

The stated meeting of the Public Affairs Committee of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Wednesday, July 1, 2015 at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA., with Assistant Director, Commissioner Farren presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:27 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: Commissioners FARREN, SCHREIBER, SANCHEZ, JONES
Excused: SPIEGELMAN

Township Manager LEFEVRE
Assistant Township Manager WEHMEYER
Township Solicitor CLARKE
Director of Parks and Recreation WENDELL
Community Development Director STROTHER

Also Present: Commissioners LUKER, MYERS, ZAPPONE, HECKER, GILLESPIE, KALINOSKI, BOWMAN, DiPLACIDO

MINUTES: Commissioner Farren made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Sanchez to approve the minutes of the June 3, 2015 Public Affairs Committee Meeting.

MOTION was ADOPTED 4-0.

Director of Parks and Recreation, Mr. Doug Wendell introduced Blaine Rothausser, Conservation Biologist and Senior Manager of GZA, who will be assisting with removal of invasive plants in Jackson Park.

Blaine Rothausser, Conservation Biologist and Senior Manager of GZA gave a power point presentation on existing issues in Jackson Park and how it will be dealt with.

Mr. Wendell added that under the direction of the Mr. Rothausser, landscapers will begin removal and treatment of invasive plants in the fall. We are still waiting to hear whether the Township received a grant from PECO Green Region for a conservation plan.

Resolution No. 15-023 – Annual Action Plan, Five-Year Consolidated Plan, Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice and the Citizen Participation Plan for the Use of Federal CDBG Funds

Commissioner Farren made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Sanchez to adopt Resolution No. 15-023 approving Abington Township's Five-Year Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice and the Citizen Participation Plan for the use of the Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

Commissioner Farren called on Community Development Director, Mr. Van Strother.

Mr. Strother explained that this item is a request for approval of the use and release of Federal funds. The consolidated plan is a mandatory submission for all Federal entitlement communities and is a five-year strategy for implementing the Township's housing and community development goals. These goals are expressed in specific projects with their respective costs in the One-year Action Plan that includes the annual CDBG budget.

The five-year consolidated plan is a general outlay of the use of CDBG funds over a five year period. The Township of Abington had three public meetings and conducted five one-on-one interviews with stakeholders, providers and supporters of services. There have been online resident surveys on Township website to receive public comments. This plan has been publicly advertised and the public has been notified of meetings. The consolidated plan has also been presented to officials of the Willow Grove NAACP for their review and consideration.

The Annual Action Plan beginning October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016 includes projects that have been underwritten, vetted and determined to be viable plans for consideration. The purpose of the timelines is that the Federal government does not want a project sitting around for years.

The Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice identifies impediments to fair housing choice and steps the Township will take to affirmatively further fair housing.

The Citizen Participation Plan is a detailed plan that provides for and encourages citizen participation for the use of the Federal CDBG funds.

Commissioner Farren asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Sanchez clarified that the items for the Annual Action Plan meet the criteria approved by the Federal government. Is that correct?

Mr. Strother replied yes. Part of the process is to vet projects as part of the Annual Action Plan making sure they comply and are eligible.

Commissioner Gillespie clarified that if funds are leftover from 2013 it can be used for an appropriate use approved by the Federal government. Is that correct?

Mr. Strother replied that is correct.

Commissioner Farren asked for any public comments.

Louise E. Twyman, 1672 Franklin Avenue, commented that she attended the May 20, 2015 HUD meeting, and at that meeting, she requested that \$103,000 from the five-year plan be earmarked for the soon-to-be Crestmont Community Multi-Cultural Center. She requested that the Board approve the concept of a Crestmont Community Multi-Cultural Center.

Solicitor Clarke replied that CDBG funds are earmarked for projects that are “shovel-ready” and that are well beyond the concept stage and that are in the building stage. CDBG funds are not allowed to be used for developing a project or a feasibility study.

Donna Brewer, 1644 Arnold Avenue, commented that nothing in this plan is for Ward 5 and Willow Grove is where the low to moderate income residents reside. However, in this five year plan, there are funds allotted for curbs and sidewalks that should not come from a low income fund since that is Township infrastructure and Township’s responsibility.

She is sure that \$103,000 or \$153,000 could be put towards the development and the beginning stages of a community center and we were told that these monies could be allotted for this purpose.

Mr. Strother replied he will take that proposal under consideration; do the underwriting; vet it; and bring it back before the Board for consideration.

