

PALMER TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
February 20, 2024
7:00 PM
GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING

The Palmer Township Board of Supervisors held a general business meeting on Tuesday, February 20, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. in the Municipal Building meeting room. The following were in attendance: Chair Michael Brett, Vice Chair Joseph Armato, Supervisors K. Michael Mitchell, Jeffrey Young and Charles E. Bellis III. Also in attendance were the Township Manager, Planning Director, Assistant Planning Director, Finance Director, Police Chief, Director Public Works/Parks/Utilities, Recycling Coordinator, Director of Public Services, and the Assistant Township Manager.

1. PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

2. CONSENT CALENDAR

A. Approval of Minutes - February 5, 2024

INFORMATION

The Board needs to approve/disapprove the minutes of February 5, 2024.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Supervisor Jeffrey Young, Seconded by Charles Bellis III. Passed. 5-0.

Supervisors voting Ayes: Armato, Bellis III, Brett, Mitchell, Young

B. Disbursement of Funds - February 20, 2024

INFORMATION

The Board needs to approve/disapprove the Disbursement of Funds for February 20, 2024.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell, Seconded by Supervisor Joseph Armato. Passed. 5-0.

Supervisors voting Ayes: Armato, Bellis III, Brett, Mitchell, Young

3. OLD BUSINESS

A. Staff Reports

INFORMATION

- Solicitor
- Township Manager
- Planning Director
- Township Engineer
- Public Services Director
- Public Works, Parks and Utilities Director
- Finance Director

- Police Chief
- Fire Commissioner

Township Manager, Bob Williams, said on February 8th we had two major arteries shut down in the township due to major accidents. One on Route 22 and one on Route 33. They were closed at the same time during the p.m. rush hour. I would like to say thank you to the Palmer Police Department, Palmer Fire Department and Suburban Emergency Services. As another test, there was an additional accident at Tatamy and Newlins Mill Road too. These are all another example of where our township is positioned in 2024. We are getting a lot of traffic and we need to be able to handle it. As we move forward our intent is to invest in our police and fire departments. This year we invested in Suburban EMS. Nothing is more important than the safety of our residents and visitors. Thank you again to emergency services.

Williams said, on February 13th and 16th we had some interesting snow storms. While the meteorologists predicted a few inches, in some areas we got over a foot. The Palmer Township Public Works Department was put in a bad position. The roads were not salted or treated because they were initially forecasting rain. While we chased it all night long, our municipality came out well. Thanks to Scott and his entire team. Not only were our roads and sidewalks cleared, but the bike path was available this past weekend too. Thank you.

Williams said, he had three legal items for executive session.

Planning Director, Kent Baird, said the Planning Department has two updates. With your awareness to pursue grants along with your support and approval, I've provided a list of projects we've been awarded and we continue to update our deadlines for grants and the ones we want to chase. We've attend mandatory workshops and we just attended the County Livable Landscape meeting and this morning the County held their CDBG workshop. Folks are going after grants and we are too. Right now we have 18 projects with grant funding. You will hear more later on the agenda regarding a resolution for another grant.

Assistant Planning Director, Craig Beavers, said I put before you a pie chart showing action plans between planning and also ones Paige Strasko is involved in. Some of this goes along with the Nature Center initiatives that we talked about last week. The chart identifies four separate areas; Hazard Mitigation Plan, Local Climate Action Plan, CREATE Resiliency Hub, and the Thriving Earth Exchange. Beavers went on to explained each plan.

B. 2023 Palmer Recycling Update

INFORMATION

Township Recycling Coordinator, Zachary Trexler, will present to the Board the township's 2023 recycling report.

DISCUSSION

Recycling Coordinator, Zach Trexler, gave an overview to the Board of the 2023 reported recycling numbers. Trexler reported the Hartley Avenue Recycling Center

was open for 1,712 hours with 6,938 residential drop offs and 1003 commercial drop offs. The Berks Street Yard Waste Facility was open for 588 hours with 1,729 residential drop offs and 163 commercial drop offs, which generated revenues of \$3,632.00. He noted there were 252 loads of leaves collected curbside totaling 1,775 tons, and we collected 10 loads of Christmas Trees totaling 3.75 tons.

