

The stated meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Thursday, August 10, 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, BROWNE, 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 Item BOC-05-081023 will be removed from the agenda and reconsidered in September.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS:

Mike Tobin, resident, expressed concern about the cost of an EDC to taxpayers, and there is no plan for which areas of the Township will be affected.

Joe Rozak, resident, said he does not know why an EDC is needed and asked the Board not to vote on it. He expressed concern about protecting the citizens as well as oversight of the EDC.

Cathy Gauthier, resident, commented that she has been waiting for years for an EDC to be approved and hopes the Board will vote in favor of it. It will be a great tool for economic development and for the overall tax base, so we can remain a viable Township.

George Salona, resident, commented that the EDC is an irresponsible waste of money, and the residents are faced with proposed changes that will negatively impact the Township. The ordinance seems fast-forwarded without allowing the people a chance to review it and lacks direct accountability to the citizens who will be expected to fund it creating an additional level of bureaucracy benefiting developers and landlords at taxpayers' expense.

Tina McKenzie, resident, commented that an EDC will help our community by supporting small businesses through grants, loans and partnership. As a resident of Roslyn, an EDC will be our best chance to fill empty stores on Easton Road with new businesses, and it will be transparent, accountable, and controllable as the goal will be to create a viable future for Abington.

Mirian Suarez, resident, expressed concern that the sewer and retention basins for the Toll Brother's development was not on the agenda for discussion.

Karen Milovcich, resident, asked the Board to vote "no" to an EDC and vote "no" to a liquor license for the Ukrainian Center.

Joe Rooney, resident, thanked the Abington Police Department for doing an awesome job. He expressed concern about who will benefit from having an EDC as well as appointing only three members, so he asked the Board to vote "no."

Lora Lehmann, resident, expressed concern about the cost of an EDC.

Ms. Lois, resident, expressed concern about comments made to the local media regarding issues of crime.

The Township Manager and the Chief of Police addressed concerns expressed by Ms. Lois.

Ross Able, resident, commented that an EDC would not be able to change zoning, and some areas of the Township need improvement such as in Roslyn where there are empty businesses, so it would be a good tool.

Jesse Civello, resident, commented that he is in favor of an EDC, and the Comp Plan shows that it would benefit all residents, and he would prefer five members as opposed to three.

Kia Apgar, resident, commented that we need economic development in Abington especially in Roslyn. She requested that a Roslyn resident be appointed as one of the members of the EDC, and she would prefer five members as opposed to three.

CONSENT AGENDA:

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

To approve the minutes from the Board of Commissioners Regular Meeting of July 13, 2023.

To approve the agreement with PennDOT to maintain the structural integrity of stairway B & C on the western side of the Noble Bridge and to maintain the approach roadway lighting, and snow, ice, and debris removal from the sidewalks on the approach to the bridge and over the bridge and authorize the Township Manager to execute said agreement.

To adopt Traffic Safety Ordinance No. 2207 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 Sewage Facilities Planning Module for 365 Cedar Road Land Development and adopt Resolution No. 23-011.

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Item BOC-04-081023:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman to adopt Ordinance No. 2208 creating the Abington Township Economic Development Corporation.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Vice President Vahey said the reason we need an Economic Development Corporation is that when he worked with then State Representative Josh Shapiro, we partnered with the Township to conduct a study of the Old York Road Corridor, and 15 years later, the Township is still struggling to implement just one of the many recommendations from that report such as the intersection of Rt. 611 and Susquehanna Road.

In his view, there is a lack of expertise in promoting responsible economic development, and it is not just the Rt. 611/Susquehanna Corridor study, there are numerous studies sitting on shelves gathering dust, and our struggle trying to implement change has generated the discussion of an Economic Development Corporation. Since then, we have conducted eight public meetings, heard extensive public comment on the proposal, and made many changes based on input.

Since that debate, we have lived through a global pandemic that has entirely changed the face of the economy, and he has never felt such a sense of urgency and he would not be fulfilling his duty as a commissioner if we did not try everything possible to continue making this a great place to live.

There have been debates about the mall and the future of retail in the Township, so that is why we need an EDC that will be filled with experts to help ensure we are making the right decisions and that responsible development continues.

An EDC is intended to be an independent corporation not funded by the taxpayers. If any startup funds are applied to the corporation, that decision will be made within the upcoming budget or the year after, and no funds have been committed. If the EDC becomes a drain on Township's resources, that will completely defeat the purpose, and it would not continue.

Also, the EDC will not have the power to change zoning and cannot approve land development plans, which will remain the duty of the Board of Commissioners. The EDC will be another tool to help make changes in the Township, and it will abide by the laws of the United States, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and Abington Township.

This will be a nonprofit corporation and the only motivation of the EDC will be to develop this Township in the best interest of the community, and he does not see a better way for residents to have more of a say in how this Township is developed in the future, so he supports this proposal.

Commissioner Zappone said he has a problem with the Township setting up a corporation and that the Board of Commissioners will have no say in who is appointed as directors. Will any of the existing members of the Economic Development Committee be appointed as members of the EDC?

Also, he has received several calls and emails not only from his residents, but outside of Ward 9 expressing concern about it. He has always voted in the best interest of his residents, and he votes for what they want, and in 23 years, no one has ever influenced his vote except his residents.

