

ATHENS TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS

August 31, 2016 11 AM

Thomas Avenue Bridge meeting

Chairman Cheryl Wood-Walter called the meeting to order at 11 AM. Supervisors also present were Ronald Reagan, Christine Vough, George Ballenstedt and Susan Seck. Secretary Robin Smith was also in attendance. A sign-in sheet is included with these minutes.

Lloyd Ayres, District Bridge Engineer for PennDOT District 3 gave an overview of the last several weeks and what led to this meeting. Kara Russell from Central Office, Harrisburg met with the Diahoga Trail group about the possibility/feasibility of them taking responsibility for the Thomas Avenue bridge that is scheduled to be replaced. The bridge is on the National Historic Register. The options at the start of this process several years ago was establishing the needs to determine if the bridge should be repaired or replaced. The bridge needs to be wider to accommodate two lanes of traffic with sidewalks to allow for pedestrians (the bridge is currently "Pedestrian Prohibited"). It needs to accommodate all the truck traffic and the sheer volume of traffic that exists at this location.

Because of its historical significance it was necessary to see if repairing the bridge would meet the needs of the community. It would be very difficult to rehab it. As part of the process required by the PHMC (Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission) is to exhaust all avenues. The meeting weeks ago was part of that process. They were aware of the trail, but not all the details. Kara was at that meeting for PennDOT. The trail group is loosely organized and has no funding available for the bridge, and they have no preliminary plans or funding sources for extending their trail over the bridge into Athens Township.

Lloyd said someone has to own the bridge and asked if we have any potential owners. The list of possibilities included the trail group, township, PennDOT, Sayre Borough, Bradford County, and DCNR. PennDOT can't own a bridge for a trail – only highway bridges. If no one accepts ownership, we need to keep moving forward. There was a lot of mixed communication at the last meeting. This project will not stay idle – it will move forward. If it is feasible, they need to explore this, and explore alternatives to the design and location.

Robin asked Scott Shimko and John Glushefski of Borton Lawson – our design engineers for the project – if sidewalks would be incorporated on the new bridge and they will be.

Cheryl asked if no owner comes forward and you get clearance for the new bridge, what happens to the old bridge? Who would the maintenance and liability

responsibility fall to? Lloyd said the owning entity would be responsible and the bridge would remain on the Register. The Entity would also have to have any maintenance approved by several agencies. The historical value becomes that owner's responsibility. The loadings would be much less if it were a trail bridge.

Ron asked if someone takes over the bridge, can we require them to have liability insurance in case it damages the new bridge or something else? Is there money available if we have to realign our bridge – or have to purchase right-of-way (ROW).

Dave Jarrett, Sayre Borough Manager, had two concerns. He is concerned about the Borough having to relocate their pump station for a realignment. They are ready to sign the contract for that right now. They can't get parts for their current pump station. He also said they have a \$350,000 grant for bank stabilization of Cayuta Creek in that area which would also include some stream stabilization.

Ron said we can't get parts for the traffic signal on the bridge and don't want to go to the expense of replacing the signal. Ron asked if we don't get an owner, does that bridge disappear?

Lloyd said if there is no owner, that will be documented. They will be looking for meeting minutes to say 'yes' or 'no' – or letters confirming the same – ASAP. They would then publish this to the website, where consulting parties across the nation can give comments and PennDOT responds. It will be a 'rolling document site' that will give all the information they have gotten.

Ron asked if this could go on forever. Lloyd said once the documentation is done, if the consulting party disagrees or the PHMC, but can't come to an agreement, FHWA will step in and decide. Every time a post goes up, a new 30-day response period is triggered.

Ron asked how long we can keep our engineers on the hook? Are the funds increased as the costs go up? Lloyd said PennDOT has the same concerns. He wants to post the trail option, get the 30 day comment period on the website, and move on. Ron asked if there was money available for condemnation if we have to do a new alignment.

Lloyd said a bridge project with no historical procedure takes about 3 years. Our bridge has the historical element. Once it gets through the historical clearance, we

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will do design. They have a pretty good feel as to what the best solution should be. Lloyd said we are at least 2 years out.

John Glushefski said they have studied 7 different alternatives. The one that would impact the pump station is one of the more costly alternatives.

Ron asked how much money are we going to keep throwing at this? He would rather make a motion to close the bridge until it can be replaced before putting any more money into it.

