

**WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP  
OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE MEETING  
VIRTUAL MEETING – ZOOM  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2021 AT 7:00 PM**

The Whitemarsh Township Open Space Committee Meeting was held on Wednesday, January 27, 2021 at 7:00 PM. The meeting was held virtually, via Zoom, due to COVID-19 pandemic.

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Joan Biddle, Chris Lane, Hugh Moulton, Steve Kaufman, Ed Shinn

**BOS LIAISON PRESENT:**

Laura Boyle Nester

**TWP. STAFF PRESENT:**

Tom Blomstrom (*P&R*), Kevin Barron (*Finance*), Mike Lannutti (*P&R – Minutes*)

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Kevin Horan (*Hope Lodge*), Kim Sheppard (*Whitemarsh Foundation*), Jim Mahoney (*W.F.*), Paul Meyer (*W.F.*), Steve Stulb (*Public*), Kristyn Vandegrift (*Public*), Sydelle Zove (*Public*), Debra Harris (*Public*)

**1. CALL TO ORDER – 7:00PM**

- a. The Whitemarsh Township Open Space Committee Meeting was called to order on Wednesday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021, at 7:05pm, by Steve Kaufman.

**2. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- a. **Reappointment of Steve Kaufman & Hugh Moulton to Open Space Committee**
  - i. Tom Blomstrom announced that Board of Supervisors have reappointed Steve Kaufman & Hugh Moulton to the Whitemarsh Township Open Space Committee. The positions carry 3-year terms and will expire on 12/31/2023.
- b. **Resignation of Chris Indelicato from Open Space Committee**
  - i. Tom Blomstrom announced that Chris Indelicato has submitted his resignation from the Open Space Committee, effective 12/31/2020.
- c. **Open Space Committee Vacancies**
  - i. Tom Blomstrom announced that there are currently two (2) vacant positions available on the Open Space Committee.
    1. Chris Lane asked Tom Blomstrom if he were aware of any individuals being considered for the vacant positions, and if so, if any of the potential applicants were present and would like to introduce themselves. Tom shared that he was uncertain of the answer, but that Laura Boyle Nester might be able to provide some answers once she is able to join the meeting.
      - (a) Following the unanimous approval of the October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Meeting Minutes (Agenda Item 4, below) the committee revisited this announcement, with Laura Boyle Nester now present.
      - (b) Laura Boyle Nester shared that the Board of Supervisors are aware of the vacant positions on the Open Space Committee and are reviewing their list of applicants. She also noted that any interested applicants are encouraged to participate in upcoming meetings to learn more about the committee, which is what members of the public, Steve Stulb & Kristyn Vandegrift, were doing this evening.

- (i) Steve Stulb & Kristyn Vandegrift introduced themselves to the Open Space Committee members and gave a brief synopsis of their backgrounds & experiences.

### **3. RE-ORGANIZATION**

#### **a. Open Space Committee Chair**

- i. Steve Kaufman was nominated for consideration by Chris Lane. No additional nominations were made. Chris Lane made a motion to elect Steve Kaufman as acting Chair of the Whitemarsh Township Open Space Committee, Hugh Moulton seconded.
- ii. Steve Kaufman recused himself from participating in the vote.
- iii. Steve Kaufman's election as Chair of the Whitemarsh Township Open Space Committee was approved, unanimously.

#### **b. Open Space Committee Vice-Chair**

- i. Chris Lane was nominated for consideration by Steve Kaufman. No additional nominations were made. Steve Kaufman made a motion to elect Chris Lane as acting Vice-Chair of the Whitemarsh Township Open Space Committee, Hugh Moulton seconded.
- ii. Chris Lane recused himself from participating in the vote.
- iii. Chris Lane's election as Vice-Chair of the Whitemarsh Township Open Space Committee was approved, unanimously.

