

PALMER TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
January 16, 2024
7:00 PM
GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING

The Palmer Township Board of Supervisors held a general business meeting on Tuesday, January 16, 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 Jeffrey Young, K. Michael Mitchell, and Charles E. Bellis III. Also in attendance were the Township Manager, Planning Director, Assistant Planning Director, Finance Director, Police Chief, Assistant Director Public Works/Parks/Utilities, Fire Commissioner, Director of Public Services, and the Assistant Township Manager. .

Chairman Brett said, as you know our meeting typically would have been yesterday, but was pushed due to the holiday. Brett said, I am proud of Palmer Township and this Board for recognizing Martin Luther King Jr. Day. It is important to acknowledge the idealist and to remember his great words and actions.

1. PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

2. CONSENT CALENDAR

A. Approval of Minutes - December 27, 2023

INFORMATION

The Board needs to approve/disapprove the minutes of December 27, 2023.

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

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

B. Approval of Minutes - January 2, 2024

INFORMATION

The Board needs to approve/disapprove the minutes from January 2, 2024.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Supervisor Jeffrey Young, Seconded by Supervisor Joseph Armato. Passed. 5-0.

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

C. Disbursement of Funds - January 16, 2024

INFORMATION

The Board needs to approve/disapprove the disbursement of funds for January 16, 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

Solicitor Oetinger said we will need to hold an executive session following the meeting to discuss legal matters.

Township Manager, Bob Williams, said he would like to congratulate the community and thank the Board for a recent notice we received from the Court of Common Pleas of Northampton County. The court upheld the Board of Supervisors decision related to the appeal of Greystone Capital. It took the fortitude of our Board and the trust in our legal team. Thank you to our entire new legal team. Great job. It also got good news coverage in print and on social media and he went on to read the decision from the Judge. Williams said, I hear a lot of nonsense on social media and we don't typically reply to nonsense. This is a good victory for the people of Palmer Township. As we move forward the courts are giving us the ability to have a balanced approach. Being able to find a happy spot between property rights and the rights of our community. This Board is fighting a good fight and I thank you.

Williams said, this morning we had a meeting with representatives from Alloy5 and D'Huy Engineering. We worked closely with them related to the Palmer School project. They did the Easton City Hall and the Easton Police Station. They did a feasibility study for the City of Allentown and they are building the Wilson Borough Police Station. This year we are moving forward to put the pieces together to build a new Palmer Township Police Station. This was our first action toward that mission. We will put together a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a feasibility study for a new station and we will look at a half dozen possible locations. We will interview our police command staff and officers on what their needs are. We will also look at the police activity in the township that will assist us in getting us the square footage that will be required. The cost should be less than \$10,000 and we will bring it to the Board to approve the feasibility study. We do know today the current station is too small and it can't staff the number of officers we need in this community. Our number one priority is the safety and quality of life for our community. We made the right move last year for emergency services that needed funding and we are funding them as every community should be. We also have two new fire trucks ordered that will be here in two years. We've all known the Police Station is next. Williams said, he will have it as an agenda item for our next Board meeting.

Williams said, the staff continues to do a great job with grants. Lisa Boscola's office sent us an email that the Commonwealth Financing Authority is awarding two grants from Act 13. We are receiving \$14,850 for sewage facilities and \$50,000 for watershed restoration related to Fox Run Park and open space. Williams said, good job Kent and Craig. Baird said, Paige Strasko did a good job on this.

Baird said, this is great money and is related to the Schoeneck Creek, which is a hot topic at public meetings. When you look at Fox Run Park and see the Schoeneck Creek, there is a lot of open space that we own and the water just runs down to the stream. We can add a lot of trees in that field area to help that runoff. When the trail connects, it will be through a nice tree area. Baird said, again, Paige did a great job.

Supervisor Young asked, where the bank is cutting out, will this stop that? Baird said, absolutely. It will help all along the Schoeneck Creek.

Williams said, just a few years ago we looked at grants as taking a lot of work and thought they may not always be worth it, but it is paying off. Williams said, we are currently challenged to spend it. The more grants you have, the more contracts are needed and we ran a pretty skinny operation upstairs. Now we have to catch up. We will spend it and it has to be within a certain period and in a certain fashion. As soon as Tom Adams leaves, Phil will have an assistant to assist with project management.

Williams said, we've been in communication with Lisa Boscola's office for RACP grant. She toured our Police station and we will look at federal and state grants for the Police station.

Supervisor Bellis said, that was a strong report. The news article is a win and I'm happy we are moving forward on the police station. As I toured the buildings in the township I was almost embarrassed when I met with Chief and they had no proper meeting place. I want a station we can respect.

