

The stated meeting of the Public Affairs Committee of the Board of Commissioners of the Township of Abington was held on Wednesday, May 6, 2015 at the Township Administration Building, Abington, PA., with Commissioner Spiegelman presiding.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:22 p.m.

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

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

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

MINUTES: Commissioner Spiegelman made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Sanchez to approve the minutes of the April 1, 2015 Public Affairs Committee Meeting.

MOTION was ADOPTED 4-0.

Parks and Recreation Report:

Director of Parks and Recreation, Mr. Doug Wendell reported that sandblasting of the pools has been ongoing and the pools should be repainted by June 1st.

This week, the Montgomery County Senior Games are being held throughout Montgomery County such as the college and parks and activities include swimming, darts, golf, horseshoes and pickle ball, etc.

EDC General Report Presentation:

Doug Callantine, Chairman, reported that we had a strategic planning retreat last fall and ideas from that retreat were to identify target areas within the Township that need economic stimulus, which are on Old York Road, Easton Road and McKinley section.

The sections focused on were on Old York Road where the Noble/Rydal section is located and also on Old York Road from Susquehanna to Old York Road corridor Edge Hill Bridge and on Easton Road from Susquehanna Road to the Willow Grove Park Mall.

On Easton Road, we found that businesses were a bit disjointed and, with the help of the Keswick Village Business Association, we have five officers who volunteered to create and run a Rydal Valley Business Association and they will put together a website posting ongoing activities. The business owners want to enhance their business activity by having advertised certain events. Also, we organized a spring cleanup from Susquehanna to the Willow Grove Mall.

Regarding the Old York Road corridor where the Edge Hill Bridge is located; we focused on the intersection of Old York Road and Susquehanna and we are working to enhance the parking behind the businesses, and also possibly through grant money, begin acquisition process of properties.

The Noble Train Station area and Fairway Plaza was recently the focus of the Montgomery County Planning Commission in regards to a walkability audit, which is leading to a series of focus group meetings where we would survey business owners and residents in this area about what they would like to see from a walkability standpoint. A meeting will be scheduled for late May or early June to discuss concepts and ideas about we can enhance the walkability in that neighborhood.

Recently, the EDC had a presentation made by officials of Penn State Abington on their new student housing project, which was an introductory session, and then we will discuss what the economic impact will be on the community.

The EDC's next meeting will be an evening meeting in June, so the public can participate in the review process whereby we will see another presentation by Penn State as well as the findings of an economic impact study they have conducted on their proposed new facility.

Through Penn State Abington Campus and through their University Park Campus they are looking at creating an industrial partnership where they would set up at five of their satellite campuses around the Commonwealth a series of innovation-type centers. We are waiting to hear about the next step in that process.

The EDC has requested a number of property owners to speak with us about what their plans are and recently we had a presentation made by owners of the Huntingdon Valley Shopping Center about their plans for Huntingdon Pike. We will schedule a meeting with owners of the Willow Grove Park Mall to discuss their plans for the Rydal Waters site, and we have a list of about 12 various property owners that will be invited to an EDC meeting over the course of time.

The EDC has two open seats on the committee; one due to a resignation and one occurred due to the recent passing of Jack Thalheimer. After our vetting process of interviewing candidates, we have recommendations for two candidates for consideration by the Board of Commissioners.

Commissioner Hecker commented that he has been incredibly impressed with the energy, passion and work that have taken place under Doug's leadership as there has been a renewed vigor, vision and focus. Also, Commissioner Markman has done an outstanding job as the Board's Liaison to the EDC and good things will follow. Thank you.

Commissioner Spiegelman echoed Commissioner Hecker's comments, and it is very exciting to see upcoming positive changes.

PAL Site Presentation Report:

Chief Kelly said our Police Officers always try to help people especially those at risk as well as we work hard to make our community safer and better.

Back in the early 1990's, we saw a startling statistic that helped redirect a lot of our work and that statistic showed that a tremendous amount of crime is committed by those who are in the age group between 15-25 years old.

As a result, the Police Department got involved with numerous programs, but in 2001, it became obvious that we needed to work directly with our youth to be good role models.

Melissa Gargan, Project Specialist//PAL Site Manager, said she works with staff in Community Policing, the Police Officers and PAL staff and our PAL youth to coordinate programs for more than 40-50 registered members between the ages of 11-18, and consistently, we see an average of 120 kids every weekend.

There are many onsite and off-site activities, but one is PAL Council, and we meet once a month to discuss the PAL program; what changes they would like to see made; what programs they would like to participate in; and what trips they would like to take. In addition, they are involved with the planning process.

Officer Gillespie said there are fun activities that the Police Officers engage in with the kids of PAL. Basketball tournaments are cops versus kids and the kids love to play and beat the officers. We also have a dodge ball tournament, and next week, we will be bowling against Philadelphia PAL's kids and officers.

During the summer, we have a PAL Police Academy for the kids and we bring in our K-9 Unit, SWAT members and Police Detectives, who come in and speak with the kids about various things and have lunch with them. Being able to let these kids get to know our officers as people as opposed to uniforms is really invaluable and it has a positive impact in someone's life especially a child.

Ms. Gargan continued that having the ability to have our own building would open our program to be more of an educational-type of program.

Lt. Kelley Warner said a lot of the programs are held on Friday and Saturday nights and how cool would it be if we were open on a daily basis, every week. Educational programming is something that cannot be done now, but a fulltime PAL site would allow us to have tutoring during the day or ongoing mentorship every night. Health and wellness is another area we could tap into where the Police Officers could stop in during the workday to connect with the kids and we probably have not even considered yet what else could be done with our own site.