### **4. APPROVAL OF THE WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28<sup>TH</sup>, 2020 MEETING MINUTES**

- a. Chris Lane made a motion to approve the minutes, Joan Biddle seconded. The October 28, 2020 minutes were approved, unanimously.

### **5. SCHEDULE OF MEETING DATES FOR 2021**

- a. January 27, 2021
- b. April 28, 2021
- c. July 28, 2021
- d. October 27, 2021

### **6. UPDATED 2021 OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE CONTACT LIST**

- a. The Updated 2021 Open Space Committee Contact List is included in the meeting agenda packet, as submitted.

### **7. OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE – POWERS AND DUTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE TOWNSHIP CODE**

- a. Steve Kaufman encouraged meeting participants to read & review the Powers & Duties in Accordance with the Township Code document, which is included in the meeting agenda packet, as submitted.

### **8. OPEN SPACE FUND (OSF) REPORT – Kevin Barron, Director of Finance**

- a. Tom Blomstrom introduced Kevin Barron, the new Director of Finance for Whitemarsh Township, to the Open Space Committee. Following Tom's introduction, Kevin shared some additional details regarding his professional background and experience.
- b. Kevin Barron reviewed the most recent Open Space Fund (OSF) Report, with the committee. Throughout his presentation, the applicable OSF Report pages were made available via screen sharing. The OSF Report is included in the meeting agenda packet, as submitted.
- c. Steve Kaufman asked Kevin if he was aware of what caused the increase to the Debt Service Expenditure figure, for the year 2020. Steve shared that he believed Debt Service Expenditures to be a "fixed" figure, barring any miscellaneous expenses. Kevin shared that, because he has only been in his current position with the Township for approximately 1-month, he was unsure of what exactly

caused the noted increase. Kevin stated that he would investigate Steve's inquiry and pass any relevant findings on to Tom Blomstrom, so he can share with the committee.

- d. Chris Lane asked Kevin when the Highlands Mansion & Gardens transaction would be reflected in the Township's financials, and if it would be one large transaction or be split into multiple smaller ones? Neither Kevin nor Laura Boyle Nester had an answer to Chris' question.
- e. Discussion surrounding the current format of the OSF Report took place. Kevin stated that he intends on updating the OSF Report format, to make it easier to view and understand in the future.
- f. Steve Kaufman asked Kevin to review the "Proposed Request to the Board of Supervisors Regarding Township's Capacity to Borrow Against Act 153 Revenues – Draft from Three Person Committee" document, which is included in the meeting agenda packet, as submitted. He specifically noted the questions outlined in the document and asked Kevin for his feedback to them.
  - i. Tom Blomstrom noted that Kevin may not yet be familiar with the document, due to the timing of his hiring. Tom will send a copy of the document to Kevin for review, and then they will follow up with Steve Kaufman regarding his inquiry.

