. As you know, there are a lot of social trails on the site. This shows a larger, simplified trail system to support better ecological habitat restoration.

Another thing to note is the dispersed parking. We all discussed that quite a bit, and what we've shown are parking areas spread out around the site. In particular, near the midpoint of Strickersville Road, we've indicated a rough area for parking. The idea - based on our discussions - is that these lots would be small, maybe for 10, 15, or 20 cars, and dispersed across the property.

We also added one of those at the very north end of the site. We felt that was the safest spot near the property line. And then there's another one to the left of that, (name, #30) - maybe you can just point - just above, at the little T. Yes, that's the place. Boy, I could not describe that at all!

So let's see, I've covered: trail connections, location for the park office and maintenance... Oh - also, the very pale pink circles represent suggested stream crossings. Some of those already exist; some do not. But those are the spots we identified as potential crossing points.

And then of course, the ecotype areas for restoration - the darker tones indicate forested or forest restoration areas, and the paler tones show potential meadow habitat.

We worked on refining this map with a DCNR resource expert - especially thinking about grassland bird habitat. That's why some trails were simplified—to avoid disturbing those areas. It interferes with nesting. I think I hit everything, (name, #30).

30 - All right. The next image shows how the site might be divided into phases, or areas of focus at different times. It's mainly a way to think about the types of work and where they might happen. It's not meant to limit future decisions. Depending on funding or other factors, more or less could happen in each area at different times. It's really just to give a general sense of what might make sense to approach together. It also doesn't suggest any specific sequence. Just a set of potential projects, components, and site areas.

The next image focuses entirely on ecological restoration. (name, #33) touched on it, but, do you want to add more? This just strips away some of the other map layers so you can see the –

33 - Yeah, I think it's really just a way to make this more visually clear and to help understand the scale of the restoration. Particularly the grasslands. We talked a lot about that—especially the opportunity for grassland bird habitat in this area, and how it relates to Fair Hill and other lands outside the park. So I think it's just a way to make things simpler.

30 - The next image shows areas where hunting is allowed versus where it's not. That small green area is the potential site for parking, maintenance, and a visitor center. So essentially, no hunting would be allowed in close proximity to that area. Also, I think the intention is to prohibit hunting along the Spring Lawn and Mount Olivet trails as well. Yeah, when you zoom into the map, you'll see that more clearly. For some reason on this screen it looks a bit foggy, but there is a hunting buffer shown around those trails.

One thing I wanted to highlight on this map—it shows pretty clearly that the proposed area for development is less than 1% of the total park acreage. And it's actually smaller than the green square you see, since that includes a generous buffer—about 150 feet—for safety related to hunting. So again, the actual improved area would be less than 1%, possibly much less, of the entire site.

When we zoom into that zone, we've developed two different, very conceptual layout options.

33 - Sure. This one is just off Strickersville Road, at what's essentially the current parking lot. The brown maintenance building shown here is roughly where the old house was located, with the maintenance yard behind it. The visitor center is further south to take advantage of the southern views. We think it could be nicely nestled into the landscape.

You can also see 20 parking spaces and a bus lay-by, which in this case is just along Strickersville Road - taking advantage of the road shoulder. We've shown 6 picnic tables here. There might be 3, maybe 5 - it's flexible. The idea is that they're immersed in a restored meadow planting.

That doesn't mean there wouldn't be some lawn—just enough to walk to the tables—but you don't need a large, mowed lawn space. This could all be integrated into a restoration landscape. And as (name, #30) mentioned, these are just conceptual diagrams. As the project moves forward, the plans would become more refined and you could start thinking through all the detailed considerations for actually building something like this.

30 - The second option - shown in the aerial image at the top left—pulls the development further into the site, behind the hedgerow and slightly downhill. It includes the same components. (name, #33) do you want to explain?

33 - Sure. So it's the same elements, but if you remember our site walk, everyone liked the idea of placing the facility behind the hedgerow—it really helps screen it from the road. So we're really just illustrating two different approaches: one closer to the road, using the existing parking, and the other further back—below the hedgerow.

Of course, in the below-hedgerow version, if we want to allow for bus access, we'll need a bus lay-by and turnaround. But it's still the same 20 parking spaces, the same visitor center set toward the south to capture the views, and the maintenance yard placed to the north-northeast.

30 - So part of the future discussion around these two options will be the pros and cons of visibility from Strickersville Road versus a more tucked-away location like this one. Each has its trade-offs, and more conversation will be needed to determine which is most appropriate or beneficial. For

now, we're just presenting both as viable concepts. The final slide is really about next steps. We'll be wrapping this up with all of your feedback included. DCNR is also moving forward with a separate Cultural Resources Management Plan. Someone else on the call may be able to speak to that in more detail than I can.

