

**Towamencin Township
Board of Supervisors
Work Session
October 14, 2020
7:30 PM**

Present:

H. Charles Wilson III, Chairman
Laura Smith, Vice Chairman
Daniel M. Littley, Jr., Treasurer
Richard Marino, Secretary
Daniel Bell, Asst. Treasurer/Asst. Secretary

Staff:

Robert A. Ford, Township Manager
Jack Dooley, Esq., Township Solicitor
Tom Zarko, Township Engineer
Niral Modi, IT Staff
Paul T. Dickinson, Chief of Police

Present Remotely:

Colleen Ehrle, Assistant to Township Manager
Brooke Neve, Finance Director/Assistant Township Manager

Absent:

Chairman Wilson called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM and led the assemblage in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Opening Comments

Chairman Wilson made the following announcements:

- Due to the COVID-19 Emergency, the meeting is being held via Zoom video communications. The public was invited to participate remotely and e-mail questions to info@towamencin.org prior to the meeting.
- The next two work shop sessions for the preparation of the 2021 Township Budget will be held on October 21st and November 4th, starting at 7:00 pm. Due to the continuing COVID Emergency restrictions, these meetings will be held via Zoom. The public will be able to view and hear the meeting live remotely. The proposed budget is tentatively scheduled for release on November 11th, with formal adoption on December 9th.
- This year we are “turkey-trotting” virtually. All registrants get a long-sleeve shirt, bib, and medal. The top winners in this year's categories also get a turkey and pie! All proceeds support the Towamencin Special Events Fund to continue providing free community

events. You may use the Turkey Trot Course, a course of your choosing, or a treadmill/stationary bike. Distances are 10 miles on a bike or 3.1 miles walking or running. Registration and additional details are available through the Township website.

Public Comments

Greg Opdyke asked: “What is the reason to sell TMA and is it wise to sell the only infrastructure in the community that generates revenue (roughly 2 million dollars annually) to the Township. How will the township make up that loss revenue long term?”

Chairman Wilson explained the Board of Supervisors only authorized the analysis of the sewer system. He noted several southeastern PA municipalities have had their sewer systems evaluated with the ever-increased federal and state regulations, and capital needs. Sometimes the sales of these systems can be tens of millions, which could improve the health of a municipality for decades. Mr. Wilson continued that the Board felt an obligation to the taxpayers to at least have the system evaluated to see what the benefits may be for a potential sale.

The sewer fund contributes approximately a \$1 million towards the Township’s overhead. The loss of this contribution will be accounted for in the evaluation. Mr. Wilson stressed the Township would not move forward with the sale if it does not make sense.

Matthew Hickman asked: What are the supervisors referring to as deferred maintenance on the sewer system, are the supervisors referring to the collections system or the sewer treatment plant?

Chairman Wilson responded that deferred maintenance was a term used by PFM in their presentation explaining a reason why a municipality may choose to consider selling their sewer system. Mr. Wilson our sewer system is well maintained thanks to TMA and Township staff.

What would be the projected sewer rate increase if the township were to keep the sewer system as well as the projected sewer rate increase if the township were to sell the sewer system?

Mr. Wilson replied that these answers are unknown at this point and would be a part of the analysis.

Erich Fromm asked: What plans does the board have for the money obtained from the sale of the wastewater treatment plant?

Chairman Wilson responded the Board has not discussed the possibilities, but often municipalities do the following: pay down debt, pension liabilities, fund capital projects, establish capital and operating reserves, and buy down future rate increases.

Approval of Minutes: September 23, 2020

On a motion by Supervisor Bell, seconded by Supervisor Littley, the Board approved the September 23, 2020 minutes.

Voting Yes: H. Charles Wilson, III, Laura Smith, Daniel M. Littley, Jr., Richard Marino, Daniel Bell

Voting No: N/A
Abstaining: N/A
Absent: N/A

Zoning, Subdivision and Land Development

Developer Request – Residential Development Welsh Road

In early March, Cornerstone Premier Homes requested to make an informal presentation at a future Board meeting regarding the development of properties on Welsh Road, between Orvilla Road and Forty Foot Road. The developer proposes a development of a quad style/design townhouse building with four units per building, with 16 total units. He claims that it meets or exceeds all zoning requirements for setbacks, building coverage, impervious coverage, off-street parking and buffering, but would need a Zoning Code text amendment for density calculation. The developer wishes to assess the Board's thoughts on possible zoning code amendments associated in pursuing this land development of 3.7 acres.