Williams said, yesterday we celebrated Martin Luther King. Our Police Chief will tell you that Officers a year ago were asking why we weren't honoring our slain civil rights leader. I'm proud to sit with this Board and celebrate Martin Luther King for the first time here in Palmer township. It means a lot to our community. Whenever the federal, state and county offices are close and you are not, you have to ask questions as to why we aren't.

Williams said, the township recently did a Proclamation honoring Sgt. William Adams, a township resident who served honorably in the United States Marine Corps. He recently also celebrating his 99th birthday. Williams read the Proclamation.

Williams said, Zach Trexler recently received his state certification as a Recycling Coordinator. Josh handles our front desk duties and handles our trash and recycling program. Moving forward he will now be serving as our full time staff member that is the Coordinator of the ESC.

Baird said, as you know I have my certification as a certified planner. It requires a

number of years of experience and then you need support from mentors and then have to take a test. Then you can be a member of the American Planners Association. I would like to announce Craig Beavers was just elected Chairman of the Lehigh Valley Chapter. Congratulations.

Baird gave a presentation to the Board for the Bushkill Creek Greenways, Parks and Trails plan. He said you've been supporting grants we are writing to be able to get this done. This plan is using the Bushkill Creek as its focus. The woodlands, open space, quality of the water, is all part of the planning study. It is better to create an inventory of our needs. We need to know what we have and what we need to fix. This is a high priority focus. We also have the 911 Trail we host on top of our trail. We will make recommendations to protect the cultural resources and historical resources. He went on to reviewed grants already awarded. Baird added, our trail was one of the first trails approved for over the rail system.

Young said, the original Rails to Trails path was in the southern end of the township not along the Bushkill Creek. It was actually one of the first in the country. Baird said, when they come to the area, they ask about Palmer Township and Tom Adams. Young said, in the 1970's, back when B. Jack Anderson was a supervisor they worked on getting the trail and the residents at the time were furious because it was going in there back yards. Baird said, we want to be able to capture all of that. Baird went on to talk about the natural resources and working with the Wildlands, the Bushkill Stream Conservancy and Trout Unlimited. These are folks that are willing to contribute on improving the water quality of the stream. We want to make sure our stream is clean. We have an opportunity to inventory our natural resources.

Baird said, we just launched our first ADA accessibility for our parks in our community. We are out of date and we cannot hide from that. As soon as you say we are working on it, the better things get. Changes will be coming to Penn Pump Park that will help with this. They will analyze our parks and trails. We are working with the Lehigh Center for Independent Living and all our parks will meet the needs of all our residents. We believe it is best to combine two grants, the Mill Race Park and 911 Trail Master Plan. There will be surveys for people to answer and we will work hand-in-hand with our partners. We are still pursuing grants where we can for our parks in the community. Baird said, we will have a consultant working with us to assist in making this a great place for people to live and visit.

Young said, this is great stuff but our recreation plan should have had that in it. It was taken out. I ask you to include the Recreation Board in this process. Baird said that they visited the Recreation Board once and they will be included in the process.

Public Works/Parks/Utilities Assistant Director, Jamie Paetzell, said the Public Works team was working since 9 p.m. last night with snow removal. They are now home getting some sleep and they may be called out again tonight for icing. Scott Kistler asked me to share that this three inch storm was one of the most expensive. The township was salted five times, the main roads were plowed three and the side streets two times. A lot of work went into a three inch storm because of the timeframe.

Brett said, we always know when we are leaving the township by the change in road conditions. Armato said he had favorable comments from his neighbors. You did a

great job.

Williams said, I thank Scott and Jamie and the entire team. It was a long 36 hours. It was the most expensive three inches that we had to move. We thought we were done and then more came. This township is continually out until it is done right. There is no comparison to our surrounding communities. We had a police officer from outside of Palmer request that Scott give a class on how to do the roads in a storm. Thank you.

Bellis said, kudos to you guys. I'd also like the public to know we take care for our workers as far as safety goes. We let them decide when they need a break. We don't push them. We take care of our employees.

Farley said, he can share some good news. Year end reports from Keystone Collections shows a 9% increase in collections from our previous year. It is normal to go up 3% to 5%, but the additional increase was from them collecting delinquent monies in addition to us seeing some organic growth. I hope we continue to see this moving forward. It helps with our budget.

Williams said, normally your delinquents are 2% or 3% and we are less than 1%. Farley said, Bob and I are active on Tax Collection Committee and we are very aggressive with our vendor and making sure they do a good job. Williams said, I remember when we had \$300,000 delinquent in trash and sewer billing. It is now down to single digits. Thank you. Farley said, we just turned over 87 accounts to Portnoff for collections. Portnoff is doing a great job as well.

Chief Smith said, thank you for your support in looking into a new police station and thank you Bob for hosting the meeting. We've been talking about it for at least a decade and until today, this was the first step we took. Smith said, our Public Works Department is out there strong during a storm. Our guys called them out at 9:00 p.m. last night. Even during daylight, people have difficulty driving. We only had one reportable accident and one non-reportable and two tows. Kudos to the Public Works Department.

Bellis said, a new Police facility is long over due and your department deserves it. I hope we build a station that represents you and the department.

B. Palmer Pointe Phase 1 - Extension Request

INFORMATION

3100 Charlotte Avenue, LLC requests an extension of time to complete the improvements of Palmer Point Apartments, Phase 1; specifically, those listed in Condition A10 of the Approval Decision Letter for Greenwood Avenue Improvements. The requested extension of time is to July 31, 2024.

Board action is requested.

DISCUSSION

Baird said, the group on this site has picked up their pace. The extension is required because it is tied to the traffic light. It appears to currently be under good management.

Oetinger said, the extension request is until July 31, 2024. I believe their letter had stated December 31, 2024, which is incorrect. Oetinger said, they are working on acquiring required right-of-way.

Bellis said, he noticed when going through notes it seemed to be dormant for two years, why? Baird said, all sites suffered due to COVID. Young said, a big part of that was the discussion as to which side of the road the improvements would be on. It started on the west side and then we changed them on to the east side. A lot of it was not their fault.

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

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

C. Palmer Pointe Phase 1 - Security Release #2

INFORMATION

3100 Charlotte Avenue, LLC, the applicant-developer of Palmer Pointe Apartments, requests an improvements security reduction of \$223,074.00 from security held for the Palmer Pointe Phase 1 project.

Carroll Engineering, the Township Engineer, reviewed the request and inspected the site and recommends releasing the requested amount. The remaining balance of the security held for the Township will be \$2,317,512.41.

Board action is requested.

DISCUSSION

Oetinger said, the starting balance is the \$2 million amount and it will be reduced by \$223,074.00 that was recommended by Carroll Engineering.

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

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

D. Parkview Estates Phase 8 - Security Release #3

INFORMATION

Kay Parkview, LLC, the developer of Parkview Phase 8, requested a release of funds from the improvement security held for the project.

Carroll Engineering, the Township Engineer, reviewed the request of \$290,777 and inspected the improvements thus far. The Engineer recommends a release of \$129,752.00. The remaining balance of the letter of credit will be \$585,600.00.

Board action is requested.

DISCUSSION

Williams said, this developer has deserved close scrutiny from this township. Phase 8 is a dumpster fire. There was a home that recently sold for \$880,000. The community floods, the road is course, manhole covers are exposed. It's a train wreck. I understand the \$129,752.00 release is legitimate, but every T needs to be crossed and every I dotted. They are very quick to try to escape what needs to be done.

Young asked, with the amount of money left after this release, is there enough to complete the work the prior developer was supposed to do below Phase 8. Is that included in this phase? Baird said, no. We refused to finish inspections until they cleaned up the utility right of way. You are referencing things that are not part of this. Young asked how do we ever get money set aside for those improvements. Williams said, there is a million dollars of improvements needed. Baird said, we are giving them money back for things that were completed. We are itemizing everything that they still need to do. We are not ready to do another release until it is significantly done.

Oetinger said, they have agreed to increase their Letter of Credit (LOC) by 10%. It will increase by \$58,000. Oetinger said, you can only increase it by 10% of the value of the LOC. This is for improvements they have completed, so you must release for those.

Baird said, the offsite improvements of Phase 8 is secured through their LOC, but we are not releasing it today. \$132,000 will remain in the letter of credit. Williams asked if that is enough. Baird said, we believe so, along with the additional 10%. Williams asked, what if we say you are not getting this because of the other work. Young said, lets release it. Baird said, there was never an increase previously to the LOC. There should have been increases every single year.

Oetinger said, we can make this release conditioned upon the 10% increase to the LOC. Brett asked for clarification. Oetinger said, the \$129,752.00 will be release once the township receives the 10% increase to their LOC.

Baird said, he wanted to thank our Solicitors, Grim, Biehn and Thatcher for turning around the reduction of security. We are following the Municipal Planning code regarding the time frames allowed for staff review, engineering review and then 15 days for you to make a decision. In the past, you may have made releases lumped into a solicitor report. That isn't happening anymore.

Bellis asked, are there any other projects we haven't been increasing the 10%. Baird said yes, but we aren't now.

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

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

4. NEW BUSINESS

A. Introduction of 2023 Planning Commission Annual Report

INFORMATION

In accordance with the Municipalities Planning Code, the Palmer Township Planning Commission prepared an annual report of their activities and recommendations in 2023.

