



Thirty five acres of natural woodland destroyed by a bankrupt developer at Rydal Waters across from the Abington Library on Old York Road

Since my election on November 6, 2007, I have been actively engaged in discussions concerning Rydal Waters (RW). On November 15, 2007, I was first contacted by residents of the Huntingdon/Brooks/Susquehanna Roads (HBS) neighborhood, which is directly adjacent to the property. Since then, many e-mails have been exchanged and several meetings with various interested parties have occurred.

What follows is a summary of where the project is as of this moment. This is a condensed version, because there has been a lot of activity, but I think I captured the basics. If I left anything out, it was in the interest of brevity. If I forgot something, it was purely accidental. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

RW, formerly a privately owned 35-acre natural woodland directly across from the Library on Old York Road, was sold several years ago to a developer, the Elliott Group. In October 2005, the Board of Commissioners approved the developer's plan to build 84 single-family homes on RW. The property was then improved (a term that refers to the clearing of the land and the installation of storm drains and roadways). The developer went bankrupt soon thereafter and all work on the project ceased. When bankruptcy proceedings in November 2007 failed to attract a qualified buyer, the banks (hereafter referred to as "the owners") that financed the project took possession of RW.

In January 2008, representatives of the owners met with Township officials to discuss resolving safety and security issues raised by the HBS neighbors. These issues included traffic flow, securing the site to prevent accidental injury, dumping and vandalism, and cosmetic concerns. The owners have provided strong assurances that they plan to resolve quickly all of the outstanding issues. You may have already noticed that the Elliott Group sign has been removed (to discourage curious passing motorists from driving on to the property) and millings (road debris) were piled at the far entrance to the property to prevent dumping and to keep vehicles out. I will keep you informed periodically as other issues are addressed.

As far as the disposition of RW is concerned, please note that the property is zoned Neighborhood Residential (NR). This is a special category that was created specifically for RW as a result of negotiations involving the Township, the HBS neighbors and the developer. At this point, any entity that purchases the property must either build what the property is approved and improved for (defined above) or seek a zoning change. Thus, each idea discussed below can only be accomplished with Township approval.

I met with Penn State Abington officials on November 20, 2007 and again on December 11, 2007. They want to purchase the property for use as active open space (athletic fields) and overflow parking for students. They do not intend to build any structures other than, at some future point, a field house. They are sensitive to HBS neighborhood concerns and, if they succeed in obtaining the property, have committed to work closely with the HBS neighbors to mitigate any negatives. Penn State must vet their interest through the University Board of Directors. This process could take some time.

Brandolini Companies, the owner of the [Baederwood Shopping Center](#) (BSC), is interested in RW. In a meeting I had with Brandolini representatives on November 30, 2007, they presented a plan that includes ceding the front 20 contiguous acres plus the existing building (the former Harbison home) to the Township for use as open space. This plan is contingent on Township approval for Brandolini's request to build 31 homes on the rear portion of RW (closest to the BSC) plus increasing the proposed BSC apartment complex from 266 units to 500 units. The outcome of this plan is not certain.

I met with Township staff on January 4, 2008 to discuss possible outcomes for RW. One of those outcomes is for the Township to purchase it, restore it and preserve it as passive open space. This outcome requires prior approval from the Board of Commissioners. The Board would have to vote whether to allocate Township open space funds and how much (\$2.9 million is available). I have begun the process of exploring the feasibility of this outcome. I cannot estimate a timeframe for completion of this task. Obviously, a significant amount of other monies would need to be obtained to accomplish the purchase, since the liability assumed by the owners is in the area of \$17 million.

Representatives from Rydal Park contacted me to discuss their interest in RW. I met with them on February 5, 2008. If they succeed in purchasing the property, they plan to build age-restricted single-family dwellings for younger, independent seniors (age 55 or so). The type of dwelling (carriage house, town home, etc.) and the number of units (about 100 total, slightly more or less) are still to be determined.

Other possibilities (and several have been rumored) are just speculation at this point.

If anyone has any concerns, questions or ideas, please do not hesitate to contact me. I will continue to keep you informed as events warrant it.

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