David J. Caracausa, developer and principle of Cornerstone Premier Homes, presented a review of his proposed development, including several renderings of the layout and buildings to the Board.

Supervisor Bell noted he lives in the development depicted behind the proposed land development, and asked if Mr. Caracausa had reached out to gauge the feedback of adjacent property owners. Mr. Caracausa replied he had not to date, but was waiting on feedback from the Board before meeting with residents.

Chairman Wilson praised the project's appearance, but noted his concern with the 50 percent increase in density, and how that would ultimately affect all properties of that district when applied. Mr. Caracausa noted there is an additional acre of open space generated by his plan and that he is sensitive to the buffering needed for the project. Supervisor Bell asked what is the impact with the current zoning density to his project. Mr. Caracausa replied he can not make his project work if the current density requirement remains.

Supervisor Marino raised the concern of the front elevation view from Welsh Road, which may reveal undesirable side views of some units and/or backyards. Mr. Caracausa acknowledged the point and noted the plan includes a berm and plantings on the frontage and he would consider shutter accents.

Supervisor Smith asked if the access road to the property would include three lanes, accounting for two exit lanes, one for left turns, one for right turns. Mr. Caracausa replied that it does not account for three lanes, but that there are only 16 units. Supervisor Littlely asked if emergency access was considered in developing the plan, emphasizing the need to accommodate a 34' rescue truck for emergencies. Mr. Caracausa responded that the plan does not account for emergency access currently, but said he would take a look to see if he could implement a horseshoe design extending the road way with two curb cuts along Welsh Road, rather than one egress/ingress road into the property.

Chairman Wilson recommended Mr. Caracausa meet with residents of the Grist Mill Community before seeking zoning changes and that staff should analyze the impact of other nearby tracks.

Township Engineer suggested staff could do a sketch plan review, including assessing surrounding parcel impacts. Mr. Caracausa noted his preference to meet with adjacent residents first before any sketch plan review.

Amazon – Extension Request for Conditional U&O

As a condition of the land development process, Amazon was required to improve portions of Gehman Road and Detwiler Road in order to accommodate increased truck traffic generated by its new facility. Amazon requested a temporary Certificate of Occupancy (“TCO”) to allow it to commence operations while addressing the roadway improvements – acquiring needed rights of way, etc. The approved TCO was given and was set to expire on December 31, 2019. Due to delays, and at the request of Amazon, the Board of Supervisors approved an extension until October 21, 2020. The required road improvements have not yet been installed and Amazon is now seeking a two-year extension of its TCO to expire October 31, 2022.

Darwin R. Beauvais, Esq, representing Amazon, provided a summary of the land development process. Meredith Ferleger, also representing Amazon, reviewed the status of outstanding land acquisitions and temporary construction easements. Ms. Ferleger stressed one property owner has not been cooperative to date and she was not optimistic with the prospect of resolving the associated right-of-ways easements.

Jeff DeZort, engineer of CESO, described an alternate truck-turning plan that may address the impasse with the one property owner. The draft plan was distributed to the Board. This alternative plan would tighten the curb radius for trucks making right turns from Detwiler Road onto Gehman Road.

Chairman Wilson emphasized the Board would like to see progress being made to the site and proposed the alternate traffic plan be reviewed by the Township Traffic Engineer and suggested a shorter 120-day extension. Supervisor Marino noted the Township wants to help Amazon accomplish the road improvements. Mr. Beauvais closed by noting they wish to comply with the Township’s requests and plan to do so transparently, and appreciated the opportunity to resolve the issues and will be back to present progress updates to the Board.

On a motion by Supervisor Littley, seconded by Supervisor Smith, the Board approved of a 120-day extension to the temporary certificate of occupancy and will have the Township Traffic Engineer review the alternate truck-turning plan for feasibility.