And in the future, we'll begin planning how to implement some of these elements. That was a very quick overview. Being virtual, it's harder to have a back-and-forth dialogue like we would in person, but we're here. I can flip back and forth between slides to help answer questions.

(name, #1), I don't know if you had anything in mind for next steps with this presentation—or (name, #2) - you two are the chairs, so I'll turn it over to you.

1 - I'll just say again—thank you for the summary presentation of the master plan. Over the last week, we've been discussing the draft document as it moves into final form. This presentation does a good job of summarizing that.

And the plan is to share that draft document electronically with the task force—probably within the next two weeks. That way, you'll have the full document in hand, including all the text corresponding to what was presented in the summary, so you can review and provide final comments. This will extend our review and comment period a bit. We're now anticipating that it'll go through the end of August.

After receiving your comments, we'll prepare to release the final plan to the public—with task force comments included in that final draft—so there's full transparency around everything Todd presented tonight. So you'll have the document in hand before it's made public and an opportunity to weigh in.

That's the current thinking for this process, and it aligns with what we discussed back in February during the last task force meeting. There's value in that approach, and of course, I'm open to any thoughts, concerns, or considerations from task force members about what I just shared.

2 - I have a couple of questions if you don't mind. Two things from your presentation... First, you mentioned something about improvement areas—sounded like you said less than 1%? Could you clarify or restate that?

30 - Sure. The park is roughly 1,700 acres, and the area being considered for improvements—where the two layout concepts are—is probably around 3 to 6 acres. It might even be less than that, so it's a very small portion of the park—definitely less than 1%, maybe even less than half a percent.

2 - And that number doesn't include trails or restoration areas?

30 - Right—it's only referring to the immediate area around the proposed park structures—the conceptual layouts I just showed.

1 - Just to add—since the park is 1,700 acres, even 17 acres would be 1%, so these plans are well below that.

30 - Exactly—so yes, significantly less than 1%. If you include trails and ecological restoration areas, the footprint expands. But this figure is strictly for the “construction” aspect—like buildings and associated features.

2 - What about proposed parking—how much area does that take up?

30 - Good question. I don’t have that specific number offhand. I could probably estimate it, but...

2 - That’s OK, I just wasn’t sure if that was included in your earlier comment.

30 - Good clarification. Yes, it includes the parking for the location where the two proposed structures would go. But it doesn’t include the other potential dispersed parking areas we’ve talked about elsewhere in the park.

2 - Got it. OK. My second question is about DCNR’s cultural resources work. Could you repeat what you said about that?

30 - Sure—and maybe I’ll ask (name, #1) or (name, #31) to speak more specifically to that. DCNR has already started the process—a consultant is on board.

1 - I’ll actually defer to (name, #31)—she can go into more detail.

31 - We have brought on a cultural professional consulting firm, the 106 Group, which is National Park certified for work like this. They will be conducting a deep dive into both above-ground and below-ground cultural resources within the park, as well as developing the cultural themes for the site. Their work will explore the significance of the Mason-Dixon Line—especially to freedom seekers—the importance of waterways to those individuals, and all related stories.

Additionally, they will look at indigenous use of the waterways and landscape, the industrial revolution period including potential mill dams and other industrial uses, the agrarian and gentleman farmer eras, and up through more recent DuPont-era and recreational and cultural uses.

All of this will be compiled, highlighting key takeaways such as significant themes for the park, archaeological sites and ruins that can be stabilized and interpreted (though not restored), and other core cultural elements. I’ll stop there for now.

1 - OK, (name, #31), just to connect here - If I recall correctly, from the work done with the National Park Service, quite a bit of documentation was started in the foundation document by Paul Zeff, and all that has been provided to the 106 Group.

2 - My last question, and then I'll be quiet is: will this effort connect to the heritage plan currently being commissioned by the townships of London Britain, Franklin, Elk, and New Garden?

31 - Yes, the Bureau of State Parks is currently developing a list of stakeholders to engage, and those local historical groups are definitely among the potential stakeholders. We expect those conversations will naturally lead to that connection. Now that it's on our radar, we'll ensure it happens.

2 - Perfect, thank you.

1 - I'll just add - (name, #31) reminded me this week that the 106 Group also did the cultural plan for Point State Park in Pittsburgh, a National Historic Landmark. They're among the best in the business for this type of work—engaging stakeholders and capturing both well-known and untold stories to fully represent the landscape.