Trexler went on to review his internal, County, and State reporting system requirements. He noted the information was reported to the County on February 15, 2024, and then the County sends it on to the State. Trexler said, the Palmer recycling program started back on 1990 when we received an implementation grant for \$27,233.31. To date the township has received \$3,814,737.50 in grant funding for our recycling program. He went on to explain the 902 and 904 grants and stated that number will continue to grow since we have an approved grant and those funds should be on the way.

C. Enhancing Road Safety with Radar Feedback Speed Signs - Presentation
INFORMATION

Enhancing Road Safety with Radar Feedback Speed Signs. Presentation will be made by Public Services Director, Phil Godbout.

DISCUSSION

Public Services Director, Philip Godbout, said two weeks ago I was ill with bronchitis and Tom Adams made our first presentation regarding options for road safety with radar speed signs. In Palmer Township we have a traffic safety program in our Police Department and we have 28 locations that we have cleared with PennDOT where they record vehicle traffic and speeds that allow us to gather data. I met with Chief Smith and the Traffic Safety Committee and we looked at the need for this. At your last meeting you received copies of signs with displays. I reached out to installers I worked with in the past and some we work with in Palmer Township. Eloncity gave us a price for a solar panel display. The pole for the pedestrian signal would be similar to the sign currently on Bethman Road. It has a concrete foundation. Total price is \$12,200 for complete installation of a permanent sign. Statistics state 60% of people will slow down, not necessarily below the speed limit. It was suggested to maybe place them near churches, schools, parks, and bike trails. We asked our Police Department for recommended locations based on their statistics. There are requirements related to line of site, right-of-way, and you need 700 feet to make it effective.

Godbout said, our first potential location is northbound on Mine Lane Road heading towards the bike path. Young asked, why can't we put it in the park across the street? Godbout said northbound is approaching the bike path. Young asked, why can't you put it both ways, are there accidents there? Chief said, we used our speed collection citations in that area and it meets the criteria with the bike path and the park. Young said, people are flying on Greenwood Avenue and Freemansburg Avenue. Chief Smith said, the Traffic Safety Committee discussed Greenwood Avenue and I believe we already have plans there. Brett said, I believe this checked all the boxes from the Traffic Committee.

Godbout said, our second location is southbound on Van Buren Road approaching Corriere Road. This connects areas and has a significant amount of traffic with pedestrians.

Harry Graack, 1380 Van Buren Road, said it is down too far. They slow down to get up the rise. You need to come further north.

Bill Hartin, 1375 Van Buren Road, said put it on the other side of the bridge.

Brett said, at this point, this is only a presentation of data.

Godbout said, the third recommendation, since it was recommended to put near churches and residential areas is Hartley Avenue. When we have incidents like Route 33 and Route 22 closed the township becomes a gridlocked mess. We want people to be able to travel safely on these roads.

Young asked, is the \$12,200 the COSTARS rate? Godbout said, that is not a COSTARS price, but is from a COSTARS vendor. Cooperative purchasing doesn't get us a cheaper price. Mitchell said, I like the idea, but it isn't budgeted. We can't keep buying things not budgeted. Young said, why not? Mitchell said, it's just my opinion. Young said, our revenues always come in higher than budgeted. Brett said, I don't think we are voting to install tonight. We talked about doing one or two this year to not put a strain on our budget, and then budget more for future years.

Harry Graack, 1380 Van Buren Road, said other municipalities in Pennsylvania have much more significant traffic safety devices that collect information 24/7 - 365 days a year. It is routed through police and they know everything everywhere going on. PennDOT has them on major roadways too. Van Buren Road, not only southbound but also northbound, experience speeding. The Chief had a counter out there and I said some are going 80 mph and he had exception to that. If you put it at the right location it will be that high. I want to hear they will be both ways. I know it is expensive. You have seven more warehouses up there with trucks that aren't supposed to be there. I'm looking for something to knock down the speeds. Young said, they can't do speed control everywhere. They try to address all parts of the township. You implied that they only do a couple speed checks and that isn't correct. Graack said, I don't see anyone being stopped.

