

#17-2021
WORK SESSION
September 9, 2021 – 6 p.m.

A hybrid work session of the Whitpain Township Board of Supervisors was held on Thursday, September 9, 2021 at 6 p.m. for the purpose of updating the public on several matters and reviewing the agenda of the September 21, 2021 Supervisors' meeting. In-person attendees included Supervisor Michele Minnick, along with Township Manager Roman M. Pronczak, P.E., Assistant Township Manager David J. Mrochko, Police Chief Kenneth Lawson, Solicitor Alexander M. Glassman, Esq. and IT Director Nicole Leininger. Remote attendees included Supervisors Frederick R. Conner, Jr., Jeffrey Campolongo, and Joyce Keller, Public Works Director Thomas Farzetta, Code Enforcement Officer Michael E. McAndrew, Finance Director Christine Bauman, Township Engineer James E. Blanch, P.E., Parks and Recreation Director Kurt W. Baker, HR Director Kathleen Yackin and Fire Marshal David M. Camarda. Supervisor Kimberly J. Koch was absent. There were three members of the public in-person and fifteen via Zoom.

Chair Minnick welcomed everyone and asked them to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Minnick then introduced Chief Lawson for tonight's Mission Moment. Chief Lawson opened the Mission Moment by noting civilian awards are presented at least once a year to people who assist the Police Department and/or community, with the recent past honoring those who jumped in to help after the Broad Axe plane crash and the individuals who assisted in preventing someone from jumping off the Route 202 bridge. This evening highlights the Ingrams of West Ambler. They were driving on Mt. Pleasant Avenue and saw a woman, seemingly in distress, near the railroad tracks. They stopped, and Mrs. Ingram engaged the woman in conversation while Mr. Ingram contacted the Police Department. Mrs. Ingram was able to use de-escalation techniques to calm the woman. After the woman walked away from the tracks and entered her car, Mr. Ingram gave the dispatcher a description of the car, and the responding officers were able to find her and get her to the hospital where she received the help she needed. She has since reunited with her family, and all turned out well. Chief Lawson thanked Tamica and Sean Ingram for bravely stepping up, it was huge. Chair Minnick read a commendation and presented one each to the Ingrams, thanking them for what they did. Chief Lawson also presented a Civilian Award to each of them.

Chair Minnick made several announcements:

- Wings 'N Wheels event of September 11th has been canceled due to the increase in COVID cases
- Centre Square Fire Company Fire Expo will be held October 1st on the grounds of the fire company from 6:30 to 9 PM with a rain date of October 2nd
- Ambler Whitpain Youth Football and Cheer Association – Trojan Day September 11th, 12:30 PM at Stony Creek Sports Park

Chair Minnick turned the meeting over to Mr. Pronczak for a review of the preliminary September 21st agenda.

Mr. Pronczak reviewed the business meeting agenda of September 21st which begins with the Board considering enactment of Ordinance No. 390, to add stop signs at the intersections of Valley Road, Laurence Drive and Doans Way, the Consent Agenda including approval of minutes, the August Voucher List, July Treasurer's Report, pass a Declaration of Emergency of September 2nd, release of escrow funds, request for a waiver at 652 DeKalb Pike (former Beachcomber property), authorization to sign a Pillar Agreement, and authorization to proceed with a groundwater investigation at Mermaid Lake.

The ordinance for stop signs adds stops at two intersections where confusion currently exists regarding which approach is required to stop. A review was completed, and recommendation made by the Traffic Task Force for the installation of the all-way stop signs.

Mr. Pronczak then explained the details of the proposal from Environmental Standards for Mermaid Lake and why additional testing is needed. Based on a preliminary investigation we wanted to focus on an area where there were underground storage tanks, and also evaluate the soils because of golf courses and the use of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides. Samples taken earlier in the year found evidence of arsenic and mercury in amounts exceeding residential standards. It is not uncommon to have these compounds on a golf course. In June, the Board authorized additional samplings to delineate boundaries where these materials exist. The samples that indicate mercury show good soils below, however, to rule out potential groundwater impacts, a 20-foot sampling of clean soil is needed and that could not be met because groundwater elevations are high in this area. Further monitoring wells will test 20-to-25 feet deep to rule out the need for remediation. The third part of the proposal is a preliminary risk assessment to see if the arsenic and mercury present an unacceptable risk to visitors. There is no risk with how the property is currently being used. A summary report will include remediation recommendations and the additional work will be authorized at the business meeting on September 21st. Chair Minnick called for any questions from the Board or the public. There were none.

Mr. Pronczak gave a brief review of Zoning Hearing Board case #2290-21 which is scheduled for September 23rd. It is a minor variance request to allow a 20' x 30' one-story addition to the side of a residence that will project into the rear yard of the property. At the time of the business meeting, the Board will have the Planning Commission recommendations for its review. Mr. Pronczak asked if anyone had questions. There were none and the review of the preliminary business meeting agenda was concluded.

Mr. Pronczak continued with discussions regarding the use of meeting rooms by outside organizations. When COVID hit, we discontinued allowing public meeting room use with only two exceptions: the Red Cross held an emergency blood drive early in the

crisis, and voting was permitted. The recommendation is to allow voting to continue. The Red Cross has moved having blood drives to the community college. Members of the Board concurred not to permit outside use of the meeting rooms at this time.

