

The stated meeting of the Finance Committee of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Thursday, May 16, 2024 via webinar and the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA, with Commissioner Spiegelman presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:02 p.m.

PRESENT: Commissioners SPIEGELMAN, VAHEY, DiPLACIDO
Excused: Commissioners WINEGRAD, HENRY

OTHERS: Finance Director Hermann
Township Manager Manfredi
Manager of Financial Services Embery
Deputy Chief Porter
Fire Marshal Platz

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Spiegelman made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner DiPlacido to approve the minutes from the Finance Committee Meeting of April 18, 2024.

MOTION was ADOPTED 3-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Item FC-01-061324:

Commissioner Spiegelman made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner DiPlacido to approve the April 2024 expenditures in the amount of \$2,730,234.25 and salaries and wages in the amount of \$2,281,372.97 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 July 2024.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked for any comments from Commissioners. There were none.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked for any public comment.

Lora Lehmann, resident, expressed concern about the minutes; also, about knowing what the money was spent on and not just the general description, and she is unable to manipulate the different lines.

MOTION was ADOPTED 3-0.

Presentation on Proposed Fire Inspection and Permit Fee Schedule:

Fire Marshal Platz said Fire Prevention staff manages a variety of programs such as inspections and permitting, investigations and community outreach. Besides himself, the staff is currently comprised of the Assistant Fire Marshal, and full and part-time fire inspectors.

The Fire & Life Safety Inspection Program has inspectors verify compliance with applicable codes and ordinances of commercial occupancies such as restaurants, offices, apartment buildings, the mall, and hospitals. The inspection program is a requirement for the accreditation process as well as for the Insurance Services Office.

We have approximately 1,900 inspectable occupancies within the Township of over 20 million sq. ft. of inspectable space. It is a large undertaking, and the staff works diligently. In 2023, there were 711 annual inspections, 196 reinspection's, and 3,326 violations were found. Top violations include fire alarm maintenance; extinguisher maintenance; improper use of power strips; improper electrical wiring; and damaged/broken EXIT signs.

The Fire Protection System Permitting Program averages over 100 fire permits issued annually for fire suppression as well as a variety of permits including fire alarm and fire sprinkler permits.

The programs are paid for by the fee schedule in which the current one was last adopted in 1992 by Resolution No. 92-038, and since then, the cumulative rate of inflation is 122.6%. The fee schedule covers fire and life safety inspections, fire permitting, and various fire administration fees.

Inspection fees are based on use-type and square footage ranging from \$35 up \$350, and we do not charge for reinspection as the goal is compliance and safety.

Surrounding municipalities have fee schedules for their fire programs, which have been updated most recently. Abington's current fee schedule includes all construction and operational permits with fees dating back to 1992, which are lower than others. Fire alarm and sprinkler fees are \$25 per \$1,000 of cost, other construction (\$25-\$75) and operational permits (\$25-\$250).

2024 Fire Department budget included hiring a new full-time Fire Inspector that would allow for inspections of all commercial occupancies annually. Currently, we prioritize inspections of those at the highest risk such as the hospitals, schools, malls, restaurants, etc., but we are unable to visit every inspectable occupancy annually. Being able to inspect all commercial occupancies would add to the department's calculated ISO rating, which is what the insurance industry uses to assess homeowners' insurance rates.

Increase in inspection fees will be phased in over four years and the goal is to figure out what the actual cost for the program is and then find a middle ground. Regarding permits and other fees, surrounding municipalities charge varying fees for various processes and our goal is to make the fees commensurate with the work required while simplifying the schedule overall.

Commissioner Spiegelman clarified that any given property could expect an inspection every three years or so. Is that correct?

Mr. Platz replied we propose to make inspections of all commercial occupancies every single year and meeting that goal would increase our ISO rating.

Commissioner DiPlacido said while he is in favor of an increase in fees as they are needed, he suggested tweaking the 1-1000 square footage calculation for new small business owners.

Mr. Platz replied we can certainly consider tweaking it as calculations were based on being comparable with other municipalities.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked for comparison of an increase in inspection fees versus the cost of a new inspector.

Mr. Platz replied approximately \$165,000.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked for any other comments from Commissioners. There were none.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS ONLY:

Lora Lehmann, resident, asked about fees for inspections of school buildings and how that is calculated.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked Mr. Platz to provide an answer in writing.

Ms. Lehmann expressed concern about the budget and the public is not brought in until their comments make no difference and the documents are not provided at the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT: 7:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary