

The stated meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Thursday, June 8, 2023, via webinar and in-person at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA, with President Hecker presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: Commissioners BRODSKY, ROTHMAN, DiPLACIDO, WINEGRAD, HENRY, ZAPPONE, CARSWELL, SPIEGELMAN, BOLE, SCHREIBER, BOWMAN, VAHEY, HECKER
Excused: Commissioner VAUGHN

Also Present: Township Manager MANFREDI
Township Solicitor CLARKE

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

BOARD PRESIDENT ANNOUNCEMENTS:

President Hecker announced that no action will be taken on agenda Item d. as listed under New Business, and the June 15th public information session on the Comprehensive Plan will be rescheduled to a later date.

Manager Manfredi said the Township continues to receive public comment, so we would like to postpone the public information session to a later date to provide opportunity for additional public comment and then a comment/response document will be posted on the website.

President Hecker continued there is public health concern about air quality, and he called on Mr. McAneney to provide an update.

Mr. McAneney said the air quality index has improved; however, it is still unhealthy. Everyone should take steps to reduce outside exposure and use fans to recirculate air conditioning. Air quality will continue to improve through the weekend, although it could change due to winds and fires still burning out of control. Also, May was the driest month on record, so avoid using firepits and barbeques, and don't hesitate to call the fire department if needed.

President Hecker added that the EPA has an AirNow app where you put in your zip code, and it provides various components of air quality in real time.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS:

Lora Lehmann, resident, commented that the tree plan is important; however, she expressed concern about major plans being considered for the Township in “seven days.”

Karen Milovcich, resident, provided statistics on the population in Abington and requested the Township work with other municipalities regarding zoning. Also, traffic and road rage are issues, and there is no YMCA, family diners, movie theaters or bowling alleys in the Township.

Mr. Burton, resident, commented that he moved to the Township two years ago and works in Philadelphia as a firefighter. He and his family moved to Abington to live in a safe community with great schools, and he would like it to remain that way. He expressed concern about building on every spot of land, which will affect the residents.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner DiPlacido to approve Items a. and b. as listed under Consent Agenda as follows:

To approve the minutes from the Board of Commissioners Regular Meeting of May 11, 2023.

To adopt Traffic Safety Ordinance No. 2206 amending Chapter 156 “Vehicles and Traffic,” Article II – “Traffic Regulations,” Section 14 – “Stop Intersections;” Section 18 – “Vehicle Weight Limits Established;” and Article III – “Parking Regulations” Section 25 – “Parking Prohibited at All Times; No Parking Between Signs; No Parking Here to Corner; Parking Prohibited Except Certain Hours; No Stopping or Standing” and to add “Stop” signs on Huron Avenue southbound at Cypress Avenue and northbound at Jenkintown Road, Laurance Avenue, eastbound at Huron Avenue, Roanoke Avenue eastbound at Huron Avenue, Crefeld Avenue eastbound at Huron Avenue, establish a maximum vehicle weight limit of 6 tons on Washington Lane between Township Line Road and Wyncote Road and add a “No Parking Here to Corner” sign on Rossiter southside at Fitzwatertown Road.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners. There were none.

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Item BOC-02-060823:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Carswell to consider a resolution to fill a vacancy on the Board of Commissioners for Ward 6.

President Hecker said last month, Commissioner Thompson resigned as he moved to a different area of the Township. Applications were opened to residents and two were received. He opened the floor for nominations.

Vice President Vahey nominated Mr. Jeffrey Browne to fill the vacancy in Ward 6, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman.

President Hecker asked for any other nominations. There were none.

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-0.

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman to approve the resolution to fill the vacancy on the Board of Commissioners for Ward 6, Mr. Jeffrey Browne.

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-0.

The Honorable Magisterial District Judge John D. Kessler administered the Oath of Office to Mr. Jeffrey Browne as Commissioner of Ward 6 of the Township of Abington on this 8th day of June 2023.

Item BOC-03-060823:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman to affirm the existing wards as contiguous, compact, and as nearly equal as practicable.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners. There were none.

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

Item BOC-04-060823:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner DiPlacido to accept the Master Tree Action Plan, and refer it to the Strategic Planning and Comprehensive Plan Consistency Committees.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners. There were none.

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

FINANCE COMMITTEE:

Item FC-01-060823:

Commissioner Winegrad made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman to approve the April 2023 expenditures in the amount of \$2,899,970.91 and salaries and wages in the amount of \$2,151,829.72, and authorize the proper officials to sign vouchers in payment of bills and contracts as they mature through the month of July 2023.

Roll call resulted in motion being passed 14-0. Commissioner Vaughn was absent during roll call.

Item FC-02-060823:

Commissioner Winegrad made a MOTION, seconded by Vice President Vahey to approve the amendment 2 to the OpenGov, Inc. software agreement with the Township of Abington.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners. There were none.

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Ms. Shameeka Browne commented that she is proud of Reverend Commissioner Jeffrey Browne. She is overwhelmed by his dedication and service to the community, and this position is for him as he will lead with integrity and serve well, so well done.

Adele Kubel, resident, expressed concern about commercial blight at Raymour & Flanigan, and she asked for the status of a petition; also, about the conditions at 100 York Apartments as well as poorly designed apartment buildings by “greedy” developers.