18 - Just a quick question—will the maximum and minimum square footage for the proposed building sites and parking lots be included in the final master plan?

30 - We could definitely include the square footage of the model buildings we based our concepts on. I actually think parking might evolve over time—John, correct me if you disagree. In other words, usage and demand in certain areas may guide adjustments, so it's flexible.

I'm not sure as a designer how to define a strict maximum for parking at this stage, if that makes sense. I'm not trying to avoid the question; I just think that's a fair approach.

And I think in keeping with the work of this task force, what we were ultimately aiming for was small, dispersed parking lots—primarily trailhead lots that are safe and accessible—rather than large, defined parking areas. That said, there is one lot that is more defined: the 20-space parking lot plus bus parking near the visitor center. That's sort of our minimum.

We spoke about this in depth in task force meetings. That approach is aligned with what's done at White Clay Creek. And that scale will also correspond with the small to medium-sized structure we've proposed for the park office and education center.

18 - Great, thank you. If those points you just made could be included in the final version of the plan, I think that would be really helpful—just for transparency and clarification for readers.

1 - That's exactly the kind of comment we need to hear, (name, #18), so we can be sure to capture that.

16 - I actually have a couple of comments. First: the presentation that was put together tonight—was that specifically for us (the task force), or are you planning to use this elsewhere?

1 - It was specifically prepared for you.

16 - Great. I have about 10 quick questions. First: The restrooms. You mentioned they'd be co-located with parking. Does that mean with *all* parking areas or just around the office?

30 - No, restrooms are only planned for the office area.

16 - Got it. Second: The short loop you identified in that mango color—is that in an area with any steep slopes?

30 - No. That loop is intended to be the accessible one-mile loop.

16 - OK. That's why I asked—thank you. Third: You mentioned 15–20 cars for the dispersed parking. Just to clarify—(name, #1), you're saying that's *not* part of the 20-space lot near the Nature Center, right? In other words, those are in *addition to* the 20 spaces near the visitor center?

1 - Correct.

30 - Right. There are five parking areas plus the sixth one at the visitor center.

16 - Right. But the sixth one at the visitor center is the one with about 20 parking spaces?

30 - Exactly.

16 - So the others would be an additional 15 to 20 around the perimeter, depending what you determine, Right?

30 - You might decide at one of the sites you need 10 spaces. But the idea is they're all meant to be small lots.

16 - I understand that.

33 - I think, to (name, #30)'s earlier point, how those lots ultimately get sized depends on use and demand, site suitability, and final siting and design. They'll likely all fall into the 5 to 10 space range, with 10 probably being the max. Maybe none of them will end up needing 10, but that's the general target.

16 - OK. But that raises another question for me. So with this plan—it still feels very open. You just mentioned that the exact locations for the parking areas are not finalized. So I understand you've shown *potential* areas for parking, but the exact locations and sizes still have to be determined in the

future? So within those general zones, it sounds like more detailed work would come later. I guess I had expected we'd be seeing that level of specificity tonight. Does that make sense, what I'm saying?

30 - I think I'm following you, (name, #16). We're currently identifying *where* we believe we need parking, based on a conceptual trail system. But that trail system hasn't been fully designed yet. So ultimately, final decisions about whether we actually need a lot at a given location—or how big it should be—will come later.

Right now, we're conveying the concept: small, remote lots in certain areas, and that's what the master plan needed to capture.

16 - I guess I just wanted more specificity, honestly. I even wrote a note to myself: "*Why didn't they prepare a plan with specificity on buildings and trails?*" Because I thought that's what we would be discussing - a more concrete plan, not just general areas like, "we're thinking of putting something here or there." That concerns me.

Also, you mentioned DCNR resource experts— Does that include the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program folks or not? Have they reviewed this master plan at all?

1 - They won't have an official review role, (name, #16), until there's an actual project being proposed - something specific that's being planned and designed. But in terms of generalities—the types of features, their proposed locations—yes, ecological considerations have been taken into account.

30 - If I could add something— We're working from very coarse mapping. So while we've identified good general areas for parking, and we all agreed on those spots, getting more specific would require better topography data. And beyond that, we'd also need to understand visitor patterns—how often people are coming, where they're going. You might eventually decide, for example, not to build the remote lot up by the green triangle because it turns out people just aren't using that part of the park.

16 - How do you plan to get that kind of information?

30 - That would need to be gathered over time as the park is used. It's beyond our scope of work for the master plan to design specific parking lots. You're asking about the design of specific parking lots, and that's OK. That level of detail is just not part of our scope of work at the moment.