The 2023 Annual Report was prepared by the Planning Commission and Planning Department for review and approval from the Board of Supervisors. The Planning Director will make a presentation to the Board.

DISCUSSION

Baird distributed and presented the Planning Departments 2023 Annual Report. Baird said, when you look at the list of things moving forward, less and less will be addressing conditional use applications. Our priorities are your priorities. We will be working on grants and policy changes. We are always open to your thoughts and concerns. We came a long way since 2022.

Bellis said, he had the privilege of riding with Kent and Craig for two hours and it was great to see their knowledge. The bike path is important to many in this township. Thank you.

B. Approval of WalkWorks Steering Committee

INFORMATION

In 2023, Palmer Township was awarded grant funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Pennsylvania Downtown Center, and DCNR to support the preparation of the Active Transportation Plan update to the *2020 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan*.

The Planning Department prepared a list of possible members of the Steering Committee for the Active Transportation Plan, a requirement of the grant. Staff seeks approval of the proposed members.

Board action is requested.

DISCUSSION

Brett said, the Planning Department has provided us with recommendations for the WalkWorks Committee. Young asked, why did you pick St. Luke's and not Lehigh Valley? Baird said, St. Luke's has a history of working with Bethlehem Township and other communities. Young asked to add the Chair of the Recreation Board. Baird said, this is a strategy for making residents and visitors more active in the township related to walking, biking, rolling, wheelchairs, etc. The Steering Committee represents all these entities and it is a requirement of the grant. We can stage these meetings at Planning Commission or Recreation Board meetings. Based on previous active transportation plans, we think we have a good group. Craig and I reached out to these folks and 99.9% are ready to roll. The Board agreed to the committee presented.

C. Villages at Wolf's Run Phase 3 - Hearing Continuance Request

INFORMATION

Tuskes Homes requests a continuance of the Villages at Wolf's Run Phase 3 Public Hearing scheduled for Monday, January 22nd. Tuskes seeks Board approval for Final Land Development of a residential development consisting of 140 units.

Board Action is Requested.

DISCUSSION

Oetinger said, if you remember at the last hearing the attorney for the applicant said their engineers had conflicts. It was agreed to reschedule to the February 26, 2024 meeting agenda.

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

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

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Jim Trenberth, 150 Jeremy Court, said I travel Van Buren Road every day and I wasn't crazy about the development of townhouses going in. There is a sign on the construction road that says something about Ryan Homes. What does Ryan Homes have to do with that Tuskes development? Is that legit that Ryan is building in the Tuskes Development?

Baird said, Ryan Homes has been buying some of the lots and finishing Phase 1 and 2. They visited with the township and we were aware some units would sell. The entire development did not sell, but individual lots did sell. Young said, if you remember in the past, Chrin sold off lots within their developments as well.

Williams said, Ryan Holmes came in and we fought them. They wanted a propane park; we said no. They wanted their own sales center; we said no. They wanted their own access road; we said no. They wanted their own signs; we said no. Every opportunity we could to keep their feet to the fire and keep them to the original plan, we did. We are doing everything we can to eliminate anything that is not by the approved plan. Armato said, Tuskes is also offering deals on closing costs. Young said, I think some of that is due to home sales dropping off.

Trenberth said, at the top of the hill at Corriere Road there is a sign in the yard with the house. Baird said, that is part of Wolf's Run, Phase 3. Trenberth asked, is that whole development a horseshoe around the Meilinger property? Baird said yes; they are pulling that property into their land development plan. Baird said, we can get you a copy of the plan if you like.

Colin Burke, 1415 Stones Crossing, said at one meeting someone wanted to donate properties by the Bushkill Creek. Half to us and half to Forks. Baird said, our Solicitor is working on it. Brett said, the Board supported accepting the property.

6. REPORTS

Supervisors

Bellis said, I get residents asking me about the Stormwater Authority. Can we get that in the newsletter and get the informing out to the people about it. Public Services Director, Phil Godbout, said there is information in the upcoming February newsletter.

Young asked Jamie Paetzell to pass on to the Public Works staff that they did an awesome job with the storm. I was sliding all over in Bethlehem Township. Young said, I am in full support of the new police department. We will figure out funding. Regarding grants, at Suburban we realized we were deep sixing our grant requests. Once you start it, it is easy to get it accelerated. Palmer is working it. It is awesome what is going on. Thank you.

Brett said, a lot of what we are doing is the foundation that was established from previous Boards. That allows us to take steps forward.

Armato said we have an exemplary team and I look forward to 2024.

Mitchell said, he echoes what everyone else said.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Adjourn, Moved by Supervisor Joseph Armato, Seconded by Supervisor Jeffrey Young. Passed. 5-0.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda DeGerolamo
Assistant Township Manager