Mr. Wendell presented the Crestmont Park Master Plan that was developed between 2006 and 2007 that was approved by the Board and residents. Shown was a possible location for proposed PAL activity building. A committee was formed and four meetings were held with residents. We worked with Planned Concepts, who developed the plan and revisions were made following those meetings, and finally, we came up with the plan as presented tonight.

Residents asked for a cultural-type center that would have neighborhood activities that could be used by them when PAL was not using it, and the location shown on the plan lends itself very well for a building to be constructed.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked for the timeframe for construction of the building.

Mr. Wendell replied he is not sure at this time as there are zoning and financial issues to be worked out first.

Commissioner Sanchez commented that he would like to see sustainability features incorporated into the building.

Van Strother said he is President of United Neighbors, which is the group who worked with Mr. Wendell back in 2007 to develop the plan. Recently, he began working with members of the PAL organization to bring this project before the Board tonight.

The United Neighbors voted unanimously in support of the PAL building application and he made presentation before the Willow Grove NAACP and they also voted unanimously to support this project and will provide in writing a letter of support for a PAL center to be located in Crestmont Park. Also, he spoke with surrounding neighbors in Crestmont and they are also in support of the project.

Chief Kelly presented a picture of the current site as well as a rendering of the proposed Police Athletic League building. Steps involved would be preliminary Board commitment that we are asking for at next Thursday's Board of Commissioners' meeting. The second step would be a formal agreement between the Township and PAL that would describe exactly what is expected relating to use of this land for this particular building. The third step would be the development of an engineering plan. Step four is zoning approval and the granting of a use variance and, if that was approved, the next step would be to appear before the Board for land development approval.

Eric Sussman said he is head of the Building Committee for the PAL building plan, and we intend to build and sustain a PAL building by a collection of individuals and/or companies who do business or live in our community that have a deep commitment and love for our kids. He represents others who could not be here this evening, but the Board has his commitment to raise the funds.

Commissioner Kline asked for an estimated budget.

Mr. Sussman replied we know preliminary that the building will cost in the \$3 million dollar range not including the land.

Commissioner Kline asked for the square footage of proposed building.

Mr. Strother replied we are estimating a 15,000 sq. ft. building, and we need to survey the land prior to being able to provide information on land development process, timeline and budgets.

Commissioner Kline asked about a timeframe of when the actual project would see fruition.

Mr. Strother replied if we get preliminary commitment, we would like to get started as soon as possible to hire a land surveyor and look at the building footprint.

Commissioner Spiegelman clarified that the engineering plan would be contracted out. Is that correct?

Mr. Strother replied yes.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked what would the annual sustainability costs be for the building going forward?

Mr. Strother replied he does not know at this time, but that will be part of our due diligence.

Commissioner Schreiber questioned whether the Township's EAC has been involved with this project.

Mr. Strother replied not at this time.

Commissioner Jones asked would it be fair to say that this building could be a resource for the entire Township.

Chief Kelly replied it will be the property of PAL and those activities will take priority; however, it will certainly be open to others as well.

Commissioner Jones asked what exposure would the Township have financially for initial costs?

Chief Kelly replied there is no intention to involve the Township for any costs.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked would a building manager be needed in the future or would existing staff of PAL handle it.

Chief Kelly replied that would be a consideration if the facility was open more frequently.

Commissioner Hecker commented that he is a huge supporter of PAL and the benefit to the Township is inspiring. PAL is a nonprofit organization coming before the Board with an application to enter into an agreement with the Township, but it is a nonprofit that employees a number of people employed by the Township, so are there protections and measures the Board should be thinking about going forward, so that it will be viewed as a fair and evenhanded process.

Solicitor Clarke replied we will look at all aspects of this matter going forward.

Commissioner Schreiber questioned whether the Solicitor will look into this matter before next Thursday's Board meeting or wait until after the vote is taken that night.

Solicitor Clarke replied there is nothing to prevent the committee from voting on this item tonight as well as the full Board next Thursday because nothing we would determine in the next eight days would impact this initial step.

Commissioner Kline suggested that the motion should include language saying, "final approval of the use will be dependent on zoning land use approvals; the financial viability of the project; community support; an acceptable lease agreement between the Township and PAL; and that additional input is received from surrounding residents and the Board of Commissioners."

Solicitor Clarke noted that this motion can be amended before next Thursday's Board meeting.

Commissioner Kline continued that we all support PAL, but we need to make sure that the Township is protected. Also, he would like to see a larger number of the population be involved and aware of the services of PAL that would be held in this building.

PAL Building Site Approval

Commissioner Spiegelman made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Sanchez to support Crestmont Park as the future location of the Abington PAL Activity Building for fundraising purposes. Final approval of the use will be dependent on zoning and land use approvals, the financial viability of the project and community support. The exact location of any building on the property will be determined after fundraising targets are attainable and additional input is received from surrounding residents.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked for any comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Jones commented that he supports this as long as the Board directs Township Solicitor to pursue a legal course of action that will protect not only the Township, but also the residents as well as the PAL organization.

Commissioner Spiegelman asked for any public comments.

Lora Lehmann, 1431 Bryant Lane, suggested incorporating this building with the pool building and she feels every segment of the community should be able to use this building and it should not be privately built on public land.

Fire Marshal Clark commented that we have five fire companies in the Township and they own the buildings and the apparatus and funding comes from both the Township and Fire Tax and also through donations. In each fire company's bylaws, there is a section that says, "In the event that the Fire Company disbands for any reason, all property owned by the Fire Company reverts back to the Township."

MOTION was ADOPTED 4-0.

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

Lora Lehmann, 1431 Bryant Lane, commented that she feels the Boy Scout Nature Preserve is being neglected and that the Trust has been violated and she feels the Township needs to get back into compliance with it.

Public Affairs Committee Meeting

May 6, 2015

ADJOURNMENT: 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael LeFevre, Township Manager

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