

The stated Working Session of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Thursday, May 8, 2025 via webinar and in-person at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA, with President Hecker presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:58 p.m.

PRESENT: Commissioners ROTHMAN, DiPLACIDO, LANEY-MARTIN, BROWNE, WINEGRAD, HENRY, ZAPPONE, YOUNG-GERTZ, SPIEGELMAN, SCHREIBER, BOWMAN, VAHEY, HECKER
Excused: Commissioners BRODSKY, BOLE

Also Present: Township Manager Christman
Township Solicitor Clarke

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

President Hecker made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman to approve the minutes from the Working Session of April 10, 2025.

MOTION was ADOPTED 13-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Review and discuss amending an ordinance revising the Volunteer Service Tax Credit Program originally established pursuant to Ordinance No. 2143, enacting Tax Credits for Volunteer Members of the Volunteer Fire Companies of the Abington Township Fire Department and Non-Profit Emergency Service Agencies.

Mr. Tom McAneney, Director of Fire and Code Services, said this is a request to amend an existing ordinance. Originally, the ability to allow tax credits was a result of Act 172 of 2016 in Abington Township in which we are one of the first municipalities to embrace it when Ordinance No. 2143 was adopted in December 2017.

Act 172 allows the municipality to permit a 20% rebate on property or earned income tax; however, a 20% maximum rebate is not a very utilized tool by the members. In 2020, the state updated the law to allow 100% tax rebate on property as well as earned income tax.

The proposed amendment would increase the potential amount of the tax rebate, but in return, incentivize members to run on more fire calls and attend more training. The point and tiered system are modeled after the Montgomery County Tax Rebate Program that was put into place this year.

Last year, the Fire Department ran 1,917 calls for service totaling 24,274 volunteer hours of service. We have a membership of about 230 with 130 active members, the other 100 are retired and administrative, and the highest tax rebate they can obtain is 25%. Only active members can obtain higher than that.

President Hecker said on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, we are incredibly fortunate to have a fire department and the fire companies in this Township, and their volunteerism and spirit and what Mr. McAneney and his colleagues have done to save this community time and time again, especially with the most recent SPS disaster, we could not exist as a community without the work that they do.

We are here tonight to discuss how we can get something done that would be meaningful and to retain what has been built over the past 25-30 years.

Mr. McAneney said we appreciate the sentiment, and we would not have a strong department if we didn't have such a great relationship with the Board. While the numbers across the state have been diminishing, we are fortunate that our membership has remained remarkably steady.

In 2013, we had 190 active members. As of April 1st, we have 226 active members, and that is due to the partnership between the Township and the fire department, and with the support of the Board of Commissioners, we can put together such great programs and training and have become an attractive agency for those to volunteer with.

President Hecker asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Browne said when he first became Commissioner, he was informed by one of our firefighters about the programs and the tax breaks, and after doing some research, we have an elite fire company in Abington.

The Abington Township Fire Department has CFAI International Accreditation, and they are the only 100% all-volunteer fire departments in the country, which speak not only to the accreditation, but also to the ongoing training and the work done to keep it. The dedication in keeping that accreditation was shown in the results of the recent fires. He is full-throated in support for this ordinance as the men and women of the fire companies deserve it wholeheartedly. It is an effective retention and recruitment tool, and he hopes to vote on the ordinance shortly.

Commissioner Schreiber echoed Commissioner Browne's sentiments. The accreditation helps with the recruitment and the training helps with accreditation, so it works both ways. She is in full support, and it is wonderful. Members are also able to receive benefits from the County. Is that correct?

Mr. McAneney replied yes.

Commissioner Spiegelman said this is an upgrade for the retired and administrative members and he also echoes the sentiments of his friends. With everything the ATF does saves the residents money in our day-to-day lives in so many ways such as insurance rates that are suppressed because we have the best fire suppression anywhere. He wholeheartedly supports this.

Commissioner Young Gertz said this is a wonderful program and she is so proud to be in this community. Also, a volunteer who is injured in the course of duty will retain eligibility to a certain degree. Is that correct?

Mr. McAneney replied yes. They retain eligibility for a certain number of years afterwards or until their injury subsides. Also, the earned income tax credit is a policy decision that needs to be made by the Board.

Manager Christman noted this will be back before the Board of Commissioners at their meeting in June for a vote for advertisement and then in July for final ratification.

President Hecker asked for any public comment. There was none.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Recording Secretary