Mr. Pronczak asked Mr. Baker to give a brief update on the Steppingstones Project near Prophecy Creek Park. Mr. Baker began by noting that over the past few years we have been working with Wissahickon Trails (formerly known as the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association) to establish steppingstones at Prophecy Creek in the section that takes you to the northeast corner of the property. This section of the creek is on Watershed property and will connect from the Ridings on the eastern side of the Township across the creek to the Briar Hill Trail. The Township obtained the permits and Wissahickon Trails has been making efforts to raise money toward this project, raising \$10,000 to date. The bid for the project is \$25,000, and Wissahickon Trails is asking if the Township can support the other \$15,000. While we do not have that amount specifically allocated in our open space budget, we did install the new sign at the entrance to Prophecy Creek Park under the direction of Tom Farzetta substantially under budget. With approximately \$17,000 available, we would not have to look for funds to allocate to the steppingstones project. Once the project is under way, Mr. Baker will be working with the Solicitor and Wissahickon Trails to establish a maintenance agreement. Supervisor Conner is happy this will move forward in partnership with Wissahickon Trails. He added that the access to Briar Hill from Wissahickon Creek sustained much damage with the recent storms and asked what the plans are to repair the damage. Mr. Baker said he is presently not aware of the status of the work. This will be a vote by the Board at the meeting on September 21st.

Mr. Pronczak continued with the work session agenda discussing the potential creation of Blue Bell Springs Committee. Township elected officials and staff have informally met with state representatives and community members in the past, though it might be a good idea to formalize a committee to deal with issues related to this community. Vice-Chair Koch has volunteered to be on the new committee if it is created, and if this Board concurs with the need, he asked who might be interested. Supervisor Keller said she is interested, and thinks it is an excellent idea. It also gives committee members an opportunity to hear from the constituents. Supervisor Campolongo is also interested in participating, though he will defer to Supervisor Keller. He added that there might be a benefit to have a subcommittee for Blue Bell Country Club, and if that comes about, he is happy to serve on that subcommittee. Mr. Pronczak said there have been meetings with residents at Blue Bell Country Club, which have been good opportunities for updating residents about projects in the Township, and the residents also offer input about what they would like to see happen. Chair Minnick agrees with the creation of the Blue Bell Springs Committee, and with Vice-Chair Koch and Supervisor Keller as members. Supervisor Keller asked to be made aware of when meetings are held with other communities. It would help with learning about different matters. Mr. Pronczak said he is glad to set something up and notify the Supervisors, though the Board must be careful how many members attend so there is no problem with the Sunshine Laws. While there will be no deliberations, it is better to be cautious.

Mr. Pronczak followed with a brief discussion of closed captioning for our meetings. We previously discussed the Zoom capabilities, with Mrs. Leininger demonstrating how it would work. Because of some inaccuracies in translation, the Solicitor expressed some concern about potential problems with it becoming an official transcript. Mr. Mrochko is working with the Solicitor to iron out some of the concerns before making any recommendation to the Supervisors for implementation.

Mr. Pronczak then discussed requests for outdoor dining after September 11th. When COVID restrictions began, allowances were made for outdoor dining which currently expire on September 11th. With the recent rise in cases, we have received requests from Blue Bell Country Club and also Whitpain Tavern for leeway to extend outdoor dining. At Blue Bell Country Club, there are three events currently planned after September 11th, and only one event will have music for the first hour, and others are luncheon meetings with approximately 100 people. During previous discussions, the Board agreed to review requests on a case-by-case basis instead of extending beyond September 11th. Mr. Pronczak asked if the requests from Messrs. Hansen and Tronoski are acceptable to the Board, or if there is anything additional. Chair Minnick said she is okay with reviewing case-by-case, though it might be good for the business owners if we continue to allow outdoor dining for a bit longer. Supervisor Campolongo agreed, adding that any of the restaurants seeking a case-by-case review are aware of ordinances, especially for noise. Supervisor Conner agreed with his colleagues in taking no action now, though with the current resolution expiring on the 11th, there is a problem with the events between now and our next meeting. Solicitor Glassman said that the Board can extend the timeframe of the resolution at this advertised public meeting and ratify it at the business meeting on the September 21st.

A motion was made by Supervisor Conner, duly seconded by Supervisor Campolongo to allow outdoor dining until the end of this year. Supervisor Keller confirmed that this will be a blanket approval, instead of continuing with case-by-case reviews. Chair Minnick added that it should be passed with a caveat about significant snowfall and the use of tents. Supervisor Conner further noted that since we are not in post-corona environment yet and as we transition, the Board will be well-served to look at an outdoor dining ordinance and related requirements. Supervisor Keller agreed that the trend for outdoor dining is moving forward, as agreed by Chair Minnick. Chair Minnick called for public comment. Christine Steere said one of the requests from Blue Bell Country Club is for a fundraising event her organization is holding to support the Methacton Education Foundation. Mike from the Whitpain Tavern thanked the Board for its consideration of extended outdoor dining, noting that customers feel more comfortable outside, with no COVID anxiety. Pat Tronoski, owner of the Whitpain Tavern, also thanked the Board for its consideration. With no further comments, Chair Minnick called a roll-call vote to extend the deadline for outdoor dining to the end of the year. Supervisor Conner, aye; Supervisor Campolongo, aye; Supervisor Keller, aye and Chair Minnick also voted in favor. The motion carried.

Chair Minnick announced that prior to this meeting, the Board held an executive session to discuss matters of potential litigation.

Supervisor Campolongo thanked Tamica and Sean Ingram for their life-saving efforts. Mr. Pronczak thanked all staff members who were part of the EOC and for the storm recovery work that was the second of this year. Everyone stepped up. Chair Minnick also thanked everyone and agreed that we were fortunate with this storm in light of what Upper Dublin and Horsham experienced. There are many heartwarming stories of people helping people. If additional opportunities for donations or assistance are requested, something will be posted in the Wire. She thanked the Public Works and Police Departments for their assistance to our neighbors in Upper Dublin.

With no additional discussion, a motion was made by Supervisor Campolongo, and seconded by Supervisor Conner to adjourn the meeting at 6:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Roman M. Pronczak, P.E.
Township Manager

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