

September 27, 2023
Special Meeting of the Board
Community Center Update

A special meeting of the Whitpain Township Board of Supervisors was held at 7 PM Wednesday, September 27, 2023 in hybrid mode – in person and virtually via Zoom. Supervisors Scott M. Badami, Kimberly J. Koch, Jeffrey Campolongo and Joyce M. Keller were present. Also in attendance were Township Manager Roman M. Pronczak, P.E., Assistant Township Manager David J. Mrochko, Police Chief Kenneth Lawson, Finance Director Christine M. Bauman, IT Director Nicole M. Leininger, Parks and Recreation Director Michael J. Richino, and Recording Secretary Virginia Papale. There were 50 members of the public in attendance in person and remotely.

Chair Scott Badami welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the other Board members. He announced that we continue to use closed captioning for the recorded meetings, auto generated by Zoom, which makes occasional mistakes. The official written minutes will be approved by the Board at a future meeting. Chair Badami also noted that we welcome participation of public comments which are required to be made in person. Those wishing to speak should come to the podium and identify themselves, also confirming whether or not they are residents. He then asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. Prior to beginning the session, Chair Badami included one additional message noting the Community Festival will be held September 30th beginning at noon and ending with fireworks at 8:15 pm.

Chair Badami noted that the Township has been incredibly fortunate to have received a \$10 million donation to build a community center to include naming rights and acceptance of the donation by the end of 2022. The funds have been invested and to date, interest has topped \$200,000. The Township issued a request for proposal (RFP), and we received 21 responses. The firm of Phillips and Donovan was hired, and the architects are present this evening to hear your thoughts. Our challenge is to do our best and use the money responsibly. We have met with partner organizations to receive their input. Tonight, we hear from the public. Joe Phillips gave a summary of program development to include the size of the spaces needed and what should be included in public spaces, community spaces, gymnasium and fitness spaces to include a Phase I total of just under 58,000 sq. ft. with an anticipated construction cost of \$300-to-\$400 per sq. ft. The donation to the Township should be able to fund a building of approximately 30,000 sq. ft. When the design begins, each of the phases will have a cost estimate included. There are many requests that the committee will review and make decisions as to what should be included based on what will be beneficial to all Township residents. Additional requests in future phases could raise the total space requirement to 104,000 sq. ft.

If processes run smoothly, the approximate timeline will be one year for design and permitting, and 18 months for bidding and construction. Consideration is being given to two sites, one at the location of the dog park, and the other at Mermaid Lake.

Before opening up the meeting for public comment, Chair Badami offered guidelines, stating that it is not the intent of the Board to raise taxes with respect to the community center. We have a budget and want to stick to it. Second, we heard there are two possible sites. If anyone has an idea for another site, the Board would like to hear it. The two possible sites discussed are for properties the Township already owns. If someone suggests a site that the Township does not already own, acquisition costs have to be subtracted from the \$10 million. Chair Badami offered to discuss process questions after the meeting if anyone has them. This meeting is to hear community thoughts on location and design. Anyone is welcome to come to the microphone and give their name and resident status.

The following residents offered comments:

- Antonio Scalise continues to advocate for a community pool in the Township
- Mark Eberle is supportive of a community center, though he does not support using open space for it because it's a premium; he suggests the empty office space areas be considered as the infrastructure is already in place
- Clair Cubbin is concerned that if the dog park site is chosen, it will take away from the beauty of St. Helena's Church as well as add to an already congested area
- Len Gordon offered that the Plymouth Community Center has a fantastic design and asked if it might be used as a model, and also would like to see a community pool
- Sharon Weinberg believes a pool is needed; she likes the idea of the dog park site with its accessibility and a dog park move to the annex to Mermaid which is more private
- Vicky Hyczko suggests the dog park location, which already includes sports fields and walking tracts and will be more visible than in a residential area
- Judy Kane wants to advocate for the facility to concentrate on activities for residents 40+ years of age and agrees that open space should not be used for the facility; some of the donation dollars should be reserved for parks and trails connected to the current trails so people can walk to the facility; finally, regarding the pool, taxpayers paid for the Wissahickon High pool that was built five years ago and should be able to use it
- Mr. Rizanow said the building should shine, and Rt. 202 is visible and will draw people in; Mermaid is hidden; most use will be after-hours and the dog park seems to be the best area

- Mark Prince asked if there are different costs in different locations and added people who are dedicated to swimming are willing to pay
- David Doll said there is an expectation that the facility will fund itself in the long run; Plymouth is a beautiful facility that runs at a loss; there should be a traffic study or survey
 - Mr. Pronczak shared that McMahon will be making a presentation to the Board soon with the results of their study to evaluate traffic as we requested
- Mr. Doll additionally asked if there is a cost to relocate the dog park and if there is a timeline requirement for the groundbreaking; there is not
- Peter Lowry is a member of Plymouth to utilize the pool, paying \$500/year as a non-resident; there is no access for resident to the Wissahickon High pool; he stressed energy and environmental sustainability
- Mr. Scalise returned, again stressing the need for a community pool
- Bob Moore agrees the dog park is the better site for visibility; he asked when a final plan will be ready, and added pools can be profitable, and does not disagree with the logic of having a pool, though in a community center, it may be just a pool
- Eileen Stephenson asked what happens to Mermaid if it isn't chosen; she prefers the Mermaid site for its beauty
- Ms. Weinberg returned and believes seniors and stay-at-home parents would use the community center during the day; working adults would be using it in the evening and weekends; has consideration been given to after school programs with school buses dropping off children from elementary schools which could help bring in some money; she also suggested having cooking classes
- Mr. Rizanow returned and asked if the facility will have a flat roof to allow art classes to be held, as well as company picnics; it would offer additional room for activities as opposed to a pitched roof
- Susan Mudambi pointed out that we have to decide between a wish list and fiscal responsibility; she thought a basic idea would be shown tonight
- Sean O'Donnell, Pat Foley and Susan Bishop of WRA shared their list of needs to maintain WRAs programs and facilities for youth sports, with space being a priority
- Ms. Hyczko returned noted that the three phases with increased space per phase will require additional funding, and asked if that will come from increased taxes

Chair Badami said we are working with the donated funds, and the additional phases are aspirational at present. Vice-Chair Koch added that just as the Mermaid overall plan is projected at \$27 million over time, we have

aggressively applied for grants so the phases and steps can happen, and we seek public/private partnerships similar to what we have at the Manor House at Prophecy Creek. There were no additional comments.

Chair Badami thanked all for coming in as well as those who listened remotely. There is more to come which will be shared over the coming months.

The meeting ended at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Roman M. Pronczak, P.E.
Township Manager

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