

Ligonier Township Supervisors
Regular Meeting Minutes
November 22, 2022

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

Also present were Manager, Michael Strelac; Solicitor, Dan Hudock; Chief of Police John Berger, Engineer Ben Faas, and Finance Officer, Bethany Caldwell.

Comments from the Public

There were no comments from the public.

Comments from the Supervisors

There were no comments from the Supervisors.

- A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by John Beaufort to approve the minutes from the November 7, 2022 meeting. Motion carried, with Supervisor Resenic abstaining from the vote as he was absent at that meeting.

Correspondence

1. Email from Dan Weimer, expressing interest in serving on the LTMA board
2. Email from David Copeland, expressing interest in serving on the Planning Commission
3. Westmoreland County board of assessments: the assessed value of all property in Township is \$100,975,150
4. Joy Haven Property LLC v Commonwealth of PA DEP
5. Rolling Rock stormwater improvements

Manager Report

Mr. Strelac reported we are short-staffed again, there were some good interviews for the Zoning / Code Enforcement position and he is ready to discuss the PW Director position in Executive Session.

Public Works Report

Mr. Strelac also reported the first snow of the season was last Friday. The crew continue to trim trees on private property to avoid limbs falling into the roads.

Engineer Report

Both the H2O and Small Water & Sewer grant application deadlines are coming up (December 21), the township will need to pass a resolution at the next meeting if the Board wants to apply. Replacement of the private water lines might be a good candidate. Unlike CDBG grants, there are not income requirements.

Chairman Resenic noted for the record that Supervisor Matson arrived (4:40 p.m.).

Solicitor Report

Mr. Hudock is continuing to work with the EADS Group on the Myers School Road issue. He noted the Coal Loaders agreement is on the agenda later in the meeting and is ready to be executed.

Treasurer Report

The October Budget vs. Actual monthly report for the General Fund was provided to the Supervisors.

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

Old Business

The Myers School Road Agreement – The agreement included a \$3,000 payment to be made upon execution and the road will remain closed until October 31, 2024. Road to be restored prior to reopening; improvements to include added drainage, base leveling, and tar and chipping the section that was removed. The penalty provision is set at \$5k/month if the road is still closed after November 1, 2024. Should issues with liquid fuels tax arise Coal Loaders shall reimburse the Township for any lost revenue. Solicitor recommends a motion executing the agreement.

- A motion was made by Stephanie Verna and seconded by John Beaufort to approve the agreement. Motion carried.

The 2023 Operating Budget and 2023-2027 Five-Year Plan was discussed.

Supervisor Verna cautioned that the board should not adopt the 5 year capital plan as it was created by a director that is no longer here. Highlights include:

Revenue – projecting the deed transfer tax will decline due to the market, but optimistically planning for some increase on the earned income. Another item to consider is the amusement tax – discussion about increasing it / expanding it and will have to follow the process to change it. The operating budget is relying on \$172k in ARPA funds to balance and will use ARPA funds to balance the 2024 budget too. This is a known revenue deficit, as the money will not be there in a few years. There is a general fund reserve that could be tapped into if needed.

Expenses – cost of labor keeps going up. Compare to 2021 (because 2022 had vacancies) there is a 34% increase. Supervisor Matson asked how much the Public Works employees contribute to their benefits - \$32/month. He suggested they pay more. Mr. Strelie noted that half of the crew are making \$19.10/hour and there are trade-offs that need to be considered.

There are increasing contributions to Liquid Fuels Fund and the Capital Fund to build up reserves for capital purchases scheduled a few years out.

The township's contribution to fund the LVPD remains flat.

Finance Committee will have an advertised workshop, open to the public to discuss the budget in greater detail. Costs are going up while revenue is not.

The 2023 Operating Budget, the 2023 Capital Budget and 2023-2027 Capital Improvement Plan, 2023 Real Estate Tax Rate, and 2023 Fee Schedule are on hold.

The Carcella employment matter agenda item was deferred to the executive session.

New Business

Amusement Tax amendment – There was discussion about increasing the amusement tax and possibly expanding the amusement tax. Mr. Hudock explained the tax cannot be expanded to include the ski facilities (they are exempt) and golf courses (clubs). Swimming pools to be researched. Air B&Bs will also require some research, but seems unlikely, perhaps a fee can be collected to issue a business license? The Board directed the manager to reach out to Idlewild's manager to discuss the impact – may phase the increase over time or suggest a payment in lieu of taxes (flat fee) that is linked to performance (good year vs. bad year).

There was a discussion about proposed changes to the Wilpen, Darlington, and Waterford VFDs callout sheets.

Supervisor Ross said they've been thinking about combining companies to better serve the Township. Darlington is requesting to be removed from tree down calls, they don't have the necessary equipment to respond. The proposal will also streamline the process and eliminate multiple companies from responding with the same equipment. Call volume has increased tremendously (quadrupled) over the past 30 years – puts a strain on the volunteers and membership is dwindling and unnecessary wear & tear when duplicate vehicles respond.

- A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by Scott Matson approving the Volunteer Fire Departments call out sheets pending the final review of Wilpen's map. Motion carried.
- A motion to advertise for the Public Works Director was made by Erik Ross and seconded by Stephanie Verna. Motion carried.

Executive Session

The Supervisors went into executive session at 5:16 p.m. to discuss personnel matters and resumed regular meeting at 5:29 p.m.

- A motion was made by Erik Ross and seconded by John Beaufort approving a Township Resolution authorizing payment of \$10,000 to settle an employment claim made by Terry Carcella. Motion carried.

Comments from the Public

There were no comments from the public.

Comments from the Supervisors

Supervisor Matson – Said he has heard from people about the news article regarding the LVPD agreements and pay raises. He suggested the Ligonier Valley Police Commission give the Board a heads up on these raises. His concern is government tends to raise taxes when they're in trouble and there are many people struggling to pay their bills.

Supervisor Verna (LVPD Commissioner) responded that the commission has been very careful with their budget, they treat it like a business and have kept their costs flat. They're able to do this because LVPD management does not incur overtime costs and LVPD management has found other sources of revenue while not sacrificing service levels. The department has reduced their health insurance costs significantly. Additionally, LVPD has taken over the financing of their vehicles (a cost the township used to incur but no longer does). Having a local police department adds value, it's a tremendous benefit to the community.

Supervisor Matson said for the record he thought the Chief and the Assistant Chief do a good job.

Supervisor Beaufort (LVPD Commissioner) – the Chief and the Assistant Chief do not get overtime, comp time, they work the holidays and they get called out 24x7. Even if they're not on the clock when there is a major event or accident, chances are they'll be there. It is excellent value for the money.

Supervisor Verna – No comment

Supervisor Ross – No comment

Supervisor Resenic – For the cost of less than one cigarette a day (about 30 cents) we get 24x7 police protection. There are two types of costs – dollar and cents and human life. Just last week there was a man holding people hostage, our police responded and no one was hurt. There were no state police cars available to take that call. Yesterday, state police got a call there was someone on a township road with a gun threatening suicide, and again our police responded, secured the scene and no one was hurt. Of all the townships in the county with a police department, Ligonier Township has the lowest millage rate. It is the best value for our dollar.

Happy Thanksgiving!

- A motion was made by Stephanie Verna and seconded by John Beaufort to adjourn the meeting at 5:40 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Bethany Caldwell
Assistant Secretary/Treasurer