

**Ligonier Township Supervisors**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**  
*October 24, 2023*

The Supervisors of Ligonier Township met in regular session at 4:30 p.m. Present were Chair, Dan Resenic; Vice Chair, Erik Ross; Supervisor, D. Scott Matson; and Supervisor, John Beaufort. Secretary/Treasurer, Stephanie Verna attended by phone.

Also present were Manager, Michael Strelac; Solicitor, Dan Hudock; Engineer, Drew Walker; Public Works Foreman, Lance Griffith; Zoning / Code Enforcement Officer, Rick Krouse; and Finance Officer, Bethany Caldwell.

**Comments from the Public**

1. Deb Messer – commented on Right-to-Know requests she submitted.
2. Wilma Light (PSU Master Water Site Steward) – commented on the importance of trees with respect to stormwater management.
3. John Geisey – commented on the number of trees the Township has marked for removal, their condition, and asked about the removal process.
4. Kathy Mistraw – commented on the Township’s past tree removal process and said some trees should be removed as they are damaged, diseased, and/or they take down lines.
5. Jim Mistraw – asked about the trees’ root balls.

Mr. Griffith clarified the root balls would be removed but at a later date.

Supervisor Resenic asked Mr. Strelac to address the township’s tree removal policy / procedures. Mr. Strelac explained the Township had not been removing trees in the Township’s Right-of-Ways (ROWs) for several years now, so we are trying to get caught up. The criteria for removing trees in the ROW are trees that are less than 6 inches from the road – trees that can damage snow plow equipment and trees leaning in to the point they become a hazard (narrowing the road width, blocking line of sight).

Supervisor Matson added that vertical clearance for larger vehicles on narrow roads is a safety issue when there is nowhere to go and the trees damage the vehicles.

Supervisor Ross said that trees blocking the ROW need to come down whether they are alive or dead.

Supervisor Resenic said that trees are a blessing and a curse. They’re beautiful, especially at this time of year and they reduce stormwater runoff. But they seek sunlight and move towards it, sometimes creating hazards for drivers on the road and damaging township’s equipment. This needs intelligent management; balancing environmental

concerns and safety responsibilities. He asked Mr. Strelac and Mr. Griffith to review the trees that have been marked for removal.

### **Comments from the Supervisors**

Supervisor Matson – told Mr. Griffith that he will take care of any trees in the ROW on his property.

Supervisor Ross – no comment

Supervisor Beaufort – no comment

Supervisor Resenic – no comment

- A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by Scott Matson to approve the minutes from the October 10, 2023 meeting. Motion carried.

### **Correspondence List** (Note these items are not read aloud.)

1. David Copeland, Planning Commission resignation
2. Westmoreland County Association of Township Supervisors meeting
3. Mutual Aid request for financial support, \$5 per resident

### **Manager Report**

Mr. Strelac deferred his report to the budget item later in the agenda.

### **Emergency Management Report**

Emergency Management Coordinator Patrick McDowell reported there was training today for the officials to understand their role as elected officials. The Township should participate in the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan, there is no cost but there are benefits. The Plan is updated every 5 years and identifies potential flooding hazards, transportation issues, develops emergency escape routes / detours, etc. If the Township supplies this information to be incorporated into the County's plan it may be eligible for future funding.

Mr. McDowell also said that addressing trees in the ROW now is a mitigation effort as it reduces expenses later. We need to keep the roadways open for firetrucks and ambulances to reach people in emergencies, he cited the high wind storm earlier this year – trees came down blocking roads and leaving some without power for up to 4 days.

### **Engineer Report**

Mr. Walker reported the grant application for Carey School Road was done and that the Orme Road bridge field inspection was completed yesterday (waiting on the final report).

## **Solicitor Report**

Mr. Hudock deferred his report to the Act 537 topic later on the agenda, and noted that the owner of a property with code violations was served on October 3, and the next step would be to file for default judgement.

## **Staff Reports**

### Zoning / Code Enforcement

Mr. Krouse presented his monthly report for September.

Supervisor Verna joined the meeting via phone call.

### Public Works

Mr. Griffith provided a handout detailing the need for another Public Works employee.

Supervisor Ross noted the Public Works Committee met last week and have a 5 year operating & capital public works plan to be incorporated into the overall budget.

Supervisor Matson asked if the Township should allow the LTMA to borrow a Public Works employee if we are short staffed.

