

## **Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority Meeting**

### **APPROVED Minutes**

October 28, 2024

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, Treasurer  
Tom DiBello, Montgomery County Commissioner, Assistant Treasurer  
Scott France, Executive Director, Montgomery County Planning Commission, Secretary  
Brian O'Leary, Executive Director, Chester County Planning Commission, Assistant Secretary  
David Hunter, Executive Director, Berks County Planning Commission  
Eddie Moran, Mayor of Reading  
Stephanie Henrick, Mayor of Pottstown

#### **Authority Members Absent:**

None

#### **1. Call to Order**

Christian Leinbach, Chair of the SRPRA, called the meeting to order at 3:01 p.m. Christian introduced the officials attending the event, gave a brief history of the Reading Railroad station which is now the Saucony Creek Franklin Station Brewpub, where the meeting was being held. Christian cited the contribution of Dennis Louwerse, former Berks Area Reading Transit Authority's (BARTA) Executive Director, who passed away, and his work on the area's regional transportation.

#### **2. Welcome to Reading – Mayor Eddie Moran**

Eddie Moran, Mayor of the City of Reading, welcomed attendees. Greg Downing, Executive Director of BARTA, which owns the station building, also extended a welcome to the attendees.

#### **3. Adoption of September 23, 2024 Minutes**

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

*As there were no corrections to the minutes, Christian Leinbach announced that the SRPRA's September 23, 26, 2024 meeting minutes stand approved as presented.*

#### **4. Board Member Comments**

*There were no Board member comments.*

#### **5. Public Comment on Agenda Items**

Dan Becker of Kozloff Stoudt Attorneys, legal counsel for the Authority, read the guidelines for making public comments.

*There were no public comments on agenda items.*

## 6. Committee Reports

### a. **Finance – Mayor Peter Urscheler, Chair**

#### i. Committee Update

Mayor Peter Urscheler reported that the SRPRA's PA DCED LSA grant application would be submitted before the November 30th deadline.

Peter informed the Board that the Finance Committee voted to advance the recommendation to the Board to support the use of QuickBooks accounting software for the Authority's bookkeeping and accounting needs.

Peter added that the Finance Committee also voted to support the adoption of a staff expense policy for the Authority.

#### ii. Motion to Pay Bills – Action

Peter indicated the Finance Committee recommends that the Board ratify the SRPRA's three prepaid bills paid between October 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024 totaling \$134.33 and three invoices dated between October 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> totaling \$64,764.81. The Finance Committee recommends the ratification of the prepaid bills in the amount of \$134.33 and the approval of payment for the outstanding bills in the amount of \$64,764.81.

*Peter Urscheler motioned, Marian Moskowitz seconded, all voted unanimously, and the motion was carried to approve the payments of prepaid and outstanding bills presented in the SRPRA's October 28, 2024 Board meeting packet.*

#### iii. Motion to Procure Accounting Software – Action

Peter indicated the Finance Committee recommends that the Board authorize procurement of QuickBooks accounting software for the use of the SRPRA.

*Peter Urscheler motioned, Marian Moskowitz seconded, all voted unanimously, and the motion was carried to approve the procurement of QuickBooks software for the use of the SRPRA.*

#### iv. Motion to Adopt Expense Policy – Action

Peter indicated the Finance Committee recommends that the Board adopt the expense policy drafted by the Executive Director and members of the Finance Committee.

*Peter Urscheler motioned, Brian O'Leary seconded, all voted unanimously, and the motion was carried to adopt the drafted expense policy presented in the SRPRA's October 28, 2024 Board meeting packet.*

### b. **Personnel – Comm. Moskowitz, Chair**

#### i. Committee Update

Marian Moskowitz, Committee Chair, reported that the Personnel Committee has reviewed the final version of the contract agreed with Katherine Morris, candidate for SRPRA's Administrative Assistant position. She reported that the Committee approved the terms of the contract, including a rate per hour of \$20 for a maximum of 16 hours per week, over a duration of one year.

#### ii. Motion to Execute Administrative Assistant's Contract-Action

Marian Moskowitz, Vice Chair, presented the Personnel Committee's recommendation to the Board that a contract be executed with Katherine Morris, to serve as the Administrative Assistant to SRPRA's

Executive Director, consistent with the terms presented in the Board's October meeting packet.

