

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
JOINT MEETING
APRIL 19, 2012

The Board of Supervisors of Upper Merion Township met for a Joint Meeting on Thursday, April 19, 2012, in the Board Room, in the Township Building in King of Prussia. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m., followed by a pledge to the flag.

CHAIRPERSON'S COMMENTS:

Chairperson Spott announced a number of Township meetings and events.

VICE CHAIRPERSON'S COMMENTS:

Vice Chairperson Waks reported on a volunteer clean-up event at 431 West Valley Forge Road during which a significant amount of trash and invasive vines were removed. The area still requires a significant amount of work and he encouraged additional volunteers to contact the Park and Recreation Office and join in at the next clean up date.

DISCUSSIONS:

PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

ROLL CALL:

Supervisors present were: Greg Waks, Erika Spott, Carole Kenney, and Greg Philips. Also present were: Ron Wagenmann, Township Manager; Dan Russell, Park and Recreation Director; John M. Tallman, Jr., Chairperson, Park and Recreation Board; David Burns, Vice Chairperson; Mary Ann Ahearn, Secretary; Eileen C. Connelly, Barbara J. Schafer, Neil Sardinas, Michael Trachtenberg. Supervisor Jenaway was absent.

Mr. John M. Tallman, Jr., Chairperson, discussed trails and connections and reported the township received a state grant to design and construct a new connection between Heuser Park and Valley Forge National Historical Park.

Mr. Tallman noted the heavy field use at Heuser Park and the difference it will make with additional fields. He indicated how much impact that will have on the overall picture relates to his next point about a master plan for the park system.

Mr. Tallman stated it has been approximately 12 years since the township last developed a master plan for the park system. Master plans are usually done every ten years. The Park and Recreation Board is interested in taking a look at

the changes in demographics in Upper Merion Township and how they will affect Park use. The master plan needs early consideration to make sure the right number of fields are available. The fields at Heuser are in almost constant use during the day and sometimes at night.

Ms. Eileen Connelly reported on a fundraiser for adaptive equipment for the playground at Heuser Park. It is acceptable for children with special needs. She also commented on the success of the Outer Limits Program.

Ms. Mary Ann Ahearn discussed the revival of the use of goats to control invasive vines. The Park and Recreation Board has secured the help of Yvonne Post, a horticulturist, who is an expert in this field and she has accepted an invitation to provide a presentation to the Board of Supervisors. Ms. Post has been involved in managing weed control in Philadelphia parks. She is eager to work with the Park and Recreation Board as another data point in her study. Bob White Park has been selected as the study site since it has a significant weed problem. Ms. Ahearn explained goats are nervous, prey animals and need time to get accustomed to an area before they eat.

Ms. Ahearn asked for the Board of Supervisors support in getting the community "on board" since this method of weed control is being done in many communities around the country and it is a very green solution.

Mrs. Spott noted Ms. Post is already scheduled to make a presentation to the Board at the May 17th business meeting. She commented the harmful chemicals are not necessarily needed when approaches such as this are available for weed control. Mrs. Spott noted there will be no cost to the township since this will be part of the study. She indicated those living in the area of Bob White Park will be advised of what is going on, and it is anticipated there will be a good launch of this program.

Mr. Waks asked for information on how interested citizens can make contributions. A member of the Park and Recreation Board responded a check could be made out to the township to be used to buy more adaptive equipment for autistic children.

Mrs. Spott recommended the check be made payable to the Upper Merion Township Foundation since it is a 501(c)(3) and as such tax deductible.

Mr. Philips asked if the Park and Recreation Board would be willing to work on the master plan with the Shade Tree and Beautification Commission. Mr. Tallman gave an enthusiastic response in the affirmative.

Mr. Waks addressed the master plan and said it is a much needed blueprint for the future, particularly when considering the demographics of Upper Merion Township.

Mr. Waks discussed field turf as another aspect of the master plan and

whether the costs of field turf could be addressed and the difference between safety of field turf and natural grass. He noted field turf is completely different from artificial turf. Mr. Tallman responded this is something which has been discussed within the Park and Recreation Board; however, the economic reality of the last few years kept it off the table. He stated the master plan will cover the next ten years, and he can guarantee it [field use/turf] would be addressed.

Mr. Waks asked how the long term expenses currently compare to field turf and natural grass when considering field maintenance. Mr. Russell responded studies vary with regard to field turf as compared to natural grass. They show a payback of five to six years. Field turf and imbedded turf still require some maintenance, but the advantage of field turf is that it could be used at any time, even after plowing a foot of snow. There is also an ability to generate revenue from field turf as other municipalities and school districts have done. Recent studies indicate fields are lasting anywhere between ten and twelve years.