### Finance

Mrs. Caldwell provided September's budget vs. actual monthly report for the General Fund. The Township is forecasting to be ~\$100k under budget year end due to vacancies. The total dollar amount to be paid out of each fund was read.

- A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by Scott Matson to approve the bills as presented. Motion carried.

## **Old Business**

1. Westmoreland County stormwater grant – have not received the revised agreement yet; tabled, no action taken.
2. Residential & commercial sewage line inspection testing – the LTMA is still drafting policy & procedures; tabled, no action taken.
3. Public Works Operator vacancy – Mr. Strelic was asked to table this subject in late July, to allow the new Public Works foreman time to analyze the department's needs and make a recommendation.
  - A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by Scott Matson to approve advertising for a Public Works laborer. Motion carried.
4. Public Works Laborer job description - Mr. Strelic clarified what changed: the CDL requirements were removed and new language from the union agreement was added.

- A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by Scott Matson to approve the Public Works Laborer job description. Motion carried.

## **New Business**

### **1. Ligonier Country Market 2024 detour**

This is a prerequisite the Country Market needs before PennDOT will consider their road closure permit application. There is to be a meeting set up with Supervisors Verna and Beaufort to discuss the 2024 special event market permit with Country Market staff. There was a brief discussion about the best way to proceed.

Supervisor Resenic hesitated to approve the request when there were still issues to be worked through. Supervisor Verna questioned the timing of the process and was in favor of approving the request as there is still time to address concerns related to the 2024 special event(s) permit.

- A motion was made by John Beaufort and seconded by Stephanie Verna to approve the Ligonier Country Market's 2024 detour. Roll call vote, Supervisors Beaufort, Verna, and Ross voted aye, Supervisor Matson and Resenic voted, nay. Motion carried, 3:2.

### **2. Burning Ordinance 2023-O-07**

Mr. Strelic asked the Supervisors to review the draft ordinance that was provided and let him know if any changes are requested. This ordinance incorporates state regulations allowing for more local control and focuses on what residents are not permitted to burn (garbage, tires, etc.).

- A motion was made by Stephanie Verna and seconded by Erik Ross approving the advertisement of Ordinance 2023-O-07 for possible adoption. Motion carried.

### **3. Resolution R-23-24, Investments**

Mr. Strelic noted that this Resolution was slightly different from previous iterations in that it allowed him to make some future dated (but not indefinite) investments.

- A motion was made by Stephanie Verna and seconded by Erik Ross approving resolution R-23-24, CDs and investments. Motion carried.

### **4. Resolution R-23-25 PennDOT Multimodal grant for Carey School Road – seeking \$1.18M to add sidewalk and widen the bridge that students use to get to / from the High School. If granted, the project will require 30% match, but this project will be a great benefit to the community. The Supervisors asked staff to seek some support / assistance from the School District and other entities.**

- A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by Stephanie Verna approving resolution R-23-25. Motion carried.

5. Ligonier Beach cleanup approval

No proposal, therefore no action taken. There was a brief discussion about the possibility of directing volunteer work.

6. 2024 Budget

There was a lengthy discussion about the 2024 budget, it needs to be advertised for 20 days. It is balanced due to the remaining ARP funds. The board to consider when and how to raise revenue, we are out of things to cut.

Supervisor Verna stated she is not prepared to vote on raising mills that are multiple years out, the Township's expense were reduced due to vacancies, will have a better sense of the costs now that we are up and running; performance should be better. Another unknown is how long the investments will continue to have 5% or higher rate of return.

Question - has the vacant Public Works laborer position been included in the 2024 budget? Yes.

Supervisor Ross – suggested raising the real estate tax by one mill next year and another mill in two years, but that may change with unforeseen circumstances. To fund the police department alone is going to require a 1.5 mill increase. The Township has done its due diligence: gained efficiencies, is now staffed at optimal levels, etc. He urged the LVPD Commission to look at their budget and ensure that everything that can be done is being done.

Supervisor Verna clarified that the baseline budget that came over from the municipalities to fund the LVPD did not include any funding to purchase / maintain the police department's fleet – a vehicle budget was non-existent. The LVPD was able to purchase four new vehicles by becoming a revenue generating entity and while there may be an opportunity on the service contract side, it can't be counted on. So for the 2024 budget there is an increase and there is a small reserve due to timing, but the reserve is needed to float payroll.

Supervisor Beaufort noted that no other police department in the state has been able to keep their budget flat for 5 years.

