

Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority Meeting

DRAFT Minutes

December 18, 2023

3:00 p.m.

The following members were in attendance:

Authority Members in Attendance:

Christian Leinbach, Berks County Board of Commissioners, Chair
Marian Moskowitz, Chester County Commissioner, Vice Chair
Peter Urscheler, Phoenixville Borough Mayor, Assistant Treasurer
Brian O’Leary, Executive Director, Chester County Planning Commission
Jim Gerlach, President, GRCA, Assistant Secretary
Stephanie Henrick, Mayor of Pottstown

Authority Members Absent:

Kenneth Lawrence, Jr., Montgomery County Commissioner, Treasurer
Scott France, Executive Director, Montgomery County Planning Commission, Secretary
Eddie Moran, Mayor of Reading

1. Call to Order

Christian Leinbach, Chair of the SRPRA, called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. Mr. Dan Becker of Kozloff Stoudt Attorneys, legal counsel for the Authority, read the guidelines for making public comments.

2. Adoption of November 27, 2023 Minutes

Christian Leinbach called for any corrections to the minutes. There were no corrections to the minutes.

Mayor Peter Urscheler moved for their adoption and Jim Gerlach seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Board Member Comments

There were no board member comments.

4. Public Comment on Agenda Items

There were no public comments on agenda items.

5. Report on FRA CIDP Application Acceptance

Mr. Tom Frawley, Executive Director of the SRPRA announced that the SRPRA has been accepted into the FRA Corridor Identification and Development Program (CIDP). He reported that the acceptance includes access to \$500k to support Step 1 tasks, with additional funding levels to be defined for Steps 2 and 3. A kickoff meeting with FRA is scheduled for January 9, and work has already begun on the grant agreement.

6. Award of Consultant Contract to begin SDP Preparation – Action

Tom Frawley explained that the SRPRA advertised on October 27 its Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking consultant services to perform activities related to preparation of a passenger rail Service

Development Plan (SDP). A proposal evaluation team, was assembled consisting of seven members, six of whom represented the Planning Commissions of Berks, Montgomery and Chester Counties, plus the Executive Director. He reported that he and the six-member team evaluated and scored the submissions. Five proposals were received; the two highest scored firms were asked to respond to questions regarding their proposals, and their responses were then taken into consideration as well. Tom said that while he participated in meetings of the proposal evaluation team he did not score the proposals, having recused himself due to having an existing contractual relationship with one of the proposers.

Two firms were finalists: AECOM and Urban Engineers, with the evaluation team recommending the contract be awarded to AECOM. Upon the Board voting on this action, he said that the firm would then have 10 business days to respond. If – barring changes in direction from FRA – an agreement cannot be reached within ten business days, negotiations would be terminated, and new negotiations initiated with the second ranked proposer. The action requested of the Board is to authorize such negotiations, and to authorize the Executive Director to execute the resultant contract.

Mayor Peter Urscheler moved to authorize representatives of the SRPRA to enter into negotiations with and execute the resultant contract with AECOM; Assistant Secretary Jim Gerlach seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

7. Direction to Virtual Farm Creative for 2024 level of effort – Action

Tom Frawley provided an overview of Virtual Farm Creative’s (VFC) social media services provided for the SRPRA in 2023 at a monthly fee of \$2,500. The monthly charge for ongoing maintenance and support of the social media channels during 2024 was priced in the VFC proposal at \$1,717 per month or \$20,600 for the year, which corresponds with the amount budgeted for these services. (Additional optional services were also identified that would increase the monthly cost to as much as \$4,500.) After acceptance of SRPRA into the Federal Railroad Administration’s Corridor Identification and Development Program, the SRPRA’s Marketing & Public Relations Committee concluded that the website needed an immediate update to reflect a change in focus from generating interest for advocacy to reporting project planning and design progress; as well, with 120+ names of “subscribers” already enrolled, the design of a virtual newsletter or email blast was needed. These activities have been negotiated to cost \$3,000 as a one-time fee, to be charged against the 2023 budget which currently anticipates a \$5,000 surplus. Tom said the Committee recommends that VFC be directed to perform the identified slightly increased level of effort for 2024 at a monthly fee of \$2,400 and that one-time additional tasks be initiated in December 2023, be continued to completion in early 2024.

