

The stated meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Thursday, August 11, 2022, via webinar and in-person at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA, with President Hecker presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:04 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: Commissioners ROTHMAN, DiPLACIDO, VAUGHN, THOMPSON, WINEGRAD, HENRY, CARSWELL, SPIEGELMAN, BOLE, SCHREIBER, BOWMAN, VAHEY, HECKER

Excused: Commissioners BRODSKY, ZAPPONE

Also Present: Township Manager MANFREDI
Township Solicitor CLARKE

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

BOARD PRESIDENT ANNOUNCEMENTS: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS:

Adele Kubel, 1848 Ambler Road, read a petition signed by over 500 Abington residents into the record that includes a request that the Township make maintenance a priority and that “land development is destroying Abington.” She presented her first petition signed by over 200 Abington residents in the fall of 2021 concerning “Abington blight.” She expressed concern about the “environment deteriorating, decaying commercial areas, traffic congestion and that WAWA stores add to the congestion, and large-scale apartments built into an already crowded Township won’t do any good.”

Lora Lehmann, resident, requested that the Board of Commissioners not vote on Item BOC-03-081122 regarding the Recreation, Parks, and Open Space Advisory Committee “because it has not been presented to the public at workshops.” Also, she expressed concern about the amendment to the “OpenGov vehicle that needs to be improved and was done without public input.”

President Hecker clarified that the Board is voting on an amendment to allow for the creation of an advisory committee. Is that correct?

Manager Manfredi replied yes. The resolution was discussed and adopted at a public meeting. The actions tonight are to change the sunset date from December 2022 to December 2023 and ratify members if Vice President Vahey is inclined to do so.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Commissioner Schreiber made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman to approve Items a. – c. as listed under Consent Agenda as follows:

To approve the minutes from the Board of Commissioners Regular Meeting of July 14, 2022.

To adopt Traffic Safety Ordinance No. 2194 amending Chapter 156 – “Vehicles and Traffic,” Article II – “Traffic Regulations,” Section 14 “Stop Intersections” and Article III – “Parking Regulations,” Section 28 – “Special Purpose Parking Zones” to add a “Stop” sign on Joyce Road at Osbourne Avenue and a “Handicapped Parking” sign with Fine Placard on the west side of Hall Avenue, five (5) feet north of the driveway for 2901 Susquehanna Road.

To adopt Ordinance No. 2195 amending Chapter 154 of the Code of Ordinances of the Township of Abington, County of Montgomery, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to establish general and specific standards relating to small wireless communications facilities in the rights-of-way and Ordinance No. 2196 amending Article XXVIII of the Zoning Ordinance of the Township of Abington, County of Montgomery, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to establish general and specific standards relating to wireless communications facilities and adopt Resolution No. 22-021 Fee Schedule for Wireless Communications Facilities.

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Item BOC-03-081122:

Commissioner Schreiber made a MOTION, seconded by Vice President Vahey to amend Section 1.3 of the Recreation, Parks, and Open Space (RPOS) Advisory Committee, and ratify members.

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-0.

Item BOC-04-081122:

Commissioner Schreiber made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Thompson to adopt Resolution No. 22-022 authorizing the Township of Abington to apply for a Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Greenways, Trails, and Recreation Program Grant for land acquisition at 118 & 122 Cricket Avenue for a future park from the Commonwealth Financing Authority.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Bowman questioned whether there are existing homes at those locations.

Commissioner Thompson replied the current property features two mostly demolished single-family residences that were granted a demolition permit some time ago and then the project was halted with the discovery of underground infrastructure. These lots are a confluence of two significant stormwater management lines taking water from the community to the Sandy Run Watershed. There is also a large sanitary sewer line running underneath the property, and if it ever cracked, the sewer gases could get into residences built on top of it and would be a life-safety risk.

So, the goal is to remove what is left from the two residences rather than restore or reconstruct them and simply covert the land into a park, which will provide the Township easier access to significant infrastructure and alleviate a life-saving issue ultimately benefiting the local community in North Hills. He asked the Board for their support to apply for a grant to be able to obtain this property.

