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OKEHOCKING NATURE CENTER PROSPECTUS

Willistown Township is pleased to announce its plans to create a nature center at Okehocking Preserve. The draft mission of the center is to enhance people's relationship with nature, sense of community, and knowledge of natural resource management and stewardship, thus improving their life experience and creating life-long natural resource advocates and practitioners. The purpose of the center is to:

- Ignite public interest in the environment and promote conservation and natural resource stewardship and improvement through providing quality environmental education programming and recreation.
- Encourage community "ownership" of Okehocking Preserve, establishing a strong volunteer base and programs that will ensure the Preserve's long-term ecologic, educational, and recreational successes and its public benefits.
- Provide a facility for public environmental education and recreation, resulting in a positive impact on the ecology at Okehocking and enriching the lives of those who visit. (Provide programs based not upon volume of participants, but upon quality that will safeguard the property from overuse.)
- Promote and execute conservation and natural resource management now to insure their future.
- Provide an indoor educational/meeting/gathering space and an outdoor classroom, which is the Preserve.
- Promote positive relationships between people and the environment and teach proper land and natural resource management techniques and stewardship.
- Provide a model for private and public land management, environmental education and recreation, and conservation.
- Promote the use of green technology.
- Provide office space for the Parks and Preserves Department, partner programming staff, volunteer staff, etc., to implement the center's programs and the Okehocking management plan.
- Provide space to community organizations/groups for meetings/lectures/events.
- Hold special Township events and lease to the public and organizations for special events.

The Township will partner with community organizations in achieving the mission and purpose of the center. The partners will offer educational and interactive programs that further their mission and coincide with the center's mission and purpose.

At this time, the Township has enrolled the Upper Main Line YMCA as a major programming partner. The Upper Main Line YMCA is one of the few YMCAs in the country that has a permanent Environmental Education Center and varied ecosystems right on its campus. The outdoor classroom at the Y includes over twenty acres of woodland, wetlands, the headwaters of Darby Creek, and a one-acre pond. The Y's Environmental Education and Summer Camp programs have been utilizing Okehocking

as an outdoor classroom and environmental recreation resource since the acquisition of the Preserve in 2000.



The Upper Main Line Y’s Earth Service Corps (YESC), a national service-learning program for teens ready to make a difference in their communities, has been a strong partner at Okehocking Preserve. Constructed on the building blocks of leadership development, environmental education, action, and cross-cultural awareness, this proven program allows teens to use their talents, develop new skills, and learn more about themselves and their surroundings. The program is dedicated to spreading awareness of the biodiversity in the tri-state area, the preservation and creation of wildlife habitats, and the local species that are at risk. YESC provides its participants with leadership training, outdoor adventure, and opportunities for service to the environment. In addition to its use by the YESC program, the new center will be utilized by existing Y programs that serve people of all ages. The Township is currently conducting partnership outreach to its existing partners at Okehocking and potential new partners. If there is an organization you feel may fit into the mission and purpose of the Preserve, kindly have them contact Mary McLoughlin at 610-640-1669 to discuss the possibility of their partnership.

“Places for all people to connect with their loved ones and the natural world sustain us.”

Emilyn Sheffield, Ph.D.

The Township intention is to raise public and private funds, with assistance from partners where possible, to execute the project, including the construction of a “green,” energy efficient building and to establish a maintenance endowment for the building. The center will be located in the middle of the property at the old barn site behind the farmhouse. The Township will own the building and the partners will run the bulk of the programming out of the center. The Willistown Conservation Trust conservation easement on the property permits this use, and the Trust and Township are looking forward to working together on the project.

If you would like to share your thoughts or insights on this project or volunteer your time, please contact Mary McLoughlin at 610-640-1669. To hear more about the center or discuss it in person with Mary, she will be at the Willistown Friends Meeting Environmental Stewardship Festival on Saturday, September 16th, from 11am to 4pm and will be giving a talk at 12 noon. Editor’s note: More information on the Environmental Stewardship Festival is located on page XXX of this publication.