Brian O’Leary motioned, and Mayor Peter Urscheler seconded the motion to direct Virtual Farm Creative (VFC) to perform the identified level of effort for 2024 at a monthly fee of \$2,400 and that one-time additional tasks be initiated in December 2023, be continued to completion and be charged against the remaining budget for 2023. The motion was approved unanimously.

8. Committee Reports

a. *Finance – Mayor Peter Urscheler, Assistant Treasurer*

i. *Motion to Pay Bills – Action*

Mayor Urscheler said there were three bills presented for payment, subject to the Board’s approval.

Mayor Urscheler motioned, Commissioner Marian Moskowitz seconded, all voted unanimously, and the motion was carried to approve the payments of three bills presented in the SRPRA’s December 18, 2023 Board meeting packet.

b. Marketing & Public Relations– Brian O’Leary, Chair

i. Committee Update

Brian O’Leary reported on the publicity the SRPRA has received upon being accepted into the FRA Corridor Program. While Reading did a good job of spreading the word, he said that Philadelphia’s effort was lacking, and said further efforts at outreach will be required.

c. Planning – Scott France, Chair

i. Committee Update

In Scott France’s absence, Brian O’Leary reported that the Planning Committee met last week to review the consultant services RFP proposals. They also met with PennDOT officials last month in Harrisburg. The next meeting with SEPTA has not yet been scheduled.

d. Personnel – Comm. Moskowitz, Chair

i. Committee Update

Commissioner Moskowitz, Chair, said that the Committee had no news to report.

e. Community Engagement – Jim Gerlach, Chair

i. Committee Update

Jim Gerlach reminded the Board that he will be leaving the Board at the end of the year as he is retiring, and that the Community Engagement Committee will need to be reconstituted. After the swearing in of new Commissioners in Bucks, Chester, and Montgomery Counties, an informational session will be held to bring them up to date on the status of the project.

Christian Leinbach, Chair, thanked Jim for his great work on behalf of the SRPRA, and said there would be much scheduling work to be done and that he and the Board would move quickly on meeting dates to insure that they met with the new Commissioners to bring them up to speed.

f. By-Laws – Scott France, Chair

i. Revision of Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation– Action

On behalf of Scott France, Brian O’Leary reported that the Articles of Incorporation have now been adopted by all three counties (Berks, Chester and Montgomery).

Tom Frawley added that all three executed resolutions are awaiting proof of publication to be submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of State along with the Articles of Amendment.

9. Executive Director’s Report

Tom Frawley, Executive Director, reminded the Board that all the SRPRA committees will have to be reconstituted in January, and that there will be a need to elect four new officers. (Treasurer, Deputy Treasurer, Secretary and Deputy Secretary)

10. Acceptance of Letters of Resignation– Action

Christian Leinbach announced that the Board received Jim Gerlach’s official resignation, thanked him for his service and wished him well.

Jim Gerlach thanked the Board and Commissioners responsible for setting up the Authority and for their leadership. He remarked that it is a great team and offered his congratulations on the FRA decision.

Brian O’Leary motioned, Peter Urscheler seconded, all voted unanimously, to accept Jim Gerlach’s resignation from the SRPRA Board.

Tom Frawley informed the Board that he also received Commissioner Ken Lawrence's resignation letter, and asked that the Board vote on accepting his resignation.

Marian Moskowitz motioned, Peter Urscheler seconded, all voted unanimously, to accept Commissioner Ken Lawrence's resignation from the SRPRA Board.

11. Other Business

Tom Frawley announced Mr. David Hunter's appointment by the Berks County Commissioners to the SRPRA Board to serve out the remainder of Jim Gerlach's term, which was scheduled to end on June 16, 2024, but which has been extended to conclude at the end of 2024. He added that Mayor Eddie Moran's initial term has expired, and that he has been re-appointed by the Berks County Commissioners for a full five-year term.

12. General Public Comment

There was no public comment.

13. Adjourn

Christian Leinbach called to adjourn the meeting.

Brian O'Leary motioned, Peter Urscheler seconded, all voted unanimously, to adjourn the December 2023 meeting of the SRPRA Board.

Next Board Meeting

January 22, 2024 at 3:00 p.m. via Zoom

Respectfully submitted,



Ann Marie Meehan