

Ross Township Commissioners Committee Meeting
1000 Ross Municipal Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15237
April 1, 2019
6:30 p.m.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Daniel L. DeMarco, Jeremy Shaffer, Patrick Mullin, Jack Betkowski, Jason Piring, Joseph Laslavic, Grace Stanko and Junior Commissioner Lira Murtezi

ABSENT: Stephen Korbelt and Richard Avon

SOLICITOR: P. J. Murray, Esq.

TOWNSHIP MANAGER: Douglas Sample

RECORDING SECRETARY: Noreen A. Re

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND BOARD

LIAISON: Dominic J. Rickert

Whereupon, Commissioner DeMarco was acting chairman in the absence of Commissioner Korbelt.

Pledge of Allegiance/Invocation

PRESENTATION OF PLAQUE:

Kenley Gardner – Girl Scout Gold Award

Commissioners DeMarco and Laslavic presented a plaque to Kenley Gardner on achieving the highest award in Girl Scouts, the Gold Award. For Kenley's project she worked with the North Park Nature Center to "Save the Bees." She created a pollination garden and designed and built bee habitats to focus on the mason bee, a pollinator native to Pennsylvania. She also developed a brochure and educational program with the Nature Center for future generations and anyone wanting to make an impact at their own homes for the declining bee population. She will be attending Penn State Behrend in the fall pursuing a degree in environmental science.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS ONLY - None

CONSENT AGENDA:

Approval of Minutes – None
Bill List – April 1, 2019

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Mullin and seconded by Commissioner Stanko.

Motion passes – 7 to 0

PUBLIC WORKS, SANITATION AND SEWERS:

Chair: Pat Mullin; Members – Jack Betkowski and Rick Avon

Public Works Director Report

Mr. Funk stated Shields Paving has a tentative start date of April 15th starting off at the Sewickley Oakmont area. The 8,000 ton obligation for salt through the COG has been met.

The old playground has been removed at Rosecliff. The new playground construction started today. It should be completed in the next couple weeks. The infield has been taken out, and new material is being hauled in.

The bridge construction at Brookview is continuing and is set to open in mid May. Upon inquiry by Commissioner Shaffer, Mr. Funk stated 9.7 miles of roadway is being paved this year. The cost per square yard is higher due to the cost of asphalt.

Upon inquiry by Commissioner Shaffer, Mr. Funk stated there are 13 ball fields in the township. Herb Field is the No. 1 field. This year the work force for field maintenance has been doubled.

New Business - None

ADMINISTRATION, OPERATIONS AND POLICY:

Chair: Joe Laslavic; Members – Dan DeMarco and Pat Mullin

Township Manager Report - None

Herb Field Turf Update

Mr. Patrick Zeni, representative from FieldTurf, gave the Board a presentation on FieldTurf and the proposed installation. He went through various FieldTurf installations across the country. He described the product and the possible accessories.

Upon inquiry by Commissioner Laslavic, Mr. Zeni stated organizations do receive rental income from the renting of their fields to outside organizations. Mr. Zeni stated rental income is especially received from soccer organizations, since soccer clubs are always looking for artificial turf fields.

Upon inquiry by Commissioner Shaffer, Mr. Zeni stated the fence would remain in place. The field could have multi purposes. Mr. Zeni stated lines could be painted. Upon inquiry by Commissioner Laslavic, Mr. Zeni stated the township could do the painting or they could hire a painting company or even purchase a line-painting robot.

Mr. Zeni stated the lifespan of the field is 10-12 years. He indicated 50 percent of the cost of the field should be budgeted for future replacement. The warranty on the turf product is eight years. Mr. Zeni stated field maintenance is important. Maintenance includes grooming and sweeping weekly. Mr. Zeni described snow removal on the field.

Upon inquiry by Commissioner DeMarco, Mr. Zeni indicated the current lights would be sufficient. He also indicated some customers hold community events on the field. Mr. Zeni also indicated there are service technicians available to answer questions in less than 48 hours. He also suggested a sideline logo is less expensive than a center logo. Mr. Zeni described in detail the actual turf composition, available accessories, turf colors and time of installation. In the fall after football is the preferred time of year for installation.

Commissioner Shaffer inquired of Mr. Zeni's knowledge of lawsuits claiming that there are carcinogens in the materials that are

used. Mr. Zeni stated the data they have does not link the two. He suggested consulting a third-party consultant in that regard. Commissioner Shaffer also inquired about knee injuries on artificial turf. Mr. Zeni suggested looking at the data of Dr. Michael Meyers regarding injuries on turf.

Upon inquiry by Commissioner Shaffer, Mr. Zeni stated they do install bubbles over fields, but it is expensive. Commissioner Shaffer also inquired if FieldTurf still sold Duraspine, which was the subject of a lot of controversy and lawsuits. Mr. Zeni stated they did not. They manufacture their own fiber.

Commissioner Stanko commented she spoke to people at the Pirates and Steelers who stated they do not have turf because they do not want their players injured. Mr. Zeni indicated the Steelers have turf at their indoor facility. He stated Major League Baseball is a “big-time natural grass proponent” at the Major League level.

Ms. Julie Lemay, senior environmental health scientist, addressed the Board regarding the health and safety of recycled rubber and artificial turf fields. She has been in the environmental health field for over 15 years and is currently employed with Gradient, which is an environmental health and risk science firm in Massachusetts. She went through her credentials.

She became involved in recycled rubber research about four years ago when an artificial turf play yard was put in at her son's school. She examines exposure in her current work, which is the ability of a chemical to harm a person. She indicated studies that evaluate exposure and risk do not identify concerns for human health related to recycled rubber or artificial turf. She went through her research in this area in detail, as well as different studies conducted nationally and internationally.

Commissioner Shaffer inquired if her company or any principals in her company have received any payments from FieldTurf or any of its subsidiaries. Ms. Lemay indicated she did not receive any funding from any turf organization for the study her group did, but they did receive a little bit of funding from a public health commission that was out of Washington State to help with the collection of data. She indicated the results of the study were all theirs. Ms. Lemay did

indicate she has testified on behalf of field turf companies, based on the research she has done.

Mr. Berty addressed the Board regarding the matter. Gateway was asked to do an analysis and indicated that the water drainage is the big issue. The cost to address the drainage is \$150,000. The figure Mr. Berty gave for maintenance and supplies for the current field over 12 years is \$450,000. The school district would be asked to contribute 33 percent of the cost of the turf field. The \$450,000 plus the 33 percent is approximately \$800,000. Mr. Berty indicated the “real” cost to the township is around \$200,000 for the project. They are also working with Pirate Charities for a grant.

Mr. Berty calculated the cost of the field to the township being about \$15,000 per year over the 12-year cycle. \$250,000 was budgeted for the project. The total to be financed would be approximately \$400,000 over 7 years. The payment would be approximately \$60,000 per year over that term. He indicated it would be a \$10,000 increase in future budgets to cover the 7-year loan. Mr. Berty stated “It seems like it's a no-brainer for the township to improve this field. And I feel confident, as the finance director, to say that we can handle this.”

Upon inquiry by Commissioner Purring regard road paving, Mr. Berty indicated the road program is in the Capital Improvement Fund, which is driven by a General Fund transfer every year. Regardless of building the turf field, road paving will continue.

Upon inquiry by Commissioner Shaffer regarding the possible interest rate on the \$400,000 loan, Mr. Berty stated FNB has given the township very favorable loan rates and has indicated they are interested in this loan. Due to not wanting to drain the fund balance all in one year, a loan would make sense. Commissioner Shaffer commented that revenues tend to grow slower than inflation, and Mr. Berty agreed. Commissioner Shaffer also commented it is a challenge not to have to increase taxes. He mentioned EMS is requesting a larger contribution, and pension payments are scheduled to continue to rise. Mr. Berty was in agreement.

Upon inquiry from Commissioner Shaffer as to any other significant or moderate increases in expenses that would have to be

dealt with, Mr. Berty mentioned personnel cost is the big one. Health insurance is also going to continue to go up. Mr. Berty indicated the cost to live in Ross Township is significantly less than any of the surrounding communities. He felt if there were a tax increase in a future year, Ross would still be below other communities in the area.

Commissioner Shaffer also inquired as to the condition of the other fields in the township and the cost to improve them. Commissioner Piring indicated the committee discussed assessing a \$10 fee per player to go to the township strictly for maintenance of the fields.

Commissioner Betkowski commented that he thinks it is a good idea, but he needs to get to a comfort level with the numbers. He questioned the effect of borrowing on the township's bond rating. Mr. Berty went through annual expenses associated with maintaining the field currently. With the turf field there is still going to be maintenance that is required, which is a cost Commissioner Betkowski stated he would like to know. An exact agreement with the school district has not been reached as to how they will pay their share.

Commissioner Betkowski also inquired if the number is actually higher than \$400,000. He also indicated he would like to know where the township's debt level would be after funding the project.

Commissioner Piring commented that Denny Park had not been touched for over 30 years. He stated the condition of the fields in Ross is “an embarrassment.”

Commissioner Shaffer inquired if the school district could provide information on how the fields at Ross Elementary and Martorelli Stadium are being utilized. He also questioned how it would be decided which organization would get priority over field usage. Commissioner Laslavic stated there would be a sign-up for slot times. Commissioner Betkowski inquired as to how many fields Shaler and McCandless have compared to Ross.

Commissioner Stanko thanked all the people from Ross and West View that are coaches and give their time up to help the youth that like to play ball. She expressed concern over parking, noise and

traffic. She also suggested remembering senior citizens in the township and their ability to afford a tax increase. Commissioner DeMarco commented residents would not be concerned about a necessary tax increase to improve the township.

Ms. Sandra Miller, 144 1st Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15229, questioned whether property values would increase because of having a turf field. She was in support of the project but questioned the funding for the field and maintenance and insurance costs. She was also unaware of the proposal until she saw it on social media. She also questioned the parking and possible rental of the field. Ms. Miller stated if she went to the bank for a loan for \$1.2 million, they would request a business plan with the projected cost and projected revenues.

Commissioner Piring commented that they have been talking about the turf for over a year. Commissioner Mullin commented the original price was \$1.2 million, and now it is under \$1 million. Commissioner Betkowski reiterated his comment regarding laying out the actual numbers.

Mr. Charles Schrankel, 263 Kinvara Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15237, questioned who was going to pay for the field. He also questioned the return on investment and the pay-back period. Mr. Schrankel commented " I would caution the young people that are here and the young people that are represented here that the success on the field is not determined by what's under their feet or what's over their head. It's determined by what's in their heart."

Mr. Eric Pitchford, 109 Crestvale Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15237, spoke in favor of the turf field. He stated the current field is unsafe.

Mr. Dale Bricker, Jr., 104 Stevens Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15237, expressed his doubts about the proposal, although he was not unopposed to the plan. He felt it would not be utilized ten or more months per year. He suggested a bubble or dome would be more appropriate.

Mr. Dean Bonenberger, 2 Norwich Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15229, president of the North Hills Athletic Association, spoke in favor of the proposal. Upon inquiry by Commissioner Shaffer,

Mr. Bonenberger stated having a field that is half-and-half seems to be more of a problem than it should be.

Mr. Steven Long, head varsity baseball coach at North Hills High School, spoke in favor of the proposal.

Ms. Lana Mazur addressed the Board with her concerns regarding more information being given to the public, a possible survey and parking,

Mr. Josh Cote, 127 Cherrington Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15237, spoke in favor of the proposal. He mentioned injuries that could occur on the current field.