Our charge is to identify *potential* locations. As (name, #33) mentioned, we don't have detailed information—a site surveyor hasn't gone out to survey those specific spots—so we don't yet know how we would design those areas.

33 - Exactly. There are future steps that go beyond what we're currently tasked with.

16 - OK, that's fair. I didn't realize the plan was limited in that way. I honestly expected the plan to be identified to a higher degree of specificity, which makes me nervous.

Like the second option you've proposed—tucking the Nature Center and maintenance buildings behind the hedgerow—that worries me. I know people said, "Oh, you wouldn't really see it because it's behind the trees." And I understand it's a small area compared to the size of the park. But personally, I liked the first option better because I recall that after the hedgerow, the slope drops off pretty sharply. I'm not sure if it's still flat back there.

I can see your grade lines on the map, but my memory is that once you pass those trees, it falls off quite a bit. That worries me. So when would that final decision be made? Who's going to decide between Option 1 and Option 2? That's the kind of question I have after looking at this plan. Can that be answered?

1 - Understood, and that's a good question. Again, that kind of individual siting decision for that location—formerly the original farm—would be addressed during the design stage. As (name, #30) noted, and as many of us have seen on-site, the primary development (the farmhouse, the barn) was located where Option 1 places it.

Once you go past the hedgerow (Option 2), you're in historically agricultural fields, and yes—it does drop off. So all those factors—the grades, the historic use, the views—would be part of the design-phase consideration. And yes, that design phase is still a ways off. If you'd like, we can talk a bit more about that tonight or at a later time.

16 - It just makes me nervous. I really thought we'd be coming to a conclusion—like, *this is the plan*. Not, "This is one option, but we might also do this other one." And I know we won't be around when those final decisions are made, which concerns me. Also, on your mention of the Natural Heritage Program—I hope their concerns are *primary*. I hope that their input is treated with the importance it deserves. Thank you.

1 - Thanks. (name, #15)?

15 - Hi, just a quick question regarding the trail maps. Again, I understand everything's conceptual and nothing is set in stone. But we've discussed this at length in multiple meetings: the Springlawn and Mount Olivet trails are *Township* trails. The townships have explicitly requested that they *not* be included in DCNR's plans going forward. That means not being shown on DCNR maps, etc.

So I just, I have a little bit of a concern when you're looping your trails directly into the Township trails, does anybody wanna jump in? Are we just noting that I have a problem with it?

1 - Sorry, I was just going to say there's probably easement concerns and access to those existing trails that's at issue.

15 - Well, that's part of the issue, yes. The other part is that the townships don't want their trails

connected DCNR's trails and they've repeatedly expressed that that concern. So I just want to make sure that we know going into trail planning and everything else that nothing is connecting to Spring Lawn, nothing is connecting to Mount Olivet. I know both townships sent emails requesting the trails to be removed from DCNRS maps and website and I don't believe that's been done as of yet. So this is definitely an issue that needs to be looked at.

1- Yes, and we're aware of that issue. Thank you, noted.

36 - Yeah, I've got a couple of questions. First, I see a little parking lot at the beginning of the Springlawn Trail. Is DCNR planning to add a secondary parking lot there, or is that marker just for our existing lot?

33 - That parking lot already exists.

36 - OK, thanks. And (name, #15) is right—it wasn't that we proactively requested removal from the map. We were *asked* by (name, #24) whether we had an issue being included in your maps, and both Franklin and Elk townships said *no*, we do *not* want to be included. We don't want to drive outside traffic to those trails—we prefer they remain primarily open for residents. But that request wasn't honored.

Then recently, it was *DCNR* that advertised use of our Springlawn Trail parking lot for people trying to fish on the creek. So we're constantly fighting this battle just to keep the few parking spaces we have as open and accessible to residents as possible. I remember at a previous meeting there was some conversation about maybe just running a parallel trail alongside the township trail. From the latest map, it doesn't *look* like that's still being considered—but earlier in the process, I was told the townships would have to approve any trail connectivity.

So I assume if there *is* any connection being proposed, that conversation will still need to happen, and any decisions would have to go through the boards in either Franklin or Elk?

1 - Yes, certainly. Regarding trail connectivity and those two specific pathways through the park, we will continue to engage in further conversations and coordination with the townships before any action is taken.

36 - OK, thank you.

11 - Sorry for being a bit late tonight. I got stuck on I-95 in that storm. First, I just want to acknowledge that there seems to be a lot *less* gray area on this version of the plan than in earlier drafts. I want to thank you for that—it looks like some of the feedback we've provided *has* been heard and incorporated. That's worth saying out loud.

