

Ligonier Township Supervisors
Special Meeting Minutes
October 18, 2022

The Supervisors of Ligonier Township met in special session at 6:00 p.m. Present were Chair, Dan Resenic; Vice Chair, John Beaufort; Secretary/Treasurer, Stephanie Verna; Supervisor, D. Scott Matson; and Supervisor, Erik Ross.

Also present were Manager, Michael Strelac and Solicitor, Dan Hudock.

Ligonier Beach Discussion:

Janell Emery, from the Friends of Ligonier Beach (FOLB) introduced Mr. Flynn from Gateway Engineering.

Dennis Flynn (Gateway Engineers) – Had prepared a report for FOLB and introduced potential next steps, which includes seeking funding. There is a DCNR grant which could be used for site planning – components might include a master site plan, plan for a pool, and a feasibility study. DCNR requires multiple steps, including public participation. As the property’s owner, Ligonier Township would apply for the grant. FOLB would be able to provide some funding for the grant’s match. The grant is due soon, it’s a “tight window.” Gateway Engineering employs a former DCNR staffer that helps them get grants like this, as well as others. Gateway put together preliminary project costs, but this project would require a DCNR grant to get estimated project costs. Another grant that recently opened, through the DCED, is the H2O grant for water, sewer, stormwater projects.

Supervisor Verna – H2O grant may not be appropriate, as MAWC owns the water line, not the Township. H2O is due in December. Questioned whether DCNR grant is for plan and feasibility, or separate studies? Per Dennis Flynn, it could be a single study.

Mrs. Emery – FOLB is willing to fundraise the grant’s match (\$50,000). They are working on fundraising now and have letters of support. Township support will help.

Terrell Funk (Township Recreation Board Member) – Lives across from the Beach, so he’s very familiar. The Recreation Board presented a plan with many options, but nothing’s been done since. The project has hit dead ends on water line and Route 30 access from PennDOT.

Supervisor Resenic – Spoke with McKenna foundation, one of the funders, and they are ok with funding \$28,000 to move the pipe out from under the buildings. Currently discussing with engineers, county, demolition contractor to get that done.

Question for Mr. Flynn – Points to examples of flooding, which happens almost every year. How to address constructing something in a regulated floodway?

Mr. Flynn – That is a challenge associated with the site, no matter what is developed or built there. It will require a joint permit. It is another obstacle with the site, regardless of whether it is a pool or not a pool.

Supervisor Resenic – Everyone he has talked to would not be willing to pay taxes to support a swimming pool. He will never vote to have the Township own a swimming pool. Would support a privately owned swimming pool.

Mickey Corb – Ligonier Beach would be an incredible advertising tool, to get people to move here. We need professionals to do the work, such as DCNR. If DCNR says no pool, she feels everyone would be ok with that. None of the studies done so far have been from “top people.”

Supervisor Resenic asked the Manager for his draft budget. Mr. Strelac stated it would cost approximately \$2.3 million a year to maintain the site including a pool and that includes borrowing capital to build the pool and other buildings.

Supervisor Beaufort – What if we get money elsewhere, for the upfront capital costs? For example, the LTMA isn't going to pay the entire cost for their projects.

Mrs. Emery – We're here to talk about the DCNR grant, not just the pool.

Supervisor Resenic asked the Township's engineer about the plans they worked on. Mr. Faas said they worked on some ideas, an option with the pool, an option without the pool, an option with some sort of water feature in the old footprint of the pool.

Supervisor Beaufort – Plans worked up by The EADs Group are similar to plans developed by FOLB. Why not do this, we're not putting any money up. Let a professional engineering company do this.

Mr. Flynn thinks this feasibility study could be done with and without a pool, study multiple options.

Mr. Funk recapped some of the ideas that were thrown out early in the process: dog park, wedding venue, tennis, pickle ball. People suggested things they wanted, other than just yes/no answer on a pool. The pool is used today as an unofficial skate park. If the Township doesn't want to move forward, what would it take to sell the property?

Supervisor Resenic reminded the Recreation Board that the Board of Supervisors instructed them to develop a plan without a pool. That motion still stands.

Supervisor Ross – Property has sat barren for three years. Talking with residents, the concerns are the success of the pool. He is concerned with spending \$100,000 on another feasibility study, when feasibility studies have already been completed. When the Township bought the Beach, it was clear that a pool would not be a part of it. Supervisor Matson agrees. A fund should be established, for when this goes defunct so the taxpayers are not on the hook. Laurel Mountain only succeeded because Mr.

Nutting stepped in, after it went bankrupt twice. Supervisor Ross would just as soon sell the property.

Mrs. Emery – Supervisors have expressed that they do not want the pool, and have talked to residents that don't want it. FOLB's experience differs, as they've had many people approach them wanting a pool. Let's truly find out from the public what they want. Let's keep state taxpayer dollars here, not Philly and Harrisburg. Making the property a field with a fishing pier will not attract people to Ligonier. FOLB wants to create something here that is lasting, and makes people want to come to the Township to play pickle ball and eat at food trucks. Allow this study to incorporate the studies already done, and to talk to the public again. There will be no money coming out of the township's pocket for this study.

