

MEMORANDUM

TO: BETSY POINSETT & GREG WESTFALL, (Regional Greenway Planning Group)
FROM: SUZANNE FORBES, AICP, FORBES ENVIRONMENTAL & LAND USE PLANNING
DATE: JULY 17, 2006
RE: COMMUNITY SURVEY REPORT (FINDINGS ONLY)
CC: WILLIAM BROKAW, BORTON-LAWSON ENGINEERS

The following will provide an overview of the community survey component of the Doctors-Assunpink Trail Feasibility Study. This memo will serve as the basis for subsequent information sharing at: meetings with the Crosswicks/Doctors Creek Regional Planning Group; public outreach meetings; neighborhood meetings. The information will assist us with our efforts to formulate recommendations for the *Doctors-Assunpink Trail Feasibility Study*.

Please also refer to the attached excel spreadsheet, as I may have missed something you may feel is important or useful. Please let me know if you have any comments or additional suggestions.

1.0 Introduction

Various planning periodicals note that a random sample survey of a community's citizens is an effective way to gather valid input and opinions from all segments of the community if conducted in a statistically valid manner. Conducting a survey is recommended for the following reasons:

- This is the only means of collecting data and opinions representing all residents.
- Even with a low response rate, you hear from more residents than any other method; particularly public meetings where typically less than 50 people attend.
- Results can be more accurate and powerful than other methods.

Early in the planning process, the Regional Planning Partnership noted the importance of the neighborhood survey and began designing a method for random sampling of the community. It was decided that landowners abutting the two creeks would provide the most information for the trail feasibility study.

A three-paneled brochure was created and contained directions, an overview of the project, a small map of the watershed, an invite to the September 5, 2006 public meeting, seventeen (17) questions, (e.g., categories: general respondent information, general watershed awareness, overall perception, suggested recommendations, opportunities for involvement), a voluntary contact section, and an overview of the Crosswicks/Doctors Creek Regional Planning Group.

The team agreed that a large distribution of surveys did not mean a better survey, however targeting properties proximate to the main stem of the Doctors and Assunpink Creeks would be best. Members of the Committee worked with the consultants to identify the addresses closest to the main stem and major tributaries. The database resulted in approximately 300 landowner's addresses. Of those addresses, 300 were sent.

In addition, the project team recommended that return postage be provided to further increase response rate. The pre-addressed and prepaid community surveys were mailed in early May, 2006. The deadline for responses was June 12, 2006.

2.0 General Response/Information

The following is an overview of information regarding the geographic distribution of the community surveys, and some general findings regarding response rate:

- **Distribution-** Three-hundred (300) surveys were distributed.
- **Location-** Addresses were proximate to the Main Stems of the Doctors and Assunpink Creeks.
- **Non-Deliverable Surveys-** Twenty-four (24) surveys were returned marked "undeliverable".
- **Response Rate-** Seventeen (17) were returned fully completed.
- **Location of Respondents-** The respondents were from the following municipalities: Allentown Borough (4); Hamilton Township (4); Upper Freehold Township (7), and Washington Township (1).
- **Age of Respondents-** Most respondents (7) were in the 51-60 year old age range.
- **Residency Type-** The majority (10) of respondents lived in single-family detached homes.
- **Residency Longevity-** The majority of our respondents (9) lived in their home for more than 20 years.

3.0 Additional Community Survey Responses

The list of questions may be found on community questionnaire entitled "Crosswicks/doctors Creek Regional Greenway Planning Group: Trail Feasibility Survey for Residents". The list of respondents is included in the spreadsheet entitled, "Doctors and Assunpink Creek Trail Feasibility Study: List of Respondents and Contact Information (Sheet #2)". A tally of community survey responses is included in the same spreadsheet (Sheet #1). An overview of findings (based on each question and resulting from the tally) is listed below:

1. **Location of Creek-** Most respondents (14) lived on the Doctors Creek.
2. **Definition of Watershed-** The majority of respondents (14) knew the definition of "watershed".

3. **Definition of Stormwater-** The majority of respondents (14) knew the definition of “stormwater”.
4. **Importance of Water Quality & Water Conservation-** When asked to rate the importance of water quality and water conservation, most respondents (9) felt water quality and water conservation was important; while six (6) felt it was the most important issue.
5. **Most Valued Creek Features-** Respondents were asked to circle their most valued, listed Doctors/Assunpink Creek features. The ranking is as follows: the habitat (13), scenery and beauty (9), open space (9), recreational opportunities (4), and drinking water (3). There was a category to list “other” features and one (1) respondent noted privacy as a valuable feature.
6. **Activities On Doctors/Assunpink Creeks-** Respondents were asked how they spend time on the Creeks (activities). They were provided with a list of activities and noted the following: walking/hiking (11), nature exploration (9), fishing (8), water sports (3), and picnicking (2). Four respondents listed other activities including: mountain biking (1), hunting (1), riding ATVs (1) and living (1).
7. **Historical Impacts On Water Quality-** Our respondents were asked to determine the change in water quality during the time they lived in proximity to the Creeks (note: the majority of respondents have lived in proximity for 20 or more years). Most of the respondents (8) noted that water quality has worsened, while others noted that water quality had improved (4), or remained the same (2). Those answering that water quality has worsened, provided the following reasons: low flow (2), polluted (1), runoff/eutrophication (1), development (1), inadequate dam releases (1) and over growth of vegetation (1).
8. **Existing Water Quality-** Our respondents noted that the water quality of the Creeks is presently moderate (5), and high (4), or poor (4).
9. **Main Sources of Pollution-** When asked to rank the top three main sources of Doctors/Assunpink Creek Pollution, the respondents ranked them as follows: #1- stormwater runoff, #2 household sewage, and #3 litter/illegal dumping.
10. **Recommended Improvements-** The respondents were asked to rank improvements they would like to see take place in the Creeks. They ranked their responses in the following manner: #1 water quality improvements, #2 less litter, and #3 better flood controls.
11. **Land Conservation Status-** When asked to note the present status of land conservation, our respondents shared that their land was presently conservation eased (2), farmland preserved (1), and farmland assessed (1). One (1) respondent had been approached for a land easement. None (0) were approached to put their land in the farmland preservation program or to sell. Four (4) were not interested in land conservation programs, and four (4) wanted to be contacted for more information about programs.

12. **Water Quality Impacts-** When asked to rank the actions that impact water quality in their neighborhood, the ranking of impacts was as follows: #1 over use of fertilizers and pesticides, #2 riding ATVs, and #3 dumping trash in lots and parks. Three respondents noted water quality impacts from (2) over use of farm chemicals and (1) over development.
13. **Neighbors Knowledge of Their Impacts-** When asked if their neighbors knew of the direct impacts upon the Doctors/Assunpink Creek from their actions (see previous question), the majority of respondents (10) noted that their neighbors did *not* know, and (6) that they did know.
14. **Reporting Impacts-** When asked if they knew who/where to call if they saw something negative impacting Creeks, (9) did know and (8) said they did not know.
15. **Involvement in Watershed Projects-** One hundred and ten (15) respondents were not involved in watershed projects, and one (1) is involved.
16. **Watershed Activities-** When provided with a list of potential watershed/creek activities, respondents were most interested in: (4) attending planning meetings, (4) attending public meetings, (3) in watershed/creek walks, (3) planting trees/trash clean ups, and (3) water quality monitoring. Some (1) expressed interest in educating others. Nine (9) chose not to answer this particular question.
17. **Willingness to Share Additional Contact Information-** Of the total respondents, ten (10) provided addresses to obtain more information. They are listed in the attached spreadsheet.

4.0 WRITTEN COMMENTS

A number of respondents submitted written comments. The following items were noted, submitted or suggested as a result of the community survey:

- Respondent Corky Danch of Allentown Borough provided a letter and it is attached.
- R. Chrznowski of Cream Ridge, NJ noted the following:
 - *We are not interested in opening our backyard to the public. We pay high taxes for this privacy that we live out here for. A trail opens up a host of land problems and issues. What happens if people get hurt?*
- Survey respondent (Paul & Jane Kraska, 250 Meadowbrook Road, Robinsville, NJ 08691, 609-443-6861) shared,
 - *We own 851 feet along the Assunpink Creek. We maintain that area to the best of our ability. We keep trees trimmed and branches and debris out of the creek. We also have a working farm and raise livestock (approximately 20 goats) on 20 acres. We feel as though a walking trail would not only infringe on our privacy (our home backs up to the Creek) but would endanger the well-being of our animals. You are welcome to physically come visit our farm and give us your input on our concerns.*

- *In reference to land conservation, we have been approached numerous times by developers. Our preference is to keep it in farmland preservation. The tax situation is not a hardship, but the near future does not look good.*

50 DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey return was very small; however the findings should be used, along with other research and public comment methods, to formulate goals, objectives and specific management recommendations for the trail feasibility study.

As we want to involve landowners in our study, we should reach out to each of the respondents to thank them, invite them to all meetings, and visit their property (one-on-one communication) where we are invited to do so.

Please provide your input and examples of how you would like the findings and the community questionnaire tally presented in the report.