I do have a few things I want to mention—I'll try to keep it brief. The first is really a question for you, (name, #1). I'm not sure if everyone on this call has been thinking about this as much as you and I

might have in the environmental space, but obviously, there's a pretty serious threat these days to both public lands *and* to funding for projects like this.

So, I just can't help but wonder—what's the situation with funding for this project? And could you share some insight about how the financial side might impact or shape the project moving forward?

1- Certainly. Thank you for the question—and also for acknowledging the evolution of the plan. I'll echo what you said: I think what's been developed through your support and input is a pretty significant departure from the early concepts that were presented back in November 2023.

The footprint and scale of proposed improvements—particularly related to amenities and their placement within the park—have been dramatically reduced. We talked earlier about acreages, but again, the shift has been notable, and it's very much a reflection of this task force's input.

Regarding funding—it is absolutely a concern and a key consideration for DCNR. We're always in a position where we need to seek and secure ongoing annual operating funds.

Right now, we're in the middle of a budget impasse here in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. And honestly, I don't have any clear sense of when that will be resolved. Hopefully within the next two months—but I don't have a crystal ball.

Those are our operating dollars - the funds we use to provide services and steward all of our parks, including Big Elk, White Clay, and the Ridley Creek complex. When it comes to the larger long-range work that this master plan outlines - like a park office, education center, maintenance facility, and trail development - that funding is *not currently secured*.

We don't have money in hand to do everything that this plan aspires to accomplish at Big Elk. And that includes critical resource work that we know needs to move forward. I don't want to paint a grim picture—but I do want to be transparent: this is a concern. That said, I'm a "glass half full" kind of park manager. I truly believe we'll ultimately be able to bring the needed resources together and program funding to support what Big Elk deserves.

So yes, we have concerns. But as I've said before—DCNR isn't going anywhere. We're committed to mitigating these funding needs in the future so we can make meaningful improvements at the park.

11 - OK, thank you. My next question relates to something (name, #16) already brought up—consultation with the Natural Heritage Program. I won't rehash that point, but I did want to add that myself and several other trained ecologists have been doing regular walks through the park.

We've been documenting species, including some native orchids and butterfly species, a few of which are listed either at the state or federal level. I'm just wondering how we can be helpful in sharing that information. It's opportunistic observation—we're not following any specific survey protocol—but we believe it could still be informative for your planning process. We want to make sure you have access to that information.

1 - Absolutely. We really appreciate that offer and the data you're collecting. Even opportunistic observations can bring important insights. (name, #37) is our on-site manager at Big Elk, and I'd recommend that you connect with her so this information can be integrated into our ecological planning and future work.

11 - Great—can you share her e-mail in the chat, or somewhere I can grab it? I want to make sure I have the right person.

1 - Yes, we can do that. (name, #37), could you please drop your contact info in the chat?

11 - My last question is about the final slide from (name, #30)'s presentation, which talked about sharing the plan with the public. Could you explain more about what that will look like? Some of us had imagined there might be another public hearing, and we're wondering how this information will actually be disseminated.

1 - Sure. So, first, we plan to release the draft master plan to this task force—the group that helped create it—sometime in August. Once it's released, we'll provide a two-week comment period for task force members to review and respond. That timeline is contingent on when State Parks, and (name, #33) and (name, #30), feel the document is in its final draft form. But we're aiming to have something ready within the next couple of weeks.

After the two-week comment period, we'll likely allow an additional week for us to assess, record, and incorporate any comments into the final version of the plan. We are not planning to hold a public meeting at this stage. Instead, we'll issue a press release and an electronic release of the final document sometime in September. That's the current plan.

11 – Thanks, (name, #1). That answers all my questions for now.

15 - Sorry—I actually had one more comment before I go. There was a map—sorry, I'm not sure which one—that referenced reorienting the south end of the Mount Olivet trail. I was just curious: what exactly does that mean?

33- Good question. So, that section *might* remain where it currently is, depending on what the municipalities want to do. But the idea—and I believe this was suggested by someone on the committee—was that it would be better not to route it by the nearby homes. So instead, the proposal is to reroute that portion of trail through the meadow behind the houses. There was also concern about the road crossing at Mount Olivet, which is considered dangerous.

So, the idea is to move the trail up the hill into an area with better visibility for safety and to reduce impacts on nearby residences. If (name, #30) can bring the map back up, we can show you exactly where that rerouting would go.

