

Forest City Outdoor Town Action Team Update - Center Street Pocket Park at Forefront of February 2, 2023 Meeting

The Forest City Outdoor Town Action Team (FCOTAT) held their monthly meeting on Thursday evening, February 2, 2023 at Elegante' Restaurant. Katie Zefran, Chairperson of the team, presided over the meeting. Also in attendance were committee members Erin Debish, Suzanne Atcavage, Julianne Doyle (remotely) and Deb McNamara (remotely).

The first presentation of the evening was from Justin Byrd and Christine Byrd of Machi Systems, a media creation and management company. Justin and Christine are Forest City residents and have graciously donated their services to the FCOTAT to establish our social media presence and enhance our accessibility and communication with the Forest City Community. The FCOTAT plans to develop a steering committee to develop presentation and content.

At the forefront of the meeting was discussion and planning for the Center Street Pocket Park Project. A "pocket park" is a "mini-park" that provides an inviting environment for a community. These smaller scale spaces are known for providing inviting environments for small events, play areas for children, or a space to relax - just to name a few ideas. Paul Bechtel from McLane Associates, the firm hired to establish design plans for the park, spoke to the group regarding several considerations. These included ADA compliance, assessing condemned housing which could be eliminated to expand the park footprint, determining if the project would encompass connecting the walkway to Delaware Street, the structural integrity of the wooden retaining wall and the replacement of the metal stairs and design. To fully address these items and gain a true picture of public vision, Mr. Bechtel presented a public survey which is currently in circulation until March 1, 2023. The survey is available in both paper and pencil form and online. The survey can be found on the Forest City Borough website at forestcityborough.com or the GFCBA website at visitforestcitypa.com.

Gus Fahey of Valley in Motion reported on the facade program in Forest City. From the original applications, 8 applications remained to be funded. Forest City Borough Council was scheduled to vote on a resolution to fund the projects at their next meeting on February 6, including determination of funding amounts. Katie Zefran commented that she will request Borough Council to consider creating a second round of facade grants in their 2024 fiscal year. This program is considered an important piece to enhancing the appearance of Forest City and has been well received by business owners.

Hannah Debish, an 8th grader at Forest City Regional, has stepped into the FCOTAT and is leading a "junior board" feature of the group. Katie Zefran stated her intention to attend a school board meeting and propose to make the FCOTAT Junior Board an official "club" at the school. The inclusion of young community members is vital for vision, planning and perspective.

Many of the projects the FCOTAT is pursuing incorporate identification and pursuit of grant funding. Suzanne Atcavage, grant team leader, reported that the FCOTAT did not receive

funding from the Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau Room Tax Grant to support the base project of a “sculpture trail”. However, the GFCBA and Rail Trail Council have stated their intent to support the maiden project with funding. Suzanne and Deb McNamara reported that the team is looking toward a Creative Sector Flex Fund (CSFF) grant through the Pennsylvania Arts Council, for further support toward sculpture trail development.

In additional grant related projects, the “Erie Street to Main Street sidewalk project” should move forward with assistance from a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). Once the grant cycle opens, the team will organize details needed for its submission.

The meeting opened to public comment. Mayor Christopher Glinton recommended that the FCOTAT have representation at the Borough Council meeting on February 6th. Mayor Glinton reported that Alan Hall, Susquehanna County commissioner would be in attendance to discuss a transition from the Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau and creation of the Susquehanna County Visitors Bureau. Katie Zefran agreed to attend.

Cain Chamberlain of the Endless Mountains Heritage Region invited the FCOTAT to their grant workshop at the Dietrich Theatre in Tunkhannock on March 10th. Mr. Chamberlain also recommended the team investigate the EMHR’s mini-grant series, which are scheduled to open in April.

Gus Fahey of Valley in Motion invited the FCOTAT to a webinar on February 14th, 2023 regarding strategies for trails and the recreational economy in rural Pennsylvania. Committee member, Julianne Doyle, will attend.

The next meeting of the Forest City Outdoor Town Action Team will be held on Thursday, March 2, 2023 at Elegante’ Restaurant, beginning at 6 PM.. The meeting is open to the public and the team welcomes attendance and input.