

Bedford Gazette
10-26-16

Commissioners approve Pike 2 Bike RFP

By Andrew Carr
Gazette Associate Editor

Strife erupted at the bi-weekly Bedford County Commissioners meeting Tuesday, regarding a motion to approve the request for proposal (RFP) to update the Pike 2 Bike Master Plan.

The motion, which was based upon the recommendation of the Pike 2 Bike Steering Committee, passed unanimously, but not without public comment.

Community member John Maxwell asked the board why the RFP had not been distributed to the public, or the public been given an opportunity to comment, prior to the vote.

"At this point you are voting on something that the public has not seen and has not had an opportunity to comment on," he said. "The RFP itself you are voting on has not been presented for people to look at. We don't know what you are looking at."

Commissioner Chairman Josh Lang said the RFP was made on the recommendation of the steering committee, which held open, public meetings when developing the plan.

"This RFP was supplied to the commissioners, we deliberated on that based on the recommendations of the steering committee, which they have had ample time for people that wanted to come into the meetings to discuss that," Lang said.

Maxwell said he believes the vote is a violation of the Sunshine Act.

After the meeting, Lang said that the commissioner do not release RFPs prior to approval, and the proposals are "a record of internal predecisional deliberations and it would not be subject to RTK (Right to Know) disclosure under 708 (b) (10)."

"Since it appeared on today's agenda for deliberation and decision it becomes a public record subject to disclosure," he said in an email response. "A major reason of why we don't distribute them before the fact is because we want to ensure the RFP is consistently distributed in the final form. If we shared an RFP with others before voting on it, it could end up being distributed beyond our control."

During the public comment portion of the meeting, Maxwell began to offer comments regarding Planning Commission Director Don Schwartz, but was halted in his comments by Lang.

"For five years the Bedford County Commissioners have relied on Don Schwartz to lead the planning
—Continued on Page 5

Pike 2 Bike approved. . .

—Continued from Page 1
process for the Pike 2 Bike project. I'm here today to warn you that the reliance on Mr. Schwartz concerning this project is misplaced," Maxwell said before being asked to limit his comments to the steering committee, and did not speak further.

During the meeting, steering committee member John Carlin spoke, thanking Schwartz, "who worked for five years as part of Bedford County to get this trial project moving forward."

Carlin also informed the board that as of Monday, the county was awarded \$30,000 from the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Financing Authority through the Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program to help pay for the RFP.

"Don wrote the application for that grant, so he isn't just generating excitement for the turnpike trail, he is generating money to pay for updating this matter plan," Carlin said. "When you put that with the \$20,000 Jim and John Bitner provided for funding this trail update, we are more than halfway there, probably."

Carlin also recognized Maxwell, who he said "has a lot of ideas."

"Some of them have a lot of merit, so we have used them," he said.

Maxwell then asked the board why Carlin was allowed "to speak extolling Don Schwartz and I'm trying to offer criticisms about the steering committee's

process and I'm not even allowed to speak in criticism of Don Schwartz. How is that fair?"

According to the rules of procedure for weekly meetings of the commissioners, the chairman may rule out-of-order scandalous, impertinent, irrelevant, and redundant comments, or comments the discernible purpose or effect of which is to disrupt or needless protract the proceedings of the meeting.

"I don't think that is the proper decorum for a commissioners meeting, to bash someone in that manner," Lang told Maxwell.

Maxwell responded with, "I'm trying to avoid this county from making serious mistakes, which I was about to recount, that are being pursued. You are throttling that, you are preventing that from being discussed, and I want that to go on the record."

Commissioner Barry Dallara then said the steering committee has a combined more than 50 years of higher education and more than 300 years experience in related fields to the project, "and I am grateful for the work they did. And I am very comfortable with accepting their recommendations to the commissioners."

He also said in working with Schwartz, he has found his "integrity impeccable."

"And I find it offensive that you would come here and want to challenge his integrity in a public meeting," Dallara said. "And

thirdly I would tell you that I think we have a chance to help something in economic development in Bedford County if we quit criticizing it and work together."

The RFP, provided to the Gazette after the vote, calls for proposals from contractors to "satisfy a need for updating the Pike 2 Bike Master Plan."

The master plan, originally completed in 2006 for developing the Pike 2 Bike recreational trail/corridor in Bedford and Fulton counties, which consists of 8.5 miles of trail, 205 wooded acres and two abandoned Pennsylvania Turnpike tunnels that account for more than two miles of the trail. Originating at the intersection of Turnpike exit 161 and Interstate 70 in Breezewood, along Route 30 east of the Gateway Travel Plaza, the trail heads north-east through Bedford and Fulton counties.

The document seeks proposals, including in-depth analysis of the cost of rehabilitating existing facilities, construction of new facilities, and detailed discussion of both ownership and management models that will assure long-term fiscal viability of the trail.

Proposals must be sent to Debra Clark, chief clerk, by Dec. 28, and an online copy is available at www.bedfordcountypa.org/RFP10216_P2B.html.

Contact Andrew Carr at acarr@bedfordgazette.com 623-1151, ext. 130.