

NATURAL AREAS ADVISORY COUNCIL
36 Years of Service to Improving Delaware’s Quality of Life
“Preserving Delaware’s Natural Areas Today for all Delawareans Tomorrow”

NATURAL AREAS ADVISORY COUNCIL
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

December 12, 2019
Rose Cottage
102 South State Street
Dover, DE 19901
9:30 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

Council Members:

Debbie Heaton, Chair
Dr. Christopher Heckscher
Richard Bergold
John Williams, Esq.
Edward Lewandowski, Secretary

Park Staff:

Ray Bivens, Division of Parks and Recreation Director
Matt Ritter
Bob Ehemann
Elena Stewart
Jennifer Holmes
Tim Byan

Visitors:

Ann Chisholm
Steve Griffith

I. Call to Order/Welcome/Introductions/Announcements

Debbie Heaton called the Natural Areas Advisory Council meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. She welcomed everyone to the meeting. The public attendees, Ann Chisholm and Steve Griffith, introduced themselves. Ms. Heaton thanked Elena Stewart and Bob Ehemann for sustaining the program during the time between program managers.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The September minutes were unanimously approved.

III. Old Business

- Council vacancy – Ms. Heaton reminded the Council that there is a vacancy on the Council.

- Office of Nature Preserve updates – Ms. Holmes informed the Council of programmatic updates including improvements to information tracking, development of new and revisions to existing standard operating procedure documents, the development of an outreach strategy, and progress on preserve management plans.
- Fork Branch dedication update – Ms. Holmes updated the Council regarding the pending dedication DelDOT Nature Preserve parcel. This property is located south of the stormwater pond just east of Saulsbury Road and was approved by the NAAC at the March 2019 meeting. Ms. Holmes will be working with DelDOT to execute the articles of dedication. Ms. Holmes also gave an update that the farm fields located on the western boundary of the Fork Branch Nature Preserve at the intersection of Dennys Road and Kenton Road were acquired as a buffer to the preserve. Ms. Stewart informed the Council that the acquisition came with a \$90,000 donation to the Fork Branch Nature Preserve endowment.
- Frenchtown Woods Natural Area – Ms. Holmes discussed the recent interest in Frenchtown Woods Natural Area. There is increased development pressure along Old County Road. Local community members have been actively working to preserve portions of the Frenchtown Woods Natural Area in the vicinity of the proposed development. Ann Chisholm and Steve Griffith, members of the community, updated the Council on their efforts in working with the County and meeting with the developer to discuss possible options for conservation and preservation. Council members discussed the importance of the natural area and suggestions to the community about engaging non-profit organizations.

IV. Natural Areas Registry

- Flint Woods addition – Ms. Holmes reminded the Council of the recent acquisition of property adjacent to Flint Woods Nature Preserve, which is not currently on the State Registry of Natural Areas. Ms. Holmes asked the Council if they think this area should remain as a buffer to the existing Nature Preserve or if they think this area should be evaluated to see if it meets the criteria to be listed on the registry and then incorporated into the Nature Preserve. Council supported the evaluation of this property for the possible listing on the registry. Ms. Holmes will work with Chris Bennett to evaluate the property and look into the necessary requirements in listing this as part of the existing Natural Area.

V. Nature Preserve Dedications

- Doe Bridge Nature Preserve – Ms. Holmes updated the Council on DelDOT’s proposed North Millsboro Bypass project. The planning for this project has been occurring over the past 12 years. The current proposed alignment crosses the Doe Bridge Natural Area and Millsboro Pond. Although there will be impacts to the Natural Area, the alignment is no longer through the existing Doe Bridge Nature Preserve. The Office of Nature Preserves has provided DelDOT with comments regarding this project and supported the continued coordination with Delaware’s Division of Fish and Wildlife in order to avoid impacts to rare, threatened, and endangered species. There is a possibility that the remainder of the Natural Area located on the peninsula also known as the “boot” will be preserved as Nature Preserve.