Judy Meriweather, 1664 Prospect Avenue, asked for information on what grant money is available and the procedure on how to apply, which is something that should have been provided years ago.

Larry Long, 1841 Davisville Road, suggested tabling any action on a PAL center until community members and the Commissioners are on the same page.

Commissioner Farren clarified that this agenda item is not related to a PAL center.

Manager LeFevre replied that is correct. Previously, representatives of PAL came before the Board to request authorization to proceed with fundraising efforts for the potential of a PAL Center in Crestmont Park.

Doug Vaughn, 1747 Easton Road, commented that while growing up, we had no community center except Crestmont playground and no place to congregate, which leads to mischief, etc., so he supports a recreation center.

Commissioner Jones questioned whether RCAP could be a funding source for a project such as a community center.

Mr. Strother replied he will look into it.

Lora Lehmann, 1431 Bryant Lane, commented that she is encouraged to hear that Mr. Strother will consider this in this round.

Harriet Luker, 1665 Summit Avenue, apologized to the viewing public about how Ward 5 and the area of Crestmont have been portrayed. She has no problem with a community center or a PAL center, but she has a problem with “someone from the other side of town playing Robin Hood with their 10-15 seconds of fame on our backs.” In regards to grants for a community center, a politician is not a grant writer, they make policy. She clarified that Mr. Strother will meet with residents in regards to this matter. Is that correct?

Mr. Strother replied yes.

MOTION was ADOPTED 4-0.

Resolution No. 15-025 – Economic Development Multimodal Transportation Fund Program

Commissioner Farren made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Sanchez to adopt Resolution No. 15-025 approving Abington Township to submit an application to the Department of Community and Economic Development for the Multimodal Transportation Fund Program. The grant submission will support the Old York Road/Susquehanna Road project.

Assistant Manager Wehmeyer said this is for a multimodal grant and the guidelines indicate that a resolution needs to be approved by the Board of Commissioners in order to apply for it. This is to support the vision of the Old York Road and Susquehanna Road project, which is to realign the intersection.

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

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 4-0.

Economic Development Traffic Planning and Design, Inc. Agreement

Commissioner Farren made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber to approve the Professional Services Agreement from Traffic Planning and Design, Inc. (TPD) in the amount not to exceed \$7,900.00 to be used from contingency funds.

Commissioner Farren asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Hecker noted that this matter was discussed in Finance Committee meeting and there was support for it.

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

MOTION was ADOPTED 4-0.

Dedicated Policy

FOR DISCUSSION ONLY

Commissioner Farren said this is to consider the adoption of a formal policy for the future dedication of Township facilities including, but not limited to, buildings, parks, fields, and streets in honor or memory of current or former Township Commissioners, officials or residents.

Commissioner Sanchez questioned whether there is a current policy.

Manager LeFevre replied no. When this field dedication was first brought to our attention, several Commissioners suggested creating policy for the naming, renaming or dedication of any Township facilities going forward. The committee does not need to create that policy this evening, but if they support the concept of a policy, he will be happy to develop a template for the next Public Affairs Committee meeting in September for the committee to work on.

Commissioner Sanchez commented that he wouldn't mind discussing a policy and consider the purpose of it, but he asked for data on previous dedications of Township facilities

Commissioner Jones questioned whether municipalities in the surrounding area have such a policy or is this unique to Abington.

Manager LeFevre replied he is not aware of any communities in this area that have a policy such as this one, but he did a Google search and found examples of policies throughout the country. The suggestion is to formalize the process with structure going forward and it can be amended at any time in the future.

Commissioner Gillespie commented that she thought there was already a policy in place as the naming of the dog park was previously discussed. So when this came up she was surprised there was not.

Commissioner Kalinoski asked how many streets, parks in the Township that are named after someone?

Mr. Wendell replied about five or six.

Commissioner Zappone said he feels criteria needs to be put together as part of the policy and discussed in committee to be passed onto the full Board for discussion and implementation.

Commissioner Myers agreed that the naming of the dog park was previously discussed.

She feels this matter should be looked at globally because at all times there are 15 Commissioners on this Board and we all make major contributions. Members of this Board changes by one or two or more every two years, so there are many elected officials, and the Township will run out if we set this policy.

As part of a donor policy, if someone wants something named after a family member or someone else, they donate money, and for that donation they get something in their name.

She feels it is "dangerous" to name things after elected officials. That is not why we are here, although we all work very hard in different ways. There has to be criteria and a process and this one was not handled very well at all.