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-0.

Item BOC-05-081122:

Commissioner Schreiber made a MOTION, seconded by Vice President Vahey to approve amendment 1 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 13-0.

Item BOC-06-081122:

Commissioner Schreiber made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Rothman to approve establishing Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Remembrance and Day as an official event of Abington Township.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Bowman questioned whether a certain status is needed that it does not have currently because this has been a traditional event.

Manager Manfredi agreed that it has been a traditional event for several years, and it was suggested by Commissioner Carswell that to give it the stature it deserves, we should not only mark the remembrance but also the day, so that Martin Luther King Jr. Day is recognized by the Township as a special event, and this resolution would give the Board of Commissioners the ability to determine who best to make sure that program is put together and that the day is forever remembered.

Commissioner Carswell said this is an event that we informally made sure it happened year-after-year by the work of former Commissioner Luker, who tapped several people to assist in that process including the police department and school district. Over the last two years, the event was held virtually with a great turnout, and the hope is for it to continue in its popularity and value to the community and make it an official process where we recognize the day and empower volunteers to help steer and give it space to grow.

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-0.

Item BOC-07-081122:

Commissioner Schreiber made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman to authorize the waiver of permit fees for the Edge Hill Fire Company restroom upgrade in the amount of \$4,448.00 and McKinley Fire Company upgrade of their exterior sign to an LED variable message sign in the amount of \$640.00.

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-0.

FINANCE COMMITTEE:

Receive Treasurer's Report:

Township Treasurer Jay. W. Blumenthal reported that monies received from various departments deposited into Republic Bank for July 2022 totaled \$1,856,033 as compared to last year of \$1,725,775 representing an increase of \$130,258; YTD \$66,161,185 as compared to last year of \$59,291,631 representing an increase of \$6,869,554.

Deposits of Real Estate Taxes and fees transferred to Finance Department in July 2022 totaled \$116,337 as compared to last year of \$159,186 representing a decrease of \$42,849; 97% has been collected with 3% remaining.

Item FC-01-081122:

Commissioner Winegrad made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman to approve the June 2022 expenditures in the amount of \$3,713,085.33 and salaries and wages in the amount of \$2,115,597.25 and authorize the proper officials to sign vouchers in payment of bills and contracts as they mature through the month of September 2022.

Roll call resulted in motion being passed 13-0. Commissioners Brodsky and Zappone were absent.

Item FC-02-081122:

Commissioner Winegrad made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman to authorize advertisement of Ordinance No. 2198 – Updating Fees for Collection of Delinquent Municipal Refuse and Sewer Claims on behalf of the Township of Abington and amending Chapter 92 – “Garbage, Rubbage and Refuse,” at Section 19 – “Payment of Fees; Collection,” Subsection E – “Schedule of Fees,” and Chapter 132 – “Sewers and Sewage,” at Article VIII – “Rules and Regulations,” Section 45 – “Annual Rate or Rental,” Subsection 3 – “Billings; Payment of Current Bills; Delinquent Collection Procedures and Fees for Collection of Delinquent Accounts,” Subsection 5 – “Schedule of Fees.”

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Thompson asked for an overview for public edification.

Ms. Monica Embury, Manager of Financial Services, explained that when a property owner is delinquent in payment of taxes, the sewer and refuse fees are turned over to the Finance Office at the end of the year for collection. We make three attempts to workout a payment schedule with the owner, but if we do not make a connection with them, the fees are turned over to Portnoff Law Associates to collect those fees.

At the end of 2021, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau released new guidelines causing Portnoff Law Associates to change how they collect fees, and they need to update the fee schedule and their agreement with the Township.

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-0.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Joe Rooney, resident, commented that the property on Cricket Avenue is blight and a hazard for children, so he hopes that works out. Also, why isn't "green" paper used for the tax bills, and has the Township's sign ordinance been suspended due to Attorney General Shapiro running for governor or is it for everyone?