Cheryl said it's just throwing good money after bad. The intentions are good, but we have to look at the residents and the township. There is an actual everyday impact on a small municipality. We are happy to work with Sayre and our neighboring municipalities, but we're tired. We want to get something resolved for our own residents and for safety. It's like your 15-year-old car – you replace it for safety reasons.

Ron said we appreciate just having to pay 5% for this project, but we need to move forward. It's like we're bogged down in the mud. Cheryl said 5% doesn't seem like much, but when you're talking millions of dollars.....

Ron asked when it went on the National Historic Register. Lloyd said it was already on there when the project began.

Linda Politi, Vice Chairman of Futurescapes, said the meeting they had a few weeks ago was their regular monthly meeting. Kara had contacted her and came up from Harrisburg. That was just one piece of their meeting. She handed out information on Diahoga Trail project. She said they started 5 years ago as a post-flood recovery group. This is their 5th year of the project. They have a \$241,000 grant for the trail and are ready to sign the contract with DCNR for Phase I, which will include building the trail from the Athens Bridge to Hayden Street. Phase II has not been done yet, but will take the trail to Thomas Avenue. Futurescapes has no capacity to own the bridge. The trail now is just proposed for Sayre and Athens Boroughs. They endorse keeping the bridge as a wonderful historical piece, but are not able in any way to own the bridge.

Ron said as long as we have sidewalks on the new bridge the trail would have access.

Todd Babcock, President of the Tioga Point Museum, said he would like to have us save the bridge. We have a tendency to tear things down and then regret it.

Lori Unger, Chairman of Futurescapes, said they have had a lot of success getting grants and thinks we would have success as well.

Matt Williams, Bradford County Planning Director, said DCNR has funded Phase I and Phase II is up for funding consideration. Would DCNR want to own this bridge? Lloyd said he hasn't posed that exact question yet.

Ron asked if we get a new owner, how are we guaranteed that the liability responsibility will continue if the organization "goes away"?? When we priced the cost of painting the bridge, it was well over \$100,000. We have enough bridges to take care of. We can't afford to maintain all the roads we have. He asked what the FHWA's position is. Lloyd said they oversee the process. If a dispute can't be resolved, they come in and will make the decision.

Ron asked if this funding will go away once a new President takes office in January and Lloyd said the funding is locked into the FHWA bill.

Cheryl said she can't believe PennDOT would be able to put money into a bridge that won't have vehicles on it. Lloyd said the owner could request Federal money to upgrade the bridge and make their argument. They may get funds, and may not. It could come down to State or local funds. You also don't know how much you would get – if anything.

Ron asked where we are right now. Lloyd said if we find an owner, we need to hash out the trail option. George said we would accommodate pedestrian/bike room on the bridge.

Lloyd said if we restore the bridge, do we take away the historical value of it? That is a consideration. George asked if people visit the bridge to take pictures, etc? He travels that way and it just seems like a structure that takes you from Point A to Point B. Lloyd said there are a few interest groups around the nation that relocate structures like this.

Robin asked what Lloyd would like to see at this point. Lloyd wants to know if there are any entities wanting to own this bridge.

Ron asked at what point FHWA says enough. Lloyd said they are making sure we do the clearance process. He also asked if this is a trail extension that will 'maybe' be proposed.

Susan asked if the state would take ownership and Lloyd said they can't. The crossing will be a new bridge and they can't afford multiple bridges in the same location. Ron asked what type of timetable we're looking at.

Robin said the option that affects the Sayre Borough pump station is the most expensive option and probably won't be approved. Dave Jarrett asked if the township could decommission the bridge from the Register, and they didn't think so.

Matt Williams said the trail ends at the bridge. Phase I and Phase II are all on public property. An extension crossing the bridge would be all private property.

Christine asked if there is a possibility of one person taking ownership of the bridge, leaving it there and taking responsibility for maintenance and liability. Lloyd said if it's not where it's at, they would have to obtain clearance for new, it would go into mitigation and would be marketed as part of that mitigation. It would be left in place until they let the bid.

George asked if we would be responsible for any of the ROW process and Lloyd said we would be responsible for our 5%.

Ron asked Scott and John what their thoughts are. Scott said they want to move forward. He also said he thinks we're closer to the end than the Board thinks. John said they don't have preliminary design – it's more just conceptual at this point.

