Bushong Mill Dam Community Meeting
Thursday, March 4, 2010
6:30 p.m.

Meeting Summary

Officials Attending: D. Reed, V. Spencer, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, J. Waltman, R. Golowski representing Rep. Santoni, D. Sauder representing Sen. O'Pake, T. McMahon, C. Jones, S. Katzenmoyer

Lorri Swan of the Berks County Conservancy made a power point presentation highlighting the following:

- Plans to include the Schuylkill River trail north connections and extensions
- The dam must comply with PA Act 91 if it remains

R. Scott Carney of the PA Fish and Boat Commission made a power point presentation highlighting the following:

- They have assisted in the removal of many small dams in cooperation with Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton, and several municipalities in Lancaster County.
- The dam currently blocks the migration of American Shad.
- The dam has a negative impact on the natural habitats of wildlife.
- Permission to remove the dam must be obtained from PA DEP and the Army Corps of Engineers. It is also necessary to receive a restoration waiver from the PA Historic and Museum Commission.
- They have assisted in the removal of approximately 150 dams.
- They have no jurisdictional authority to order the removal of dams. They participate at the request of the dam owner.
- The dam does not have any flood control purpose. It actually exacerbates flooding problems by not allowing the free flow of water.
- It will be more economical to remove the dam (and its liabilities) than it would be to obtain compliance with Act 91.
- Additional funding may be obtained to erect historical signage.
- The removal can be performed at little or no cost to the City of Reading.
- The negative aspects of the removal include a big change to the area, the loss of the fishing pond, the loss of a landmark, and the short-term aesthetic appearance and environmental impacts.

Sara Strassman of American Rivers stated that the source of the funding is through a grant from Freeflowing PA. She stated that a decision needs to be made to remove the

dam or bring it into compliance with Act 91. She reviewed the comparative analysis (attached).

Ms. Reed stated that the City's Environmental Advisory Council has reviewed the information and that the members are split – two members favor removal, two members oppose removal. She reviewed the reasons given in the EAC's recommendation memo to Council.

Mayor McMahon thanked all those in attendance. He stated that legal research has shown that the City owns the dam. He stated that the high cost of installing fish ladders would cause financial difficulties for the City. He also noted the liability to the City in regards to personal injuries. He requested that these groups put their proposal in writing for review by City staff.

Mr. Carney stated that the entire Schuylkill River is now open to the movement of fish due to the removal of dams and the installation of fish ladders.

Mary Anne Bitting, of Allegheny Ave, stated that this neighborhood has little crime and is community oriented. She stated that the City took the dam by eminent domain in the 1970's and River Place performed a $40,000 study to plan the design of a park in this area. She suggested that the plan be located and used at this time. She stated that the recent work performed by the Army Corps of Engineers destroyed the walking path and put holes in the knee wall which have not been repaired. She stated that the dam has been declared sound and is a beautiful area. She described a recent trip to Angelica Park and stated that the former pond area is now a very narrow waterway which has been taken over by weeds. She stated that the dam should not be removed because of special interest groups and suggested that these groups acquire funding to assist the City to bring the dam into compliance with Act 91 and to make park improvements.

Harry Sands, of Blair Ave, stated that he has lived in this neighborhood his entire life. He stated that there have been no problems with the dam and that he swam in the Tulpehocken Creek in his youth without issue. He stated that Shad are found in the Schuylkill River and not in the Tulpehocken Creek. He stated that there are two more dams between Bushong Mill and Blue Marsh and questioned if Blue Marsh would be installing fish ladders. He stated that there would be fewer places for fishing if the dam is removed due to the smaller creek area. He stated that he does not want the area to become another Angelica, full of bugs and weeds. He stated that this neighborhood is often forgotten by the City. He asked the City to forget them now and leave the dam in tact.

Irvin "Oogie" Gring, a neighborhood resident, stated that this is the same information that was presented last year. He expressed the belief that the issue has been dealt with. He stated that the removal of the dam would make the dock at Stonecliffe useless and suggested that the County be made aware of this initiative. He stated that currently fishing is good above and below the dam. He stated that he also canoes and questioned why boaters could not get out of the Tully and carry their canoes around the dam, calling them lazy. He stated that shad will not be found in the Tully unless they are added. He stated that the County has not installed signage as required by Act 91 at Gring's Mill.