Supervisor Verna – The grant application is due soon – when will awards be granted?

Mr. Flynn – Maybe some time in January, before spring round opens up.

Question – We went through a process with surveys, what is different in a DCNR process? How is that different?

Mr. Flynn – Previous studies just looked at two options, DCNR would look at many options.

Supervisor Verna – What are the detailed output, outcomes, deliverables?

Mr. Flynn – A report of hundreds of pages, short term and long-term costs, would look at all potential possibilities. Would look at other things in area, like nearby pools and parks. Would be ready for design and construction after this report.

Supervisor Verna – When would the report be done?

Mr. Flynn – It's a long term schedule, potentially breaking ground in 2024, 2025.

Supervisor Verna – If the Township moves forward, what are we obligated to do? Will we be obligated to do something in the meantime? In relation to water lines, current grants, etc.

Mr. Flynn – There are no restrictions, he's worked with people who installed tennis courts during the study. Township will need an official Resolution, as well as letter stating where the funds are coming from.

Supervisor Verna – If we were awarded the grant, what's the burden on Township staff?

Mr. Strelic – In my experience, it's usually been a full time project manager assigned to a project like this, plus other shared staff.

Mr. Flynn – Could be in house, or he's worked with Townships that relied on outside contractors.

Supervisor Verna – If we get a result back that says it's feasible, the board may still chose not to move forward. The site as it looks now is a blight upon the community. It needs to be cleaned up and secured, which is tough to do while it's stuck in this middle ground.

Doug Finger – FOLB is willing to help clean up, again. FOLB wouldn't be willing to buy the property without the pool asset. There's nothing to lose by going forward with the grant.

Supervisor Verna – Do we need to prove we have funds set aside for this grant? Are we going to be on the hook for funding?

Mr. Flynn – The Township only needs to write a "letter of commitment."

Mrs. Emery – FOLB already has about half the money and pledge letters.

Tom Stickle – Cooperation could mean a lot for the community, and potentially for the site. Appreciates that the Township doesn't want to spend money out of their pocket. DCNR could react favorable to this grant, since they already have skin in the game (their other grants at that site).

Supervisor Resenic – Haven't heard any objections to other things at the site (pickle ball, tennis, food trucks, amphitheater, etc.). We don't need a feasibility study for those things. The sticking point is the swimming pool. FOLB wouldn't be here in attendance for a pickle ball court. Reiterated that he will never vote for a swimming pool.

Mrs. Emery – Reminded the Supervisors that there was a special meeting on April 5th regarding a feasibility study. Such as the one being proposed.

Supervisor Matson – How many times were you at the pool when it was open?

Mrs. Emery – Stated she took her kids there many times when they were younger.

Supervisor Matson – Has not heard from a single person in favor of a pool. He was against the Township buying the property and at the time the Township was purchasing it was not their intent to reopen/operate a pool.

Mrs. Emery – If all you've heard is negative, how can you explain the amount of Facebook comments, the amount of support, the amount of "FOLB" hats waking around?

Mr. Finger – FOLB would need to do its due diligence before buying the property. What EADs group did was ideas, "DCNR will cook a real meal."

Supervisor Resenic – I would support a feasibility study without a pool. Demographics are changing. The population doesn't exist to support the pool. There's a flood risk assessment, the problem is its location.

Supervisor Beaufort – The fort flooded in 2018, nobody proposed closing the fort. Ligonier is different, people come here for the weekend. They don't do that in Windber, Latrobe, Derry, other places with pools. The pool was packed when it was open. There were a lot of great ideas in those early meetings, but the only idea that has continued to be pushed is the pool. The supervisors didn't do anything with those other ideas. Only the pool people are still here. Nobody else came after those early meetings. I just want to see something done out there.

Supervisor Ross – Do we need to give our permission for the FOLB to do this? Solicitor Hudock replied the Township will be the grant administrators. Mr. Strelic added the Township staff do not have the capacity to take on this grant at this time.

Mrs. Beaufort – This is an opportunity to get the facts. Who would be against getting facts?

Comment from the back: People would come from Connellsville, Butler, far away areas to come to the pool when it was open. People would come back.

Supervisor Verna asked what the Board can do to make FOLB prove that they can cover the funds. Solicitor Hudock advised some sort of letter or agreement.

There was a discussion on possible motions and best way to make the motions.

- A motion was made by Stephanie Verna and seconded by Dan Resenic that the Township will apply for a DCNR grant to pay for the Ligonier Beach's master site plan and feasibility study; FOLB agrees to pay the cost and will write and submit the grant, and if awarded the FOLB will provide the matching funds. No Ligonier Township tax dollars will be expended. There was a roll call vote, all supervisors voted aye. Motion carried.
- A motion was made by Supervisor Ross and seconded by Supervisor Verna to adjourn the meeting at 7:13 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Strelic
Township Manager