

FORKS TOWNSHIP, NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
Board of Supervisors

3-02-2023

Work Session Minutes

A work session of the Forks Township Board of Supervisors was held on Thursday, March 2, 2023, at the Forks Township Municipal Building, Easton, PA. Chairman O'Neil opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

BOARD MEMBERS: all present

John O'Neil, Chairman
Ty Corallo, Vice Chairman
Tim Hughes, Secretary/Treasurer
Kelly Keegan, Member
Dean Turner, Member

IN ATTENDANCE:

Donna M. Asure, Township Manager
Rachel Sulzbach, Director of Parks & Recreation

Supervisors Comments:

Chairman O'Neil – none

T. Corallo - none

T. Hughes – none

K. Keegan – none

D. Turner - none

Announcements: none

Public Comment: none

Treasurer's Report –

The township total debt is \$4,091,000.00

T. Hughes made a motion, seconded by K. Keegan to ratify the following online/ACH payments –(action item)

- Travelers Insurance – cyber security policy (ACH)– 2-17-23 - \$14,552.00
- PMRS – check – 2-23-23 - \$ 254.06
- Police Union Dues – 2-23-23 – check - \$ 1,259.00 (Jan) and \$ 1,219.00 (Feb)
- Principal Life Insurance – police pension – 2-23-23 – check - \$10,343.73
- PMSI – 2 quarters deposit for new utility mailing company – ACH – 3-3-23 - \$ 6,813.60

All in favor. Motion carried.

T. Hughes made a motion, seconded by K. Keegan to approve payment of vouchers received through February 27, 2023, in the amount of General Fund - \$ 27,715.75; General Capital Fund - \$ 4,412.07; Utility Fund - \$ 65,777.80; Utility Capital - \$ 2,814.01; State Liquid Fuels - \$ 4,012.50; ARPA - \$ 49,056.00. All in favor. Motion carried.

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T. Hughes made a motion, seconded by K. Keegan to approve the following checks made payable to Unity Bank to begin process of opening new bank accounts – General Fund - \$ 1,000,000.00; General Capital Fund - \$ 1,000,000.00; Utility Fund - \$ 1,000,000.00; Utility Capital Fund - \$ 500,000.00; Recreation Capital fund - \$ 250,000.00; Sewer Tap In Fund - \$ 1,000,000.00; ARPA Fund - \$ 1,000,000.00; Escrow Fund - \$ 250,000.00. All in favor. Motion carried.

T. Hughes made a motion, seconded by K. Keegan to ratify the gross payroll for pay period ending February 26, 2023, in the amount of \$ 153,449.64. All in favor. Motion carried.

T. Hughes made a motion, seconded by K. Keegan to ratify PO #2840 to Northern Nurseries, Inc for the purchase of items for the Ramblewood Basin retro-fit, in the amount of \$ 9,175.50 to be paid from the utility capital fund as part of the Ramblewood Grant. All in favor. Motion carried.

T. Hughes made a motion, seconded by K. Keegan to ratify PO #2839 to Vianini Pipe, Inc, for the purchase of pipes needed for the Ramblewood Basin retro-fit, in the amount of \$ 5,659.14 to be paid from the utility capital fund as part of the Ramblewood Grant. All in favor. Motion carried.

Old Business

Approval of Minutes

T. Hughes made a motion, seconded by T. Corallo to approve the minutes of the February 16, 2023, regular meeting of the board of supervisors. Roll Call Vote: T. Corallo, yes; T. Hughes, yes; K. Keegan, yes; D. Turner, yes; J. O’Neil, abstain due to being absent. Motion carried.

Discussion Items –

Open Space discussion -

J. O’Neil stated that the board would now have a discussion on the topic of open space.

The board of supervisors do not normally take action at work sessions so tonight is a discussion and this will be placed on possibly the March 16th agenda for further discussion/action.

He stated that K. Keegan will begin with an introduction and after the introduction the board members will present their comments. The public will then be asked to comment. Mr. O’Neil asked those present that they remain respectful of each other, that comments are to be kept to five minutes and the board is here to listen as they must make decisions in the best interest of the entire population and all tax payers of Forks Township.