So the idea was if this was agreeable, the suggestion is that it actually gets routed through the Meadow and crosses fire for public safety and to protect the residents that live adjacent to Mount.

1 - Thank you, (name, #9)?

9 - So, thank you for the presentation, everyone. A couple of things. I do agree with some of the earlier comments this evening—that the plan is not as complete as I might have expected, especially considering it's been, I think, four months since we were originally supposed to have this meeting.

Can we return to the slide about the task force process—the one with ideas and considerations?

So that slide is missing any mention of the lengthy discussions the task force had about preserve status for Big Elk. Can you clarify why that was left out?

30 - From the design team's perspective, it's not a physical planning element. So it's not necessarily within our purview. But yes, it was certainly part of the extensive conversations within the task force's work.

1 - Yes, I'm making a note now that we should include that in the comments related to the task force process. And again, this slide is just a summary.

I believe—and Todd, correct me if I'm wrong—there's an introductory paragraph being worked up that outlines the task force role, and then the shared concepts and points of divergence will follow.

But maybe in the text of the task force process—or for the task force itself—we could cover the preserve discussions.

9 - So it's very concerning to me that a concept that was repeatedly embraced by a majority of the task force at multiple meetings—a concept that was included, I believe I'm correct in saying, in every one of the comments submitted by this task force for consideration in the formation of this master plan—was completely excised from the plan. It doesn't even get a mention.

Speaking for myself—and frankly I think a majority of the committee here—preserve status is *maybe* the issue. It's certainly an issue of primary focus. Again, given that it was included in every comment submitted for the master plan and supported in writing by a majority of the committee, at the very least, it should be included in this report. And in my way of thinking, it should be more than included. It should be adopted.

1 - It just—John, it was not maliciously excised. I think, to (name, #30)'s point, it was not a design consideration that they were tasked with including in the planning document. But I agree with you that, given the significance of that designation, it was missed. And we'll include it in the task force document that you will see in the draft.

9 - One point of feedback I would provide: there *must* be a public meeting. There must be a public meeting with an opportunity for feedback from the general public and questions and answers directed to DCNR officials. I think that is very necessary, (name, #1). I think it's necessary for DCNR to hear directly from the people. And I also think, given the history of this issue over the past several

years in the community, that the community will not receive *any* plan well without the opportunity to have a public meeting. I think a release of the plan via press release is a poor strategy. I think it could be interpreted by many as a slap in the face to the local community. And I would encourage DCNR strongly to reconsider that plan.

1 - Thanks, John. I'll take those comments and that recommendation into consideration. (name, #16)?

16 - So, getting back to two slides, (name, #30)... One was the map you had up there for a while, and I'm assuming that the blue area at the center of the map showed the floodplain? Is that what that blue shadow was?

33 - Yes, that is. GIS makes it look big. So if, you know, you said yes, we do want a bridge crossing or some sort of stream crossing, you'd go in and get detailed mapping for that.

16 - I just didn't see that color on the—on your chart below, on the legend. That's all. I wanted to know. And then the other one that (name, #9) was just discussing, where the Education Center was also being discussed on that slide— And you talk—there's language on there about, you know, there was conversation about using existing facility or a new facility. Can you bring that slide—say that again? I'm sorry—the slide that you just brought up for (name, #9). So it's discussed as an Education Center. You know, most felt having—using an existing building— Let's see—having visitor education office space within an existing building. But there was a lot of sentiment also that that was not needed at all. So if that could be reflected in that paragraph, that would be more accurate to—I believe—the sentiment not just from my little group, but I think others as well. It was mixed. It went from zero to—I agree—a huge facility.

30 - Yeah, I agree. I mean, if you don't think this phrasing captures it, we could look at that.

16 - But I mean, I agree with you. I think there were all—there was a variety of sentiment around that. The only reason I don't think it does—I think it captures the medium and the large, but not the small, which was: no Education Center needed.

And then with regards to the different options, I'm not really understanding what the—and maybe (name, #1), you just haven't explained it yet. Is it dependent upon additional funding, number 1? And then number 2, when will those options actually be determined?

1 - Certainly, funding always is our consideration. I'll just say though—and I think I stated this in previous task force meetings on potential timelines—we have to go through and get through and have a completed master plan, as we did for Susquehanna River Lands. And then we can take the next step with funding hopefully in hand to start the design process.

But if we're done with this again in early fall, the master planning work, we will be needing to secure funding for initial projects and that would probably start design in 2026, sometime in 2026. But I don't want to—I can't make promises on when that would be. And again, funding contingent.