Commissioner Schreiber agreed that it is a possibility that the Township could run out of things to name, and donors do get their names on things, but there are buildings throughout the state and country named after elected officials. She would consider a policy drafted by the Manager and she also did a Google search, but did not find any policy in this area.

She would like to move forward with this dedication because not only was Martin Reddington a former Commissioner and Board President, but he did a lot for the community as well, so she will support it.

Commissioner Sanchez commented that he thought this dedication was for Martin Reddington's community service and not just because he was an elected official. He is in favor of discussing a policy.

Commissioner DiPlacido commented that he does not have a problem with naming a park, tree or bench after an elected official as his entire neighborhood is named after elected officials.

Commissioner Hecker commented that he will discuss with the residents in his area to get a sense of how they feel about it.

Commissioner Luker thanked all of the Commissioners for the discussion tonight. This one agenda item has consumed more of his time that he has had on any subject in 20 years. It is a touching and complicated situation and we need to consider naming an entire park after a person versus an item in the park. Item PA4 is not about naming a park, but an item within the park, and he feels it would be appropriate.

However, the way that it was handled leaves a lot to be desired as it was handled very awkwardly. We should have been apprised with more information at the onset and, if anyone was owed an apology, it should be Commissioner Zappone as he was not included in the initial stages. Moving forward, we have all learned from this and he guarantees it will not happen again.

Commissioner Farren asked Township Manager to provide factual background information to the Board about what has already been done in the Township in regards to this matter as well as the distinction about items named after someone versus naming an entire park after someone.

Field Dedication – Ardsley Park

Commissioner Farren made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Sanchez to authorize the dedication of the baseball field (closest to Cricket Avenue) in Ardsley Park in memory of former Commissioner and Board President Martin Reddington.

Commissioner Farren asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Zappone read a statement into the record as follows: "As Commissioner of Ward 9, it is an honor to be part of this process, which honors a lifelong member of the Ardsley community and family and a past President of the Board Commissioners. He has known Marty, Diane and Kevin for some time and his grandchildren have benefited numerous times from the Easter Egg Hunts that Marty sponsored. He asked at this time for this committee to advance this agenda item to the full Board for approval and implementation."

Commissioner Kalinoski said Mr. Reddington was more than a former Commissioner, he was a businessman and realtor building property value in Ardsley, and he made Ardsley a better place to live. Marty gave advice to those selling homes throughout Ardsley as well as to him helping him over the years.

Kathleen Joyce, 2404 Lafayette Avenue, commented that since there was no policy, it was not known how to go about it, so we approached Chairman of Public Affairs Committee and, if that was not the correct procedure, she apologized.

Kevin Reddington commented that his father is Martin Reddington and discussion tonight has been mostly about Marty's political career, but what spearheaded this idea was what Marty did for Ardsley.

His father opened his real estate business in 1980, and shortly after, he was influential in opening Ardsley Community Center and he did a lot for his community other than being a Commissioner. Marty was a good citizen and a good business leader in the community and he took pride in his community. The request was for the naming of one ball field in Ardsley Park and not the entire park, and at the very least, Marty deserved that.

Donna Brewer, 1644 Arnold Avenue, commented that she feels it is a great thing to honor former Commissioner Reddington; however, when the Board considers this matter in the future, she asked for it to be considered whether the person was someone who was paid to do their work as opposed to someone who volunteered their services and gave of themselves and their time. She hopes that some type of policy is passed for those who have provided a good service.

MOTION was ADOPTED 4-0.

Commissioner Farren asked for any general comments relating to Public Affairs.

Lora Lehmann, 1431 Bryant Lane, expressed concern that "several years ago, there was a contract presented in regards to PAL and they were going to put their names on the building."

She also expressed concern that she feels "one park gets so much attention and not the other parks."

She also feels there was a "conflict of interest" at a recent meeting.

Solicitor Clarke clarified that the way the matter was handled at that meeting was entirely appropriate and legal and there was no "conflict of interest" as indicated by the speaker.

Chief Kelly said in regards to a Crestmont PAL Center; it was always his intention to get a community group together to discuss it and that is he what he did with numerous meetings. It is important to have community involvement, and if they helped accomplish something that was wanted for a long time by a lot of people it would be appropriate to include their names on a plaque inside a building. Members of PAL agreed enthusiastically to the commitment to make a PAL Center for the community.

Also, since the red light camera program began, there has been someone writing to the Commissioners and writing to many others about it, which is fine, except that there were corrections made to the outright lies made by that person.

ADJOURNMENT: 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael LeFevre, Township Manager

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