

CUMRU TOWNSHIP BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
5th TUESDAY MEETING NOVEMBER 29, 2022

The 5th Tuesday Meeting of the Cumru Township Board of Commissioners was called to order by President Ruth A. O’Leary at 7:00 p.m. Other Commissioners in attendance were Vice President David J. Batdorf, Sam Kalbach, William B. Miller, and Lisha Rowe. Also attending were Solicitor Michael A. Setley, Chief of Police Madison Winchester, Superintendent of Public Works Robert McNichols, Jr., Asst. Superintendent of Public Works Michael Yost, Jr., Business/Personnel Administrator Peggy A. Carpenter, Manager/Secretary Jeanne E. Johnston, Special Projects/Asst. Secretary Patricia A. Wylezik-Pfeiffer. Fire Chief James A. Beane was excused with prior notification.

NOTICE:

Public comment will be accepted in person. Please include your first name, last name and address for all comments. Any comments without a name or address will not be considered. To accommodate as many people as possible, we request that each person’s comments be limited to 3 minutes. The meeting comment period is limited to a total of 60 minutes. This time period may be extended at the discretion of the Commissioners. While public comments will be given due consideration, immediate responses will be done at the discretion of the Commissioners.

PUBLIC

No one from the public wished to speak.

DEPARTMENTS

Police Department

A.) Civil Service – certified list

1) Civil Service Commission meeting 11/29/2022

Chief Winchester reported that the Civil Service Commission held a meeting today and they certified a list of potential hires.

ON MOTION OF MR. KALBACH, SECOND OF MR. BATDORF, A UNANIMOUS VOTE TO RECOGNIZE THE HIRING LIST THAT WAS CERTIFIED BY THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION ON 11/29/2022.

B.) Hiring

Chief Winchester reported that during the most recent Police Department liaison meeting, the liaisons recommended that the Police Department hire 2 more officers in addition to the 2 new hires that were already discussed for 2023. He requested Board approval to hire 4 officers instead of 2, conditioned on passing all background checks and testing.

ON MOTION OF MR. KALBACH, SECOND OF MR. BATDORF, A UNANIMOUS VOTE AUTHORIZING THE CHIEF OF POLICE TO ISSUE CONDITINOAL OFFERS OF EMPLOYMENT TO FOUR CANDIDATES FOR PROBATIONARY POLICE OFFICER, SUBJECT TO SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF ALL BACKGROUND CHECKS, PHYSICAL EXAM, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING.

Fire Department

A) Fire Academy Graduation

Ms. Johnston reported that she, Chief Beane, and Mr. Miller attended the Fire Academy Graduation at HACC. Four Cumru Twp firefighters graduated and the 5th candidate is expected to finish in the spring of 2023. The graduates will need additional training beyond the Fire Academy. Mr. Miller stated that he was impressed with the graduation ceremony.

B) Santa Run 2023 – canceled

Ms. Johnston informed the Board that there will be no Santa Run this year due to a lack of volunteers to run the event.

Administration

A.) Green Hills Corp. Center Tax Appeal

Ms. Johnston informed the Board that the Board of Assessment Appeals reduced the real estate tax assessment for Green Hills Corp. Center by over \$4 million. The Governor Mifflin School District is appealing the decision. The Board concurred that the Township should support the school district.

B.) Sewer Bills – corrected for RAWA customers

Ms. Johnston informed the Board that there had been a computer error in computing the usage for the quarter for the RAWA customers in Cumru Township. The error originated with the information from RAWA. The customers affected were sent corrected bills.

C.) Angelica Trail Extension – follow up

Ms. Johnston researched easement agreements for this area. Mr. Setley explained that the easement agreements allow for surface use of the easement area but do not allow for any structures to be built in the easement area. Ms. Johnston pointed out that the Township is not the property owner and the property owner, the Governor Mifflin School District, is permitting the use of their property for the trail extension. The Board of Commissioners agreed that, as long as a building is not placed on the sewer easement, the Township would not take a position for or against the use of school district property for the trail extension.

