

**WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP  
OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE MEETING  
AT THE WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP ADMINISTRATION BUILDING  
WEDNESDAY, JULY 24<sup>TH</sup> 2019**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**1. CALL TO ORDER – 7:01pm**

X BIDDLE   X INDELICATO

X KAUFMAN     LAMB   X LANE   X MOULTON

BOS LIAISON: STERLING X   NESTER      TOWNSHIP STAFF: BLOMSTROM X  
BENDER (MINUTES) X

**1. APPROVAL OF THE WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24<sup>TH</sup>, 2019 MEETING MINUTES**

- a. Hugh Moulton made a motion to approve the minutes from the April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 Meeting.
- b. Christopher Indelicato seconded the motion.
- c. The minutes were approved unanimously.

**2. OPEN SPACE FUNDING REPORT**

- a. The funding report was given to the Committee members in their packets.
- b. Nate Crittendon, Interim Finance Director, gave an overview of the report and went into detail about 2018 refinancing of the \$15,000,000 2009 notes, which were used to finance the purchase of the Sheep Tract at Erdenheim Farm and various capital projects unrelated to Open Space. The report indicates that \$3,900,000 in Open Space funds accumulated from EIT revenues were used to prepay a portion of the \$9,799,000 balance on the 2009 notes. As indicated on a schedule *entitled Debt Service-Payment Schedule by Fund Obligation - 7/23/2019*, most of this prepayment was initially applied to the General Fund portion of the debt. Upon further research, the prepayment was applied to the Open Space portion of the debt. The result is that the portion of the new 2018 bond attributable to the Open Space Fund drops substantially and the annual debt service burden on the Open Space Fund is reduced from \$527,110.97 to \$205,573.38. Committee praised Nate's work for its clarity and transparency.
- c. Nate suggested to the Committee that it increase the Open Space Fund maintenance reserve to one-quarter (25%) of the fund balance -- the maximum allowed amount for the Open Space Fund as it has not been increased since 2016. He added that while the money could still be used for acquisitions he suggested that the Committee should focus on maintenance, from a finance view, so it does not put a strain on the general fund. He also stated that in-house

expenses -- such as staff time spent on maintenance of properties acquired from the Open Space Fund -- are not included but could have been.

- d. Committee members questioned focusing on maintenance rather than acquisitions. Much land protected with Act 153 money is not owned by the Township and is maintained by others. Maintenance expenses from 2015 to date total \$80,063, as against a maintenance reserve balance of \$1,642,330. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the existing portfolio of preserved properties will put the general fund under strain.
- e. A discussion ensued about any possible drawbacks of not increasing the maintenance reserve, why it has not been increased since 2016, and why out of pocket costs such as the time of Public Works staff were not included. Also discussed was the Committee's concern that the Township had to be prepared to issue bonds if an opportunity for acquisition should arise for which the Open Space Funds were insufficient.
- f. The Committee thanked Nate for the detailed report and for attending the meeting. It was requested that the cumulative cash flow page show the debt so it shows both assets and liabilities.
- g. The Committee also requested that it be noted on financial reports that the Township can spend the maintenance reserve on open space acquisition at its discretion and that Act 153 allows, but does not require, a municipality to spend up to 25% of its EIT revenues on maintenance.
- h. Further, the Committee requested an explanation for the difference between three numbers allocating costs to the acquisition of the Sheep Tract:
  - (i) The cumulative cash flow as of 6/30 shows an expenditure of \$8,534,222
  - (ii) The pie chart as of 6/30 shows an expenditure of \$7,881,565.
  - (iii) 63% of the debt service on the 2009 Notes was paid by the Open Space Fund from 2009 to 2018. 63% of \$15,000,000 is \$9,450,000.

It is possible that bond issuance and real estate closing costs are responsible for these differences.

- i. Public Comment:
  - i. Eli Glick, Whitemarsh resident, asked questions regarding the Dixon Farm property, such as how much taxpayer money actually went to acquisition.
  - ii. Nate Crittendon stated that the report does not include everything and the chart only reflects property, and the report does not show how much taxpayer money was used.

- iii. Eli Glick asked if there was any downside to spending every dollar in the Open Space and maintenance funds and if it affects the bond rating or lending status. He added that there is always money coming in and it makes the Township look bad if it is holding back on going after properties.
  - iv. Nate Crittendon stated that the allure of the Township is that we have been able to manage money well. Building up reserves looks good if we acquire or “ease” land.
  - v. Linda Doll, Township resident, stated that the Maintenance Reserve was much larger than necessary – given the modest expenditure to dates – and should not be increased.
- j. Chris Lane made a motion to recommend to the Board of Supervisors that 25% of 2019 EIT collections be added to the Maintenance Reserve.
  - k. Chris Indelicato seconded the motion.
  - l. The motion passed 4-1 (Steve Kaufman was opposed).

