The stated meeting of the Strategic Plan Committee of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Wednesday, April 6, 2022, via webinar with Chairman Commissioner Bole presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Commissioners Chairman BOLE, Vice Chairwoman SCHREIBER, WINEGRAD, CARSWELL, HENRY

Also Present: Township Manager MANFREDI
Township Solicitor CLARKE
Commissioners SPIEGELMAN, VAHEY, THOMPSON

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Bole made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Winegrad to approve the minutes of the Strategic Plan Committee Organization Meeting of January 19, 2022.

Commissioner Bole asked for any public comment. There was none.

MOTION was ADOPTED 5-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Introduction of the Strategic Plan Committee, Its Role and Scope:

Commissioner Bole said the new committee structure set forth by the Board includes the appointment of Commissioners to five committees, three of which are new. The 2020 Strategic Planning process even with its missed opportunities most of which came at the insidious hands of the pandemic, yielded important information that directly contributed to the formation of three new committees. The other two, Finance and Pension Committees, are more evergreen in their focus and will expand well beyond any particular strategic plan.

Through the previous strategic planning process, we identified four key areas of focus for Abington, and one of those areas was putting a flag into the ground committing to the importance of working to make Abington a safe, inclusive, connected, and sustainable community. There are various ways substantively and symbolically to follow through in this area telling Abington residents that they belong and will be safe here, and we are going to continue to do that work because it is important.

Another angle in working towards this commitment is how we use our transportation, housing, land use, and other related assets to advance this work, and so was born the Comprehensive Plan Consistency Committee. The formation and submission of a Comp Plan is an obligation for the Township to coalesce topics of transit, land use and housing.

The Comprehensive Plan Consistency Committee helps ensure that the work done on the Comp Plan is not to file it away but follow up and provide a series of checks and balances and a higher degree of transparency around how we are executing the plan. It takes a linear process and creates a circular feedback loop designed with the explicit intention of self-betterment through self-examination.

The work of the Strategic Plan Committee will have two key functions; insuring that a strategic plan is created that will identify focus areas for the Township over the next few years, and after this work is completed, we will use this committee as a feedback group to review our highest priorities and examine what worked well, what could be done better, and what barriers exist that we will need to work through, around or over.

We will discuss as a committee how we can continually improve our work and that it is imminently practical and will be done with a commitment to sober evaluation and creative problem-solving. We are making an investment of taxpayers' dollars to hire a firm with demonstrated professional expertise in which this is an area that has plenty of research behind it, identified best practices, and other data points that are not readily available to those who do not do this every day, so we need an expert to guide us through this process.

The work of this committee will help ensure we are taking full advantage of the document that will be delivered to the Board while being respectful of and responsible with taxpayers' dollars. The strategic plan will provide a rubric to help the Township Manager with budget planning, a broad guide for how we are asking Township staff to spend their time and energy and provide focused content for discussions as Board members as we engage with those we represent.

Our work is to help see to it that a strategic plan is created with key areas of focus and to make sure we are following it and how it will add value to the work of each Commissioner, Township staff, and most importantly, the residents of Abington.

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

Commissioner Bole asked for any public comment.

Karrie, resident of Berkley Avenue, commented that the Township is 98% developed and to please keep in mind the environment, traffic and increased tax burden for the citizens. Also, she asked for a "no" vote on spot zoning, changing zoning where apartments could be built in the center of beautiful homes as well as building apartments on the Giant Food Store parking lot of the Huntingdon Valley Shopping Center.

Discuss Township Strategic Plan including process and consultancy considerations:

Commissioner Bole said we need to discuss the qualities that we would like to see in the Strategic Planning Consultant who will be partnering with the Township such as how much would they engage with the public and how would the vendor approach the process of meeting with Township Administration. Also, we will engage with other members of the Board as there are diverse types of experiences of planning consultants who have worked with large government bodies to small local communities.

He asked Manager Manfredi to speak about the RFQ (Request for Qualifications) process in selecting a vendor.

Manager Manfredi replied that the scope of work focuses on key elements such as the vendor meeting with Township Administration and members of the Strategic Plan Committee to get a true understanding of expected and desired outcomes; reviewing the schedule for the timeline of the budget formats; conducting workshops with the Board of Commissioners to understand what the leadership is looking for; conducting workshops with various Township departments to understand how they deliver services as well as engagement with the public to understand the public's vision and how that meshes with the elected representatives. Data collection from the workshops will be used to develop the strategic plan, set the priorities and the goals to develop clear and concise statements focusing on an effective and efficient strategic vision going forward.

Commissioner Bole asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Schreiber commented that flexibility and creativity are most important and so is community engagement; however, there should be different modalities for how people could engage.

Commissioner Spiegelman concurred with Commissioner Schreiber, and in terms of consultants, he is wrestling with breadth of experience versus significant experience working with our size municipalities or smaller and forgo those who have worked for large cities as well as having a more diversified background.

Commissioner Winegrad commented that in terms of experience and competence, we need to look at sliding scales, and he wants an end-product that is a practical roadmap for the Board to use going forward.

Commissioner Henry commented that she would be interested to know how this worked for other municipalities such as their experience with the results and how the documents have served them and does it continue to serve their purpose.

Commissioner Carswell agreed with Commissioner Henry in that she would like to see outcomes from other clients as well as the consultant should provide a clear structure on how to continue to use the plan well-beyond its final crafting. It is important to learn how we will build budgets around these strategies and how it will connect to the Comprehensive Plan and that there is intentionality about what will happen after the strategic plan is completed.

Commissioner Schreiber agreed that it needs to be interconnected to the Comp Plan and other plans; however, this is different in that it should guide our administration, so we need to be clear what the purpose is.

Commissioner Bole agreed that we need to balance the deliverable as a list of priorities as well as guiding principles and determine how we can bring them together in which we can explore during interviews.

In summary, the end-product needs to be a practical and actionable document; consider the flexibility and creativity of the vendor in that if we only use a singular modality, we will get singular results; consider whether the vendor has diverse backgrounds and practical experience. We will make sure to do our homework in reviewing results from other municipalities as to how they use their documents and whether it is sustainable and usable; and we will consider whether the vendor can assist in using the final document noting there should be interconnectedness striking the right balance.

The next step in the process will be to narrow down the list of those who file RFQ's based on feedback received tonight as well as from other Commissioners and bring in a select number of vendors for interviews and then meet again as a committee to vote on a recommendation to the full Board.

Commissioner Bole asked for any public comment. There was none.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS ONLY: None.

ADJOURNMENT: 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Minutes Secretary