



Friends of White's Woods, Inc.

P.O. Box 1271
Indiana, PA 15701

May 5, 2022

White Township Supervisors
950 Indian Springs Road
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear White Township Supervisors Lenz, Gallo, Gemmell, Gillette, and McCauley:

I am writing to express both confusion and concern about the discussion regarding the agenda item "Stewardship Committee Mission and Information" that occurred at the April 27, 2022 regular meeting of the White Township Board of Supervisors.

In this meeting, the White Township Manager alluded to the possibility that the White Township Stewardship Committee is being bogged down by excessive focus on the Sunshine Act. After three careful, minute-by-minute reviews of all four White Township Stewardship Committee meeting recordings (January, February, March, and April, 2022), it is clear that:

- a. The January meeting began with the Township manager's statement of the Township's commitment to transparency and involving the public. What's more, statements were made by multiple committee members at this meeting to underscore the importance to the committee of involving the public in the stewardship planning process, of "building consensus on the front end," and about maximizing public access to the committee's ongoing work.
- b. In the first three White Township Stewardship Committee meetings, all discussion of matters related to the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act totaled about 16 minutes, or an average of less than 5.5 minutes per meeting.
- c. In the April, 2022 White Township Stewardship Committee meeting, the committee engaged in one lengthy (23 minute) discussion which concluded in a motion that enjoyed unanimous committee support: Contact the Pennsylvania Office of Open Records to get clarification regarding appropriate procedures for the committee's between-meeting work.

While it is clear from comments offered at the April 27, 2022, BOS meeting that the WTSS's work is not moving along as quickly as the Township staff or Supervisors might have hoped, the time taken to abide by the Sunshine Law is not a major factor contributing to the committee's current pace.

The committee members, along with the public, recognized the importance of public trust, public access, and public involvement from the outset. One lengthy discussion over the course of four months regarding how best to meet these goals is not a lot of "lost" time. In fact, it is a little time, well spent, both for gaining public trust and maximizing the possibility of the rich dialogue necessary to produce a stellar stewardship plan.

The development of a stewardship plan is a complex task, and a task that both committee members and the public approach with both great sincerity and thoughtfulness.

When the Supervisors first charged the committee with developing the stewardship plan, the committee was asked to work within a three year time-frame. A review of published plans, or responses to emailed questions posed to municipal planners in Pittsburgh, Erie, Willistown Township, and Allegheny County indicate that the typical stewardship planning process requires a minimum of two to five years. Murrysville park stewardship plans include ecosystem inventories gathered over a 12-year period.

The White Township revised 18-month timeline for Stewardship planning is short. But this self-imposed deadline does not provide justification for refusal to respect the purposes of the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act and the benefits that derive from the commitment to open government.

The White Township Stewardship Committee deserves both compliment and support for their work toward gaining public trust. It would seem that their efforts to this end require the support of not only the public, but of the Supervisors, as well.

On behalf of Friends of White's Woods,

Sara King, President
Friends of White's Woods

Cc: White Township Stewardship Committee

Barbara Hauge, Chair
David Dahlheimer, Vice Chair
Sierra Davis
Jeff Geesey
Matt Klunk