

#11-2021
WORK SESSION
June 1, 2021 – 6 p.m.

A virtual work session of the Whitpain Township Board of Supervisors was held on Tuesday, June 1, 2021 at 6 p.m. for the purpose of updating the public on several matters and reviewing the agenda of the June 15, 2021 Supervisors' meeting. Supervisors Michele Minnick, Kimberly J. Koch, Frederick R. Conner, Jeffrey Campolongo and Joyce Keller were present. Also in attendance were Township Solicitors Michael P. Clarke, Esq., and Alex M. Glassman, Esq., Township Manager Roman M. Pronczak, Assistant Township Manager David J. Mrochko, Township Engineer James E. Blanch, P.E., Police Chief Kenneth Lawson, Director of Code Enforcement Michael McAndrew, Finance Director Christine M. Bauman, Director of Public Works Thomas Farzetta, IT Director Nicole M. Leininger, and Parks and Recreation Director Kurt W. Baker. There were six attendees who joined the meeting.

IT Director Nicole Leininger gave an overview of the process for participants, then turned the meeting over to Chair Michele Minnick who asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. Chair Minnick began the work session with a roll call, then introduced Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Michael Richino for the Mission Moment.

Mr. Richino pointed out the unique challenges we continue to face in celebrating this year's Earth Day celebration. Normally, grade school children participate with drawings and poems which they submit to have considered. This year, all participating schools and grades submitted videos they created that were 30 seconds or less in length. The videos of all first-place winners were shown. Congratulations and thanks were offered to all who participated. Chair Minnick noted that in addition to being creative, they gave creative and sound advice.

Chair Minnick then turned the meeting over to Mr. Pronczak to discuss tonight's agenda and review the agenda for June 15th business meeting.

Mr. Pronczak began by sharing that Whitpain will received \$196,300 in grant funds from the Montco 2040 Implementation Grant Program to complete the PECO trail.

Mr. Pronczak continued with an update to the Board regarding a concern raised by a resident regarding notifications that were not sent for a subdivision application that was on the May 19th agenda. We were concerned because as a courtesy we try to notify residents so they are aware of potential development in their neighborhood. The good news is that notifications did go out, though some neighbors did not receive them for several reasons. We believe four residents did not receive notices, and 82% did. We looked into potential causes and how we develop lists. We use our Geographic Information System (GIS) which has a database of property owners in the Township that comes from the county. Unfortunately, because of Covid the database was not updated as frequently as usual. Neighbors who are relatively new property owners were not in the

updated records. Another complication is that some residents use a physical street address and have mailboxes in front of their properties and others use a post office box. When a post office box is closed, it does not automatically turn over to the new resident. There is the potential when a post office box is closed, the new resident would not be notified until the GIS database is updated. We discussed what can be done to learn and improve. If we take the GIS information and manually compare it to the county Board of Assessment website, we may be able to catch some of the recent transactions that are not yet updated in the GIS. Another matter that was brought up references text notifications through our website. This feature is new to our website after the upgrades. The function has been turned on and when someone signs up, they will receive a notification. Mr. Pronczak cautioned that when someone signs up for the Board of Supervisors' agenda or Planning Commission agenda, any time there is a new agenda they will receive a text message noting a new agenda has been posted. It does not notify residents of individual projects in their neighborhood. The subdivision in question was tabled to the June 15th meeting and any questions regarding it can be raised during the review of the agenda. Supervisor Conner asked if we are still posting properties. Mr. Pronczak responded that that is done only for zoning hearing applications and rezoning applications, not for land development or subdivision applications. We go beyond what many other municipalities do in sending notices. As we move forward, things should be better than in the past.

Mr. Pronczak stated that the next item was brought up by Supervisor Koch, a situation where the parapet on the Mt. Pleasant Avenue bridge was defaced. He explained that the bridge itself is not a Township bridge, but one owned by Montgomery County, but the Township owns the road on either side of it. When we saw what was painted on the bridge, Public Works Director Tom Farzetta contacted the county for permission to clean it up. Supervisor Koch thinks this might be an opportunity to work with Wissahickon High School and their arts program to look into potentially painting a mural on the bridge. We would need to add some type of protective coating in case additional graffiti is done to make cleanup easier. The County Commissioners seem receptive to this idea if we would like to pursue it. Supervisor Conner said this was brought up some time ago at a town hall meeting to create art in the area, though the residents were not interested in the then proposal. If we are going to do murals through a program, it should be across the Township, not only in West Ambler. Supervisor Campolongo asked what some of the reservations were, and if the content of the history of the area was the basis for the lack of reception to the idea. Supervisor Koch thinks we could reach out to the American Legion near the bridge to partner in sharing a theme for the bridge. Students would need to submit design ideas for approval. Chair Minnick added that community input is important and maybe we could reach out to the Philadelphia Mural Arts program to see how they handle murals that have been defaced.