#### **9. WHITEMARSH FOUNDATION – ACT 153 GRANT REQUEST – Kim Sheppard & Paul Meyer**

- a. Hugh Moulton recused himself from any participation relating to this agenda item, as he is a member and officer of the Whitemarsh Foundation Board.
- b. Kim Sheppard, President of the Whitemarsh Foundation, started by introducing herself to the committee and thanking them for allowing her to present the proposal on behalf of the Whitemarsh Foundation. Kim also introduced the Vice-Chair of the Whitemarsh Foundation Board of Directors, Paul Meyer, to the committee. Kim's presentation was accompanied by a Power Point slideshow, which was made available during the meeting via screen sharing. The Whitemarsh Foundation presentation is included in the meeting agenda packet, as submitted.
- c. Kim Sheppard gave an overview of Whitemarsh Foundation's history, including a look back on the development of the 14-acre nature preserve known as the Dixon Meadow Preserve & Boardwalk. The Township supported its acquisition with Act 153 funds.
- d. On behalf of the Whitemarsh Foundation, Kim Sheppard proposed a request for support from Whitemarsh Township. Specifically, the Whitemarsh Foundation requested that the Township provide funding from Act 153, to help subsidize (50%) annual maintenance expenses associated with the Dixon Meadow Preserve. The funding requested of the Township totals \$37,000.00.
  - i. Kim elaborated that, as part of this request, the Whitemarsh Foundation would agree to underwrite the replacement of the railing-spindles throughout the boardwalk, as well as the installation of additional support for the boardwalk throughout the preserve, as needed. The Whitemarsh Foundation estimates their required contribution to be approximately \$100,000.00.
- e. Ed Shinn asked Kim Sheppard if the boardwalk is handicap accessible. Kim shared that not only is the boardwalk ADA compliant, but that the entire Dixon Meadow Preserve, including the Dixon Meadow House, is ADA compliant.
- f. Paul Meyer shared an overview of the natural benefits that the Dixon Meadow Preserve provides to the local & regional ecosystem. Paul continued by sharing some insights to the natural flora & fauna found in the Preserve and the steps the Foundation is taking to maintain & improve their natural habitat.
- g. Chris Lane asked Kim Sheppard about the Township's current role in maintaining the Dixon Meadow Preserve, and if the Foundation felt the support has been adequate. Kim explained that, per the contractual agreement between the Whitemarsh Foundation and the Township, the Township's Public Works Department maintains the Preserve's boardwalk and trail system. In instances where maintenance is required, the Foundation notifies the Township so the issue can be addressed. Kim shared that in certain instances, specifically those relating to the maintenance of the macadam trail, the Foundation has noted inefficiencies in the overall process and inconsistent results. She continued, explaining that the Whitemarsh Foundation believes that the decision to utilize a

contracted 3<sup>rd</sup>-party vendor for trail maintenance twice-per-year, instead of the Township's Public Works Department, would be a mutually beneficial one.

- h. Chris Lane asked if the Whitemarsh Foundation anticipates this to be an annual request. Kim Sheppard explained that while this specific request was designed to be an introduction to the idea and only require 1-year commitment, the Whitemarsh Foundation is hopeful that a successful trial this year could result in an annual partnership moving forward.
- i. Steve Kaufman shared his support for Whitemarsh Foundation's request, with the committee.
- j. Steve Kaufman suggested that the Open Space Committee consider developing criteria for reviewing requests for maintenance funding from outside organizations, at a later meeting.
- k. Steve Kaufman asked Paul Meyer to share some information about the Preserve's ongoing planting program with the committee. Paul gave a brief overview of a few of the planting projects that the Foundation is working on at the Preserve.
- l. Laura Boyle Nester asked Kim Sheppard if the Foundation would also be presenting this proposal to the Township's Environmental Advisory Board. Kim Sheppard shared that the Foundation was given guidance to go before the Open Space Committee first, then the Environmental Advisory Board, before finally presenting the proposal to the Board of Supervisors.
- m. Chris Lane made a motion to recommend Whitemarsh Foundation's Act 153 Funding Request Proposal to the Board of Supervisors, Ed Shinn seconded. The Whitemarsh Foundation Act 153 Funding Request Proposal was approved, unanimously.

#### **10. OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS**

- a. Notice to Real Estate Advisors and Landowners
  - i. Tom Blomstrom shared that the Open Space Committee has submitted a draft of the notice, as well as the criteria attachment, to the Board of Supervisors for their review.
  - ii. Chris Lane announced that he, Ed Shinn, and Joan Biddle met with members of the Wissahickon Trails organization, to discuss the outreach that the committee has been working towards. Wissahickon Trails expressed interest in a collaborative effort for the outreach, noting that they have already established relationships with some of the property owners in the area.
    - 1. As a result of the meeting, the sub-committee requested that the draft notice and criteria attachment that was submitted to the Board of Supervisors for review, also be sent to Wissahickon Trails for review. Joan Biddle noted that the two groups will then need to formulate a memo of understanding, which outlines the restrictions & requirements of both organizations. It was stated the Ed Shinn would work on drafting a Memo of Understanding for this opportunity.
    - 2. Through their discussion, the committee redefined the planned order of operations regarding this action. They clarified that once the Memo of Understanding has been drafted, it will be sent to Wissahickon Trails, along with the drafted Notice to Real Estate Advisors and Landowners, for review. Wissahickon Trails will then submit their updated drafts to the Open Space Committee for approval, before finally being passed on to the Township Board of Supervisors for consideration.
    - 3. Ed Shinn noted that any agreements should be reviewed by the Township Solicitor, to ensure there are no issues regarding the Right-to-Know law.
  - iii. Steve Kaufman inquired about the number of committee members allowed to participate as part of a sub-committee, without being in violation of the Sunshine Law.
    - 4. Tom Blomstrom stated that he would look into this inquiry and follow up with the committee, accordingly.