Following up on previous comments, Mr. Waks noted the field turf being discussed involves a larger initial outlay of funds and far lower on the long term scale than grass in the future where there is the constant amount of expense year after year.

Mr. Russell expressed appreciation to the members of the Park and Recreation Board who are volunteers and have devoted many hours and years of service to the community. He pointed out that every month, separate from meetings, each board member is assigned a park to go on site, evaluate and report back to the staff on items that need to be addressed.

Mr. Russell thanked the Board of Supervisors for their support and understanding of the importance of parks and recreation and open space as it relates to communities. He reminded the group the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) recently completed a study on the economic value of parks and open space and how it impacts taxpayers. This study can be found on the DVRPC website.

Mr. Russell mentioned some of the exciting programs planned this summer with the support of the Board of Supervisors.

Mrs. Spott asked about the cost of master plans for parks. Mr. Wagenmann responded approximately in the \$50,000-\$70,000 range.

Mrs. Spott stated there is a need for the master plan, and it will be considered during budget discussions later this year. She commented people routinely think of township services such as infrastructure and the police department; also important is the quality of life and recreation provided by a public park system.

Mrs. Spott commented the trail will be a major asset to our community and

expressed appreciation to everyone who worked so hard on it, particularly Neil Sardinas who has been very creative advocate for this project.

Mr. Tallman noted in addition to field use, the Park and Recreation Board is also very interested in passive use parks, for example, connections and open spaces which tie into the work of the Shade Tree and Beautification Commission. He pointed out last month's meeting included a discussion of open space. If there are some additional fields at Heuser it is envisioned to have some surrounding open space where people could walk or do whatever they choose.

Mr. Russell explained a master plan will take a look at the department's entire operations, not only parks, but also the recreational programs to see if there are any voids not being met for the residents. It would also take into consideration the bike pedestrian plan, the Schuylkill River West trail plan and the community center feasibility study. It would bring all of these issues into one big master plan.

A brief discussion followed about fundraising efforts for the skateboard park including an electronic recycling event on Earth Day.

Mr. Wagenmann provided a status report on the extension of the Chester Valley Trail.

Mrs. Kenney asked if there is a timeline for the trail from Heuser Park to Valley Forge National Historical Park. Mr. Russell responded it is currently in the design phase and easement negotiations are underway with some property owners. He said while it will take some time to design since it is very detail oriented with crossings, everything is moving along at a very good pace.

Mrs. Kenney asked if there is a time estimate for completion. Mr. Russell responded the grant stipulates five years to complete the project and once negotiations and easements move forward, it is anticipated to go to construction some time this fall or next spring.

Mr. Wagenmann stated the major easement is with Norfolk Southern and it is also the most cost saving easement being working out. He explained this easement will allow the use of their bridge across Trout Creek. Since the township would not have to construct a bridge and obtain environmental permits, the project would be expedited. Mr. Wagenmann noted the Norfolk Southern operational staff have been open to have the trail go through that area and have suggested ways it can be accomplished and still maintain their operations and meet the safety requirements of the railroad.

POLICE CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

Supervisors present were: Greg Waks, Erika Spott, Carole Kenney, and Greg Philips. Also present were: Ron Wagenmann, Township Manager; Ron Fonock, Chief of Police; Sgt. Chuck Zadroga; Jennifer M. Schauble, Chairperson;

Matt Frangiosa; Frank Rodrique; and Jeff McCabe. Supervisor Bill Jenaway was absent.

Ms. Jennifer M. Schauble, Chairperson, stated the primary goal of the Police Advisory Board remains to be a forum and opportunity for the exchange of information between the citizens of the township and the Upper Merion Police Department. She highlighted a variety of ways the Police Department interacts with the citizens of the township:

- fingerprinting of approximately 66 children of the township and people who visited the Farmers Market in June of last year and the Community Fair in September of last year. Fingerprinting will be available again at the Farmers Market and the Community Fair this year.
- National Prescription Drug Take Back Day sponsored by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) was held in April 2011 and October 2011. The next scheduled date is April 28, 2012. At the 2011 event, there were 100 pounds of expired, unwanted or unused pharmaceutical controlled substances and other medications brought to the Police Department.
- In June 2011, there was a Bike Safety Day held in partnership with Mainline Health Systems where bike safety information was distributed and helmet use was stressed. A similar event is being planned to get the message out this summer.
- Police Week this year will be held at the Farmers Market and will include children's fingerprinting. The disadvantage in previous years in having Police Week at the Mall was there were a lot of people present who were not Upper Merion residents. The Farmers Market will be more targeted to the Upper Merion community.
- Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) classes are ongoing at the Middle School this spring for the 6th graders; essays are read and judged by the Citizen Advisory Board members.
- Citizens Police Academy is in its 12th session this year. Classes started in March and there are 18 residents in attendance.
- Four new officers were hired this year.

