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Report - Water coalition meeting July 25 with Penn State executives



Nittany Valley Environmental Coalition
State College, PA

Jul 26, 2017 — <http://nittanyvalleywatercoalition.org/index.php/2017/07/26/report-water-coalition-meeting-with-penn-state-reps-july-25-2017/>

This report is based on information provided by Terry Melton, Kelli Hoover and Mark Huncik to Katherine Watt after the meeting.

Four Nittany Valley Water Coalition representatives met with five Penn State representatives on Tuesday, July 25, in Room 242 of the State College Borough Building, from noon to 1 p.m.

NVWC representatives included Kelli Hoover, Terry Melton, David Hughes and Mark Huncik.

Penn State representatives included Kurt Kissinger, Associate Vice President for Finance and Business; Zack Moore, Vice President for Government and Community Relations; Charima Young, Director of Local Government and Community Relations; Steve Watson, Office of Physical Plant, Director of Campus Planning and Design; and Rob Cooper, OPP, Director of Energy and Engineering.

Although NVWC had asked during a prior meeting for Penn State representatives to provide information on possible alternative sites for the Toll Brothers project, and the Penn State officials had verbally agreed to do so, they did not provide that information ahead of the July 25 meeting.

However, the NVWC representatives prepared thoroughly for the meeting, and presented a report

<http://nittanyvalleywatercoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/7.25.17-NVWC-Report-for-PSU-Execs.pdf>

that assembled information on eight “University Planned District” parcels identified in the most-recent UPD District Plan, adopted by some but not all of the regional municipalities in Spring 1999.

<http://nittanyvalleywatercoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/UPD-District-Plan.pdf>

At the July 25 meeting, Penn State executives offered information on current uses at each site and answered questions about whether or not student housing is an allowable use. According to Hoover, in Penn State “lingo,” non-student housing means student housing not owned by the University.

The parcels identified by NVWC representatives include:

UPD 3 – 28 acres along College Avenue at/near old OW Houts buildings, south of west campus along to the corner of College Avenue and Blue Course Drive.

UPD 4 – 91 acres along College Avenue at/near old OW Houts buildings, south of west campus along to the corner of College Avenue and Blue Course Drive.

UPD 7 – 395 acres east of Overlook Heights, west of Fox Hollow Road, north of campus, south of I-99.
UPD 9 – 420 acres east and west of Porter Road near PSU sustainability facilities (MorningStar house, community gardens) and pig farm, north of Centre Furnace Mansion.
UPD 11 – 584 acres east of Overlook Heights, west of Fox Hollow Road, north of Campus, south of I-99.
UPD 12 – 26 acres along East College Avenue near the Lifelink building past Hampton Inn.
UPD 14 – 1,111 acres east of Fox Hollow Road, north of I-99, across from The Villages.
UPD 15 – 108 acres east of Fox Hollow Road, north of I-99, across from The Villages.

Penn State objections

According to Melton, Watson pointed out that rezoning would be needed for each of the proposed parcels

Kissinger stated that, because Penn State has a sales contract with Toll Brothers, Penn State executives can't look like they're trying to undermine the contract by proposing alternatives.

Kissinger repeatedly used the term "program" in relation to Toll Brothers proposed housing developments, and stressed uncertainty about whether parts of UPD would "fit" the Toll Brothers program, since some UPD areas have multi-use zoning (including non-residential or commercial uses along with housing).

Penn State executives expressed concern that neighbors in the areas around the alternatives might object to student housing in their neighborhoods, and also expressed concerns about environmental impacts on the Big Hollow water wells near UPD 7.

Moore expressed concern about preservation of natural settings (forested areas) in the parcels identified, particularly UPD 14, comparing removal of trees as contradictory to "preserving nature."

Water coalition rebuttals

Nittany Valley Water Coalition representatives acknowledged that rezoning would be needed, and said they would support rezoning in an alternative site to promote sustainable, community-respecting development.

Water coalition members pointed out the hypocrisy of Penn State's position on threats to University water wells and forests as contrasted with the University's willingness to put the public Thomas and Harter water wells, Slab Cabin Run, and nearby farm fields and forest groves at risk.

Water coalition members noted that there is already student housing in most of the alternative neighborhoods.

Regarding the existing contract, NVWC representatives emphasized that Penn State's role at this time is simply to identify parcels that the University would consider for a land swap.

Whether Toll Brothers executives accept the land swap offer – to foster positive community relations in the Centre Region – is up to Toll Brothers executives.

At end of meeting, NVWC shared the online PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources map, showing documented sinkholes and depressions in the Centre region, including multiple documented sinkholes in the Whitehall Road/Blue Course Drive property near the intermittent stream and swale.

Although the Penn State executives did not put anything in writing, they verbally agreed to examine the list prepared by NVWC and identify parcels that are feasible from Penn State's perspective and parcels that are not feasible, including the feasibility of subsections of larger parcels. For example, if one portion of a 500+

acre parcel is not a practical choice, other sections of that same parcel may be workable.

Melton said Penn State executives agreed to forward the information by email to NVWC representatives by Friday, July 28, ahead of the scheduled August 2 trilateral meeting between Hoover, Hughes and Melton (representing the water coalition); Kissinger, Cooper and Young (representing Penn State) and Charles Elliott, Managing Director of Toll Brothers.

Melton said she anticipates Penn State will put forward at least two or three alternatives in their July 28 email, and commented of the July 25 meeting, "It went as well as could have been expected."

Centre Daily Times reporter Sara Rafacz interviewed meeting participants afterwards, and interviewed Hughes on camera for a forthcoming CDT video report.

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