Mr. Michael Sapsar, 115 Shangri Lane, Pittsburgh, PA 15237, representing the North Hills Soccer Club, spoke in favor of the proposal.

Ms. Jan Schmitt spoke in favor of the proposal. She mentioned she hoped there would be research, transparency and line items so everyone knows them.

Ms. Brianne Mazzoleni, 93 1st Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15229, spoke in favor of the proposal. She questioned the township's maintenance of its fields and the safety of the fields in the township.

Mr. David Martin, owner of Right Direction Real Estate in Ross Township, spoke in favor of the proposal. He questioned why the township has never asked business owners to help. He indicated he helped for the Halloween parade and never heard from anybody again. Mr. Martin stated he would personally donate \$25,000 and pledged an additional \$2,500 a year for the next 10 years.

New Business - None

PARKS AND RECREATION:

Chair: Pat Mullin; Members – Jason Piring and Joe Laslavic

Parks and Recreation Director Report - None

Hiring of Program Assistant and Social Media Coordinator – Five candidates were interviewed for the position.

Motion to hire Laurie Berie for the position of Program Assistant and Social Media Coordinator at a salary of \$40,000.00 made by Commissioner Mullin and seconded by Commissioner Laslavic .

Upon inquiry by Commissioner Perring, Commissioner Mullin outlined Ms. Berie's experience. Commissioner Shaffer requested in the future that resumes be provided.

**Motion passes – 5 to 0
Commissioners Laslavic and Stanko not present for vote**

Resolution – DCNR Grant for Denny Park, Phase II

Motion to approve Resolution No. 2316 requesting a grant of \$114,151.00 from the DCNR for the Phase II of the Denny Park Master Plan made by Commissioner Mullin and seconded by Commissioner Perring.

**Motion passes – 5 to 0
Commissioners Laslavic and Stanko not present for vote**

Evergreen Park Building Deck and ADA Access

Motion to award the Evergreen Park Building Deck and ADA Access Project to TBI Contracting, Inc., in the amount of \$126,485.00 made by Commissioner Mullin and seconded by Commissioner Shaffer .

Motion passes – 7 to 0

New Business - None

PLANNING, ZONING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Chair: Dan DeMarco; Members – Jack Betkowski and Grace Stanko

Community Development Director Report

Mr. Rickert did not have a report this evening.

Harvesting and Management Ordinance

Commissioner DeMarco stated this was a draft ordinance. Mr. Rickert indicated it would repeal and replace the existing Chapter 14. Mr. Rickert stated the tree protection is for tree protection during land development. If someone wanted to log 30 acres of woods, they would fall under the auspices of this ordinance. If someone wanted to develop 30 acres to put in homes, it would fall under the auspices of the amendment for tree protection. Mr. Rickert stated the key here is commercial sale of the tree products off site. Commissioner Shaffer requested a summary of the key differences. Mr. Rickert stated he would provide that.

Upon inquiry from Commissioner Shaffer regarding the Canopy Ordinance, Mr. Rickert indicated they are waiting for the county to respond. The Planning Commission is reviewing the Tree Protection Ordinance currently. Upon inquiry from Commissioner Shaffer, Commissioner DeMarco stated the Political Sign Ordinance is pending. It has been introduced, but it has not been adopted. It is currently at the county for review. Commissioner Shaffer commented that, as a pending ordinance, he thought it had the effect of taking effect. Mr. Murray commented as follows:

MR. MURRAY: "I drafted a resolution. I don't know what happened to that resolution.

MR. SAMPLE: "We passed it.

MR. MURRAY: "Yes. The Pending Ordinance Doctrine is applicable here because your Board passed the new resolution adopting the pending ordinance. So the new ordinance applies, according to the Pending Ordinance Resolution."

Upon inquiry by Commissioner Betkowski if the "Pittsburgh Singles" signs could be removed, Mr. Murray replied in the affirmative.