16 - So, two things on that. I'm hopeful that there would be a public meeting when the design will be determined. And I reiterate what (name, #9) said about having a public meeting for this. I strongly encourage you to do that—to explain the DCNR's plan and give the public opportunity for feedback.

And I do believe that some of the options that you are depending on for your plan also—and you indicated—do some of the options require conversations with the Township? So I would hope that that would happen before you would finalize this plan, because depending on those outcomes might determine a change. I don't know, I'm just putting it out there. I'm not involved in any of that. I'm just saying you might want to get your ducks in a row that way.

1 - Certainly. And I think I mentioned this too in previous task force meetings—and with the sort of improvements and enhancements, project-specific, that this plan has concepts for—when we would be moving into planning and design for those elements: We would be in consultation with the townships, up to and including potentially providing public meetings associated with those improvements—again, in consultation with the townships.

It's similar to what I think I conveyed—remember the anecdote before the one task force meeting that (name, #23) and I had just returned from meeting with the municipality in Bucks County, related to the planning and design work associated with a park office visitor center there. And again, this is our process and our commitment to neighbors—that we'll be doing the same thing in these townships at Big Elk Creek State Park.

16 - OK. And I just wanted to say thanks to (name, #11) for reminding me to say thank you. So thank you, (name, #1). And you know, (name, #30) and (name, #33), I did not understand—I think your contract with DCNR—with regards to the level of specificity. So if there's frustration there, that was only because I thought it would be more detailed. Please understand that these are concepts. So it's more of a concept plan than really a master plan—unless a master plan *is* a concept plan. But the detail really matters—really, really matters. So please have public meetings when you get to that part.

1 – (name, #20).

20 - Thanks, (name, #1). First of all, I too wanted to thank DCNR for having this process and thank all the committee members. It's been very informative. And I also want to thank DCNR for recognizing the cultural resources as well—the indigenous people and the freedom seekers—and how important this part of Pennsylvania was to our statewide history.

I understand the big to small and I'm confident that DCNR will really look at the resource and protect the resource. I'm going through the process right now of placing an ADA canoe and kayak launch out at a state park and I have to go through a resource review. It doesn't just like I can just plop it in there. We have to make sure that we're not having any adverse impact on the resource, all resources. So I'm confident that you will be good stewards of this particular piece of property, as you are with all other 123 state parks.

When it comes to public comments, because this is a state entity being funded by taxpayer dollars from taxpayers across the state, I think you would be remiss in not putting it out publicly for all taxpayers to be able to weigh in on the concepts that you're putting forth. So I just want to make sure that that is not removed from the table because taxpayers need to know how taxpayer money is being spent. So thank you.

1 - Thanks, (name, #20), (name, #21)?

21 - Thank you all so much for the presentation. I know there was kind of one slide that broke down the projects kind of in phases. I know you said kind of with no discussion towards sequence or anything like that, but I was wondering if there were priorities of the work—either like really wanting to focus on the development of trails first or like habitat restoration.

Like if there were any top priorities that you think, funding dependent, would be kind of the first projects to work on at the park?

1 - Good question. I think there'll be, you know, where we can bring our own internal funding forward for smaller scale projects, be it to improve or make safe a trailhead parking lot per se. We'll advance that just as we'll advance and leverage every dollar that we can on the resource side of things to ensure that the resource work continues because it absolutely needs to, to not get stalled out and sort of intertwined with the larger capital improvements that are going to be the big ticket items—a park office, an Education Center, the site amenities associated with them. So the priority would be what we can get done with what we have in hand right now.

And again, I'm trying to manage expectations both for myself as well as for the public and that those larger improvements that are called out in concept in this plan. Again, at the earliest, they could be starting design in '26. And then we're looking at an 18 to 24 month design and permitting process and going through all of those necessary environmental clearances.

I see the sort of trail development and some of those larger, more expensive elements like the stream crossings and spans and bridges being tied to those larger investments like the park office and Education Center.

21 - Thank you.

1 – (name, #6)?

6 - Good evening, (name, #1), and it's good to see everybody and thank you for putting this presentation together tonight. One of the questions that I wanted to bring up is that it's safe to say that there's going to be no RVs or trailers allowed for overnight use or camping.

1 - That is accurate. This plan does not contemplate or put forward any overnight. Everything that you've looked at and everything will be communicated in this plan and that will ultimately move to design is for day use. No overnight.

6 - Thank you, (name, #1). And I also want to just, you know, put it out there. I was hoping that preserve when it's still been left in there, but unfortunately, it's not on the plan right now and I'm disheartened. But thank you for putting it together.