Supervisor Verna added that the police budget is simplistic and the Commission monitors it closely. They plan to add an administrator – that will help the department overall gain some efficiencies and elevate the Chief. While not filling the Assistant Chief position may save some money, there was not much of a cost differential due to overtime incurred covering staff shortages.

Supervisor Beaufort noted we are using ARP money to balance the budget. He would rather spend that money on equipment now that will last years (as that was the intent of the money) and raise taxes in 2024 – so we can make the public works team more productive today. He doesn't want to raise taxes, but at the same time, we can't stick our heads in the sand.

Supervisor Verna agreed with Supervisor Beaufort's sentiment, and asked whether or not we are we ready to properly take of care the equipment if we make the investment? She cautioned her intent was not accusatory.

Supervisor Resenic said our track record with expensive equipment is dismal. He agreed the ARP funds would be better spend on investments instead of using it to pay the bills. He is in favor of smaller but more frequent tax increases.

Supervisor Ross said a one-mill real estate tax rate increase for most residents is around a \$20 increase.

Supervisor Verna asked staff to make changes that were discussed to the 2024 Budget (increase the Real Estate tax by 1 mill, include a transfer to the Capital Fund for equipment purchases), research the previous motion made regarding the ARP funds, recirculate the draft budget, and advertise the 2024 budget is being presented for adoption.

#### 7. Act 537 Appeal

- A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by Scott Matson approving Mr. Hudock to sign off on a stipulation the Township would like to withdrawal its Act 537 Plan appeal without prejudice (preserves the right to refile in the future). Motion carried.

Supervisor Beaufort stressed that the Township reserves it right to file an appeal at a later date.

#### 8. Finance Officer

- A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by to John Beaufort approving a \$1 per hour raise, effective October 29 for the Finance Officer. Motion carried.

#### **Executive Session**

There was no executive session.

#### **Comments from the Public**

1. Deb Messer – commented on the Board's real estate tax increase discussion and fees charged by the Township.
2. Vicki Oles – Thanked the Board for moving forward with the burning ordinance and said as a resident, it was helpful to hear what a one-mill increase means for most property owners.

#### **Comments from the Supervisors**

Supervisor Matson – Thanked the staff and said he is satisfied with the way things are moving along.

Supervisor Ross – Proud of the efficiencies gained, the roads are above par, and he is looking forward to more improvements from the increased revenue, the township can provide more for the tax payer.

Supervisor Beaufort – no comment

Supervisor Resenic – no comment

- A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by John Beaufort to adjourn the meeting at 5:57 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Bethany Caldwell  
Assistant Secretary/Treasurer

Ligonier Township, Westmoreland County, PA

Bill Payments for All Vendors

October 24, 2023

Vendor	Type	Num	Amount
<b>Oct 24, 23</b>			
Andrews Sales & Service	Bill Pmt -Check	25821	16.06
Bedford Valley & Jacobs Petroleum	Bill Pmt -Check	25822	589.00
Cord Kelly	Bill Pmt -Check	25823	123.50
Fayette Parts Service, Inc.	Bill Pmt -Check	25824	148.08
Glassmere Fuel Service	Bill Pmt -Check	25825	3,685.52
Heidleberg Materials	Bill Pmt -Check	25826	539.89
Judy Ridgway - v	Bill Pmt -Check	25827	114.16
Ligonier Valley Police Department	Bill Pmt -Check	25828	113,778.23
PSATS	Bill Pmt -Check	25829	149.26
Stephenson Equipment, Inc.- Old Walsh	Bill Pmt -Check	25830	27.77
Town & Country Motors	Bill Pmt -Check	25831	66.95
Tresco Paving Corp	Bill Pmt -Check	25832	1,251.78
UniFirst Corporation	Bill Pmt -Check	25833	165.74
Washington National Insurance Company	Bill Pmt -Check	25834	165.36
Wilkins Services	Bill Pmt -Check	25835	326.00
Comcast	Bill Pmt -Check	25836	552.10
<b>Oct 24, 23</b>			<b>121,699.40</b>



12:05 PM

10/23/23

Ligonier Township - Escrow Account  
Bill Payments for All Vendors  
October 24, 2023

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Vendor	Type	Num	Amount
Oct 24, 23			
Thomas Sibal	Bill Pmt -Check	1054	6,666.67
Oct 24, 23			<u>6,666.67</u>