

**LOWER MOUNT BETHEL TOWNSHIP  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES – OCTOBER 23, 2023 @ 7:00 P.M.**

**CALL TO ORDER** - The October 23, 2023 workshop meeting of the Lower Mount Bethel Township Board of Supervisors was held in person at 6984 S. Delaware Drive, Martins Creek, Pennsylvania, 18063 (formerly known as Centerfield School). The meeting was called to order by Chairperson DeBerardinis at 7:00 p.m. In attendance were M. DeBerardinis, S. Disidore, S. Newman, J. Mauser, S. Burns and J. Smethers. There were 5 members of the audience present. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES – OCTOBER 2, 2023 – MOTION** by J. Mauser, second by S. Burns to approve the minutes as submitted. Vote: 5-0.

**1. Fire Company Presentation 2024 Budget** – George Russo Jr. and Jeff Larrison did a slide show presentation. Topics they discussed were what the volunteer Fire Company does for the community and the implementation of a fire tax. The Fire Company consists of community members who have careers, families, households and pay the same taxes as the rest of the community, and selflessly dedicate and volunteer their time to safeguard the residents. They serve the community without any monetary compensation, sacrificing time with families, witness traumatic events and confront life threatening situations.

In 2022 the Fire Company reported 185 emergency responses and 2023 so far 169 emergency responses. George explained our tax millage is the 7<sup>th</sup> lowest compared to 38 municipalities in Northampton County. If the Township implements a 2-mill fire tax, we would still be the 13<sup>th</sup> lowest.

A 2-mill fire tax would be roughly \$200,000 per year in revenue and approximately \$200.00 per year per resident depending on the property assessed value. George explained the benefits of a fire tax and being crucial for covering the costs of equipment and ensuring that the Fire Company is able to comply with the National Fire Protection Association safety regulations. The costs and requirements of replacement of their equipment would be impossible to support much needed upgrades in years to come without any additional tax base. They would use the funding to replace equipment as needed and required.

The NFPA 1901 recommends that apparatuses greater than 15 years old, even those that have been property maintained and are still in serviceable condition, be placed in reserve status. It also states that apparatuses that were manufactured to the applicable NFPA fire apparatus standards or that are over 25 years old be replaced. They will continue to apply for grants and do fundraising. Without a fire tax, it would be near impossible to replace the equipment in kind – replacement schedule was provided to the BOS. George on behalf of the Fire Company thanked the residents and BOS for supporting the Fire Company and generosity in making a significant difference in the community's safety and security. J. Mauser thanked the Fire Company for all they do and are happy to continue supporting them. John mentioned the magnificent turnout for the car show, they did a wonderful job and is so proud of the community for supporting them.

**2. REC. BOARD – 2024 Rec. Board Budget.** M. Posner and N. Palmieri were present to review with the BOS the Rec. Board Budget. M. Posner mentioned the Rec. Board is happy to work with the Fire Company and contributed money towards their dinner. The Rec. Board and Fire Company both indicated they are not interested in hosting the Easter Egg Hunt and don't want to use Rec. Board funds towards this event. Martha indicated the 2024 revenue will be better next year. The Rec. Board is losing members next year and the plant sale is very labor intensive, so Regina Marinelli is looking into purchasing bulk plants from a local nursery.

In light of the money needed to be spent on disaster relief, the Rec. Board is cutting back expenses for the Tree Lighting by having Merchants Bank provide their hot cocoa truck for free. Martha mentioned our events are relatively free to the community, the only donations accepted have been directed to be given to the Fire Company. M. DeBerardinis thanked the Fire Company and Rec. Board for their presentations.

**COURTESY OF THE FLOOR – None.**

**SUBDIVISIONS / ZONING – None.**

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. 2024 Budget - J. Smethers reviewed with the BOS the 2024 Draft Budget.**

General Fund – 362.410 Building Permits. Jen noted there will be an increase in fees from Barry Isett's office. They have not had an increase in a few years since they merged with Code Master. Jen reviewed the details of the grants. The Road Department has completed the road repairs on Hahn & Klausz road. 406.213 – This is for new computer equipment. S. Burns suggested getting a MAC. S. Disidore suggested docking stations for the laptops. 409.260 – there is \$1,500 allotted for a tv at centerfield. S. Newman also suggested a sound system for Centerfield. S. Burns suggested having zoom set up all the time at Centerfield. J. Mauser suggested for the future modern lighting at Centerfield be installed. 411.820 – Capital Equipment purchase – Jen noted if we don't get the grant for the pickup truck, then we will need pay the down payment. We do have \$211,000 in the American Relief Fund that needs to be used by the end of 2024.