1 – Thanks, (name, #6). (Name, #36)?

36 - I just have a minor concern about some of those trail lines look like a couple run really close to the property line on next to private property. I don't know if there was a reason to keep it that close. You need space in the center, but I know that might be better if they're not that close to a property line, especially on that bottom left portion. But just something to keep in mind whose property you're alongside of.

1 - Thanks, (name, #36). For everyone's benefit, regarding the trails and to your point, these are conceptual trail alignments and corridors for the park. That was the charge given to (name, #33) and (name, #30) in the master plan. However, actual planning work and the final design for a trail system in this park will require much more, including on-the-ground flagging of the corridors.

So where the trail is currently dashed on the master plan isn't necessarily where it will ultimately go.

16 – (name, #1), I have one last question.

1 - All right.

16 - It's really not a question. I want to reiterate what (name, #9) and (name, #6) said about the preserve status. I know you will address it in the next iteration. But I hope you don't give it short shrift, because it remains at the heart of many people's thoughts to this day. Putting something like this together is our mission and what we have to do. But just following what's written on a sheet of paper won't be helpful. I really hope the writing reflects the passion with which people have expressed their desire and expectations for this property.

1 - We'll do our best to capture that in the draft master plan before it's released. Then we'll receive your feedback on the language before it goes public.

3 - Hi, everybody. I'm sorry I'm on the phone, but I've been able to hear everything. I didn't get to see the plans, but I could picture them, shall we say. First, thank you so much for the presentation today, the draft plan, and the opportunity to comment and be part of the detailed outcome.

Two things for me. One, I want to put my two cents in on including "Preserve" in the name—whether it's Preserve and State Park or something else. I've said this before, and I'll just reiterate it now.

Second, I wanted to ask about any lighting that will be used. I kept pointing this out on the work boards and so on.

My interest is in dark skies and responsible outdoor lighting as per Dark Sky International standards. Are you at that detailed point yet? Perhaps not, but could you assure me and us that this would be the choice for the lighting?

1 - Yes. Rest assured that when we get to actual design, there will be minimal lighting in this park to begin with. Any necessary lighting for safety purposes will be dark sky compliant—down-shielded completely. That has been our design consideration for all of our parks in recent years. We will certainly not overlook this when designing any lighting for this park.

3 - That's great, very good. Thank you so much.

1 - Thank you, (name, #3). (name, #8), thanks.

8 - Yeah, I just wanted to say thank you. I was looking back at some comments the Watershed Association had written about a year and a half ago, back when the camping controversy was still hot. The concerns we had for the park seem to be well covered in this plan.

I feel like this plan is consistent with everything we hoped for tonight. A lot of props to (name, #9), (name, #15), and the folks who pushed to get camping eliminated. People expressed wanting something very similar to White Clay Creek Preserve here. From my perspective, people should feel pretty good about this.

It seems like we basically have a plan that aligns with those hopes. So, yeah, I hope people are feeling good.

1 - Thank you, (name, #8). I know from looking at the RSVP list (name, #25) provided that some of you will also be at the park next week in person. Hopefully, we won't have storms to run us off.

But yes, we will be there. We'll be at the meeting house. I want to say it's the 5th at 6:00 in the evening. Well, again, I don't see any more questions. I want to thank everyone again for pivoting this afternoon. Again, safety was a consideration for all of us.

11 - Yeah, hi (name, #1). I just wanted to clarify for next week—what's the plan? I got a little confused by the two meeting options. Are you doing the same thing again next week?

1 - We will be doing the exact same thing next week, yes. But it will be in person, and we'll actually get to see the paper maps—like printed out maps, I thought? I'm not sure if you have printed versions you're bringing?

30 - We weren't necessarily, but they'll be larger on screen and easier to see than on your laptop, for sure.

1 - And I'm sorry—this has been a bit of a mess trying to schedule. We find ourselves now sliding into August for our last in-person master plan review. I scheduled two meetings close together because we had sort of irreconcilable scheduling problems, and I was trying to maximize your participation.

So it's not required that you come in person. We were affording the task force the option of picking one or the other date, since some people couldn't make one or the other—or couldn't make either date. In fact, I think we had one or two folks where it just didn't work out. So, (name, #3), I'm glad you were able to join today. I know you had some scheduling conflicts you were trying to work around.

3 - Yes, I'm very happy I could join in tonight. Thank you.

1 - So if you participated tonight, you certainly don't have to come next week—but you're absolutely welcome to. All right, if there are no further questions, we'll adjourn for the night and see some of you next week. Thanks, everyone.