Mr. Pronczak then discussed the potential Juneteenth celebration in West Ambler. He was hoping to have more details before this meeting and added that the Parks and Recreation and Police Departments will be working to assist in any way we can. As soon as additional details are received, Mr. Pronczak will send them. Supervisor Conner said

the coordinator is working with the Chief, the Boys & Girls Club and the American Legion about the celebration on Saturday, June 19th.

Mr. Pronczak followed with an update on the Broad Axe traffic calming project. We have been working with the community, with a series of public meetings including on-site. We installed temporary speed humps in three locations with temporary markings and signs to see what they look like, and are waiting to hear from the community representative to see if we will move forward. If this works well, we will follow the same procedure in several other communities.

Mr. Pronczak then asked Chief Lawson to give the Board an update on the Department's logo and patch. In talking with Supervisors Keller and Campolongo, members of the Emergency Services Committee, the discussion included that the Police logo, which is about 20 years old, is a bit different from the Township logo. The current Police logo was implemented during the Township's 300th Anniversary in 2001. The proposed logo is consistent with the Township's logo and will be used on everything including letterhead, Facebook, business cards, etc. The Police patch is a bit different, a traditional triangular shape for the uniform with Police in larger letters, and Whitpain Township below. The word "Police" should always be larger, so the public is able to identify the agency, followed by the name of the community. Supervisor Campolongo said he and Supervisor Keller agreed there was a lot to consider, including how the officers who wear the patch feel about it. That was the important consideration of both of them. Chair Minnick thanked everyone for their efforts.

The next discussion item is the Mermaid Request for Information that was in the Board packet. Mr. Pronczak explained that this is a slightly different process than for a request for proposal or an actual bid. The request for information is an opportunity to get information and input from parties who may potentially be interested in a public/private partnership. Mr. Pronczak noted that Supervisor Conner prepared the document with a few tweaks by the Solicitor and staff. Chair Minnick thanked Supervisor Conner for his work in preparing the document and for his guidance and expertise. It is a valuable tool to use going forward. Supervisor Keller asked if the process will be the same as a request for proposal. Mr. Pronczak responded that yes, we normally come up with a list of those who had previously submitted proposals, or who we think may be interested. It will also be posted on the website in case anyone else is interested. We are also looking into how this can be posted on PennBid. Supervisor Campolongo asked if there is anything that addresses conflicts of interest that an applicant might have. Mr. Pronczak responded that it will be part of this packet, and when the requests for proposal are prepared, that language will be strengthened. Supervisor Koch asked if the Township is aware of any interest, and Mr. Pronczak responded that letters of interest were submitted when word got out that we were purchasing Mermaid. Supervisor Koch asked if there is a statistic from the survey of how the community feels about this. While the information was not readily available during the meeting, Mr. Pronczak said it has been well received, and Parks and Recreation Director Kurt Baker will forward the information specific to Mermaid to the Board.

Mr. Pronczak continued with an update on Covid-19 as discussed with the Operations Committee. Three main items are public meetings, masking requirements and personnel, which will be discussed in executive session after this meeting. We have received good feedback on our present format of virtual meetings via Zoom, with meetings being convenient for residents and applicants to be able to participate. The ability to screen share allows for a better view than someone who sits in the back of the meeting room would have. In discussing the capacity of our meeting room which holds 152 people, current restrictions permit 50%, allowing 76 to attend. The two largest groups with attendance at meetings are the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission. With the Board and staff, there are 20 people without applicants or residents. The Planning Commission with seven members and three alternate members, along with staff, totals 15 people. The numbers have to be deducted from the permitted capacity, and if there is a controversial topic, we would not be able to accommodate the number of people who might be interested in attending. Mr. Pronczak confirmed with Mrs. Leininger today that with the Zoom format, we can accommodate up to 500 people. The Operations Committee thinks it is best to stay with this format through the summer and to reevaluate after Labor Day. Supervisor Conner asked about the outlook for video for live meetings. Mr. Pronczak explained there are options, one being to record the meeting and stream it the following day as we are presently doing. From what we are hearing from other municipalities, it isn't a good idea to move directly from virtual to live without a hybrid step in between. Hybrid would be the most complicated of the three options with setting up laptops and cameras, and then having people who are attending remotely to be able to display. We are in the process of acquiring equipment and will be ready to go once a decision is made to return to live meetings. Supervisor Conner would like to return to live meetings as soon as possible. Chair Minnick said there are concerns of some employees who are not comfortable being in close quarters that have to be considered, as everyone should feel comfortable in their workplace. We are very close. The plan is to evaluate over the summer in order to have a smooth transition from Zoom to recorded meetings. Mr. Pronczak also mentioned there are so many essential employees in our complex, that we want to minimize the risk of having a problem that could affect the various departments. There are new guidelines regarding masking, with no masks required for the fully vaccinated. Businesses have the ability to implement stricter guidelines, and there are additional guidelines for government entities, specifically to assure that non-vaccinated employees or visitors are wearing face protection. Sometimes it is hard to determine who is or is not vaccinated, and to avoid any confrontations, for the time being we are requiring masks for employees and visitors. The same applies for Township vehicles when there is more than one person. Reasonable accommodations will be made for medical reasons or otherwise to make sure we are doing the right thing. Following this meeting during executive session, we will discuss this more regarding personnel issues.