Voting Yes: H. Charles Wilson, III, Laura Smith, Daniel M. Littley, Jr., Richard Marino, Daniel Bell
Voting No: N/A
Abstaining: N/A
Absent: N/A

Old Business

Montgomery County Transportation Program (CTP) Grant Projects

At their September 23rd meeting, the Finance Committee recommended, and the Board approved, moving forward with certain traffic signal improvements that would be funded through a \$42,700 grant received from Montgomery County. The Township was also awarded a 2017 Green Light Go (GLG) Grant that was intended to be the match for the Montco CTP Grant. Subsequently, COVID-19 struck and the 2017 GLG Grant funding (approximately \$341,000) was pulled and is no longer available. The Montco CTP Grant of \$42,700 remains. The out of pocket cost to the Township was identified to be approximately \$3,150. The County recently sent updated guidance on the use of the County grant, which now requires an equal match to the grant amount of \$42,700. This County grant expires June 30, 2021. Plans are approved and construction is anticipated to take two to three months. Therefore, the latest construction could start is March 2021.

Township Manager Robert Ford noted that he recently received an update that the GLG grant may be restored by the state in June 2021. He suggested checking to see what the County's position is with extending their match deadline considering the GLG grant funding may be possibly reinstated for 2021, and moving this scope of work into the 2021 budget.

Chairman Wilson asked if the Township could look into moving forward with the preliminary work, and noted his concern if the project stalls due to the uncertainty of the GLG grant. Supervisor Smith added the Township should utilize their State Representatives to assist them in navigating this process so the Township can advance with these projects.

It was the consensus of the Board for Township staff to reach out with the County and PennDOT grant representatives to discuss logistics and deadlines for each grant. Staff will provide an update to the Board at a future meeting.

New Business

Parks Master Plan Update

The Township Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee has been working on a Master Plan update for all Township Parks. The draft plan was presented to the Committee earlier in the week by the Township's planning consultant, Peter Simone. Should the Board find the plan acceptable, it must be adopted by resolution at a subsequent Board meeting.

Mr. Simone presented an overview of the Master plan to the Board. The goal of the parks and trails evaluation is to create an action plan of recommendations for each park. The plan includes priority lists of Township projects where funds may be allocated and/or grants sought to implement. The plan included an updated parks and trails map of the Township, which will be a useful reference. Mr. Simone outlined the priorities of the Township parks and trails.

Park priorities include:

- two new basketball courts at Firehouse Park
- new amenities to Grist Mill Park, such as trails, a pavilion, playground and defined parking
- adult exercise equipment and shade for existing playground at Fischer's Park.

Trail priorities include:

- safe crossings off Sumneytown Pike, and Forty Foot Road/Route 63 and Bustard Road
- off road trail along PECO powerlines
- a prioritized connection to the Liberty Bell trail.

Joseph Meehan, Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Chairperson, noted he appreciated Mr. Simone's approach with the compilation of projects. The document is an account of all the Committee's aspirational goals. While the items all together are rather costly, the report is a useful guide to use for planning and referencing Township priorities. He added the plan update was money well spent.

Chairman Wilson also expressed the plan is a great work product to use for planning and grant applications, and recommended the Board should spend more time reviewing the document before a formal adoption is made.

Supervisor Smith suggested the Board bring the plan out to the parks to get a true feel for the recommendations. Ms. Smith compared the plan update to a wish-list guide for the Township. Supervisor Marino complimented Mr. Meehan and the Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee members for their work and feedback that went into the preparation, noting the document exceeded his expectations. Mr. Marino added the plan update is well thought out, and easy to read with the cost analysis. Supervisor Bell praised the document as well, appreciating its simplicity and ease of use, noting the plan can be used as a roadmap going forward.

Mr. Simone thanked the Board for their comments and the Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee members, especially Mr. Meehan, for their feedback and the direction provided through the process.

Proposed Eliza Talal Memorial Butterfly Garden

Residents made a request to the Open Space & Parks Advisory Committee to allow volunteers to construct a memorial butterfly garden in Fischer's Park for Eliza Talal, the young girl who tragically lost her life during the tropical storm Isaias in early August. The Committee unanimously endorsed the proposal and agreed that a garden focused on butterflies would not only be an appropriate memorial for Eliza, but would also reinforce the environmental benefits of establishing habitat for bees and other insects, as well as, butterflies.

Ms. Kelly Bertolazzi and her son, Andrew Bertolazzi, who noted his educational background is in civil and environmental engineering, presented two concept sketch plans for a butterfly garden memorial for Eliza.

