

PALMER TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
January 22, 2024
7:00 PM
GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING

The Palmer Township Board of Supervisors held a general business meeting on Monday, January 22, 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, and Charles E. Bellis III. Supervisor Jeffrey Young was absent. Also in attendance were the Township Manager, Planning Director, Assistant Planning Director, Finance Director, Police Chief, Director Public Works/Parks/Utilities, Fire Commissioner, Director of Public Services, and the Assistant Township Manager.

1. PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

2. CONSENT CALENDAR

A. Approval of Minutes - January 16, 2024

INFORMATION

The Board needs to approve/disapprove the minutes of January 16, 2024.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell, Seconded by Charles Bellis III. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: Young

B. Disbursement of Funds - January 22, 2024

INFORMATION

The Board needs to approve/disapprove the Disbursement of Funds for January 22, 2024.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Supervisor Joseph Armato, Seconded by Charles Bellis III. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: 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

Williams said, we need a volunteer from the Board of Supervisors for the Pension Boards. Ann Marie Panella used to serve with Mike Mitchell. They meet twice a year and review two pension accounts for the police and non-uniform. Our next meeting is scheduled for this Thursday, January 25 at Noon. Armato said he can do it after this Thursday, but he can't make it this week.

Williams said, as you know, we have the new Stormwater Authority now up and running. I met the Chairman of PENNVEST today. They are a state financial organization that finances infrastructure improvements for municipalities throughout the Commonwealth. We talked with this Board previously about a new Police Station and I will get to that later on the agenda. The Allentown Police Station costed \$37 million. We don't believe ours will cost that much. A rough estimate, we believe we may need to go out for bonds for around \$20 million for our Police Station. We also need another \$4 million for two fire trucks we have on order. We can also apply for grants. We also have to catch up on our roads. We are 20 years behind on road repairs. This township went a lot of years without road improvements and we are now playing catchup.

Scott Kistler said, we had \$8 million through a previous bond and Liquid Fuels funds that got us half way through our project list. After COVID hit the pricing increased significantly and the money didn't cover as many projects as originally expected. Williams said, we now have a good \$10 to \$12 million we need for road repairs. That has us looking at a new bond issue. We don't want to extend ourselves too thin and hit our bond ceiling with the Stormwater Authority. They will have revenues of at least \$5 million a year and we also have a \$10 million grant for the Stormwater Authority. We don't want to mix stormwater financing with what we need for public safety items. Our three prong approach is, police, fire and EMS. When we get a new police station we will need additional staffing to follow.

Williams said, as you know, Mike Mitchell and Ann Marie Panella are members of the Stormwater Authority. I would like this Board to give endorsement that the staff strongly endorses PENNVEST for their funding mechanism. Currently the bond market is at 6 to 8%. Our Stormwater Authority is like a new teenager buying a car. They will need the townships endorsement for bonding. PENNVEST is currently at 1.7%. I'm asking for direction for Mike Mitchell to take back to the Authority. Williams said, the state will also matchup grants for the Stormwater Authority projects as well. When you do a bond issue you have all the money in the bank, and it gets cumbersome.

Mitchell added, depending on the size of the project, they could also forgive some funding as well. The Board was in favor of recommending the Authority use PENNVEST. Mitchell said he can go back to the Authority saying this Board supports using PENNVEST for stormwater funding.

Chief Smith said, since we are in the first weeks of 2024 I'd like to update you on our 35 officer department with our 2023 year end statistics. We were dispatched to 13,567 calls in 2023. That is an increase of 1,161 calls from 2022. Weapon calls went from 5 to 9; simple assault went from 18 to 21; burglaries went from 15 to 16; robberies went from 2 to 15; overdose non-deaths went from 9 to 3; overdose deaths went from 1 to 3; domestic disturbance calls went from 167 to 193; DUI calls 23 to 28; accident non-reportable from 666 to 672; accident reportables from 209 to 207; retail thefts from 74 to 95; adult arrests from 169 to 217; juvenile arrests went from 10 to 13; traffic citations from 1,229 to 1,160; and non-traffic arrests went from 55 to 68.

Brett asked how many Officers typically go to a scene. Chief said, that depends on the type of accident and traffic volume.

