

The stated meeting of the Public Affairs Committee of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Wednesday, May 1, 2019 at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA., with Commissioner Spiegelman presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 9:06 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: Commissioners SPIEGELMAN, BOWMAN, SCHREIBER, DiPLACIDO, MYERS

Township Manager MANFREDI
Assistant Township Manager WEHMEYER
Township Solicitor CLARKE
Community Development Director STROTHER
Director of Parks & Recreation OLES

Also Present: Commissioners LUKER, KLINE, ROTHMAN, ZAPPONE, BRODSKY, CARSWELL, THOMPSON, VAHEY, GILLESPIE, WINEGRAD

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner Spiegelman made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Myers to approve the minutes of the Public Affairs Committee Meeting of March 6, 2019.

MOTION was ADOPTED 5-0.

PRESENTATIONS:

Environmental Advisory Council Annual Report:

Acting-Chairman Jim Webb of the Environmental Advisory Council gave a power point presentation on the annual report and a copy was provided to the Board. Also, he thanked Jennifer Sherwood for all of her hard work over these past years.

Shade Tree Commission Annual Report:

Dr. Rita Stevens, Chairperson of the Shade Tree Commission, presented a video and annual report and a copy was provided to the Board.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

Item PA-01-050919 – Consider and discuss Hunter Soccer Club’s proposal and request to improve and lease the upper field in Penbryn Park to an artificial turf field.

Commissioner Spiegelman called on Commissioner Thompson.

Commissioner Thompson said if approved, this application will need to go through land development process.

William Manchester, President of Hunter Soccer Club, 220 Houston Avenue, Glenside, PA., 19038 introduced Russell Lyddane, Partner with Keystone Sports Construction, 180 Gordon Dr., Suite 107, Exton, PA, 19341, and stated that Hunter Soccer Club has 2,000 children playing soccer and the club spends \$8,000 a year in field rentals, lighting, grass cutting and fertilizing including putting sod down at Penbryn Park that lasts two years maximum. When sod is put down no one can play on it for two seasons so the field cannot be used. The club is growing at a fast rate and we propose to turf the upper field where the lights are already there and there is a fence that is $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way around and would only need to pay for part of the fencing as a turf field needs to be fenced-in completely, and he reviewed several different turf companies and Keystone is the best.

Regarding financing; enough money was raised through a Jack Walsh Soccer Tournament over the last five years and we also propose to take out a loan to pay for the turf field, and if the turf field project goes through the land development process and approved by the Board, he would like to sub-lease the turf field for five years until the loan is paid off, and there would be a discount to Abington residents. Expected cash flow to pay off the loan would be about \$2,000 a month and he has further details of the financing. Requested was permission to move forward with building the turf field and then lease it to pay back the five-year loan.

Commissioner Spiegelman said if this moves through the land development process, who would be the applicant as the Township owns this field.

Solicitor Clarke replied Hunter Soccer Club.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Myers asked to hear from Director of Parks and Recreation, Mr. Andy Oles about this project.

Mr. Oles agreed that due to the re-sod of the field they lose a lot of seasons, and a turf field would provide longevity for playing time and extending seasons and the Township would then have a solid facility in the end.

Commissioner Spiegelman clarified that Hunter Soccer Club would take care of the maintenance during the lease period. Is that correct?

Mr. Manchester replied yes, we would be responsible to maintain the field.

Mr. Lyddane added that there would be a warranty covering the product and the actual installation.

Commissioner Schreiber asked about the environmental impact of a turf field as well as safety.

Mr. Lyddane replied impact would be reducing carbon footprint as there is no need to constantly mow, water, fertilize or use any chemicals. Turf system infiltrates faster than normal grass does so runoff is not a concern. From a safety perspective; one of the dangerous things for an athlete is an inconsistent playing surface causing injuries and also synthetic turf fields do not freeze, so when natural grass fields become moist and then refreezes, it becomes just as hard as pavement.

Commissioner Schreiber asked for the ratio of use by Hunter Soccer Club and other groups.

Mr. Manchester replied we play soccer year-round and leasing would be in the summer other than Penbryn Camp. We are a nonprofit and do not want to increase rates because of the turf field and that is covered in his financing plan.

Commissioner Bowman clarified that the field will be leased until debt is retired. Is that correct?

Mr. Manchester replied yes, once debt is retired there is no reason for rental.

Commissioner Bowman commented that he likes the idea and supports it.

Commissioner Carswell expressed concern about the relationship between Hunter Soccer Club, which is a nonprofit and the Township being a government agency. Is this field exclusively used by Hunter Soccer Club?

Mr. Manchester replied we apply for permits every year and it is a unique spot where only soccer can be played. Abington Township owns the land in Penbryn Park and Hunter Soccer paid for the building.

Commissioner Carswell said she does not feel comfortable moving forward until there is more information.

Mr. Oles said Hunter Soccer Club built the building and Township partnered with some of the sewer work. If Hunter ever leaves that building, it becomes a Township facility.

