

The stated meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Thursday, July 13, 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, VAUGHN, BROWNE, WINEGRAD, HENRY, ZAPPONE, CARSWELL, BOLE, SCHREIBER, BOWMAN, VAHEY, HECKER  
Excused: Commissioner SPIEGELMAN

Also Present: Township Manager MANFREDI  
Township Solicitor CLARKE

## **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

## **BOARD PRESIDENT ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

President Hecker announced that an Executive Session of the Board of Commissioners was held on Wednesday, July 5, 2023 to receive legal advice on conditional use procedures.

Regarding agenda Item BOC-08-071323 as listed under New Business, we will be receiving the updated feasibility study as reflected from commentary that took place at the May working session and the consultant is here this evening to provide an overview of the changes that were made based on feedback from the Board of Commissioners and the public.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS:**

Lora Lehmann, resident, expressed concern about the review process for agenda items and related materials, and she was opposed to an Economic Development Corporation.

Karen Milovcich, resident, commented that we were promised that all plans would be put on hold until citizens provided input, and the statistics are incorrect. Also, she was opposed to an Economic Development Corporation.

Tina McKenzie, resident, commented that she supports the work of the Board of Commissioners to make the Township a more diverse, inclusive, and wonderful place to raise families, and she thanked them for it.

George Salona, resident, commented that he has an expectation that the governance of Abington Township is conducted with full transparency, respect for residents, and adheres to both the letter and spirit of the laws.

He expressed concern that the Economic Development Corporation and feasibility study will be voted on without an attempt to inform the citizenry of the content and impact on the Township and it seems to violate Pennsylvania's Sunshine Laws, and that will result in a lack of trust between the citizens and elected officials, so it should be postponed until residents have an opportunity to evaluate the content and impact. Also, the Comp Plan promotes development that will benefit landlords and large developers at the expense of taxpayers.

Gabrielle Sellei, resident, expressed concern that substantial changes were made to the bylaws with no ability to compare it to the previous version. Also, three board members were never discussed and that is too much power in the hands of three people who could live anywhere in Pennsylvania. There are still no financial guardrails such as limiting how much money could be moved into the EDC from the Township, so there is nothing from preventing this standalone entity from becoming a "runaway train." This is not ready to be advertised and there should be another meeting to finalize the bylaws and then present them at this level.

Joe Rooney, resident, thanked Public Works staff for the great job they did cleaning up after the 4<sup>th</sup> of July event. Also, he expressed concern that residents did not have enough time to review the information in the feasibility study as well as the Strategic Plan, and the executive summary does not explain the need for an EDC in Abington Township.

Mike Tobin, resident, asked who will receive the assets if the EDC fails? It is irresponsible to vote on this tonight as we do not have all the information on cost, the number of board members, etc. Regarding the Comp Plan, he recommended not rewriting the zoning code, and if there is an application for something nonconforming, the applicant can apply for a variance.

Joe Rozak, resident, expressed concern about the amount of time for review. When there are changes, they should be presented in the original language, what it was changed to, and what were the considerations during the meetings. Also, there is a typo on Page 7 of the bylaws.

Lorraine Wallick, resident, requested that the motion be tabled for citizens to have more time to respond.

Lisa Mallon, resident, agreed with comments about the proposed EDC ordinance, and she requested tabling the advertisement until the feasibility study is completed and approved.

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**CONSENT AGENDA:**

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber to approve Items a. – f. as listed under Consent Agenda as follows:

To approve the minutes from the Board of Commissioners Regular Meeting of June 8, 2023.

To approve the escrow release request #5 for LD-16-06, 1235 Meinel Road Subdivision in the amount of \$51,034.97.

To approve the release of escrow #5 for LD-19-08, Galman Residential in the amount of \$250,843.84.

To advertise a Traffic Safety Ordinance amending Chapter 156 “Vehicles and Traffic,” Article II “Traffic Regulations” – Section 14 – “Stop Intersections” 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;” to add “Stop” signs Lillian Avenue, eastbound at Osbourne Avenue, Lamott Avenue, eastbound at Osbourne Avenue, Gregory Road, northbound at Pepper Road and “No Parking Here to Corner” on the north and south side of Rockwell Road 30 ft. from Hamilton Avenue.

To approve the grant of permanent channel improvement easement Abington School District and the Township of Abington.

To appoint Michael Melchiorre to the Environmental Advisory Council for a term ending on 12/31/25, and to appoint Maurie Markman, Daniel Kaye, and to reappoint Nancy Wright to the Library Board of Trustees for a period ending 12/31/25, 12/31/24 and 12/31/25 as included in Exhibit A.

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** None.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Item BOC-06-071323:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Bole to adopt the Township’s Strategic Plan.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.  
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Commissioner Winegrad said he read every word and attended every meeting, and the goal of the plan is to be a roadmap to move the Township forward for the betterment of our residents, and he thanked Commissioner Bole for his hard work on the Strategic Plan.

Commissioner Bole replied that it was a team effort of Township staff, participating department directors as well as the public, and changes were made as result of their public comment. It is up to the Board to apply this plan to the formation of the budget so its utility can be seen over the next few years.

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

Item BOC-07-071323:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber to adopt the Abington Township Fire Department 2023-2028 Strategic Plan.

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

Item BOC-08-071323:

Manager Manfredi introduced Mr. Darren Asper of Delta Development Group, Inc. who will present the changes made to the feasibility study for potential economic development in Abington Township.

Mr. Asper said that the economic development study incorporation of comments took place from April 4, 2023 until April 13, 2023; the finalized draft report was completed on April 14, 2023; and a full presentation was made to the Board of Commissioners on May 11, 2023 at its working session. Following that meeting, we took comments made by the Board of Commissioners and the public and prepared another draft submitting it on June 7, 2023 that included a summary of changes made to the documents.

Modifications to the study were presented as follows:

Section 3 – Demographic, Socioeconomic and Market Analysis; Section 4 – Areas for Economic Development Implementation; Section 5 – Action and Implementation; Appendix 2 – Area Scoring Rationale; Appendix 5 – Abington Township One-Page Marketing Piece; and Appendix 6 – ESRI Business Analyst Market Data Profiles.

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Manager Manfredi clarified that the feasibility study was not done as a prelude to an Economic Development Corporation. It is a tool to identify what areas in the Township should be considered for economic development along with data to help make informed decisions for the future.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Schreiber said it is great to have a study for grant purposes as well as statistics, and she thanked Delta Development Group.

Commissioner Carswell commented that she is excited to have this study as a tool to assist the Board as well as a future EDC to make smart decisions working as a team to decide where to invest funds to do good things for Abington.

Commissioner Browne asked would any areas of the Township that are not highlighted in the feasibility study be prohibited from economic development?

President Hecker replied no. The study highlights areas that seem to have the greatest immediate need for potential economic development based on history, geography, etc. It is a tool to guide decision making about where to put resources for the purposes of insuring a strong economic foundation. There are challenges and we need to be creative in deciding how to repurpose assets that will benefit the community far into the future.

Item BOC-09-071323:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber to advertise an ordinance creating the Abington Township Economic Development Corporation.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Vice President Vahey said this process began on September 4, 2019, so we are four years into the debate on whether to create an EDC. During that time, we had seven meetings to discuss proposed ordinance, the Articles of Incorporation, and the bylaws all of which have been posted on the Township's website and changes were tracked. Roundtable discussions with residents were held in person and then on Zoom and we incorporated as much feedback as possible. The last meeting was held on April 3, 2023 where additional feedback was taken and further changes were made based on comments, then summarized and posted online.

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Regarding the number of EDC members, we started with five, increased it to seven, and the current proposal is a minimum of three, which would permit appointing more members to the EDC. In this current environment, it may be difficult to find seven people, and the bylaws clearly state that members need to live here or have a direct tie to the Township. The appointment process will be public, and all applications will be posted online.

Regarding financial guardrails, language was added to the original bylaws making sure funds will be handled appropriately noting that Section 10-02 clarifies that if the corporation were to be dissolved any remaining assets would be returned to the taxpayers.

The economic feasibility study is not a study on whether we should adopt an EDC, but it does identify how an EDC can help promote responsible development of the Township, and it does not advise whether to establish an EDC because that is not what we asked Delta to do. The fact that we have two items on the agenda regarding economic development reflects how urgently this needs to be addressed and that is why he is not in favor of delaying advertisement.

Commissioner Schreiber said since 2019 when we began discussing an EDC, she has been in favor of it and so has her community. Roslyn is hurting and needs economic development, and we want any tool that we can put in our toolbox. It is the number one issue that she is contacted about, and thrilled that this will be advertised and hopefully passed.

Commissioner Bole said that this has gone on for so long that it may feel new to some people, so during the advertising period, he would like the Board to be creative in referring to the FAQs to educate the public as to why this is important and necessary, and he supports advertising this ordinance.

Commissioner Rothman said that back in 2019, he was skeptical about an EDC; however, over time, he realized economic development is a major issue. We hear the residents, and over the next 30 days if there are concerns expressed by the public, they will be addressed. He is in favor of moving this forward for advertisement and he will work quickly to send out a newsletter.

Commissioner Winegrad said regarding a minimum of three members, a quorum would be two and 51% of the vote is required, so he suggested a minimum of five members. Regarding five-year terms, volunteers may not want to serve that long, and agrees that a member may live outside of the Township if they have business here.