Chief Smith said, we collected the data and not one registered anywhere near 80 mph. Graack said, you did not have it in the right location.

Brett said, no one is disagreeing with you of the need, but the location should be from the data we collect. Godbout went on to review how the new signs will generate data that will be recorded and downloadable.

Bellis said, this was a strong report. You mentioned if the sign faces one way it will still collect data for the opposite direction. I think if we don't do any this year we should budget for next year.

Brett asked to share the presentation with the Board and to provide how it will impact the budget. Armato said, this is good information. Feasibility were the two bullet points

made tonight. We can review at a future meeting.

D. Palmer Point Phase 2 - Extension Agreement

INFORMATION

The Board previously granted an extension for Palmer Point to install the public improvements, notably the Greenwood and Hartley intersection improvements.

The project contains an additional deadline for Phase II plan recording. However, Phase II may not be recorded until the intersection improvements are complete.

So, while the Board granted an extension to install the public improvements, the request tonight is to authorize an extension of time to record Phase II to December 31, 2024.

DISCUSSION

Oetinger said, Palmer Point was proposed in two phases. We provided an extension for Phase 1 public improvements. They also have to record Phase 2 that allows them to build the intersection. This is to record the other half of their plan.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Supervisor Jeffrey Young, Seconded by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell. Passed. 5-0.

Supervisors voting Ayes: Armato, Bellis III, Brett, Mitchell, Young

E. Northwood Farms Phase 4 - Maintenance Agreement

INFORMATION

At the January 22, 2024 meeting, the Developer's requested to have its project moved into the 18-month maintenance period. At that meeting, the Township Engineer recommended the project move into the maintenance period, conditioned upon the Township Landscape Architect's concerns be adequately addressed.

After consultation with the Township's Landscape Architect, the proposed maintenance agreement includes a requirement that the outstanding landscaping issues be addressed in the Spring.

The requested action of the Board is for authorization to execute the proposed Northwood Farms Phase 4 Maintenance Agreement.

DISCUSSION

This item was removed from the agenda. No action required tonight.

4. NEW BUSINESS

A. Green Light-Go Grant Application and Resolution

INFORMATION

Township staff are seeking approval to submit a Green Light-Go Grant to the

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. The application seeks funds to replace outdated traffic and pedestrian signals at the intersection of Park Avenue and Route 248 to improve motorist and pedestrian safety.

Board action is requested.

DISCUSSION

Beavers said, this would be to make improvements to the intersection at Park Avenue and Route 248. It currently doesn't have an active pedestrian signal. It would be replacing the lights with pedestrian signals and updating line striping.

Godbout said, I participate on the Traffic Safety Committee and we reviewed issues at this intersection regarding line painting. We submitted our proposal and received positive feedback. The grant has 20% matching funds. If the Board agrees, we will need to submit the grant application by the end of this month.

Brett asked if it is four ways? Godbout said, four crosswalks and three corners will be able to be addressed. It also connects with Lanta bus stops. It's not a total solution, but it will be a vast improvement.

Supervisor Bellis made a motion to approved the grant resolution.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Charles Bellis III, Seconded by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell. Passed. 5-0.

Supervisors voting Ayes: Armato, Bellis III, Brett, Mitchell, Young

B. Feasibility Study for New Police Station Proposals

INFORMATION

Phil Godbout will review responses received to the township's Request for Proposals for a new police station feasibility study.

Board action is requested.