Ernest Schlegel, of Pear St, also stated that he thought this issue was dealt with last year. He questioned why it is being addressed again. He stated that he is not a resident of the Glenside area but is a concerned citizen. He stated that he supports the removal of the dam as it is abandoned and the City is working to remove abandoned properties. He stated that nostalgia does not make keeping the dam a correct decision. He suggested that those present think about the future costs of the dam to the City. He stated that the recent opinion from the Act 47 coordinator was to stop spending capital improvement funds. He suggested that all consider the removal of the dam.

Dan Sauder, of Senator O'Pake's office, stated that he has glad to be present and to hear residents' concerns.

John Ulrich, of Schuylkill Ave, stated that kayakers should walk their boats around the dam. He stated that there are more drownings near the Penn St Bridge than in the Bushong Mill area. He suggested that this funding be used to preserve area farmland. He stated that the mill race is part of the Union Canal and its removal would destroy the history of the canal. He expressed his belief that the dam should remain.

Mark Iezzi, a Glenside business owner, stated that Blue Marsh was engineered to control flooding and has already caused ruin to much of that area. He suggested that fish ladders be installed and that the mill race be corrected, but the dam remain. He stated that the Army Corps of Engineers created a mess and stated that trails will be difficult to install due to the many businesses along the Tully and the adjoining river in this area.

Mr. Carney stated that the removal of the dam would not cause erosion problems downstream. He stated that dams actually make stream banks erode more quickly. He stated that without the dam the Tully will continue to be warm water fishing as the creek will not be deep. He suggested that residents walk downstream to a natural area

to get a visual look of the creek without the dam. He stated that the dock area at Stonecliffe will be evaluated.

Mr. Acosta arrived at this time.

Carlos Zayas, of S 11th St, stated that he is not a resident of this area but that he supports the neighbors. He stated that no work can commence without the consent of the Army Corps of Engineers. He stated that other options are available and they should be analyzed. He stated that the City was also told that the dam at Antietam was in poor condition and since the County is now the owner, that issue has disappeared. He requested that other opportunities be examined.

Mr. Carney agreed that authorization from the Army Corps of Engineers, and the state and federal governments is necessary before removal.

Pastor Bruce Osterhaut, of Christ Lutheran Church, stated that River Place has devoted many volunteer hours to this location. He stated that the plan developed by River Place had neighborhood input and suggested that this plan be utilized. He stated that the presentations this year were better than last year and that many of his questions have been answered.

A resident questioned why action needed to be taken now as this dam has been in place for many years. Mr. Carney replied that when the dam was installed without consideration of environmental impacts. He stated that as that has changed the environment should be put back to its natural state. He stated that the concept of dam removal is spreading.

A resident questioned if the end result would resemble Angelica. Mr. Carney stated that this is a larger water source and would not look like Angelica.

A resident questioned if the state has demanded the installation of fish ladders. Mr. Carney stated that they did not. He stated that the Fish & Boat Commission has no authority to order the removal. He stated that the ladders will assist the fish population.

Mr. Waltman questioned what had changed since the issue was discussed last year. He stated that Council made its decision and that he does not see the need to address it again. He stated that he is displeased by others using financial leverage against the City and that he still does not support removing the dam. He stated that there are much larger issues for the City to be dealing with at this time.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this issue has already been addressed. She stated her commitment to environmental issues and that the history of the canal should be preserved. On the other hand, she noted her concern about safety issues. She stated her opinion that there are more than two options available and suggested that they be investigated before hasty decisions are made.

Mr. Acosta noted the importance of Council members hearing concerns from citizens first hand. He stated his confusion about the issue being discussed again since Council action has already been taken.

Mr. Spencer stated that the City owns half the dam and that signs were not posted to date because the ownership was unknown. He stated that Council learned that the issue was being discussed again through the City's Environmental Advisory Council agenda and minutes. He stated that the Administration wanted the issue revisited. He stated that he has not changed his stance and does not support the removal of the dam. He suggested that other options be investigated and that River Place be contacted to secure a copy of their plan. He also suggested that other grant opportunities be researched to include other opportunities including economic development.

Mr. Carney stated that the grants are available annually through an application process. He reiterated that fish ladders have not been ordered.

Ernie Schlegel requested clarification of the cost of removal to the City. Mr. Carney stated that there would be no cost to the City other than minimal staff time.

A resident noted that the dam removal is not necessary to improve the trail system. He stated that there are trails from Blue Marsh to RACC and that they were present and paved prior to the Thun Trail. He stated that some of these trails were impassable when Blue Marsh was drained. He stated that this area is already used for recreation.

John Ulrich questioned where the trail would cross the Schuylkill River. He stated that Car Tech may cause issues for the crossing.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shelly Katzenmoyer
Deputy City Clerk