#### **11. UPDATE ON HIGHLANDS MANSION – Hugh Moulton**

- a. It was determined that the Highlands Mansion Update had already been discussed during the Open Space Fund Report (agenda item 9) portion of the meeting, and that additional discussion was not necessary at this time.

## **12. DISCUSSION ON MATHER MILL PROPERTY – Steve Kaufman**

- a. Ed Shinn recused himself from any participation relating to this agenda item.
- b. Steve Kaufman introduced the Mather Mill property, which is currently owned by the Pennsylvania Museum Historical Commission (PMHC). During his introduction, a couple of maps and several other pictures of the property were made available during the meeting, via screen sharing. The maps and pictures shared are included in the meeting agenda packet, as submitted.
- c. Steve Kaufman shared that the PMHC is currently seeking expressions of interest in purchasing the property. He noted that the property is a former mill, located on Skippack Pike, just below where it crosses the Wissahickon Creek. Since most, if not all, of the property is located in a floodplain, it is not likely to be subdivided and developed.
- d. After some general discussion surrounding the property, the committee did not feel any further action was warranted at the time.

## **13. REPORT ON MIQUON AREA PRESERVATION SOCIETY (MAPS) – Steve Kaufman**

- a. Steve Kaufman presented a proposal where the Township would work with Natural Lands Trust (NLT), to preserve easements on five contiguous small parcels of land in the Miquon Area. As part of the proposal, Natural Lands would take over control of the easements from the Miquon Area Preservation Society (MAPS), which will be dissolving. The transaction costs will total at least \$46,000, of which MAPS will cover \$22,500. It is asking the Township to provide a \$22,500 match, with excess costs to be covered by the MAPS membership.
- a. After discussing various elements of the easement, Hugh Moulton asked if the transaction would qualify for the use of Act 153 Funds, or if general funds would be needed. Steve Kaufman noted that NL has stated that if the Township is given the right to enforce the easement upon NL's failure to do so, the transaction will qualify for Act 153 funds. He would contact NL to inquire about the agreement and see if they were able to provide any documentation that would help clarify the situation. The Open Space Committee shared their interest in working with NL and MAPS on this transaction but noted that additional information about the proposed agreement is needed before making a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.
- b. Chris Lane made a motion to include this item on the April meeting agenda for the Open Space Committee, Ed Shinn seconded. The motion to include the item on the April agenda was approved, unanimously.

## **14. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

- a. Member of the community, Debra Harris, was present for the meeting and provided comments. Debra shared that she would love if the Township were able to provide more linkages between Township assets, like the Dixon Meadow Preserve and Whitemarsh Elementary School. Laura Boyle Nester noted that future Cross-County Trail portions would provide additional linkages throughout the Township but understood that the trail will be in a different area than the one she specifically noted.

## **15. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

- a. Hugh Moulton commented that he would like to thank Laura, Tom, and the Township for their support in the preservation of open space. He acknowledged the leadership that they have provided, and their importance to the success of the Township.

**16. ADJOURNMENT**

Chris Lane made a motion to adjourn, Joan Biddle seconded. The meeting was adjourned unanimously at 9:22pm.