Ms. Schauble noted there will be a change in the Police Department with the imminent retirement of Chief Ron Fonock; and she thanked Chief Fonock for his years of faithful and dedicated service to the community.

Chief Fonock thanked everyone on the Police Citizen Advisory Board Board who serve as ambassadors in the community.

Mrs. Spott noted the Citizens Police Academy is extremely popular with

interesting information and outstanding speakers. She recommended when the Academy is promoted in the E-newsletter, it would be helpful to have the discussion topics listed for the various weeks of the session.

Mrs. Spott commented having Police Week in the community at the Farmers Market is an excellent idea. She suggested the E-newsletter could start promoting not just Police Week, but the Advisory Board's quarterly meetings and topics as well.

When asked by Mrs. Spott when Police Week is being held this year, Ms. Schauble responded Saturday, May 19th will be opening weekend.

Mrs. Spott asked about the award Matt Frangiosa received several months ago. Mr. Frangiosa responded the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce presented the award last November in recognition of a non profit he started a few years ago to provide items such as school supplies and winter coats for the less fortunate in the area.

Mr. Waks asked for the website address. Mr. Frangiosa responded the website is www.feelthewarmth.org.

Mr. Waks asked how the curfew is working out. Chief Fonock responded it is working and effective. The Police Department's annual report on the website lists how many juveniles are cited, and it has been a valuable tool. The website also includes the applicable ordinance and curfew times.

Mrs. Kenney stated she has heard many favorable comments about the Police Academy and asked her name be included for participation in future sessions.

Mrs. Spott commented on an extremely informative "ride along" she had with a police officer recently and recommended it to her colleagues on the Board.

Chief Fonock said the key to success in any organization is the level of communication, and the "ride along" is a prime example of an opportunity to see what the Police Department does and hear the input and concerns of the supervisors. He extended an invitation to the supervisors to spend a day with the police force. .

PENSION ADVISORY BOARD

ROLL CALL:

Supervisors present were: Greg Waks, Erika Spott, Carole Kenney, and Greg Philips. Also present were: Ron Wagenmann, Township Manager; Eric Medrow, Chairperson; Ron Fonock, Vice Chairperson; Fred Santoro, Human Resources Director; Sudha Suryadevara, Non-Uniformed Employee Representative; and Sgt. Andrew Andreyko. Supervisor Jenaway was absent.

DISCUSSIONS:

Mr. Eric Medrow, Chairperson, outlined the various programs within the pension board's responsibility and discussed the Upper Merion Township health care plan for 2011. Upper Merion Township offers its full time employees and eligible dependents a comprehensive health care benefit to include medical, surgical, vision, dental and prescription coverages. Additionally retired police and civilian employees may choose to continue participation in the plan at their own expense following their separation from service. The township converted the previous self-insured model and joined the Delaware Valley Health Insurance Trust (DVIT) on July 1, 2010. The annualized cost under the DVIT plan to include all benefits and administrative costs was \$3,345,437 for 2011 and it is anticipated the cost for calendar year 2012 will be approximately \$3,601,110.

Mrs. Spott asked how the new health plan has been received by employees and what the economic benefit has been to the township. Mr. Santoro responded the employees received it very well. There have been very few minor changes and minor billing errors, most of which have been coding errors by health service providers. The cost projected for 2012 is slightly higher than 2011. Mr. Santoro noted that the 7% increase is well below the industry average. The overall cost savings in 2010 was approximately \$840,000. The cumulative savings to date projected through the end of 2012 will be closer to \$6 million. With the conversion to a self-insured model, the township has reduced costs and saved money without compromising care. The biggest delay in making the conversion is the insurance companies were reluctant to match or even come close to matching the township's coverage until the township was approached by DVIT.

Mrs. Spott asked about the wellness initiatives. Mr. Santoro responded the township campus is "no smoking" and listed the following wellness initiatives:

- Weight Watchers at work - a lunch time program
- fitness club reimbursements
- reimbursements for annual physicals
- DVIT piggybacks with cash incentives for similar type preventive care programs, and the employee has a choice to either reduce their health care cost share payments or they can take the cash directly from DVIT.
- Credits are also provided by taking an annual health care questionnaire.