Williams said, great report Chief. Can you tell my why crime is increasing? Smith said, I can't answer that. Armato asked if you can tell me the average age. Smith said, I can provide that to you. Armato said he is interested in domestic violence and robberies. The demographics on those two categories. Bellis asked, with those stats can you see where your department needs more help. Smith said, sure. I'm inclined to look at detectives at this time. Bellis asked, what are the detectives involved in? Smith reviewed the type of incidents the detectives work on.

Gallagher said, I also have the Fire Department 2023 statistics. We had 825 total calls. That is 80 more than 2022. We had 902 CAD entries. CAD entries include dispatched incidents as well as phone call requests and Knox box responses. We provided mutual aid 138 times; we received mutual aid 28 times; we had 67 fire calls with 27 being building fires; there were 142 vehicle accidents; 36 EMS assist calls; 17 hazardous material responses; and 336 false alarms.

Gallagher went on to discuss National Fire Protection Association compliance requirements. Their requirement is 10 responders must respond within 10 minutes. He stated we are at 80%. We are one person away from meeting their compliance. We have 9 people getting there in the 10 minute timeframe. Brett asked if there is a penalty if we don't hit the target? Gallagher said, that is what insurance companies use at the standard. We go through inspections every year, and every year we are getting closer. Mitchell asked when the clock starts for the 10 minutes? Gallagher said, time of dispatch.

B. Villages at Wolf's Run Phase 3 - Final Subdivision Plan

INFORMATION

Solicitor Oetinger will announce for the record that the hearing is being continued to the February 26, 2024, Board of Supervisors meeting.

Wolfs Run Land, LLC, requests additional public hearing time for the Board of Supervisors to consider Final Subdivision Plan approval of Villages at Wolfs Run, Phase 3.

If approved, Phase 3 would consist of 139 attached townhouses and one (1) single

family residential dwelling.

Public hearings on this project were previously held on September 26, 2023 and October 24, 2023.

DISCUSSION

Oetinger said, we will go on the record to note the Board previously received a request from the applicant for a continuance request for Wolf's Run due to their witnesses not being able to make tonight. This will be the only notice provided that the hearing tonight is moved to the February 26, 2024 agenda.

Supervisor Bellis made a motion to close the record, Supervisor Mitchell seconded the motion.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Charles Bellis III, Seconded by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: Young

C. Approval of Compensation for Stormwater Authority Members

INFORMATION

This item was on the December 4 2023, Board's meeting agenda for approval. Solicitor Oetinger advised that Supervisors Mitchell and Panella should have abstained from the vote since they are both members of the Stormwater Authority. Therefore, another vote is requested tonight.

The township is proposing the following compensation for members of the Palmer Township Stormwater Authority:

- \$50 for attendance at Authority meetings
- \$25 for attendance at Authority committee meetings

Board action is requested.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Charles Bellis III, Seconded by Supervisor Michael Brett. Passed. 3-0.

Supervisors voting Ayes: Armato, Bellis III, Brett

Supervisors voting Abstain: Mitchell

Supervisors Absent: Young

D. Appointment to the Environmental Steering Committee (ESC)

INFORMATION

Supervisor Young and Armato met with Colin Burke and are recommending him to fill

a vacancy on the Environmental Steering Committee. The term will expire December 31, 2026.

DISCUSSION

Armato said, Colin met with Jeff Young and myself. Colin said he would like to get involved with the township and we agreed the ESC would be a good starting point. We are recommending he be appointed to the ESC.

Colin Burke introduced himself and said he's been a resident since 2002 and he would like to get more involved with the township. My kids are involved in Easton, they are involved in plays and soccer. I think It's a great place to call home for the next 20 or 30 years and I want to take initiative and get involved.

Bellis said that he met Colin during the election and I believe he has a good heart and that is key.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Supervisor Joseph Armato, Seconded by Charles Bellis III. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: Young

E. Palmer View Apartments - Extension Request

INFORMATION

Hilton Management, LLC requests an extension of time to complete deferred public improvements for the project known as Palmer View Apartments along Corriere Road. The requested extension of time is to August 31, 2024.

Township Staff, Carroll Engineering, and the Developer's Engineer are currently coordinating the project.

Board action is requested.

DISCUSSION

Baird said, the Board should remember past discussion on seeking deferrals for sidewalks, street trees, etc. We feel over the years approving those deferrals has left us without connectivity of sidewalks. This is the southern section of Corriere Road as it meets Van Buren. This is an extension request for that sidewalk. Our Solicitor has been in contact with the engineers and our engineer believes the August 31, 2024 date is doable.

Armato asked, why so long? Baird said, the timing of roadwork, trees, and being able to get it restored to full seed and full plantings. Mason said it is a big project. The sidewalk is 2,000 feet.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell, Seconded by Supervisor Michael Brett. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: Young

F. Northwood Farms Phase 4- Extension Request

INFORMATION

CMC Development Corporation previously received an extension of time until January 31, 2024 to complete all public improvements and enter into a Maintenance Agreement.

Carroll Engineering recommends entering the maintenance period, conditioned on landscaping approval from Gilmore Associates. In an email dated January 18, 2024, Gilmore Associates identifies outstanding items and does not recommend maintenance until those items are addressed and verified.

Township staff recommends an extension until February 29, 2024 to address all outstanding landscaping issues in Phase 4 and enter into a Maintenance Agreement.

Board action is requested.

DISCUSSION

Baird said, there was a bit of tree and landscaping work that was unsatisfactory to us. We hired an Arborist from our landscape and lighting consultant. With her, the Tuskes Arborist and Paige Strasko, they were able to complete 90% on tree work. Our engineer has gone out and confirmed other deliverables are in as well. Our Arborist, Valerie Liggett and Justin Stotlar can confirm some items are doable. We recommend instead of going into an extension in the winter months, going into the maintenance agreement contingent upon this work.

Oetinger said, we suggested we not provide them an extension. The amount of work outstanding is very minimal. An extension is almost meaningless for them to get into a maintenance period. There are things like removing sticks from the ground and straightening trees. I expect they will have everything done by our next meeting to be able to put them into a maintenance period.

Brett asked if action was needed tonight? Oetinger said, either no action or you can decline the extension request. Baird added, we are out there every other week with the arborists and engineers. It is not something we are letting slide by.

Supervisor Armato made a motion to deny the extension request, it was seconded by Supervisor Mitchell.

Motion: Deny, Moved by Supervisor Joseph Armato, Seconded by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: Young

G. Northwood Farms Phase 4 - Security Release #5

INFORMATION

CMC Development Corporation seeks Board approval of a security release for completed improvements associated with Northwood Farms Phase 4.

In a letter dated January 15, 2024, the Township Engineer confirmed the improvements are complete, with the exception of landscaping items, and recommends a security release of \$73,018.08 for completed public improvements.

Board action is requested.

DISCUSSION

Baird said, our engineers inspected the work and are recommending \$73,018.08 to be released. Supervisor Mitchell asked, how much remains? Township Engineer, Allen Mason said, nearly \$1 million.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell, Seconded by Charles Bellis III. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: Young

4. NEW BUSINESS

A. Annual Increase of Letters of Credit Resolution

INFORMATION

The Township Planning Department and Township Solicitor seek to standardize the annual allowable increase of funding held in developer security.

They request a resolution of the Board of Supervisors to authorize them to pursue the increase of any financial security held to secure ordinance-required improvements and adjustments to the costs of improvements and resulting financial security adjustments, consistent with the Township's authority under the Municipalities Planning Code.

Board Action is Requested.

DISCUSSION

Baird said, we've been working with our Solicitor to standardize our approach each year. Brett asked about the amount. Oetinger said, it is 10%. Oetinger said, there are a lot of outstanding projects we are holding security for. It is not feasible for them to request and increase for every project.

Williams said, we had a couple upside down projects where the public improvements

will cost more than we have in security. This is a great idea and the staff fully supports this. We need to hold the developers accountable.

Bellis asked, how many projects are outstanding that we haven't collected the 10% on? Baird said, probably a dozen. When I arrived there were an upward of 80 projects and we've worked to move into maintenance or the construction phase on many. There was no regular increase at all in the past. Bellis said, I appreciate you going after it.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Charles Bellis III, Seconded by Supervisor Joseph Armato. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: Young

B. Police Station Feasibility Study Request For Proposal Discussion

INFORMATION

Township staff is requesting authorization to advertise the Request for Proposal for a Feasibility Study for the new police station and authorizing an expenditure not to exceed \$12,000 for the study.

Board action is requested.

DISCUSSION

Godbout said, as a follow-up to our discussion last week, I wrote the proposal for a feasibility study and it is in your packet. It outlines our requirements. I assembled a short list of architects in our area code and it is open for you to ask questions at this time.

Brett asked if there are any kind of energy standards. Godbout said, at this stage, the report is to give us a plan to seek funding, where to put it, how big it should be, what do we need inside of it. Armato said, we need an ecofriendly building. Have you considered possible sites? Godbout said, part of this study is having a designer evaluate these proposals, speak to us, using metrics and tables that will help us narrow down that decision. Brett asked if there are specific sites. Williams said, the Solicitor is doing research now on the Weller Tract behind us to see what is allowed. We are considering the corners of Newburg Road and Route 248. We would like to look at five or six different site options. There are five acres up north that could be a candidate. For each location they will provide metrics with the pros and cons of each. Williams said, all sites will be considered. Talking with Phil and Tom, we expect the cost for the study to be between \$5,000 to \$10,000, but we probably shouldn't put a number on it.

Oetinger explained that legally it could fall under professional services. William said, we did entertain just going the professional services route, but if it morphs into a large project, we want to give every local firm an opportunity to have a conversation.

Armato said, we are at 22,000 residents now, how far out is this going? Godbout said, this is all about going forward. Bellis said, this is obviously in the infancy stages. Are we including the Chief in this loop? Williams said, there is a professional architect, that has set up weekly meetings with the Chief and his staff. Whoever we select will meet weekly with our police department and review their facility and statistics. We want it serviceable for at least 20 years.

Colin Burke, 1415 Stones Crossing, asked if the plans are dependent on where you put it. If it is on one side of the township, would you consider a subdivision or maybe refurbish the old station. Williams said, if we have a station up north we most certainly would have a substation in the south. Today we have a substation at fire house #2 on Freemansburg Avenue. Our patrols are also split up throughout the township. The five acres we talked about up north is clean and green. It is a nice corner with access to Route 33 and Van Buren Road, but it is too far north to cover the south. Our Police Chief is very aware of our response times.

Brett said, we are also looking at the current station at the municipal complex for the need of township staff training. Williams said, dependent where it is, our old police station could be cut in half. Half for physical training with a gym for township employees and firefighters to use and the other half for digital type classroom training. We have over 100 employees and we don't have a facility for training. Our existing Police Department has no basement.

Mitchell said, when you do this, make sure you have enough land to expand in the future. Brett said, after this first hurdle, then they will develop a plan for us.

Godbout said, he would recommend not including a price cap because then typically every proposal comes in at that amount.

Supervisor Bellis made a motion approving a police station feasibility study.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Charles Bellis III, Seconded by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: Young

C. 2024/2025 Gasoline/Diesel Bid Award

INFORMATION

Palmer Township requested bids for the 2024/2025 gasoline/diesel fuel bids. Bids were opened on Thursday January 18, 2024.

Board action is requested to award contracts to purchase gasoline and diesel fuel.

DISCUSSION

Godbout said, on December 27 and December 30, 2023, we advertised bids for gasoline and diesel fuel in the Express Times and through and through PennBid. On

January 18, 2024, we opened the bids publicly. We also contacted the Lehigh Valley Cooperative Purchasing Counsel to see if we could participate in their process. Sunoco was the lowest bidder for both fuel and diesel. This is the way we traditionally bid fuels in the township. We are ending our contract with Petroleum Traders. In the past, we locked in with two year fixed amounts. Right now we are at a relatively low, so a two year fixed is attractive. The decision is up to you.

Mitchell asked for our price now. Godbout said, \$2.15 for gasoline and \$2.78 for diesel. Williams said, we talked with staff and our new employees. Our old folks have done an adequate job, but we never really looked at PennBid before. Our new employees came in and suggested PennBid. Sunoco is \$0.23 a gallon less than Petroleum Traders. Williams said, we can lock in for two years at this rate. It is exciting to see the blend of our new talent. Godbout said, it should result in savings over \$32,000. Half is utilized by Suburban EMS. All diesel is used by the township.

Supervisor Bellis made a motion to award the fuel and diesel bids to Sunoco at the two year fixed rates; \$2.15 a gallon for gasoline and \$2.7865 for Diesel.

Adams said, Phil did check in with Jeff Young, the Executive Director of Suburban EMS since they buy 50% of the gasoline. Godbout said, Jeff was in support of a two year fixed rate to the lowest bidder.

Motion: Approve, Moved by Charles Bellis III, Seconded by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: Young

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ruthann Cardell, 379 Stones Crossing, said I wanted to make sure this Board is aware that Suburban EMS is still soliciting for their subscription plan. It is \$75 for a family and \$50 for an individual. I felt that when that quarter of a mill tax was set that this subscription fee should have went away. I don't know that the residents are aware of the tax and they are going to pay the subscription plan. Armato said, some are aware and I would encourage you to come back when Mr. Young is here. Brett said, you can reach out to Mr. Young. Bellis said, it may be one of those things that fell through the cracks. I don't think Suburban is trying to pull anything off. Maybe next year they will make do. Cardell said, I would agree if Jeff didn't sign the letter.

Cardell said she wanted to know the status of the Norma Street Sewer Project. Williams said, I'm happy to report we received a \$250,000 grant from the Commonwealth for the project. We asked for \$800,000. Kistler said, one requirement was that we couldn't begin until the grant was awarded. It was just awarded and Mr. Armato and Mr. Young should have received an email to sign the grant documents. Entech has been given the green light to move forward and we met with DEP. We are moving along from an engineering aspect. We expect mid-2025 to have a shovel in the ground.

Cardell said, this does affect me and I believe 23 other homes. At least half of us do not want it. We don't want to hook up to it when it comes by. At least 12 of us aren't going to hook up. We have two systems already on our property. There is a lot where the people just redid their systems in the last five years. We have sinkholes and I don't want digging in the area if we can avoid it. I wanted to let you know that and I think it is in your best interest to reach out to them. If you have 24 homes and 20 don't want to hook up, why are you doing it?

Kistler said this was discussed with you in the past and you were in favor when you were told you didn't need to hook up. This area was identified 18 years ago that there is a need for sewer service. The previous Director of Public Utilities didn't feel he wanted to move forward with the project. There have been numerous residents that had to spend to redo their systems. They shouldn't have had to if this system was in place. The infrastructure needs to be there for you when you need it. Cardell said yes, but I still didn't say I agree with it or wanted it. Some other people had a cistern. If you don't keep up maintenance you get into trouble and some of them didn't. Kistler said we can't force them to do that. Kistler said, what happens in 10 years when they need another system, then what? They are left with no option. Cardell said, we have to put up with all that construction and eventually in the future have to hook up to it. There should be a meeting with the 24 families it affects. Kistler said, there were surveys provided to all families. We received enough surveys back to meet DEP's requirements for the project. Kistler said, our intention is to make it better for all residents moving forward. There is sewer service all around your area and it makes sense to have this area with sewer service as well. Cardell said, I want the Board to know I don't want it and at least 12 others don't. Kistler said, we are 15 years late with this project and I apologize for that. Cardell asked if the options will be in writing. Kistler said, the township will have to put you on notification when it is available and should your system fail in the future, you would have to hookup. Cardell asked to see detailed drawings once approved.

Armato shared a story from when he lived in Stroudsburg in the 70's about this same subject. He said, to me, it is an investment in your property and it raises the value of your home.

6. REPORTS

Supervisors

Bellis thanked Bob Williams for setting up a meeting with Steve Gallagher and other members of the Fire Department. While waiting for our meeting to start the alarm went off. In less than one minute they were dressed and on the truck. Those guys are ready to roll and it was impressive to see.

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Motion: Adjourn, Moved by Supervisor Kendall Mitchell, Seconded by Supervisor Joseph Armato. Passed. 4-0.

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

Supervisors Absent: Young

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda DeGerolamo
Assistant Township Manager