### **3. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE – UPDATE MEMORANDUM**

- a. The Committee members received a copy of the Comprehensive Plan Update – current status drafted by Charlie Guttenplan, Director of Planning & Zoning.
- b. Chris Lane stated that the Planning Commission acknowledged that they received the OSC changes to the Comprehensive Plan at their meeting on Tuesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>. He stated that he and Steve Kaufman spoke to the Planning Commission and urged the Township to be more proactive in finding open space. Chris further suggested, when new development is inevitable, that the Township try to convince developers to not build as much by using Open Space Funds to purchase some portion of the property, or an easement on some portion.
- c. Steve Kaufman requested that the comments from the OSC regarding the Comprehensive Plan be posted online and Tom Blomstrom stated that he will make that request. *(After the meeting Chris Lane forwarded an electronic copy of the comments to Tom for that purpose.)*
- d. Public Comment:
  - i. Eli Glick stated that his concern about development is developers consider retention basins as open space. He added that it needs to be clear about what is open space – such as woodlands, as he believes the Township’s tree canopy is in disrepair. Steve Kaufman added to his statement saying that the developers of the Abolition Hall property characterized many of the retention basins as open space.

#### 4. DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AT MILITIA HILL AND STENTON AVE – CHRIS LANE – TABLED FROM APRIL MEETING

- a. Chris Lane stated that he saw a post on social media concerning the development on Militia Hill and Stenton Ave. He asked if the Committee would want to get involved and consider buying the property for open space.
- b. A discussion ensued about the parcel of land not being listed on the Open Space Plan as a priority, and that the property has been off and on the market for about 40 years. The Committee also discussed what the Township would do with the parcel of land as it is zoned as industrial and, having been used as a dump, may be a liability to the Township.
- c. Public Comment:
  - i. Eli Glick stated that he thinks it would be a mistake to not at least do a feasibility study on the property, as the Township needs to preserve more forested areas. He added that while there may be challenges, it is an opportunity to protect forested land.
- d. Hugh Moulton suggested that the Township could donate the land to Fort Washington State Park as it is adjacent to the Park and would expand their property by 23 acres.
- e. A discussion ensued about hiring an engineer or using the Township staff to conduct a feasibility study on the site and what the cost would be.
- f. Melissa Sterling added that she thinks there is nothing to lose about finding out more information, and the cost should not be significant.
- g. Public Comment:
  - i. Linda Doll, Whitmarsh resident stated that the developer said an office building would not make him money, and he wants to build housing on the site. She added this would be the perfect opportunity to acquire and protect open space.
  - ii. Pat Oelschlager, Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association, added that this property has been identified in the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association's report and the organization is interested in partnering with the Township. He added that he could talk to the organization about working with the Township to either have it donated to the State Park or to the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association's inventory.
- h. Chris Lane made a motion to request the Board of Supervisors to hire professional assistance in evaluating the property.
- i. Chris Indelicato seconded the motion.
- j. The motion passed unanimously.
- k. It was decided that Chris Lane will be sending a proposal/memo to Tom Blomstrom to pass on to the Township Manager and Board of Supervisors. *(This memo was sent to Tom on 8/8/19, which he forwarded to Rick Mellor on 8/12/19. A copy is attached to these minutes.)*

## 5. UPDATE ON CHESTER COUNTY REPORT "RETURN ON ENVIRONMENT" – BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACE STUDY – CHRIS LANE

- a. Chris Lane stated that he received this report from the Natural Lands Trust and that the Township and County could benefit from this information, as the logic applies to all Philadelphia suburbs. He added that while he is not asking the Township to do its own study, the Chester County report shows the health factors, property value increases, and other benefits of preserving open space -- which would be just as applicable to Whitemarsh Township.
- b. Tom Blomstrom stated that Montgomery County put together a similar study called "Trails, Parkland, and People 2015" that is currently on their website.
- c. Joan Biddle asked that the link to that study be placed on the Township Website and Tom Blomstrom stated he will put in the request to the Township Manager. *(After the meeting this request was approved, and Tom had links to both the Chester County report and the Montgomery County "Trails, Parkland, and People 2015" report added to the OSC's page on the Township website.)*