**Fire Company / Fire Tax** – J. Smethers indicated we are paying interest on all the loans and the township will save money if we institute a fire tax. The fire tax would be in effect in 2024. The fire tax money would be held in a township bank account just like the Capital Reserve account is set up. J. Mauser indicated he is in favor of a 1 ½ or 2 mill fire tax considering the cost of the replacement equipment they need. **MOTION** by J. Mauser, second by M. DeBerardinis to implement a 2-mill fire tax. J. Smethers indicated we need to pass a resolution at our November meeting. S. Newman asked how the Fire Department would ask for funds. J. Mauser suggested a separate interest-bearing account for the Fire Company. S. Newman asked if vacant land is taxed. M. DeBerardinis responded yes; it's also based upon assessed value. Vote: 5-0.

**Capital Reserve – Planning Funds** – J. Smethers allocated \$25,010.99 for Slate Belt comp. plan. and zoning. S. Newman said we might need more than that if we move forward with the SB Comp. plan. Jen said we can pull additional funds from the General Fund if needed.

**Sanitation Fund** – Jen indicated the 2023 assessment was \$375.00 with a \$30.00 credit. With the additional costs from the flood for dumpsters, we will not be able to give the credit in 2024. Also, the cost of 50 toters would be \$8,447.50. M. DeBerardinis asked if we have a list of residents that lost their toters in the flood and is not in favor of ordering more toters at this time.

**Street Light Fund** – 434.361 – Gravel Hill shows for 2024 – 0 since those residents have signed a petition requesting to have their streetlights turned off. No further comments on the budget. Jen will make those changes and the BOS can authorize to advertise the 2024 budget at the next meeting. Jen mentioned she did not put anything in the budget for Suburban. She has reached out to Portland to see if they are interested in forming a regional EMS with possibly UMBT and asked to include us in conversations with St. Lukes. S. Newman indicated they might discuss it at the next COG meeting.

## OLD BUSINESS

**1. Slate Belt Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan** – S. Disidore reported the steering committee didn't meet last month, and if they do meet in November it will be next Thursday the 2nd. LMBT coordinated a meeting with the other Townships, Plainfield and UMBT attended, and Washinton Township did not show up. It was a good meeting, and all were in agreement that pushing the pause button on moving forward would be a good idea since there will be changes in Board members following the Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> election, and now is an especially busy time due to budget preparations. Plainfield is still not happy with the landfill issues and UMBT and Plainfield both still have issues with their maps included in the plan.

**CORRESPONDENCE** – All correspondence is located at the township office.

**APPROVAL OF THE BILLS MOTION** by J. Mauser, second by S. Newman to pay the bills in the amount of \$18,500.75. Vote: 5-0.

## REPORTS

**Chairman's Report** – No report.

### Board Members Reports

**S. Newman, S. Disidore, S. Burns** – Nothing further to report.

**J. Mauser** – John reported the Fire Company had a fantastic turnout Sunday for the car show and there were lots of positive comments. Somebody hit the gate at the entrance, and it broke off. Next year he would like the dirt pile to be moved (they haven't used it in 10 year) and the entrance / exit on to the field to be widened. He will prepare a plan for the work to be done next spring.

**Township Manager Report** – No further report.

**Road Department Report** – F. Heitzman reported the tennis court fill went to repair Klausz road and the rest of the fill is at the township garage to complete Hahn Rd. Klausz is open now, he spent 8 days working to get the road done by cutting out all the bad spots, repaving, and repairing the road bed and top end. They have been mowing and helped the Fire Company set up the car show. They will be starting their first round of picking up leaves with the leaf vac.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

**D. Ascani** – Mr. Ascani asked about the speed sign on Martins Creek Bangor Hwy. Fred indicated the mobile device was stolen from Gravel Hill Rd. and they have no more permanent signs. J. Smethers mentioned she added Main Street for a sign and it was approved by Penn DOT to be placed near Good Rd. on Main Street. We have no signs, but she will try and apply for a grant.

J. Matthews - Mr. Matthews asked if we have received any income yet for Gravel Hill Enterprises. J. Smethers indicated they gave us a \$25,000 deposit, no tipping fees received yet and any excess will be put in the account for cameras to monitor the vehicles. Mr. Mathews asked if the excess money in the budget could be reallocated to the Fire Company instead of implementing a Fire tax. J. Matthews spoke about the Fire Tax for the Fire Company and the burden to Senior Citizens with the tax increase. J. Mauser mentioned the Township is required to assist our volunteer Fire Company financially. J. Smethers noted if we had a paid Fire Company, we would be paying significantly more. G. Russo Sr. explained again about the increased costs of equipment and the Company not being able to afford new equipment.

**ADJOURNMENT** - The Board of Supervisors meeting was adjourned at 8:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Melissa Mastrogiovanni – Township Secretary / Planning Administrator