Referring to Article 6, Section 6.01 regarding the Appointment of Officers, there may be some inconsistency and it should be reviewed further. Also, Section 6.08 – Officer Compensation, he agrees that directors should not be paid, and although the bylaws do allow the executive director and staff to be paid, however at the startup, it would be Township employees, so how would that work?

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Vice President Vahey replied initially, Township staff will support the corporation until it has sufficient assets to pay its own staff, so we could develop an agreement for lending its services, but that has not specifically been addressed in the bylaws. However, if the corporation can find sufficient funding immediately then there would be no need for Township staff to support the activities of the EDC.

Commissioner Winegrad referring to Section 8.01 – Insurance and suggested that any assets owned by the EDC should be insured and that language be included in the bylaws.

Vice President Vahey said regarding appointment of officers, the Board of Commissioners would appoint the initial set of officers, and then the EDCs Board of Directors would handle their own appointments.

Commissioner Winegrad said Section 6.02 says, “The officers of the corporation shall be appointed annually by the member at the meeting of the Commissioners,” so potentially there could be conflict.

Commissioner Schreiber clarified that Section 4.02 says, “The Board shall be composed of at least three (3) directors,” so we can start with three and increase it.

Commissioner Vaughn questioned whether there should be language limiting the maximum number of directors. Also, this has been a job well done in trying to consider everyone’s concerns and we need to be mindful that an EDC is for the well-being of the community and not just for a few people.

Commissioner Rothman clarified that the bylaws can be amended if necessary. Is that correct?

Vice President Vahey replied Section 10.01 says, “These bylaws may be amended at any time by the member, in its sole absolute discretion, without the consent of the Board; provided, however, that any proposed amendment shall be advertised and deliberated in accordance with the Sunshine Act,” so they can be amended at any time as necessary.

Commissioner Winegrad said initial investment will begin with a small amount; however, in terms of guardrails suggested limiting the amount of debt that the EDC could take on.

Vice President Vahey replied there is a notice provision that the Township needs to be informed about any debt that the corporation takes on, and if we find that the debt is unsustainable, we can dissolve the corporation, so he is not in favor of putting a cap on what the corporation can do financially.

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.  
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Item BOC-10-071323:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Carswell to award the Burn Building Roof Repair Bid to Quinn Construction, Inc. at the amount of \$61,133.00 and authorize the Township Manager to execute the contract.

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

Item BOC-11-071323:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber to approve final payment in the amount of \$176,800.00 for the Old York Road and Susquehanna Road Improvement Project.

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE:**

Item FC-01-071323:

Commissioner Winegrad made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Carswell to approve the May 2023 expenditures in the amount of \$3,143,700.60 and salaries and wages in the amount of \$2,136,038.61 and authorize the proper officials to sign and approve invoices and supporting documentation in payment of bills and contracts as they mature through the month of August 2023.

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

Item FC-02-071323:

Commissioner Winegrad made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Carswell to approve the Plan Year 2023 Annual Action Plan and Substantial Amendments to 2019 and 2021 Annual Action Plans and adopt Resolution 23-010.

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

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MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Adele Kubel, resident, presented a signed petition by 500 residents in which she read into the record. She expressed concern about large apartment buildings planned for multiple parking lots as well as zoning changes and blight.

Jane Straub, resident, commented that for 40 years she has walked the trails in Alverthorpe Park, and she presented a signed petition to keep Alverthorpe a resident-only park. One of the goals in the Comp Plan is to go to court to change the will of Mr. Rosenwald and make Alverthorpe a

public park so it will be available for federal funding as well as to put open gates along the perimeter of the park, and she was opposed.

Gabrielle Sellei, resident, commented that she would like to have a more robust discussion on the EDC ordinance, and that a five-member Board be reconsidered. Also, the Township does not need an EDC for economic development because it already has the infrastructure in place.

Lisa Mallon, resident, expressed concern about how successful an EDC could be if it is so difficult to find only three qualified directors.

Joe Rooney, resident, commented that the EDC has been a “done deal” since the first meeting, and it will take power away from elected representatives as well as oversight by citizens.

George Salona, resident, commented that this corporation could easily be subject to manipulation because where is the accountability? He lived in Philadelphia for 64 years, and this will lead to the same urban problems that he experienced there. Also, his wife is an amputee, and he has not heard any proposal that would make life easier for handicapped people.

Lora Lehmann, resident, expressed concern about getting a “four-day notice” on the strategic plan and “nothing will destroy this Township more than turning everything over to landlords.”

**ADJOURNMENT:** 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary

Resolution No. 23-010 was adopted by the Board of Commissioners on July 13, 2023.