DISCUSSION

Godbout said, the Board of Supervisors received copies of the five proposals we received by email and they are also in your meeting packets. As you are aware, we put out Request for Proposals (RFP) and we allowed three weeks for responses. I made a short list of Architects in the area and sent them the RFP, but any firm was able to respond. Until they are awarded they are proprietary. The proposals received range from \$8,800 to \$86,650. You probably asked why such a broad range in responses. I went through each proposal and they vary in scope. What we asked for was to evaluate sites, concepts, locations, and what the building will require. Some responses included more details on mechanical and HVAC. One included a 3D module. While impressive, it is not exactly what we needed. I believe the Alloy5 proposal, the lowest proposal, is a strong contender.

Young asked, where is this going? I heard a number the other day that I almost fell

over. What range are we talking about here? Godbout said, the price range for the building, I don't know. Low ends can be around \$2.5 million and high end, like the City of Allentown's Police Department is \$30 million. Brett said, this study is to get us recommendations for locations and what the building will include. They will meet with our staff to review what exactly Palmer needs. After the study, they will come back with a budget number that we can work toward.

Godbout said, this study will provide us with how big it needs to be, what kind of equipment should be in the building and where it would best be located. We need to define our project. Then we will know the cost and be able to seek funding. Alloy5 has worked in our area and is far along with their new Easton High School plans. It is helpful to go through the proposals to see what they offer.

Young said, this Weller Tract had restrictions when it was given to Palmer. I came across an individual who is on the Weller Foundation and I asked him to try to find out if our parking lots count or if it is just the buildings. He told me the only surviving Weller family member lives in Bangladesh and he has nothing to do with the foundation and no other family members are involved. Godbout said, I can't speak to that, but whatever site is chosen, it will be to serve the public and will be well integrated into the community.

Bill Hartin, 1375 Van Buren Road, asked how were the sites determined? Godbout said, they will evaluate multiple sites. Hartin asked, how were they selected and how many are being considered. Williams said, site options are not determined. The criteria would be sites where it could fit, space, access, and be buildable. We know of the Weller Tract, we own five acres up north, we have land around the public works building. The criteria will be weighted and talked about at a public meeting. We would love to have everything located in this general area. In addition to Board input, the Police Chief and Police staff will have a lot to say about it. All available sites will be considered.

Harry Graack, 1380 Van Buren Road, said you've analyzed some of this and you think there is a need. What is wrong with what you have? Young said, it was too small when they occupied it 36 years ago. Armato said, they are busting at the seams. Graack said, I'm interested in the responses. Graack said, large cities have precincts, rather than one large basket. Why not distribute the police force. I know Chief won't like that. Williams said, there is nothing off the table here. Today we have a sub-station in the south. The conversation is whatever will serve our community best. It doesn't need to be just one station. That is why we are doing a feasibility study. Williams said, we cannot squeeze one more officer in our current station. We need room for our detectives. This is the first step forward. Graack said, I see a short dash on an agenda item and I don't know the background. Williams said, I'm here to answer your questions. The first step is a feasibility study, then we can report back to the community. Young said, we know there is a need and this is the starting point. Graack said, I'm challenging how it gets done. Brett again explained the process of the feasibility study is just the starting point.

Chief Smith said, back when Bob Williams started at the township five years ago, he toured our facility and realized we have a glorified ranch home as a station. We have no basement. We have 35 officers with no room to grow. Our officers are not in the

station responding to calls. We have four designated sectors in the township. Our call response time is no more than three minutes, unless we are already taking care of another issue.

Young said, you mentioned the Allentown Police Department. I don't understand why we are using Allentown as a comparison. I'd be using someone twice as big as us. Brett said, Allentown was just the most recent study that was done. Godbout said, I realize our scope is much different. When we get to Phase 3, we will know what it should look like and we can pursue outside funding opportunities. Alloy5 has Dewey Engineering as their engineer who has experience in Palmer Township to include geotechnical and storm water issues. I have confidence with all of them.

Godbout said, I recommend awarding to Alloy5. They are the lowest proposal and I believe they can get it done most rapidly. Armato said that he wants more time to look through the proposals to make sure we are getting the best, not necessarily the fastest and cheapest.