President Hecker replied that he is not aware of any suspension of an ordinance, and several years ago, the sign ordinance was rewritten to be compliant with the Constitution.

Mike Tobin, resident, asked for an update on the Comprehensive Plan's uncompleted chapters, incorrect population numbers as well as the survey for citizens. Also, during the Planning Commission meeting regarding St. Basil's property, there seems to be a "big push" for walking trails, and if it is for the general public, then why does Alverthorpe Park close at 5 p.m. in the winter?

Manager Manfredi replied Chapter 8 is completed. He has not reviewed the information just received from Mr. Narcowich regarding completion of the remaining chapters in which they are scheduled for the next Comp Plan Development Team's meeting agenda. Also, Commissioner Thompson previously addressed the population numbers, and the type of public outreach has yet to be determined.

Next steps in the process are that the Comp Plan Development Team will wrap up its work and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners and the Board will consider whether to send it to the Comprehensive Plan Consistency Committee or take some other action. So, the document to be sent to the Board will become a working product and not a final product.

Ross Able, resident, said regarding the petition submitter who indicated that it ‘reflects the majority of Abington residents,’ he does not agree with that, and supports zoning changes as we are in a housing crisis right now and need density to support housing choices. He does agree there is congestion; however, we should continue pursuing traffic calming Townshipwide for safer streets with more sidewalks and bike lanes. He expressed interest in adding sidewalks to streets without them and questioned whether the Township has pursued grants through the “Safer Streets for All” federal grant program from the recent Transportation Bill. Also, he agrees that Alverthorpe Park should be an open park.

Manager Manfredi replied that the Township has a robust grants analysis and management program and reviews every grant.

Ms. Ashley McIlvaine, Special Assistant to Township Manager, added that the “Safer Streets Grant” is a federal program, and to apply for it, the Township needs to have an adopted action plan, and at this time, we do not have one that would meet their standards, so first we would need to apply for an action plan, which has a minimum grant requirement of \$200,000. The DVRPC (Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission) is considering applying for the entire region to create a plan for all the municipalities within their territory including Abington and we could then utilize that plan to seek an implementation grant.

There has been discussion with the DVRPC regarding their proposal and they emphasized that data must support implementation noting there are other municipalities that would be competing for that same pot of funds from the implementation grant.

Once we have an adopted action plan, we would need to apply for an implementation grant, and the minimum award is \$5 million dollars, so the Township will need a large-scale project, and there is a 20% match requirement.

Manager Manfredi added that the Board of Commissioners have developed the Walk, Park, Train program making sidewalks, bike paths and pedestrian pathways a priority and the strategic plan and other plans will help in making policy decisions. Also, the Recreation, Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee was discussed thoroughly during the Committee of the Whole Meeting in July 2021 and the original policy was adopted in August 2021.

Commissioner Thompson clarified that we are not rewriting the zoning. We are working on the Comprehensive Plan, which is an exercise that is State-mandated every 10 years by the MPC (Municipality Planning Code) to look at the Township holistically and set a vision moving forward. It may or may not include an update to the zoning code and that will be determined based on the outcome of the Comprehensive Plan.

Eric B. Hening, 626 Moredon Road, referring to the Sisters of the Redeemer property, questioned whether the utility transmission lines running on that property to Moredon Road will be telephone lines and will there be any disruption of traffic on a busy road while installing the lines.

President Hecker replied that the hearing has not been held yet. We will conclude this meeting shortly and then open the Conditional Use Hearing and those questions will be directly addressed during that time.

Lora Lehmann, resident, referring to the Recreation, Parks, and Open Space Advisory Committee, expressed concern that “there has not been a public vetting of this project.”

Mr. Blumenthal commented that regarding the paper of the tax bills, there was a supply-chain shortage, so the printing company was not able to acquire “green” paper.

ADJOURNMENT: 7:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary

The following ordinances and resolutions were adopted by the Board of Commissioners on August 11, 2022:

Ordinance No. 2194

Ordinance No. 2195

Ordinance No. 2196

Resolution No. 22-021

Resolution No. 22-022