D.) Code Officials Apprenticeship Program

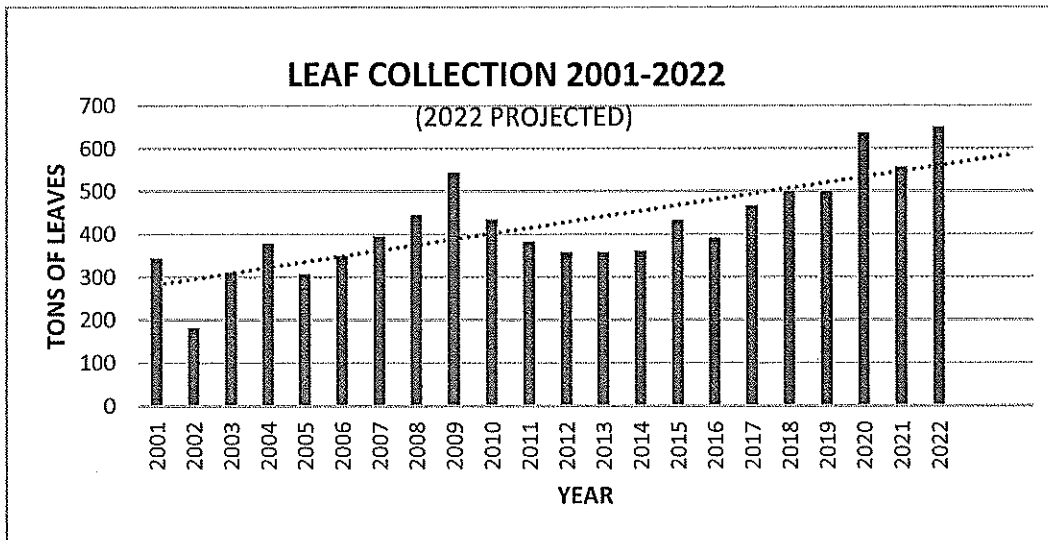
Berks County Building and Codes Association approved an apprentice program. They are researching grants to support the program. Ms. Johnston wanted the Board to be aware of this program because of the shortage of code officials. A current program requires a weeklong training and testing commitment which makes it difficult for many people to attend.

Mr. Miller asked if the Township would have to outsource for codes if Mr. Frymoyer retired tomorrow. Ms. Johnston replied affirmatively. She also informed the Board that the Township already uses Ralph “Skip” Cross at GVC to conduct commercial inspections for the Township.

Public Works

A.) Leaf Collection

Mr. McNichols explained the chart below. It shows that the amount of leaves collected in Cumru Township has continued to increase over the last 20 years. The tons of leaves collected has approximately doubled from 300 tons in 2001 to over 600 tons currently.



Some of the reasons for the increases are that the growing trees produce more leaves and that more residents are raking their leaves for collection. Ms. Johnston put this into perspective by stating that the same number of employees, in the same time frame, are doing twice as much work. Mrs. O’Leary inquired if Public Works has replaced the workers from deferred hiring after the recession of 2010. Mr. McNichols replied that they are finally fully staffed.

B.) Sectional Doors for the Public works Building – update

Mr. McNichols stated that doors should arrive soon. Hopefully, the new doors will be installed before the snow starts and plowing begins.

Solicitor

A.) Planning Ordinances

Mr. Setley reported that the Zoning Hearing Board denied the variance request for Grings Hill Business Park, LLC. This decision was based on the property uses that are currently permitted in the Mixed Use/ General Commercial (MUGC) zoning district. He presented a draft amendment to the MUGC zoning district to allow for additional uses. The Supplemental Matrix Chart 10 was also amended for utility and dimensional requirements for the additional uses. Mailing to properties in the MUGC district and posting would not be required since this amendment would not involve changing the zoning map. However, he recommended that the Board consider mailing and posting to the properties in the district. The Board concurred. Ms. Johnston also recommended changing the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance to take into account road and driveway widths in the fire code. Mr. Setley described the process for amending planning ordinances. The Board concurred to place this matter on the agenda for the December Board of Commissioners meeting.

COMMISSIONERS

A.) 2023 Budget – revised

Ms. Johnston explained that the draft 2023 general fund budget was calculated using the current millage. However, there are significant concerns about revenue for the first quarter of 2024.

The Township was recently notified by Waste Management, the owners of the Western Berks Landfill, that WBLF will be closing in 2024 since it will reach its capacity to accept trash. This time frame is shorter than anticipated, based on prior annual reports from WBLF. The financial impact of this closure is the elimination of \$500,000 in host fee revenue into the general fund in 2024. Also, WBLF will probably request a tax assessment reduction at that time because of the loss in value of the land. The County of Berks has been informed of this issue, since the County also receives host fees from WBLF.

Recent potential commercial development opportunities that might lessen the impact of this loss in revenue have not achieved increases in real estate tax assessments or earned income tax through job growth, and the future of such potential development opportunities is uncertain at this time. The current proposal to redevelop the former Pathmark/Giant site off of SR 222B is for storage units. Although redevelopment of the now-vacant site is desirable, storage buildings are not a high tax ratable and there will be very few jobs associated with the use.

Real estate transfer tax revenue is anticipated to slow down with the recent and anticipated increases in interest rates. The owner of the former Titus Station and associated land is attempting to have their entire holdings declared tax exempt and that matter is currently in litigation. Another large parcel will possibly become tax exempt in 2023.