Williams said, we as a staff have been talking about this and we should be sharing our information with the Board and the community. Five years ago I recognized our current station was undersized. We have four detectives in an office the size of a closet. The TOC is grossly undersized. The air and heating systems have issues. The roof leaks. There are mold issues in the bathroom. It has a low ceiling and is not adequate for a police department. When I brought this up five years ago, I was told to shut up and sit down. When the new Board came on, I shared this information with them and asked to consider a feasibility study. At our last budget discussion it was discussed and agreed to look into a feasibility study. Two meetings ago this Board authorized Phil to go out for the RFP's. We now have that information. We know Alloy5 from the work they did constructing the new Palmer School. They did the police station for the City of Easton and are now doing the City of Allentown. We have a good relationship with them from the Palmer School project. Nothing is decided yet on the site or the building. All of that will be provided in this study and we will then be able to come back to the Board and the public.

Brett said, we will allow time for Joseph to review the information we've been provided and put it back on the next meeting agenda.

C. Authorization to File Civil Complaint- Haymont Drive
INFORMATION

Pursuant to executive session discussion, the Township Solicitor seeks public meeting Board authorization to file suit against Elie Sabra, owner of 5 Haymont Drive, for violations of the Palmer Township Fire Code and for nuisance violations.

DISCUSSION

Oetinger said, this matter was previously discussed in executive session. It is a private road where there are fire code violations. A Notice of Violation was issued and it has not been addressed. I'm seeking public acknowledgement to file suit.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Charles Bellis III, Seconded by Supervisor Joseph

Armato. Passed. 5-0.

Supervisors voting Ayes: Armato, Bellis III, Brett, Mitchell, Young

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Tim Fisher, 68 Moor Drive, Highlands of Glenmoor, said we are so lucky. Yesterday Chief Wayne Smith came and spent two and a half hours with our community. He answered all our questions on gun control and safety. He is such a public servant. We all know Van Buren Road is a problem. It's good that it is a 35 mph speed and its good to have the signs "no trucks" southbound. He was great. We are happy and we gave him a two minute round of applause. He lives and dies Palmer Township. Thank you very much.

Jim Korp, 3005 Oregon Street, said his concern tonight is to get help and clarification. Behind our property there is a paper alley. We've received letters about how our vegetation is overgrown because someone couldn't park their car back there. The letter from Zoning states the alley needs to remain open. In other paper alleys we see fences being put up and we are looking for clarification on what can and cannot be done in a paper alley.

Oetinger said, it is a public road that never become public. So it is a private right-of-way. Anyone's property on the original plan has a right to traverse that part of the street. You own up to the mid-point of the alley, but all have access to use it. Korp said, we own the corner property as well, so we have double the space. At the opposite end of the alley it is overgrown with trees, so we can't get through there. If we want to erect a fence do we need Zoning approval. Oetinger said, you always need approval to erect a fence.

Young said, they have a unique situation. The house doesn't front on the street, the entrance is on the alley. Korp said, the real estate agent listed the property noting off street parking. Young said, only two houses have access from the alley.

Oetinger said that he would have to look at the exact locations. Anyone on the initial plan has the right to traverse the alley, not to park in the alley. Oetinger said, permanent parking isn't allowed in the right-of-way, but passing through it is. Korp said, we aren't remedying the situation. Korp said, I want the law enforced that it must remain open. Oetinger said, a paper street is private property. The township can't go put up a street sign because it is private property. Young said, Suburban EMS went through a similar situation in court. My opinion is that you shouldn't block it. If you have issues with them it is a civil matter because it is not on our property. Oetinger said, it is private property and not a township enforcement issue.

6. REPORTS

Supervisors

There were no reports.

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:29 p.m. with 3 legal items for executive session.

Motion: Adjourn, Moved by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell, Seconded by Supervisor Joseph Armato. Passed. 5-0.

Supervisors voting Ayes: Armato, Bellis III, Brett, Mitchell, Young

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda DeGerolamo
Assistant Township Manager