Mr. Pronczak noted that since being appointed to the Board at the Montgomery County Community College, Supervisor Koch has a conflict with the meeting schedule for our Human Relations Commission (HRC). Supervisor Keller expressed an interest in serving on the HRC in place of Supervisor Koch going forward.

Prior to reviewing the business agenda, Supervisor Conner commented that he and Supervisor Keller would like to update everyone regarding Dawesfield. There are several groups involved leading the efforts to preserve Dawesfield, working together to put together a viable plan. Supervisor Keller explained that the 22-acre parcel has much history, and a purchase and creation of a non-profit museum would be a gem for the Township. This is a wonderful opportunity for the Township, and it is exciting to have this possibility here. Chair Minnick thanked them for their efforts.

Mr. Pronczak continued with a review of the June 15th business agenda.

There will be a public hearing on Conditional Use Application #43-21 with Acts Retirement-Life Communities on Twin Silo Drive for a Porte Cochere. It is a small proposal to help keep people out of the elements that requires conditional use in that zoning district, and later in the agenda, they will be requesting a waiver from land development for the same project. The next item will have the Board considering enactment of Ordinance #389 to update the list of traffic signals in our code.

Mr. Pronczak then reviewed the Consent Agenda to include approval of the May 19th and June 1st minutes, the May Voucher List and the April Treasurer's Report, a resolution extending outdoor dining guidelines to September, extending Declarations of Emergency through the month of June, waiver of land development, a Joint Intermunicipal Agreement with Ambler Borough addressing treatment, costs and capacity allocations, award of contract for land planning services, approve an agreement to accept sanitary sewage into our system at 131 W. Township Line Road, and authorize submittal for a grant application for improvements at Walton Road and Stenton Avenue. The Board will also consider approval of subdivision plans for 190 Plymouth Road and 203-207 Mt. Pleasant Avenue. Mr. Pronczak gave a summary review of the Zoning Hearing Board cases scheduled for June 17th.

Mr. Mrochko gave an update on revenues. This year we will be receiving \$3 million in unanticipated revenues, including \$1.9 million from the American Rescue Plan Act, and \$1.09 million with the transfer of Arborcrest, which was sold by Spear Street Capital for \$225 million. The funds from the American Rescue Plan Act will be received through the state in two payments of \$950,000 each, and we have until December of 2024 to spend it, although with restrictions. With lost revenue and an increase in expenses due to Covid-19. We experienced losses in the Code Department because there was less activity, there were no Parks and Recreation programs, and decreases in revenue from the Manor House also contributed. We are permitted to invest the funds in water, sewer and broadband. We cannot use the funds to build a bridge or build roads, but we can use it for stormwater improvements and sanitary sewer improvements.

Mr. Mrochko continued by noting with the review of the 2021 Budget, we had anticipated the need to go to the bond market to pay the balance of Mermaid, which is a little over \$1 million. We propose to add the funds to the general fund and pay for water and sewer infrastructure. The funds from the real estate transfer will pay the balance of

the Mermaid property in the amount of \$1.47 million. The third bond issue in the amount of \$2.1 million can be delayed another year and will be earmarked for the Pulaski Drive Bridge Project, Fire Vehicles and Walkability Trails. We are able to move fire vehicles into this category since we removed the last Mermaid payment. Mr. Mrochko continued with a review of flow charts discussing fund balances and how they are affected by the influx. This was reviewed with the Finance Committee, and they approved the plan. There is no action required by the Board, though we will make an announcement at the next meeting noting the points described.

Chair Minnick commented that the windfall is welcomed news.

Mr. Pronczak continued by stating the meeting will end with public comment and any old or new business being discussed by the Board. There will be an executive session after this meeting to discuss personnel matters.

Chair Minnick reminded residents that June is Pride Month and a flag-raising ceremony will be held Monday, June 7th at 1:30 p.m. The ceremony is open to the public. Two of the County Commissioners will be in attendance, as well as the President of Montgomery County Community College. The public is welcome to attend.

Supervisor Keller added that this June is the second year of the Montgomery County Master Gardening Program, where all residents are encouraged to plant extra vegetables in their gardens and share the yield (and seeds) with local food banks for anyone one in need. Last year over 1,300 pounds of fresh produce went to food banks and this year's goal is 2,000 pounds.

With no further comments, Chair Minnick adjourned the meeting at 7:31 p.m., seconded by Supervisor Keller.

Respectfully submitted,


Roman M. Pronczak, P.E.
Township Manager