K. Keegan began by providing some history –

- 2021 the board of supervisors approved the updating of the township’s comprehensive plan
- This plan serves as a guide for a community vision, to guide and coordinate development as well as open space
- During this process there was a residents’ survey as well as a visioning meeting which was held in June 2021
- Residents listed top concerns as uncontrolled development and growth (especially industrial development); and truck traffic
- November 2021 the board of supervisors tasked K. Keegan with heading an open space committee
- 15 – 20 volunteers met, informally with experts
- They discussed smart growth, an open space program and options for farmers other than selling to developers
- They believe the increase in the EIT tax of ¼ of a percent will provide the revenue to fund an open space program

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J. O'Neil –

- J. O'Neil thanked Mrs. Keegan and the committee for the amount of time and passion they dedicated to this.
- There is a need to manage development
- The financial status in the township is that property taxes have not been raised since 2017
- With the rising costs of providing the services to the residents, it will only be another 2 – 3 years before the budget will be in the red
- The services provided from public works, the police and parks & rec are second to none and we need to keep it that way
- The township is in the process of bidding the trash and recycling hauler. The townships who have recently been through this have seen major increases in the cost to the residents
- The township must look at all ways to manage growth
- What can be done through zoning
- The tax being discussed is an earned income tax which 95% of those present tonight do not pay
- It would appear to make more sense that a vote as to whether or not to increase a tax for open space should be held on a large election such as the presidential when there is an 85% turnout and a truer representation of all in Forks Township

D. Turner –

- Tonight is a discussion and not the end of the road
- There does need to be a plan put together with all options included
- 11 townships currently have an EIT tax for open space
- Those voters passed the referendums from between 50% and 80%
- The township could consider redistributing the EIT tax already collected and use some towards open space
- There are multiple paths to take to manage growth but tonight is a discussion on a referendum to be placed on the ballot concerning an EIT tax
- If it is important enough people will come out to vote
- Education and communication are the key issues
- Need to allow the residents to make the choice and if they approve we collect the funds and finish a plan

T. Hughes –

- If open space is for everyone than everyone should pay
- Only working people, pay the EIT tax
- There are many unanswered questions
- The turnout in the presidential election would be a better representation of the township voters
- If we are told we have not done this in 30 or 20 or 15 years then adding one year to get information will not make much of a difference
- Whitehall is rezoning to manage their growth and Forks needs to look at this same approach

T. Corallo –

- It is understood and agrees that this is near and dear to many people's hearts
- If we chose to go the EIT path then the presidential election in November 2024 will provide a better way to judge the want of the community
- Not fair to burden working families by going the EIT route
- There are still many unanswered questions as to what the plan is, what is the vision, what are the targets
- Development has to be managed and open space is a part of that
- We must look at Farmland preservation as a part of this plan

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The board discussed the various meetings that were held and the involvement of various county and local experts on this issue.

Public Comment

Matt Sprung – 1035 Cozena Court

- Mr. Sprung stated he was a professional planner and on the planning commission. He appreciates open space but there should be more time dedicated to a clear vision. You need to know what you want to accomplish first. You need to look at soils, slopes, scenic vistas, farmland. He disagrees that there is uncontrolled growth. There needs to be a balance between development and open space and he encourages the board to wait until next year for the ballot question

Deb Hunter – 901 Frost Hollow Road

- Ms. Hunter stated the EIT is a good idea as it does not burden seniors. We must make sure we have the land that is required by the state for all uses. She stated that the people of Northampton County voted to put aside money for open space and it should be money first and plan after

Joan Dean – 1464 Upstream Farm Road

- Stated she is very supportive of open space and agrees the referendum should be on the November 2023 ballot. Open space will mitigate flooding, reduce stormwater and reduce stress

Madison Gayle – Lehigh University student

- Ms. Gayle supports the open space referendum to be on the November 2023 ballot. There are too many tractor trailers and large buildings. Open space is better for health issues. We need to correct the loss of biodiversity.

Steve Fanicase- 2863 Lenape Way

- Mr. Fanicase volunteers on the open space committee and believes it is needed to keep Forks Township desirable. It is not a quick process, but we need to follow Bushkill Township's example. He believes this should be on the November 2023 ballot. If you put it on the turnout will go from the normal 25% to 50% or better to answer the question. We must educate the people.