## 6. UPDATE ON HIGHLANDS

- a. Steve Kaufman stated that the resolution was sent to the Board of Supervisors.
- b. Tom Blomstrom added that the Committee should have the resolution in their packets. A copy was passed to Pat Oelschlager as well.
- c. Hugh Moulton gave a brief history on the site and stated that the Commonwealth and the Highlands have reached an informal agreement on splitting the 40 acres property into 2 parcels: 13 acres for historical preservation and 27 acres for conservation easement.
- d. Melissa Sterling stated that there was a meeting scheduled for Thursday, August 15<sup>th</sup> with Kate Harper, a local attorney who was contracted by the Highlands to facilitate this project. Melissa added that this was a precursor meeting and she was not aware of the agenda.
- e. Chris Lane inquired whether someone from the Open Space Committee should attend, and Melissa stated that she was only invited and not sure who else was invited.
- f. Hugh Moulton also requested that a work plan complete with timelines, action items, and who is performing each task be adopted at the meeting.
- g. The Committee confirmed that the Highlands is a spectacular piece of property and that it makes sense to use Open Space money to preserve it.
- h. Public Comment:
  - i. Pat Oelschlager, Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association, stated he was in attendance to collect information, as The Highlands has been identified by the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association as a property of interest to them. He said that it is located within a large block of open

space with potential for being protected, with emphasis on the area around the creek. He added he would be interested in presenting The Highlands/Sheaff Lane Corridor report at a future meeting.

- i. Tom Blomstrom stated he would send Pat the date of the January 2020 meeting for the presentation. *(After the meeting Tom followed-up with an e-mail to Pat with that date).*

## 7. PUBLIC COMMENT

- a. Linda Doll inquired about what lands the Open Space Committee were looking at to acquire or protect, and what the process was to finding out what parcels are candidates. Chris Lane responded that the Committee relies on the Township and the community to bring forward any potential properties. Chris Indelicato added that the Committee has requested a professional employed by the Township to seek opportunities for open space, and to approach property owners.
- b. Eli Glick stated that residents can help identify areas if it is promoted. He added that the Township should ask residents to suggest any sized parcel that could be open for development (derelict properties, etc.). Specifically he suggested the Township look at the Nolan property located at 505A Germantown Pike, Lafayette Hill as it would provide a good open space to connect Germantown Pike to the Westaway neighborhood.
  - i. Joan Biddle added that she was supportive of finding smaller parcels and asked if the Committee and Township could be more proactive in reaching out to developers, specifically the owner of 505A Germantown Pike property.
  - ii. Steve Kaufman added that the owner of the 505A Germantown Pike property has been around for a while and already has approvals in place to go ahead with building.
  - iii. Chris Indelicato made a motion to ask the Board of Supervisors and Township about approaching the owner about purchasing the property at 505A Germantown Pike.
  - iv. Chris Lane seconded.
  - v. The motion was passed unanimously. *(This request was included in the memo of 8/8/19, cited in 4. k above).*

## 8. BOARD COMMENTS

- a. To follow-up on Mr. Glick's suggestion, Chris Lane asked who to ask in the Township about soliciting suggestions from residents for open space possibilities, and who would manage the responses. Tom Blomstrom stated that he would need to discuss with the Township Manager.
- b. Melissa Sterling suggested that a page be added to the next "Whitemarsh Living" magazine, to connect the Open Space Committee and the public. She also

inquired about an e-mail account for the Open Space Committee. *(After the meeting Tom was successful in getting approval for a page in the Fall edition of "Whitemarsh Living" for this purpose. Text was drafted (copy attached to these minutes) for that page and sent to Tom on 8/12/19, and Tom will recommend a picture to accompany the text. Tom's e-mail address will be used to receive responses to this solicitation, with responders using the subject line "Open Space Suggestion" to help Tom collate those responses).*

- c. Public Comment:
  - i. Pat Oelschlager, Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association, stated that his organization oversees 600 acres and only has 3 employees. He added that they rely heavily on volunteers, and work to create engagement in the community. He asked if the Committee was looking for someone who does volunteer coordination or someone who does maintenance.
  - ii. Eli Glick stated that Township residents would welcome more parks and open space over townhouses.
- d. Steve Kaufman asked if Nate Crittendon could come back to the Committee to talk about whether there are discretionary funds and/or other funds available to hire a consultant. He stated that the Committee would like the full picture on the money available and asked if some staff or consultant time could be devoted to open space. Tom Blomstrom stated that he would ask Nate.
- e. Chris Lane asked Tom Blomstrom about the vacancy on the Open Space Committee.
- f. Tom Blomstrom stated that there is a procedure located on the Township website for people to fill out an application to be considered by the Board of Supervisors. *(After the meeting, at Chris Lane's request, Tom e-mailed Pat Oelschlager with a link to the Township's website where Pat could find the application form to be completed, in the event he was interested in filling the vacancy on the Open Space Committee.)*

## 9. ADJOURNMENT

- a. Motion: Hugh Moulton
- b. Seconded: Chris Lane
- c. Meeting adjourned at 9:02 PM.