Commissioner Spiegelman said the Board of Commissioners will not only appoint the members of the EDC but also can dismiss any or all of them as well as terminate the entire corporation if it does not go well, so the Board will retain control.

Currently, developers come forth with their plans and the Township reacts, and this would be a tool to provide an opportunity to have a seat at the table, which has never happened before. He thanked everyone as it has been an honor to work on this for so many years as well as the residents who made comments during the entire process.

Commissioner Schreiber said she is excited by the chance to have another tool in our toolbox, and we have heard from Roslyn residents who have expressed that they are not happy about the business district. Also, our hope is to have five qualified members who may or may not be Roslyn residents but experts in the field of economic development. Five members would be ideal, but three members would be a minimum to get started, and she looks forward to it.

Commissioner Bole said there will be risks, but we will evaluate them as we go. An EDC is a tool that will require accountability, discussion, the right people, and the right level of funding, because if we had a hard and fast plan, we would not need a corporation.

We need the expertise of those who can review P&L statements, ledgers, business trends and understand how the pandemic impacted the community and its pressure points, synthesize it, and then make a recommendation to move forward, so he enthusiastically supports it.

Commissioner Rothman said that a certain amount of ARPA funds can be used for an EDC and if this does not work, we are not stuck. The Township is facing economic difficulty as well as the country particularly post-Covid and we all have great ideas on what to do about it, but we do not have the expertise. We put a lot of safeguards in, and he is optimistic that it will be a good thing and he will vote in favor of it.

Commissioner Henry said this will be a good thing, and she likes the idea of targeting specific areas in need such as the corridor on Easton Road in Roslyn, which has so much potential.

Commissioner Browne said he thinks about what a thriving retail corridor could look like for North Hills where people can enjoy themselves and have a safe night out. This is not a cure-all, but a tool to help point the Township in the right direction in helping to stabilize small businesses, so he is looking forward to what the EDC can do for the Abington community, and he will vote in favor of it.

Commissioner Carswell said she grew up in Colorado and her parents live in Greeley, which is about 50% larger than Abington, and they have the most beautiful library and healthy tax base because there are residents who own and rent, corporations, and fracking, and when she sees what works for them as compared to what works for Abington, she is jealous.

Our mall is one of our largest taxpayers and our corridors throughout the Township have empty businesses, so we need to value what we have and make it better for the future, and she will vote in favor of it.

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-1. Commissioner Zappone opposed.

Item BOC-06-081023:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber to reapprove the Holy Redeemer Health System Agreement for Law Enforcement Services.

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

Item BOC-07-081023:

Vice President Vahey made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber to approve the Preliminary/Final Land Development – LD-22-06 –2620 West Moreland Road (Raising Cane’s).

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 14-0.

FINANCE COMMITTEE:

Item FC-01-081023:

Commissioner Winegrad made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber to approve the July 2023 expenditures in the amount of \$3,035,171.32 and salaries and wages in the amount of \$2,356,789.36 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 September 2023.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Adele Kubel, resident, thanked Mr. Rooney for organizing the cleanup of Abington Township's auxiliary parking lot; and she expressed concern about blight.

Krystn Kuckelman, resident, representing the Greater Glenside Civic Association, said our association was born from a deep love and commitment to our neighborhood as we recognize the potential within our neighborhood, and by joining forces and collaboration, we will make remarkable progress.

Our mission is to be a voice of the Glenside/Keswick Village neighbors and residents to strengthen, beautify, and promote community-building activities; support and advocate for responsible local development; and serve as a collaborative ally with neighboring communities and organizations by enhancing the quality making Glenside/Keswick Village a vibrant place to live.

She thanked Vice President Vahey for bringing the group together, and we are looking forward to working with him as well as Commissioner Bole to make many projects happen within the Township.

Joe Rooney, resident, commented that an EDC is not for small businesses, it will be for high density at the mall.

George Salona, resident, commented that he is disappointed that the vote was not postponed, and an EDC violates every provision of the Public Charities Act.

Karen Milovcich, resident, expressed concern about the amount of foot traffic at the Huntingdon Valley Shopping Center as well as the trash, graffiti and parking.

Lora Lehmann, resident, expressed concern about an EDC.

Ross Able, resident, offered solidarity with residents of 100 York Apartments and supports the Township in protecting tenants. He requested that the Board learn and support Vision Zero, which is a pursuit of zero traffic deaths through traffic calming and safe infrastructure for pedestrians, children, disabled and cyclists, and he would like the Bicycle Master Plan to include protective lanes for cyclists.

He supports the Township in pursuing a park near the Noble Station and plans from the TOD for a walkable district north of the track as well as the proposal of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan to add pedestrian connectivity to Alverthorpe Park opening it to the neighbors in Jenkintown.

Remington Daron, resident, voiced his support for making a more walkable, livable area for pedestrians and he urged the Board to update the infrastructure plan by creating protected bicycle lanes from traffic as well as to learn about Vision Zero and pursue it for the Township. Also, he supports the 100 York residents and worries about the lack of protection, and he urged the Board to take action to help renters against landlords who do not treat people like humans.

Jesse Civello, resident, agreed that an EDC will give us a seat at the table and will be another tool to help direct development, and together as a community, we will make up the directors, so get involved.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary

The following ordinances and resolution were adopted by the Board of Commissioners on August 10, 2023:

Ordinance No. 2207

Ordinance No. 2208

Resolution No. 23-011