Leo Jackson – 1620 Deer Path

- Mr. Jackson stated that the township has waited 20 to 30 years to do this and if you wait one more there will be another 268 homes built on farmland. Presidential voters don't understand local issues. He agrees it should be an EIT tax, that we must identify properties that voluntarily want to sell their land. Cannot wait another year.

Rose Emig – 2323 Ben Jon Road

- Ms. Emig spoke of when her daughters were able to ride their bikes through the township to get ice-cream. She is a retired teacher and does substitute. She does not mind paying school taxes as she believes in education and would not mind paying a small real estate tax if would help preserve something for her great grandchildren. Growth is going to cost up more in police, fire and road services.

Alex Maverick – 2005 Lambert Court

- Mr. Maverick asked about the difference between how many people pay an EIT tax versus how many people pay real estate tax. He stated that the farmers are in a difficult position when they

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compete with development for funds. He asked how is this money going to support open space and alleviate some of the truck traffic.

Peter Santini – 1616 Arrowwood Drive

- Mr. Santini stated he has lived here for 35 years and has spoken to many people about the quality of life issues. There is no time for delay, there is an urgency in getting this done.

Phil Janvrin – 900 Schuler Drive

- Mr. Janvrin asked why the board could not get extra revenue from the sale of each house and the real estate transfer tax. Thirty years ago there was a lot of open space and now we need to preserve what we have left. He feels we are on the path to becoming an East Brunswick, NJ.

Gene Hunter – 901 Frost Hollow Road

- Mr. Hunter stated that the board must act as soon as possible to preserve open space. In an off year election, the people that are concerned with this issue will come out to vote. The township needs a vision and a good source is the Alliance for sustainable communities.

Lori Jackson – 1620 Deerpath Road

- Ms. Jackson stated the board cannot kick this down the road. The township cannot wait to implement zoning changes. They need to purchase property which opens up other avenues.

Rob Neitz – Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

- Mr. Neitz stated he was here in his official capacity with DCNR. He works in Jacobsburg state park. An action plan will help and assist preserve open space through an EIT referendum. The tax will leverage other funding opportunities. Use this money for all preservation options. EIT is instant revenue source to use as a match to county and state money. Houses are worth more if they are near open space.

Jennifer Beam – top of Frost Hollow

- Ms. Beam stated she is part of the younger generation and the township must use all forms of social media to get the message out to voters and to get people involved. Don't put the referendum off another year as Forks is becoming too busy and a more expensive place to live.

Jim Handzo – 16 Aspen Court

- All points made tonight should be good enough reasons to move forward with a referendum question on the November 2023 ballot.

Adele Horvath – Denzer Hill Road

- She stated that people do care but they are busy. Like a business you need money to build a plan. State and county money are available but first you need a plan built with the EIT tax. People need to be educated on all platforms. The wording is important on the referendum to have people understand what they are voting for.

Marilyn Hessinger – 146 Derhammer Street

- Ms. Hessinger the referendum should be on the November 2023 ballot and the township must rethink of the ways they are getting people out to the polls.

Robert Parella – 3089 Corey Terrace

- Mr. Parella spoke to the number of new homes being built and proposed in the township. The sewer charges just rose \$400,000 in the last budget. School taxes are going up. More police will

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be needed, and the future may hold a paid fire department. The open space committee must educate the public.

Steve Seminak – 3084 Corey Terrace

- Mr. Seminak believes we all benefit from education. There should be a cap for retired people to pay taxes but keep them paying.

Britt Condravey – Lower Saucon Township

- Ms. Condravey stated she was caught by surprise in her township when they raised the EIT tax for open space but believes now it is a benefit. Since the township has the momentum now they should move forward.

Matt Menkowski – 1140 Vera Drive

- Mr. Menkowski stated he came from New Jersey and was originally against paying an EIT tax and was for many years. He was trying to raise a family. He now sees the benefit of the EIT tax and preserving open space. He believes the township cannot wait and urges the board to move forward.

Public Comment-

J. O'Neil again thanked the Mrs. Keegan and the open space committee for the work they have done to date. There is a lot to think about and research.

T. Hughes thanked everyone for coming out to the meeting.

K. Keegan made a motion, seconded by T. Hughes to adjourn into executive session at 9:00pm. Motion carried.