Option 1 (\$14,400 estimate) – in the general area where Eliza was found, included:

- 657 sq ft clearing brush, gathering area, watch butterflies when in bloom
- 3 feet stone wall, crushed marbles, and two park benches

Option 2 (\$21,000 estimate) - off existing trail, included:

- 796 sq ft clearing a meadow, stone wall and 2 benches

- wood chips, dryer area, higher evaluation
- with less future maintenance anticipated

The additional cost considerations included land clearing and equipment cost per acre were noted, as well as, perpetual maintenance.

Chairman Wilson commended Kelly and Andrew Bertolazzi on the quality level and detail put into their presentation.

The Board expressed their support of the concept and the family. Supervisor Marino said it was a thoughtful and fitting memorial, stressing the dryer ground, option 2 makes the most sense. Supervisor Smith found the concept compelling and that it will go a long way to bring the community together. Chairman Wilson wanted to get a better understanding on the long-term maintenance plan, as the interest of volunteers may wane over time.

Supervisor Littley recommended they be mindful of the memorial location - the creek has a habit of overflowing in the proposed area, and there are wetlands that must be avoided as well. Mr. Littley suggested they get in touch with the Township's Public Works Director David Hillmantel to review the restricted wetlands areas and other possible maintenance concerns. Supervisor Bell agreed with Supervisor Littley's comments, stressing the importance to support and memorialize Eliza by beautifying the park. Supervisor Smith recommended a fundraising mechanism be put in place as a capital component for funding.

The Board again expressed their support for the memorial, noting they will assist the volunteer group work out the mechanics to get the memorial moving forward. Kelly and Andrew Bertolazzi thanked the Board for all their feedback.

2019 Audit Presentation

Dale Umbenhauer from Mallie LP, the Township's appointed auditor, provided a presentation overview of the Township's 2019 financial audit that was completed in accordance with the Pennsylvania Second Class Township Code. The Township's net position, changes of net position from 2018, general fund and government fund balances over the last five years were reviewed, along with a summary breakdown of the Township's government activities versus business activities.

Supervisor Bell asked if GASB-84 was already implemented despite the one-year delay. Mr. Umbenhauer noted that they were underway as the audit began, adding the effects were so minimal, they decided to continue with the audit.

Chairman Wilson asked to review the net position slide, specifically the depreciation and pension liability in net positions. He explained this included the depreciated and pension liabilities, which is why the totals may look different. Mr. Umbenhauer brought up the associated slide to reference, noting the 2019 loss included the changes of deferred outflows and inflows of the pension liabilities, and is not a true reflection of 2019 expenditures. The fund level statements provide the true expenditure figure for the year.

On a motion by Supervisor Littley, seconded by Supervisor Smith, the Board acknowledged the acceptance of the Township's Financial Audit for 2019.

Voting Yes: H. Charles Wilson, III, Laura Smith, Daniel M. Littley, Jr., Richard Marino, Daniel Bell
Voting No: N/A
Abstaining: N/A
Absent: N/A

Sump Pump Discharge Locations

The Public Works Committee and Code Enforcement staff have been discussing how to best resolve the issue of sump pumps on private property that have pipes running through the curb and discharging water on to the public street. This causes a safety hazard during freezing conditions. While such pipes are required to be removed when discovered during a "Use & Occupancy inspection prior to a sale of a house, it has been questioned whether to include such removals as part of the curb replacement program currently underway. An alternative suggested by the Public Works Committee is to defer the removal of the pipes, and for the Township to conduct a pilot test as to what is the best approach to diverting sump pump waters with the clay conditions found throughout the Township.

Supervisor Marino emphasized the goal is to provide a standard to property owners that offers guidance of their options when replacing curbs. The Board and staff discussed the issue and various scenarios. They agreed the sump pump discharges that pose a public safety issue need to be identified and should be prioritized. The Township Engineer has prepared sump pump discharge alternatives for the Public Works Committee to review at their next meeting.

Resident Jeff Papeika of 2075 Pheasant Hill Road asked if there was current guidance for sump pump discharging and if some owners would be grandfathered. Township Manager Robert Ford responded that the Public Work Committee is still working on a plan to provide options for residents. More information would be available in the next month or so for owners of the referenced addresses outlined in the presentation.