Lisa Mallon, resident, commented that Abington is mainly residential with some institutional and open space, and the draft Comp Plan indicates that these three land uses represent a higher share of land than is typical in the county. Also, the Township is 98% built out and little undeveloped land remains to accommodate any new development, therefore most future development will be infill. The Comp Plan should focus on redeveloping the commercial districts for retail and entertainment, and mixing others uses in residential spaces should never be considered.

Mike Tobin, resident, commented that although there are many good things in the Comp Plan, some of them need to be changed such as housing with high rents and generational wealth. We need the Board of Commissioners to review this plan further because the citizens do not want it in its present format, and it needs to be fixed with community involvement.

Ellen Stark, resident, commented that it is a call to action for the Commissioners to review the draft Comp Plan more closely, and she read from the 2007 Comp Plan regarding increasing water consumption and preventing over usage. Also, the fire department does not have enough volunteers and the Township will be faced with hiring firefighters, which was not addressed in the Strategic or Comp Plans.

Lora Lehmann, resident, expressed concern that the vision of the Comp Plan should reflect what the residents desire, and a town hall should be held.

Charles Baus, resident, expressed concern about increased traffic and speeding on Highland Avenue. Also, the Comp Plan should be more transparent and address what the impact on services will be.

Greg Beckowski, resident, commented that the Comp Plan's generic terminology offers a high latitude for interpretation and will leave unpredictability on what the future holds. He suggested making the plan more quantitative by adding metrics and goals, and residents want predictability. If the plan was more structured and better defined, it would help make educated decisions.

A resident asked for the rule about the types of flags on the Township's flagpole.

Township Solicitor replied that the Township and Board of Commissioners are permitted to fly the American flag, the POW flag, the flag of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and any other flag they determine, which is an exercise of their free speech rights.

A resident asked for more intentionality in the Comp Plan, because if an area is overdeveloped, the current school system will suffer as a result. We want the community to grow with purpose and intent and continue with what we have while still moving forward in a positive direction.

Fran Early, resident, commented that he is glad that Mr. Browne was appointed, and he looks forward to working with him as North Hills is a great place to live, run a business, and retire.

Chris Brock, resident, commented that he lives next to the Mediplex, and the public space they built looks like a bus stop. There has been no accountability for what they said they were going to do, so he has mistrust in the systems that protect our community. When it comes to specific projects there must be rigorous accountability so that residents can trust that the Comp Plan will be the vision for our community.

Karen Milovcich, resident, commented that she lives across from the Huntingdon Valley Shopping Center, and it is so busy and loud due to increased traffic, and adding apartments would be detrimental to the area.

Natalie Powell, resident, asked when will the public get responses to their questions? Also, building multiple housing units around transportation hubs in populated areas will not be beneficial for residents.

Manager Manfredi noted that the public information session on the Comp Plan was postponed to a later date so we can continue receiving additional public comments and have the professionals address them.

Richard Veith, resident, commented that how the public sessions on the Comp Plan were hosted and the questions posed were leading in a direction that does not align with his vision of the Township. He is concerned about the process as there should be more town halls and recorded community discussions for posting on the Township's website. His vision is to improve the commercial districts, not have them grow in footprint, but fixed where they are, so they do not enlarge or encroach in our residential neighborhoods. He wants the single-family community to remain and not become doubles and triples of multifamily housing blocks.

Ross Able, resident, encouraged looking into the concept of Vision Zero, which is how communities can accomplish zero traffic fatalities using proven methods of traffic calming, and he asked the Township to investigate how to take action towards making our town safer for pedestrians.

Marlene Kessler, resident, commented that she has not seen any statistics supporting TOD, and regional ridership according to SEPTA has decreased, so instead of building more apartments, work on what needs to be fixed.

Former Commissioner Mike Thompson said there have been comments made tonight that ‘business likes predictability’ and ‘we should focus on commercial districts’ in which he agrees. We worked on restimulating commercial districts, and by increasing density with mixed use development, there would be increased walkability, connectivity and better streetscapes resulting in less crime since there would be more people on the street, and he urged the Board of Commissioners to keep that in mind.

Also, the 2007 Comp Plan was written under the International Building Code 2003, which was only the second iteration and a transition from the BOCA Code. Since then, the building code has evolved significantly encouraging efficiency in terms of energy consumption and water use, and comprehensive plans are rewritten to take into consideration changes that occur in our society.

Jeannette DiMeo, resident, commented that adding apartments to the HVSC area would not be good as high rents are hard for residents. Corporations are buying homes and turning them into duplexes, and Abington should not participate in that.

Commissioner Bowman thanked Mr. McAneney, staff of Public Works and the Police Department’s Community Policing for helping with the cleanout of a home in his ward that was a protracted problem. Also, the Board of Commissioners supports our fire department, their recruitment program as well as renovation of their buildings, and volunteerism is down across the country, it’s just one of those things.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary

Ordinance No. 2206 and the resolution to fill the vacancy on the Board of Commissioners for Ward 6, Mr. Jeffrey Browne were adopted by the Board of Commissioners on June 8, 2023.