Cheryl said this website looks for potential entities. Is it up to them to find the website? Lloyd said they will walk anyone through the process with the township. He said our solicitor will need to direct them (PennDOT) regarding the liability issues.

Todd said he wants us to save the bridge. He doesn't want to hold the project up, but he would like to explore options. They could try to get a grant. Ron asked if it was refurbished/reused, would it have the same lifespan of a new bridge?

Lloyd said he thinks the alternatives bridge components for saving the bridge are causing us the most angst. Ron asked if a weight limit would be imposed.

Linda asked about checking with our solicitor to see if the liability would be less for a walking bridge and we could keep it. The old Sayre walking bridge was torn down and there are regrets about that. Ron added that we have enough trouble finding enough money for our roads as it is. He said Ulster went through this when their bridge was replaced. They said anyone could have the old bridge if they had enough liability insurance to cover flood damage and especially if the new bridge was damaged by the old coming down. Their bridge was replaced.

Robin said she thinks Sayre would like to know what direction we're headed as they need to make decisions on their projects. Dave Jarrett said they will move forward with their plans as the alternative that would affect them would be the most expensive. Ron added that he would hate to see money being thrown away. Dave said they're not expanding their footprint with their project. He also said it might be possible to realign Shepard Road, too.

Christine said she thinks the right thing to do is to keep the bridge. A larger portion of people may think it should be saved and may find value in it. Her vote would be to keep the bridge.

Dave said Phase I stops at Hayden Street. Phase II takes the walking path to the bridge. He does appreciate that bridge taking the truck traffic and doesn't want trucks going through Sayre.

Cheryl said she would like to explore a collaborative effort. Matt suggested looking into forming a Regional Trail Authority in this area as we have so many groups here. Lori said if it was a trail bridge, she thinks funds would be available.

Robin asked, if we explore these options, what happens to our project?? Lloyd said if they can determine an owner, we can move forward with another alignment.

Brian Baker said the State TIP has \$2.4 million now, but the costs will go up. The bridge won't come off the TIP, but the costs will continue to increase. He has 166 municipalities to work with and has to be cautious to find money or projects can be delayed in favor of other projects. Realignment will increase the cost.

Matt asked what the potential delays would be with archeological study requirements if a realignment or land acquisition was required. This could be a big delay if anything is found.

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Dave asked how emergency service responses would be handled if the bridge is out for 9-12 months. Scott said that building a bridge next to the current one if one of the 7 alternatives.

Cheryl said there is a bridge down by Scranton that is down to just allowing pick-up trucks to cross because of the bridge condition. If we don't get this rolling, how far would this push out the bridge and the cost.

The estimated let date is January of 2018. Robin said if we were able to keep the original estimate, the bridge would already be built and in place.

Ron asked how long to get the preliminary design. John said it's usually about 3 years for design, but that can be expedited. However,....they can't do anything until an alternative is decided.

Scott said if we do it offline....Ron asked if we do it off line, what kind of delay are we looking at for eminent domain?

Robin asked what now. Lloyd said they will reach out to all entities we've discussed to see if they are interested in owning the bridge. Robin asked if they would start that process then?

Cheryl asked what do you need from us. Lloyd said he needs our intentions. He also needs to know if a trail group will be formed. PennDOT can't participate. Cheryl said can we say we're not interested but would entertain the interest of others. Lloyd said we need to talk to our solicitor. Robin asked what we need to put in our letter. Lloyd said that we are willing to sell to an entity if 'X,Y and Z' are done.

Lloyd said they will need to finalize all options.

Linda asked if, in the preliminary budget, if the repair cost of the bridge was considered and it was not. Lloyd said if the bridge was taken by a new owner and a new one was built next to it, PennDOT could propose FHWA give some funding, but that is not guaranteed.

Dave said if FHWA says no, you've lost 3 years. Lloyd said there would have to be a plan for owner/ownership. They may have to do railings, cover the deck, etc., for

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safety reasons. Too many changes make 'erase' the historical significance and it could be taken off the Register.

George said that if we knew someday, somehow, the bridge would be saved, we could start the process. Lloyd said the township could build a new bridge and leave the old, but there would be risk with that. Ron said even if we keep it, we would have to deal with the PHMC. Cheryl added that it would be a magnet for "bad behavior".

There being no further discussion, on motion of Cheryl, second by Ron, it was unanimous to adjourn the meeting at 12:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin L. Smith
Athens Township Secretary