New Business - None

PUBLIC SAFETY:

Co-Chairs: Jack Betkowski and Dan DeMarco; Member – Pat Mullin

Police Chief Report:

Chief Ley stated there will be a travel request at the next meeting for Sergeant Barrett to attend the American Association of Police Polygraphists on May 4th through the 11th in Reno, Nevada. The cost is not to exceed \$1,900.

He thanked Ross Park Mall for hosting “Coffee with a Cop” on March 12th. The next event will be geared towards children. The second Town Hall regarding the opioid crisis was held in conjunction with West View Police and the North Hills School District on March 18th. The chief also mentioned the police participated with two local churches in March in doing some safety and security and emergency preparedness training.

Chief Ley also mentioned the police did invoke their emergency schedule for a 72-hour period on March 23rd and ending on the morning of March 26th in preparedness for anything that might have resulted from the East Pittsburgh police officer trial and verdict. Fortunately, nothing did develop.

The Ross Township Bike Rodeo will be on Saturday, April 27th, at the Block at Northway from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

New Business - None

FINANCE, BUDGET AND PENSION:

Chair: Jason Purring; Members – Joe Laslavic and Dan DeMarco

Finance Director Report

Mr. Berty gave an overview of the financial position of the township. The Earned Income Taxes at the end of February finished at 14.9 percent of the budgeted revenue, \$44,000 higher at this point than 2018. Collections for Local Service Tax and Real Estate Transfer Tax finished above the monthly benchmark, while the

Mercantile and Business Privilege Tax finished below. Overall, \$660,000 of the prior year's reserve was used to cover the expenditures.

The expense side finished at 10.7 percent, which is lower than the benchmark of 16 percent. Total expenditures were approximately \$94,000 less than at this point in 2018. ALCOSAN's bill was not paid as of the end of February, so the revenues were over expenditures by \$1.4 million. There was a slope stabilization payment made from the Capital Fund. The operating account is approximately \$300,000 higher than it was at the end of February 2018. The Sewer Fund is approximately \$1 million higher. There was more interest earned in the investment account. The Capital Fund is lower at the end of February.

Upon inquiry by Commissioner Purring, Mr. Berty indicated last year it was budgeted to use \$1.9 million of the fund balance. The actual number was right around \$1 million. This year there is a \$3 million deficit budgeted. With the additional \$600,000 for road paving, that brings the budgeted deficit to \$3,600,000. Commissioner Purring commented if the trend continues, either spending will have to be cut or revenues would have to be raised. Mr. Berty was in agreement. He stated "Eventually it's going to dry up." Mr. Sample stated that would be in 2022.

Commissioner Betkowski, once again, raised concerns about the township's bond rating. Mr. Berty stated the GFOA recommends maintaining 25 percent of your budget for the year, which is \$5 million. As of the end of 2018, the township was around \$8 million. Mr. Berty stated they are tracking trends and looking towards the future and trying to make sure they are in the best position they can be.

New Business - None

Junior Commissioner Report

Junior Commissioner Murtezi stated on April 12-14 the high school music department is going on a performance tour. There will be school on April 17th and 18th, due to snow make-up days.

Students will be off on April 19th and 22nd. Arts Alive will be held on May 3rd. The Senior Prom is going to be held on May 4th.

OTHER BOARDS/ENTITIES (COG, CONNECT, Intergovernmental):

Commissioner Betkowski stated he attended an EMS meeting and was informed EMS would be coming to the township to request an additional \$100,000 in their budget for next year. Commissioner Stanko inquired if they had changed their subscription information, due to a problem one of her constituents experienced. Commissioner Betkowski didn't think anything had changed.

Commissioner DeMarco reminded everyone that the library's Garden Gala is coming up on April 13th. VIP tickets are sold out, but other tickets are still available.

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

Motion to adjourn make by Commissioner Shaffer and seconded by Commissioner Mullin .

Motion passes – 7 to 0

MEETING ADJOURNED TO EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 9:31 P.M.

Manager/Secretary

**President,
Stephen Korbel
Ross Township Board of
Commissioners**