*Marian Moskowitz motioned, and Mayor Eddie Moran seconded, all voted unanimously, and the motion was carried to approve the SRPRA agreement for the Administrative Assistant, based on the terms presented in the packet.*

## **7. CIDP Updates**

### **a. *FRA/The Federal Perspective – Barbara Moreno***

Barbara Moreno, the Federal Rail Authority's (FRA) Director of Network Development gave a brief overview of the Corridor ID Program and the Program's three steps: 1) creating a scope, schedule and budget for Step 2; 2) creating the Service Development Plan (SDP) to address an entire range of technical issues; and 3) preliminary engineering and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation. Barbara congratulated SRPRA on their progress to-date.

### **b. *Amtrak/The Operator's Perspective – Joe Barr***

Joe Barr serves as Amtrak's Director of Network Development for the Eastern U.S. He described Amtrak's work that was focused on two primary goals: double ridership by 2040 and net zero emissions by 2045. He noted that Amtrak is working with numerous project sponsors across the nation, and restated Amtrak's commitment to work with SRPRA during Step 2 of the CIDP. He indicated that Amtrak appreciates SRPRA's having named them as the proposed operator for the service.

### **c. *City of Reading Station Site Planning – Aaron Gantz, GRCA***

Aaron Gantz, Vice President of Economic Development & Strategy for the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) provided a brief overview of the city's station site planning for SRPRA's proposed passenger rail stop in Reading. The presentation identified the range of potential sites that were examined within downtown Reading, and the basis of the study recommendation to utilize the BARTA-owned Franklin Street Station, and in the future, the adjacent BARTA intermodal bus terminal.

### **d. *City of Reading Redevelopment & Downtown Strategic Plan–Jack Gombach***

Jack Gombach, Managing Director of the City of Reading, spoke about the restoration of passenger rail service and the reactivation of the Franklin Street Station as keys to the future success of the Downtown Plus Plan. He cited his limited tenure, having been in his position for only about a month, but committed to work to support the efforts of the SRPRA and all the project stakeholders.

## **8. Executive Director's Report – Tom Frawley**

Tom Frawley thanked the presenters and introduced SRPRA's Board members to attendees.

## **9. Marketing Team Report–Brian O'Leary**

Brian O'Leary invited attendees to learn more about the SRPRA's rail project by visiting the SRPRA website and to follow SRPRA on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

**10. Planning Team Report–Scott France**

Scott France reported that he attended the October Impact Conference last week in Philadelphia. Scott gave a shout-out to the Pottstown Health and Wellness Foundation representatives who also attended. He also reported that the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) had begun working with the Pottstown Metropolitan Regional Planning Committee to evaluate potential passenger rail station sites in Pottstown.

**11. Other Business**

Tom Frawley announced SRPRA Board member Brian O’Leary’s retirement. He thanked him for serving on the Board and expressed his appreciation for Brian’s support and work; he presented him with a plaque in recognition of his service. Board Chair Christian Leinbach and Vice-Chair Marian Moskowitz shared similar sentiments, citing his role having begun at the earliest stage of the committee formed in 2021.

**12. General Public Comment**

Several individuals took the opportunity to provide comments:

Kevin Lerch, Township Commissioner from Muhlenberg Township, Berks County

Chuck Orttwein of Boyertown Borough, Berks County

Paul Scavorlo of Reading, Berks County  
Bradley Ross of King of Prussia, Upper Merion Township, Montgomery County

Jerry Silverman, Douglass Township, Berks or Montgomery County  
Dawood Belton, Reading, Berks County, representing Walk/Bike Berks

At least one comment was critical of the need and cost of the project. Other comments focused on technical details, such as the need for alternative ticketing beyond smart phone applications and computer interface with the Internet. And others were complementary of the work to-date and the ongoing effort.

Christian said he would like to respond to the public comments. He noted that studies done previously demonstrated that commuter rail solutions were unaffordable, like the SEPTA passenger rail service that ran until 1981.

Responding to the public comment regarding government subsidized transport, Christian asked attendees to list any type of public transport that is not heavily subsidized by government. He said the only one with which he was familiar was toll roads.

**13. Adjourn**

Christian Leinbach called to adjourn the meeting.

*David Hunter motioned, Marian Moskowitz seconded, and all voted unanimously, to adjourn the October 2024 meeting of the SRPRA Board.*

**Next Board Meeting**

November 25, 2024 at 3:00 p.m. via Zoom

Respectfully submitted,

