

Draft - Whitehall Road Regional Park Municipal Comments Guide – October 2020

Question #1

If your municipality supports only utilizing the current \$4.8 million dollar loan, plus any grants and donations, what amenities of the already reduced Phase I scope should be removed from the park to meet the budget?

Note: Comment on this item is to enable broader feedback on the scope of Phase 1 and items that are the highest priority for each community. As noted below, donor / funder restrictions may impact the ability to change / delete particular items. Final decisions regarding items reduced / cut from Phase I to fit the budget will be made by the CRPR Authority.

State College Borough: Like parks in general and think the idea of a connector between the Borough/College to the state lands is a good one. The views from the site are breath-taking. This plan has been in the works for many years, however, considering the current budget climate and the pandemic, are the projections about economic drivers appropriate given the different environment? For instance, please demonstrate that there aren't enough soccer fields in the Centre region. Prioritize the Musser Gap Trailhead connection. (Staff note: Responses to questions posed in this section are addressed in the other attachment.)

College Township: The Council identified no cuts to the current construction program and has taken a strong position that no cuts should be made. It is the opinion that the current construction program represents the absolute minimum mix of amenities necessary for a functional regional park.

Ferguson Township:

Harris Township: The Board suggested putting the project out to bid now and using those updated numbers as the basis for determining what amenities should/shouldn't be built in Phase I.

Patton Township: The Board recommends that the two smaller fields (to the north) not be finished as part of Phase 1.

COG Staff Response: Pending

Option #1

Should the Authority and municipalities refinance all debt (Pools and Parks; approximately \$300,000 in estimated savings), keeping the current debt schedule and debt payment the same, applying the \$300,000 savings to the Whitehall Road Regional Park budget, while securing some additional funding for the park project?

Note: Final decisions on financing or refinancing will require a unanimous unit vote in favor by the participating communities.

State College Borough: Support Option 1, but Option 4 is also something to consider seriously. Clear Water Conservancy had a hydrologist on staff a few years ago and she argued the need to safeguard these lands. The site I believe still sits on a groundwater recharge area for our water supply.

College Township: Supports and proposes "refinancing of all parks outstanding debt - both pools and parks - on the condition that the annual debt service level remains as is projected for 2021. To achieve this, Council supports extending the payback period for a reasonable amount past the current expiration of financing in 2031. This would also assume a higher debt service level in 2029-2031 than is currently programmed. Council discussed, using this mechanism, creating additional capital to construct the nominal WRRP facility AND potentially providing additional proceeds to be used at Hess Field and Oak Hall Regional Park for Phase II improvements, i.e. flush toilets at Hess and playground at OHRP.

Ferguson Township:

Harris Township: The Board favors refinancing the debt, putting the Whitehall Road project out to bid, then having a conversation about how the \$300,000 in savings can be used at Whitehall Road. They ask that the Hess Field restrooms also be part of the discussion of how to use the \$300,000 savings.

Patton Township: The Board agrees with Option 1. And, COG should obtain financing options (increase debt service or increase term of the borrowing) from their bond consultant.

COG Staff Response: Pending

Option #2

Should the Authority and municipalities refinance all debt (Pools and Parks; approximately \$300,000 in estimated savings), keeping the current debt schedule and debt payment the same, providing the savings back to the municipalities, while securing some additional funding for Whitehall Road Regional Park?

Note: Final decisions on financing or refinancing will require a unanimous unit vote in favor by the participating communities.

State College Borough:

College Township: (See Option #1 response)

Ferguson Township:
Harris Township: The Board does not support this option.
Patton Township:
COG Staff Response: Pending

Option #3

The request is for assistance with funding of the under-budgeted project. What sources of additional funding for the Whitehall Road Regional Park is your municipality willing to consider for funding? Will your municipality consider providing additional resources to build Phase I? If so, please list.
Note: Comment on this item is to enable broader feedback on sources of funding to complete Phase 1. Depending on the policy decisions that may need to be made at the COG level, unanimous votes may be necessary (e.g. financing). Other alternatives may be able to be decided by the CRPR Authority, a majority vote of the General Forum, or by an individual municipality (such as dedicated individual municipal financial commitments).
<p>State College Borough: <i>(Staff note: Responses to questions posed in this section are addressed in the other attachment.)</i></p> <p>1) If the debt is refinanced for a savings of approximately \$300,000 and that amount is added to the 4.8 million that has been borrowed, what will the Park look like? What will the Borough be paying in debt service assuming all of the 4.8 million is used for construction?</p> <p>2) The COG should ask the Water Authority to assume the costs of providing potable water throughout the site in exchange for the preservation of the 100 acres as a permanent recharge area. This cost of providing water in phase I is estimated at \$419,000.</p> <p>3) The COG should ask the UAJA to contribute the \$175,000 costs of providing sanitary sewer within the site.</p> <p>4) If the park is abandoned, how much will be lost in grants and interest?</p> <p>5) If the existing debt is refinanced and the \$2.0 million is added to the new financial package, assuming a rate of 1.4 percent over 20 years, what would the borough's 24% share of the annual debt service amount to?</p> <p>6) Re Phase 1 possible cost cuts:</p> <p>a. Should not include cuts to the walking trail as it is an important connector. It provides outdoor recreation for those who do not have small children or play active team sports.</p> <p>b. Please clarify that if the fields are removed, how many fields are we short? If I interpret this correctly, we are short 8 rectangular fields? Also, please explore cheaper irrigation options.</p> <p>c. Can we scale back the size of the all-ability playgroups?</p> <p>d. Can we explore creative building architecture re: restrooms/storage/maintenance.</p> <p>7) (Duplicated elsewhere)</p> <p>8) Refinancing so long as it does not increase the debt service is the best way to go. It appeared from discussions by the authority with input from the consultants the Borough has used for a long time is possible. Using only the approved funding (\$4.8MM) would cut the project down to too large a portion necessary for infrastructure work necessary for future additions and would not provide a reasonable park. Cutting the original budget from the about 9MM 8+ years ago seemed reasonable at the time, but prices have increased considerably over the past 4 years. The General Forum should discuss with short statements from the Authority and the Finance Committee preceding the discussion. This was the best solution from the Authority discussions.</p>
College Township: (See Option #1 response)
Ferguson Township:
Harris Township: The Harris Township Board of Supervisors are still waiting for the restrooms at Hess Field that were promised as part of the original financing for the regional parks program (see: COG Resolution 2011-4). Harris Township will pledge no additional funding to the Whitehall Road Regional Park until the restrooms are completed at Hess Field.
Patton Township: Patton Township is willing to increase our contribution to this project, contingent upon all participating municipalities also agreeing to an increase with costs to be shared per the COG Parks formula.
COG Staff Response: Pending

Option #4

Is it the request of your municipality that the Authority close out the loan/repay outstanding balance, and then abandon the project? If so, why?
Note: Comment on this item is to enable understanding of each municipality's support for the project. Such feedback is important to the Authority and staff. If the General Forum was to discuss and vote on a recommendation to the Authority regarding ending the project, the vote would not need to be unanimous.
State College Borough:
College Township: This is the option of last resort, assuming additional funding for the currently proposed park cannot be agreed upon by the member municipalities.
Ferguson Township: Pending

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Harris Township: The Board does not support this option.

Patton Township:

COG Staff Response: Pending

Other

If your municipality has consensus regarding any other options or proposed solutions to offer, staff would be happy to investigate those and report back.

State College Borough:

College Township: The Council strongly encourages the General forum to seriously consider the “refinancing” alternative presented above.

Ferguson Township:

Harris Township: None

Patton Township:

COG Staff Response: Pending