Ms. Holmes also discussed the possible opportunity for other parcels in the area to be added

to the Doe Bridge Nature Preserve. DelDOT is looking to preserve wetland in the area as part of the Park Avenue Relocation project in Georgetown, DE. Dedicating these parcels in the Natural Areas Preservation System would be voluntary and over and above any permitting requirements. The parcels contain high quality permanently saturated forested wetland.

VI. Nature Preserve Management Issues

- Angola Neck Nature Preserve – Ms. Holmes provided an update regarding the public access/parking concerns for the Angola Neck Nature Preserve. Mr. Bivens and Ms. Stewart provided some background information about the area and the importance of providing public access. Ms. Holmes is in the process of writing a management plan for this Preserve and will engage the Council through the process as appropriate.
- James Branch Nature Preserve – Ms. Holmes provided an update regarding the water trail on the James Branch. On September 20, 2019, Parks staff conducted a site visit including a hike and canoe trip along the proposed trail. Ms. Holmes mentioned that there has been a lot of work and effort in the past to provide a water trail in this area. Staff have been building upon those efforts to provide access while protecting the important habitat and species found within the Nature Preserve. Ms. Holmes will continue to coordinate with Trap Pond State Park staff and Delaware Wildlands. Ms. Heaton mentioned that this effort would require a lot of education and outreach. Mr. Lewandowski expressed concerns about the possibility of too many visitors to this area as it does contain sensitive habitat. Mr. Ehemann discussed the possibility of requiring a permit to utilize this trail and the use of an exit survey to help inform the management of the trail including access. Mr. Lewandowski mentioned that the previous Natural Areas Program Manager, Eileen Butler, recommended not maintaining the trail above Hitch Pond Road.

VII. New Business

- Election of Council Officers (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Liaison to the Park Council) Ms. Heaton handed the facilitation of elections to Mr. Williams, as Ms. Heaton was on the ballot. Mr. Williams explained the election process and asked if there were any other nominations. There were no additional nominations then those received prior to the meeting. Mr. Bergold made a motion to close nominations, and Dr. Heckscher seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Elections took place via written ballot. The Council Officers for 2020 are as follows:
 - Chair: Deborah Heaton
 - Vice Chair: James White
 - Secretary: Edward Lewandowski
 - Liaison to the Park Council: Edward Lewandowski
- 50th Anniversary of Earth Day (April 22, 2019) - Ms. Holmes introduced the Earth Day discussion. She mentioned possible Earth Day ideas including potential tree planting at Fork

Branch Nature Preserve and a possible mini bio-blitz on one of the Preserves. Mr. Williams mentioned that the Christina Conservancy has hosted a bio-blitz in the past and clean-up efforts along the Christina River. Ms. Heaton asked about the possibility of dedications in April. Ms. Holmes mentioned there might be a possibility in the Doe Bridge area.

VIII. Public Comment and Synopsis Reports from other Councils

- Ed Lewandowski, liaison for the Parks Council, mentioned the improvement to Fenwick Island. Mr. Bivens updated the Council on those improvements and briefly discussed the recent public meeting held by Orsted.
- Ms. Stewart provided updates from the recent Open Space Council meeting. Dr. Heckscher asked for an update about the property at 0 Paper Mill Road near White Clay Creek State Park. Ms. Stewart stated that this parcel was not annexed and the acquisition of is portion of the property is on hold at this time.
- Dr. Heckscher gave a brief update regarding the Native Species Commission. He mentioned a proposed symposium to occur in 2020.

IX. Proposed Meeting Dates (subject to change)

- Thursday, March 19, 2019
- Thursday, June 25, 2019
- Thursday, September 17, 2019
- Thursday, December 17, 2019

X. Adjournment

Ms. Heaton thanked everyone and asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Bergold made a motion to adjourn and Dr. Heckscher seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned.