

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MAKEFIELD
PARK & RECREATION BOARD
MINUTES – DECEMBER 8, 2009

The regular meeting of the Park & Recreation Board of the Township of Lower Makefield was held in the Municipal Building on December 8, 2009. Chairman Fritchey called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m.

Those present:

Park & Recreation Board: David Fritchey, Chairman
Henry Carpenter, Vice Chairman
Patricia Bunn, Secretary
Dave Gordon, Member (joined meeting in progress)
Fran McDonald, Member
Andrew Newbon, Member
Dennis Wysocki, Member

Others: Terry Fedorchak, Township Manager
Donna Liney, Park & Recreation Director
Pete Stainthorpe, Supervisor Liaison

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Newbon moved, Mr. McDonald seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve the November, 2009 Minutes as written.

DISCUSSION OF PARK & RECREATION BUDGET

Ms. Liney stated the Township Manager, Citizens Budget Committee, Finance Director, and Parks Director continue to work on the proposed Park & Recreation Budget for 2010, reducing costs, making do with less, and still continuing to provide a high quality Park product.

Ms. Liney stated for the past decade, the Park & Recreation millage has increased \$6; from \$54 in 2000 to \$61 in 2009. Currently it is proposed that the Park millage be reduced one quarter mil, or \$10, and those funds be transferred to the General Fund. The proposed 2010 millage for Park & Recreation would be \$51. The Programs and Events line item in the Park & Recreation Budget has eliminated some special events that are not funded such as Community Pride Day, Spring Movie Night, and the Veterans Parade.

Ms. Liney stated Park & Recreation is looking forward to a final decision by the Board of Supervisors on the best way to move forward in serving the community.

Ms. Liney stated the DCNR Grant Application for an additional phase of Memorial Park, of which an ADA playground was included, did not receive funding.

Ms. Liney stated the 2010 Community Pool Budget is scheduled for adoption tomorrow evening as well. The Board of Supervisors accepted the recommendation of the Park Board for the adjustments to the daily account fees for the Pool, and offering a guest pass booklet of 10 passes for \$65.

Mr. Fritchey stated the Budget just discussed is the Budget that Ms. Liney participated with Mr. Fedorchak in preparing to submit to the Board of Supervisors. Ms. Liney stated the three-page summary is new and shows the reduction in the millage. Mr. Fedorchak stated he made the decision to eliminate the Special Events in order to take an extra quarter of a mil out of Park & Recreation and put it in the General Fund. He stated in addition to this, he is recommending to the Board of Supervisors consideration of a .4 mil increase in the General Fund property tax. He stated the .4 plus the .25 will give the General Fund an additional, and much needed, .65 mills for 2010. He stated on Wednesday, the Board of Supervisors will also consider up to a 1 mil increase for various Park & Rec improvements. They will discuss the Snipes Tract, Memorial Park, and the Samost Tract; and he feels many people will be in attendance at that meeting to offer their opinions.

Mr. McDonald asked how the .25 coming out of Park & Rec effects the Park & Rec Budget and asked if only the special events will be lost. Mr. Fedorchak agreed that they will be lost, and they also did not put anything in for bikepath resurfacing as they have in past years. Mr. McDonald asked if there is any discussion about looking for sponsorships for Community Pride Day to try to bring that back. Mr. Fedorchak stated members of the Special Events Committee have been communicating, and they are considering how they could keep Community Pride for 2010. Mr. Fedorchak stated Community Pride Day and other special events represent a net expense to the Township of approximately \$50,000. He stated Ms. Liney does an extraordinary job raising money for Community Pride Day, and raised approximately \$30,000 last year. Mr. Fedorchak stated if they can find a way of reducing costs and enhancing revenues, they may be able to keep Community Pride Day for 2010. He stated at this point they are trying to minimize all expenses, and they may have to seriously consider personnel reductions. He stated while Community Pride Day is an outstanding event for the community, it is not an essential function. He stated initially they had anticipated a 1.5 mil increase, and they are now at a .4 mil increase.

Mr. McDonald asked Mr. Fedorchak if he feels they have cut out from the Budget everything they can, and Mr. Fedorchak stated they were able to make sure that they met the 2009 forecasts for revenues and expenses. He stated in order to put the 2010 General Fund Budget in the position it is now, there are a number of reductions and eliminations of requests by Department Heads that had to be made in order to get to the .4 mil increase.

Mr. Stainthorpe stated they are considering borrowing \$6 million to complete the Park system. Mr. Fritchey stated this would result in a tax increase of 1 mil above the .4 mil increase so that the total tax increase would be 1.4 mils. Mr. Stainthorpe the 1 mil would go to debt service, and it would be spent on construction of the balance of the Park system.

Mr. McDonald asked if there is discussion about open space for next year; and Mr. Stainthorpe stated while there will be and there are some properties that are targeted, this is electoral debt which is voted on in a Referendum which is different. He stated the Supervisors also has to consider other items as there may be additional funds the Township has to pay for the Golf Course and there may be consideration for preservation of additional open space. He stated what is being considered is \$6 million in debt, 100% of which is for Park & Rec projects. The 1 mil would cover the debt service for twenty years. Ms. Bunn stated this would not be a one time tax increase, and it would be a permanent tax increase; and Mr. Stainthorpe agreed. Mr. McDonald stated he felt this was understood by the Park & Rec Board when they were recommending this to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

Ms. Bunn stated when they voted to recommend this to the Board of Supervisors, times were different; and she is feeling the effects of the economic downturn. She stated while she would like to see the Park system finished, she feels the timing is out of touch with what is going on. She stated if they are considering having to make staff reductions to meet the Budget, she does not feel they should be spending money to complete the Park system.

Mr. Stainthorpe stated he has received approximately 400 emails that are all exactly the same from the website change.org, all of which are in favor of the 1 mil increase. He stated he has also received approximately 60 “thoughtful” emails in favor of proceeding with this and about thirty to 40 “thoughtful” emails against. Ms. Bunn stated she is concerned about the content of the mass emails where they have stated that the Snipes Tract is going to have football fields, which was never discussed by the Park & Rec Board. She stated it also indicated that the Samost Tract is going to have an indoor batting cage, and this has not been discussed. She stated the email also indicated that Memorial Park will be used by the user groups; and when the Township agreed to go forward with Memorial Park, it was with the understanding that it would not be used by the user groups. Mr. McDonald stated while this is correct, the Board of Supervisors has

recently discussed using Memorial Park for the user groups. Mr. Stainthorpe stated he did suggest that they re-visit the use of Memorial Park, but they have not agreed that this is how they would proceed. Ms. Bunn stated the email also indicated that if they do not do the projects now, they will never get completed; and she does not feel this is accurate.

Mr. Newbon stated they did not do anything when there were good economic times.

Mr. Fritchey stated there are over \$5 million in assets lying fallow for the better part of ten years. Ms. Bunn stated the Board of Supervisors did not want to raise taxes for this when times were good, and now they are going to do it when people are feeling the economy.

Mr. Carpenter stated he does not feel this is Park & Recreation Board business. He stated those interested in giving the Board of Supervisors their opinion should attend the Board of Supervisors' meeting tomorrow when they make the decision on this. Mr. Newbon stated he feels the Park & Rec Board as an Advisory Board should let the Board of Supervisors know their opinion on this. Ms. Bunn stated she feels it is the business of Park & Rec Board. Mr. Fritchey stated over the years it has been clear that the Park & Rec Board supports these projects.

Mr. Gordon joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Fritchey stated the Board of Supervisors has asked the Park & Rec what they think the Board should do in terms of spending money since apparently there are now some on the Board of Supervisors that are willing to spend money and bring to fruition Plans that the Park & Rec Board recommended; and he feels the Park & Recreation Board should take a position. Mr. Fritchey stated he feels they through good and bad times there has been a reluctance by the Supervisors to do anything that amounts to raising taxes; and as a result there is \$5 million of real estate that is laying fallow, and an entire generation of children have gone through the Pennsbury School District without these properties being developed and opportunities for youth and families have been lost. He stated he feels for \$60 a year, the Park system is one of the great bargains in the Delaware Valley; and for \$40 a year more, they can have an even better system. He feels the Park system adds immeasurably to the property values. He stated there is now a situation where the Supervisors are willing to affirm their faith in the future and in the community, and he feels they should proceed. He stated they have followed a coherent Plan, and he believes that they should continue with that Plan. He stated they had a plan that began with a comprehensive plan, professional planning studies. He stated they had a recommendation that they should have a community park to go along with athletic complexes which is Memorial Park, and he believes that they should continue with the plan for Memorial Park and to do otherwise and turn it into an athletic complex would be wrong from a planning and philosophical standpoint and dishonorable to what they told the residents in

that area who participated in the discussions on the planning of Memorial Park. He stated they have not completed that Park, and for ten years people have not had use of it. He stated if the Board of Supervisors is willing to proceed, he would be in favor of this.

Mr. Newbon agreed and stated money at this time is very reasonable as far as borrowing is concerned; and when we come out of the economic downturn, the money will become more expensive.

Mr. McDonald stated they have been sitting on these projects for a long time; and while the economy is bad, he feels when there were good times, nothing was acted on. He stated he is in favor of the Board of Supervisors proceeding at this time.

Ms. Bunn stated she is in favor of getting the projects done, but does not feel this is the right time. She stated if they are adding all of this to the park system, this will mean there will be more maintenance at a time when they are discussing possible reductions in staff. She questions who will maintain the parks. She stated people are getting their hours cut and losing jobs, and she does not feel it is appropriate to raise taxes for ball fields.

Mr. Fritchey stated for the first time it appears that there are a majority of Supervisors that are in favor of moving forward; and while he agrees times are difficult, this is a very affluent community and \$40 per family is not a hardship. He stated the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously at the last meeting to approve a redundant leaf collection of \$40 per household despite the fact that leaves could in fact be picked up by the trash haulers. Ms. Bunn stated this is not true for her trash hauler. Mr. Stainthorpe stated Mr. Fritchey's comment is not accurate; and while the trash collectors will pick up yard waste, they will not pick up 80 bags of leaves, and this would be an additional charge by the trash collectors that is not in the current bill.

Mr. Fritchey stated he questions any Supervisor who states they are in favor of recreation, yet prioritizes leaf collection over building out the Park system. He stated he feels the Park system increases the property values and improves the quality of life.

Mr. McDonald stated if the projects are approved, the leaf program continues, and the .4 mil is added, what would this equate to an average household dollar wise; and Mr. Fedorchak stated it would be slightly more than \$60 a year.

Mr. Wysocki stated he does not feel you can compare one program to another. He stated he does feel the Park system has a larger value and adds to the quality of life. He stated when there are good recreation facilities for the youth of the community to participate in, he feels this does something to suppress other things that could be happening like the need for increased Police expense. He stated he feels it is the role of the Park & Recreation Board to put forth the priority of things they feel need to get done for the Park system, and it is up to the Board of supervisors to make the final decision.

Ms. Bunn stated she does agree; and if they were to increase the taxes next year, the facilities will still not be built next year. She stated one has Sketch Plan approval and one has no level of approval. She stated it would take six months to get Plans ready to go out to bid, and the earliest they could start building would be the end of next year yet the taxes would have been increased. She stated she feels they could approve the engineering costs and not raise the taxes so much at this time.

Mr. McDonald stated he feels this has been done already. Ms. Bunn stated they do not yet have engineering. Mr. Newbon stated they have been piecemealing it. Mr. McDonald agreed and stated in 2007 all of user groups came in to discuss their needs and wants with the expectation that the Township would move forward to get some of these things done, and now in 2009 nothing has moved forward; and if they continue to piecemeal this, it will be the same thing. He stated he understands that it is not good times, but these projects will not get done if they do not proceed now, because they did not get done when times were good.

Mr. Gordon stated he feels tough times make it a better reason to spend this money because people do not have as much extra money and it makes the fields, YMS, and PAA even more important.

Ms. Bunn stated they are focusing on the user groups; and if you are a family that have children that are not involved in organized sports, they do not use these fields. Mr. Fritchey stated that is where Memorial Park comes in. Ms. Bunn stated she goes to Memorial Park at least once a month and no one is there. Mr. Fritchey stated this is because it has not yet been built. Ms. Bunn stated there are jogging paths and a ball field, and she has never seen anyone there.

Ms. Sue Herman stated she lives in Dolington Estates adjacent to Memorial Park, and she does see people there. She stated her college-aged children come home and play pick-up basketball games there. She stated the Park is only quarter of the way finished; and if they want people to use Memorial Park, they need to educate them about passive recreation. She stated if they do away with the passive recreation, the youth will not know about these options, and they will think organized recreation is the only option which she feels is a loss for society. She stated they need a balance and they need families to use Memorial Park for picnics, fundraisers, etc.

Mr. Jason Simon, Supervisor, stated he feels it is necessary to have this debate in the Township. He stated these decision are being made because they are being forward thinking, and they feel there is value to what they want to do in the community. He stated from a financial perspective this is the right thing to do because of the opportunity to get money inexpensively and it will add value. He stated this did not happen when times were good because there was never a good opportunity for anyone on the Board of Supervisors to create this investment because of the pressure not to proceed.

He stated these tracts of land have been purchased and are unused for the purpose for which they had been purchased, and he feels this is irresponsible of past Boards. He stated he was not going to let his term of office pass without putting this forward. He stated there are thousands of children who are involved in these programs, and they have a civic responsibility to provide for the children. He stated people moved to this community because of its quality of life. He stated he feels these projects bring intrinsic value to the community. Mr. Simon stated there are scheduling issues and field wear and tear on the Township fields and a lack of ability for the School District to support their fields in a safe manner.

Mr. McDonald stated he appreciates Mr. Simon putting this out for discussion and thanked him for doing so since he feels this is long overdue.

Mr. Simon stated there are 35,000 residents in the Township, and there is a full operation which costs money to run. He stated he feels Community Pride Day and the Veterans Day Parade are part of the fabric of the Township.

Mr. Ethan Shiller, Chair of the Citizens Budget Committee, stated his Committee met last night. He stated he is present with Joe Menard another Budget Committee member. Mr. Shiller stated they are not present this evening to state where they feel the vote tomorrow night should end up but they did want to discuss ideas they have. He stated at their meeting last evening, Mr. Menard indicated they should look at all the Park & Rec businesses which have been identified of self-sustaining including the Pool, Garden of Reflection, the Golf Course, and the sewer services which all generate enough revenue to pay for their own expenses.

Mr. Fritchey stated while the Golf Course and the Pool cover their costs, the Park system overall is in a different category. Mr. Fritchey stated user fees were approved in 1994, and there was a lot of difference of opinion as to whether or not there should be user fees. He stated he felt that there should be user fees from the standpoint that athletic associations were getting a priority on the fields by virtue of using Permits, but they also did not want to say that anyone using the fields should have to pay as it is a fundamental principle of urban planning that a park system is like roads and Police services and is part of the health, education, and welfare that should be provided out of tax monies.

Mr. Shiller stated there has been no increase in the user fees since they have been implemented; and if they are going to ask taxpayers to contribute additional funds that might be targeting the user groups, there should be a consistent financial partnership with the user groups. He stated they feel there should be a balance and the user groups need to recognize that their fees should be increased the same as the taxpayers. He stated the Committee feels there should be an increase in user fees by a certain percentage over a period of time. He stated they are not present to state what the percentage should be.

Ms. Liney stated there have been two increases. She stated initially the fees were \$5 and \$10, and it was raised to \$8 and \$15 and it is currently \$12 and \$24. Mr. Shiller asked the last time there was an increase, and Mr. Fedorchak stated it was six years ago.

Mr. Joe Menard stated the Citizens Budget Committee tried to step back from all the emotion and went back to the Township financial records and did an abstract. He stated tomorrow evening they hope to present something that is enlightening and constructive and worthy of debate coming to a mutually-acceptable conclusion. He stated they are trying to present more information that has not yet been presented. He stated the Citizens Budget Commission will present facts, and they hope that there will then be discussion about this.

Mr. McDonald asked if the Commission will be presenting their conclusions as well, and Mr. Menard stated they will at the meeting tomorrow evening. Mr. McDonald asked if they are willing to share them this evening, and Mr. Shiller and Mr. Menard stated they are not. Mr. Menard stated they do not feel that would be fair to those who are not present, and they just wanted to let the Park & Rec know what they have been doing over the past couple of weeks to try and bridge the gap.

Mr. Fritchey stated with regard to Memorial Park which is to be a community park, he does not feel they could charge admission. He also stated the Athletic Associations have, from time to time, made donations to the Township. Mr. McDonald stated the turf field was an \$800,000 item. Mr. Fritchey stated PAA has made certain donations as well.

Mr. Menard stated given the little amount of time they have had to put this together, they recognize that they do not have all of the facts; and tomorrow night, he will explain that he has made certain assumptions. He stated he is trying to get both sides to understand each others' position and not just something that is emotional.

Mr. Shiller stated they are not trying to tell either the Park & Rec Board or the Board of Supervisors how to run Park & Rec or where their priorities are. He stated they are coming only with numbers as to what they feel is appropriate with payments or structure.

Mr. McDonald asked if they have looked at the user groups financial statements; and Mr. Menard stated they have not, and this is something that they are going to be asking for tomorrow night. Mr. Menard stated they have three members of the Citizens Budget Commission who have volunteered to be on a core committee. He stated they want everyone to get together to see how they can move this forward in a meaningful manner so that everyone can understand everyone else's position. Mr. Fritchey stated the user groups submit financial information to the Township each year as part of the Permitting process. Mr. Menard stated they have not had time to go through this. Mr. Fritchey stated he feels tomorrow the Board will be voting on whether or not they are going to increase taxes. He stated there would not be a time limitation with regard to user fees, and

there could be a recommendation regarding user fees at any time. Mr. Menard stated regardless of the vote tomorrow night on the millage, his goal is not to drive an answer tomorrow night. He stated regardless of his personal opinions on that, everything they are going to present will still be meaningful. He stated regardless of how they vote tomorrow night, it will not impact everyone getting together and walking in the same direction. Mr. Shiller stated it will not impact on their Committee what they are tasking themselves to do as to how they could make future recommendations. Mr. Menard stated they are trying to enlighten the whole process to make it better for everybody and bring everybody together.

Mr. Fritchey stated he does not feel it is realistic to discuss an increase in user group fees substituting for the amount that is needed to complete the Park system, and Mr. Menard agreed. He stated he feels there should be a joint partnership. Mr. Menard stated they are not recommending any numbers; and all his numbers are “x’s” to be filled in by everyone working jointly. He stated their goal is to present a better way of doing this so everyone can come together to come up with the right answer.

Mr. Shiller asked if it is the Park & Rec Board’s intention to be at the meeting tomorrow evening to provide their thoughts as a Committee; and Mr. Fritchey stated they could do this if this is what the Board of Supervisors wants. He stated in the past they have made recommendations. Mr. Shiller asked if the Park & Rec Board’s recommendation is to have 100% of the projects completed. Mr. Carpenter stated at one point they did prioritize an order in which they would want the projects performed recognizing that they did want to see all the projects completed. Mr. Shiller asked if their recommendation as a Committee will be that they want 100% of these to be completed at this point in time or are they going to recommend that they did put a list together recognizing economic constraints, and that they would be willing to work on whatever is decided upon. Mr. Fritchey stated he would not say it is all or nothing.

Mr. Stainthorpe stated this is the second time he has been the liaison to the Park & Rec Board, and what the Park & Rec Board is already on record as recommending is the completion of Memorial Park and the Snipes Tract. He stated there is no recommendation for the Samost Tract. Mr. Fritchey stated the reason they never went further with that was they agreed that there was no point in involving the community in an extensive planning process when they had already approved one Park and almost approved a second and had not constructed either one of them. He stated to raise expectations or anxiety levels about the Samost Tract, they did not feel was necessary at the time. Mr. Fritchey stated once there is an apparent willingness to spend money, then it would be appropriate to look into this seriously and ask residents to come out and participate in the discussion.

Mr. Shiller stated he feels the Board of Supervisors needs to understand that this is not all or nothing.

Mr. Fritchey stated the tax increase idea never came from the Park Board, and this came from the Board of Supervisors. He stated when they had the 2015 presentations earlier in the summer, the Park & Recreation Board was asked to come to the Board of Supervisors and state what they would do over the next five years if they were able to proceed. He stated over the last five to six months the Board has indicated they may want to proceed. He stated he would be happy to get anything since for the last ten years, they have not gotten anything. He added the Park & Recreation Board has gone on record stating that they feel it is a good idea to have a Community Center recognizing that this has gone to a Referendum twice and failed both times. He stated the Park & Recreation Board still supports this idea conceptually.

Mr. Menard stated the Citizens Budget Commission are coming from a fiscally-responsibility perspective, putting more ideas on the table, getting more people involved in the process, and getting a better understanding for everyone.

SUPERVISORS' LIAISON REPORT

Mr. Stainthorpe reported on the deer management program noting that twenty-seven deer have been removed during the public hunts, and there are two weeks more to go in that. Mr. Fedorchak reviewed the discussions he has had with the Pennsylvania State Game Commission on the public hunt and the upcoming sharp shoot.

RECREATION DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Liney stated all the user groups have met their fall obligations for lights and user fees for 2009. She thanked them for remitting their fees in a timely manner.

Ms. Liney stated the Township will be attending the annual Lower Makefield Seniors luncheon next where we have the opportunity to recognize the volunteer efforts of the members of the senior group.

Ms. Liney stated the Park crew is gearing up for a very busy winter season. This week they are finishing raising the trees along various bikepath sections in the Township, the Yardley Hunt loop, Yardley-Langhorne Road, Mirror Lake area, Five Mile Woods, and sections in the northern end of the Township. Next week they are planning to repair the roof on the storage barn at Kids Kingdom playground, continue to replace wood with the Treks at the Kids Kingdom playground, and following some vacation time at the end of December begin crack filling and re-stripping the parking lot at Macclesfield. This will

be a two-month project, weather permitting; but access to the facility will remain open. The Park crew will be able to accomplish this work in-house, and at a cost savings to the Township, as we continue to look for creative ways to save tax dollars.

Ms. Liney stated during the winter snow and ice season the Park crew will shift to emergency snow removal on the roadways. First priority in the Township is the snow removal on roadways.

Ms. Liney thanked all the members of the Park & Recreation Board for their continue support and effort with the community this past year, and stated she looks forward to a successful 2010.

Mr. Gordon stated he feels comfortable with Mr. Fritchey representing the interests of the Park & Recreation Board at the Board of Supervisors' meeting tomorrow night, and other Park Board members agreed. Ms. Bunn stated she would ask that it be made know that it was not unanimous to proceed with everything at this time.

There being no further business, Mr. Gordon moved, Ms. Bunn seconded and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Patricia Bunn, Secretary