Ms. Johnston presented a table of 2024 general capital purchases already committed or anticipated. These commitments total approximately \$360,214.00 which equates to 0.4 mil at the current level of taxable assessed value. The Township must also maintain a \$3.5 million carry over balance in the general fund at the end of each year for expenses and emergency funds in the first quarter, and for debt service obligations.

Given all of these factors, Ms. Johnston recommended to the Board to consider some amount of increased general fund real estate tax revenue in 2023 in order to have that funding available for the first quarter of 2024. For example, the dump truck ordered in August 2022, at a current cost of \$202,050, is projected to arrive in the first quarter of 2024. Among many other tasks, dump trucks are used for paving, leaf picking, and snow plowing. Ms. Johnston also reminded the Board of the surcharges that vehicle vendors began to impose in 2022, even for vehicles ordered through State contract. It was necessary to order the truck well in advance of 2024 because of the ongoing supply chain issues since the initiation of the COVID-19 pandemic. If the Board takes the recommendation to increase real estate tax revenue, options are to either increase the 2023 millage by 0.2 mil, to cover only the dump truck, or the full 0.4 mil. Not all 2024 funding needs that are known at this time.

Mrs. O'Leary stated that the Township has been operating at a deficit for several years; increasing expenses are depleting the general fund. Mr. Kalbach asked if the Board should consider 0.4 mil. Mrs. O'Leary polled the Board and they concurred that an increase of 0.4 mil for the general fund was needed. After discussion, and based on prior meetings, the Board agreed to the following real estate tax millages:

- An increase of the Debt Service millage from 0.70 to 0.85 mil, as had been discussed at the time the ordinance for the bond issue was adopted, and at the meetings of 10/28/2021 and 10/27/2022;
- An increase of the Fire Fund millage from 1.23 to 1.30 mils, as had been discussed at the 10/27/2022 meeting; and
- An increase of the General Fund millage from 4.645 to 5.045 mils.
- The Ambulance Fund millage would remain the same at 0.27.

Ms. Johnston asked the Board to consider increasing the Zoning Hearing Board fees due to rising costs, especially the cost of transcripts for the hearings. The Township has had the same ZHB fee of \$550.00 for many years. She proposed \$750.00 for residential applications and \$1,500.00 for commercial applications. Mr. Setley confirmed that these fees were consistent with, or in some cases less than, other municipalities. The Board concurred with raising the ZHB fees as proposed.

There was discussion about the method of billing for the refuse fee and the SMP fee in 2023. Ms. Johnston informed the Board that Township administration is capable of issuing those bills with the same platform that sends out the sanitary sewer bills. If the Board agreed, those fees would no longer appear on the same bill as the real estate tax. Postcards itemizing charges would be mailed to each applicable property owner. As discussed at the 10/13/2022 meeting, the refuse rate will increase from \$210 to \$255 annually for households with 1 adult and from \$225 to \$275 annually for households with 2 adults. The Board agreed that administration should issue the refuse and SMP bills, while retaining the payment profile of a 2% discount and a 10% penalty.

The Police Department draft budget has been adjusted to reflect 4 new officers instead of the 2 that were originally in the budget.

ON MOTION OF MR. MILLER, SECOND OF MR. BATDORF, A UNANIMOUS VOTE TO AUTHORIZE THE 2023 BUDGET, WITH CHANGES AS DISCUSSED AT THIS MEETING, TO BE ADVERTISED AS AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION WITH INTENT FOR ADOPTION, AND TO AUTHORIZE THE 2023 TAX LEVY ORDINANCE TO BE ADVERTISED WITH INTENT FOR ADOPTION.

B.)Reminders:

- 1) Board of Commissioners meetings for December 2022:
 - 12/20/2022 at 6:30 p.m. – Conditional Use Hearing for Budget Storage
 - 12/20/2022 at 7:00 p.m. – Regular Meeting

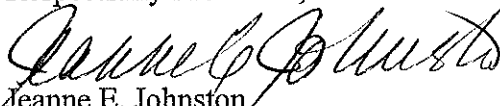
- 2) Planning Commission meeting – December 5, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.

- 3) Zoning Hearing Board –
 - December 27, 2022, at 1775 Welsh Rd. – application 799 (401 Tremont)
 - January 23, 2023 (tentative) at 6:00 p.m. at the Gov. Mifflin Intermediate School Cafeteria – zoning map appeal

ADJOURNMENT

ON MOTION OF MR. BATDORF, SECOND OF MR. MILLER, A UNANIMOUS VOTE TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:04 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,


Jeanne E. Johnston
Manager/Secretary