Authorization to Borrow for Towamencin Volunteer Fire Company Truck

The Finance Committee recently met with officers from the Towamencin Volunteer Fire Company to discuss their request for the Township to assist in acquiring a loan for the purchase of a fire truck. There would be a sizable interest savings should the Township obtain the loan through Delaware Valley Regional Finance Authority compared to what the Fire Company could obtain (fixed rate of 0.87% vs. 2%). The Fire Company has requested that the Township obtain a loan of \$300,000 towards the purchase of the fire truck. The debt service will be deducted by the Township from the Fire Company's monthly distribution.

On a motion by Supervisor Smith, seconded by Supervisor Littley, the Board approved the Fire Company's financing request for Township staff to secure a \$300,000 loan for the purchase of a fire truck.

Voting Yes: H. Charles Wilson, III, Laura Smith, Daniel M. Littley, Jr., Richard Marino, Daniel Bell
Voting No: N/A
Abstaining: N/A
Absent: N/A

Proposed Tree Planting – Perkiomen Watershed

The Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy submits grant applications each year to obtain trees for planting in various locations throughout the watershed. A location was identified, at the corner of Kriebel Road and Pheasant Hill Way, where such plantings would help the Township meet the required sediment and nutrient reductions for the Skippack Creek Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Plan and Pollution Reduction Plan (PRP), which were submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. The Conservancy will prepare the grant application for the planting in fall 2021. The PWC will plant approximately 100 trees at this location upon approval of the grant.

On a motion by Supervisor Littley, seconded by Supervisor Smith, the Board approved of this proposed tree planting site as part of the Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy's grant application.

Voting Yes: H. Charles Wilson, III, Laura Smith, Daniel M. Littley, Jr., Richard Marino, Daniel Bell
Voting No: N/A
Abstaining: N/A
Absent: N/A

Roadway Maintenance Program Proposal

The Public Works Committee has been researching the development of a more efficient road maintenance program to assess the condition of nearly 58 miles of Township-owned roads. The committee believes such a program is necessary to prioritize paving needs with limiting funding from the state. The Township Engineer implemented a free 5-mile trial within the Central Drive neighborhood using the proposed RoadBotics application. The Township Engineer can provide a report using the program's data, which could be implemented at a lump sum fee of \$15,000.

Mr. Zarko explained the nature of the RoadBotics application. It assesses the condition of the roads, analyzes the defects, noting the location and severity. After assessing, the data is analyzed, providing a road rating system to use for the prioritization of road repairs and paving projects. The application would be used to update the Public Works five-year capital plan.

Supervisor Bell asked if the RoadBotics application data coincided with Mr. Zarko's visual assessment of the sample road trial. Mr. Zarko responded that it was pretty close. Sometimes the program's assessment was a bit more critical and vice-versa. Mr. Zarko added that the application does seem to be more critical than the prior Public Works assessment criteria.

Chairman Wilson asked if this was something to implement now or next year. Supervisor Marino responded that the work should be done now to get ahead of the leave cover, as that affects the topography for assessing the road surface.

On a motion by Supervisor Smith, seconded by Supervisor Littley, the Board approved the \$15,000 proposal for engineering services in conjunction with the RoadBotics application.

Voting Yes: H. Charles Wilson, III, Laura Smith, Daniel M. Littley, Jr., Richard Marino, Daniel Bell
Voting No: N/A
Abstaining: N/A
Absent: N/A

Chairman Wilson added he would like to see a demo of the program. Mr. Zarko said he would provide something.

Resolution 20-49: 2020 PECO Green Region Application (Veterans Memorial Park)

Municipalities can receive grants of up to \$10,000 as part of PECO's Green Region Open Space Program. Applications are being accepted for the grants program, which is administered by Natural Lands Trust. The grants are designed to assist municipalities, recreational authorities and non-profits with their open space projects. The deadline for submitting applications is October 31st. This resolution authorizes an application submission of \$10,000 for preparation of a master plan for the proposed Veterans Memorial Park.

On a motion by Supervisor Bell, seconded by Supervisor Littley, the Board approved Resolution 20-49, 2020 PECO Green Region Application (Veterans Memorial Park).

Voting Yes: H. Charles Wilson, III, Laura Smith, Daniel M. Littley, Jr., Richard Marino, Daniel Bell
Voting No: N/A
Abstaining: N/A
Absent: N/A

There being no additional business, the meeting adjourned at 10:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Colleen Ehrle
Assistant to Township Manager