Commissioner Carswell questioned whether there is a contract or written agreement that expresses what the relationship is between the Township and Hunter Soccer Club.

Mr. Manchester replied he will look into that.

Mr. Oles added that Hunter Soccer Club provides the Township with Certificate of Insurance as well as all of the organizations that use Township fields.

Commissioner Carswell said this needs to be addressed prior to moving forward with future long-term agreements that should be documented.

Solicitor Clarke noted that as a land owner there would be liability regardless of whether there are certificates of insurance.

Manager Manfredi added that the building was paid for by Hunter Soccer Club and there is an agreement and we will locate it and provide it to the Board.

Vice President Kline asked who will be in control of permitting the field during the five-year lease period.

Mr. Manchester replied Hunter Soccer Club would be in control if we are still leasing it out.

Vice President Kline questioned whether the fourth side of the field will be fenced-in.

Mr. Manchester replied yes.

Vice President Kline said it is a public field, so when it is not being used, can kids play on it with a soccer ball?

Mr. Manchester replied as long as they are not doing any damage, he would love to see that.

Vice President Kline questioned whether they would be allowed to do that with a turf field.

Mr. Manchester replied he sees no reason if they are playing soccer, but no bikes on it.

Vice President Kline expressed concern about public fields being locked up and the public not being allowed to use it.

Mr. Manchester replied that will not happen. He wants the Township to own it and he wants Township kids to play on it.

Vice President Kline clarified that it will still be an open field to be used by the public whether permitted or not. Is that correct?

Mr. Manchester replied yes, and we will continue applying for the permit. If another club wants to use it, we help each other out. It is not about holding the field hostage; it is about how many kids can play on it.

Vice President Kline said he appreciates that the field will be open to the public, and if this moves forward, that is something that should be included into lease agreement. What is envisioned after the five years when the loan is paid in regards to permits.

Mr. Manchester replied it is not just Hunter Soccer's field even though we have been playing on it and will continue to apply for permits.

Vice President Kline said there has been a problem where fields have been permitted and have not been used and no one else is allowed to use it, and athletic clubs have complained about that in the past. Permitting of this field cannot be held hostage because Hunter Soccer Club installed the turf field especially after that five-year period, and he does not want to see that field locked up. He likes the idea, but wants to see details in the lease agreement and he wants to make sure the field will be open to the public.

Commissioner Gillespie asked about the warranty.

Mr. Lyddane replied warranty ranges from eight to 10 years depending on the product.

Commissioner Gillespie questioned what happens to the product when that time expires.

Mr. Lyddane replied he can provide the Board with a time-lapse video showing a full replacement project.

Commissioner Gillespie expressed concern that replacement costs will fall on the Township.

Mr. Manchester replied the burden will fall on the club who uses it the most and there will be a savings on maintenance.

Commissioner Thompson questioned whether there has been precedent set where a private sports club purchased a turf field on public land, locally or elsewhere.

Manager Manfredi replied Plymouth Township has a public park where Villanova University has its baseball field, which was completely constructed and maintained by the university.

Commissioner Thompson questioned whether the warranty covers the turf as well as labor and material.

Mr. Lyddane replied labor, material and installation.

Commissioner Thompson asked about stormwater management for the project as well as SALDO requirements for land development process.

Mr. Lyddane replied our engineers reviewed Township's codes, and as it is written, it does not state that this would fall under it, but there are Townships out there that can force something like this to go through the land development process, but it is not commonly done and not looked at as something that is considered to be a land development item.

From a stormwater management perspective; we have a stone drainage base with a piping system around the perimeter and a flat panel drain designed to move the water around through the base and percolate through the soil that can be tied into any existing systems. To say how exactly that basin will work is a case-by-case scenario that will be guided by Township Engineer; however, these fields move water through them going downward as opposed to sheeting across onto neighbors' yards.

Manager Manfredi said while it may be common elsewhere for this to not go through the land development process; however, language contained in SALDO as interpreted by Township Solicitor is that it is a land development item, so therefore that's all that matters.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked for any public comments. There were none.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked for consensus of committee.

Commissioner Bowman said he supports it and he is in favor of a motion tonight of approval.

Commissioner DiPlacido said he feels there are many more questions that need to be answered and Commissioners Carswell and Kline brought up great points. Although he likes the idea of the field, he is not ready to pass it until there is more information on leasing, etc.

Commissioner Myers said she tends to support this, but more details need to be laid out in the leasing area as well as an agreement between the Township and Hunter Soccer Club.

Commissioner Thompson said he is generally in favor of this proposal, but he is not ready to vote on it tonight as it would be prudent to wait until we have a draft of the agreement.

Vice President Kline suggested that the committee instruct the Manager's Office and Township Solicitor to work with Hunter Soccer Club officials on an outline of an agreement to be brought back before the Board for consideration.

Commissioner Spiegelman made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Myers to TABLE this matter to a future date.

MOTION was ADOPTED 5-0.

PUBLIC COMMENT – general matters relating to Public Affairs: None.

ADJOURNMENT: 10:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard J. Manfredi, Township Manager/Secretary

sev