Mr. Medrow reported the Upper Merion Township 401(a), Defined Contribution Pension Plan is similar to the private industry 401(k) plan. The township offers all full-time civilian employees a Defined Contribution Pension Plan managed by ICMA-RC in Washington, D.C. Employees are required to deposit 3% of their earnings; the township contributes 6% to each account. There are currently 115 participants, and they may select from a wide variety of investment fund options. Each employee self directs their own investment portfolio. The total account balance as of March 31, 2012 was \$12,597,107.

Mrs. Kenney asked if the 115 participants represent 100% staff participation. Mr. Medrow responded in the affirmative.

Mr. Medrow discussed the Upper Merion Township 457 deferred compensation plan for 2012. The township's 457 deferred compensation plan is a voluntary supplemental pension plan available to all full-time civilian employees; however, participation by uniformed police officers is mandatory. There are 140 accounts provided by ICMA-RC; total assets as of March 31, 2012 were \$12,579,189.

A discussion followed with regard to the various scenarios which could occur with the 457 deferred compensation plan

Mr. Medrow discussed the retirement health savings account. He explained township employees may voluntarily participate in a retirement health savings account managed by ICMA-RC. Investments are self directed by the participants; the balance for this account as of March 31, 2012 is \$829,199.

Mr. Medrow reported the Act 600 Defined Benefit Police Pension Plan is managed by the firm of D. F. Dent & Company of Baltimore, Maryland. The custodian of funds is PNC Bank, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The account balance on December 31, 2010 was \$35,415,699 and during the year of 2011 the account earned \$1,013,806 while paying a total of \$1,722,051 in benefits and expenses. The account balance on December 31, 2011 after fees and disbursements was \$36,116,476 and the most recent balance as of March 31, 2012 is \$38,571,507.

Chief Fonock discussed Act 205 which is a treasury of money obtained through the state taxing insurance companies from out of state and sell insurance policies in the state. He explained there is a formula under Act 205 as to how each municipality depending on the stress of their pension can apply for and obtain these monies. When a police pension plan is in need of an infusion of monies because of stock market ups and downs, Act 205 is the first one that gets money. If the Act 205 formula does not fulfill that first need, officers receive municipal contributions. Throughout most of his 39 year career, Upper Merion Township taxpayers did not have to contribute any tax dollars.

Mr. Medrow commented with this particular pension 80% of our total liabilities are covered with the \$38 million.

A discussion followed about the investment policy of D.F. Dent with regard to equity investments having averaged 9.62%.

SHADE TREE AND BEAUTIFICATION COMMISSION

ROLL CALL:

Supervisors present were: Greg Waks, Erika Spott, Carole Kenney, and Greg Philips. Also present were: Ron Wagenmann, Township Manager; Jay Kowal, Staff Liaison; Michael Countis, and Barbara Van Clief.

Ms. Van Clief outlined the following initiatives of the Shade Tree and Beautification Commission:

- 30 trees were distributed through the Tree Vitalize Program with funding provided by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.
- Beautification awards will be made again this year with a focus on backyard nominations.
- Worked with the landscape architect last fall work on the median strips on First Avenue.
- working with the eagle scout who is doing the trail work and cleaning up trash and evasive vines. .

Ms. Van Clief stated a review of the tree ordinance will be done with the advice of experts from Penn State.

A discussion followed about the scope of the ordinance review.

Mrs. Spott suggested creating a text for outreach to the public, including tree businesses, about tree conservation and planting to replace trees that are cut down for various reasons. She recommended getting the facts out to make people aware of what it means to the environment when a tree is cut down.

Mrs. Kenney commented the EAC and ECDC have discussed a possible forum to educate township residents on what is involved with stormwater management. She suggested a joint presentation with EAC, ECDC and the Shade Tree and Beautification Commission.

There was a brief discussion about certain insects which are destructive of certain trees and the importance of promoting diversity in the plantings.

Mr. Wagenmann noted the Senate has passed a bill to allow the creation of stormwater authorities to create funding sources to address stormwater issues. He said Upper Merion going forward will take a look at it and come up with a plan. There will also be a need to look at a multi-municipal plan because it should be developed on a watershed basis in cooperation with neighboring municipalities.

ADJOURNMENT:

It was moved by Mr. Philips, seconded by Mrs. Kenney, all voting "Aye" to adjourn the joint meeting at 8:50 p.m. None opposed. Motion approved 4-0.

RONALD G. WAGENMANN
SECRETARY-TREASURER
TOWNSHIP MANAGER

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Minutes Approved:
Minutes Entered: