
MINUTES

JUNE 29, 2022
Special Public Meeting

Board of Commissioners

Township of Whitehall

A. CALL TO ORDER

1) The Special Public Meeting of the Whitehall Township Board of Commissioners was called to order at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 29, 2022 held via Webex, with the following in attendance:

COMMISSIONERS

Joseph J. Marx, Jr., President
Philip J. Ginder, Vice President
Thomas Slonaker, Secretary
Jeffrey J. Warren
Charles G. Fisher (Absent)
Randy Atiyeh
Andy Roman

TOWNSHIP PERSONNEL

Michael P. Harakal, Jr., Mayor
John D. Meyers, Deputy Mayor
Jack Gross, Esq.,
Township Solicitor
Frank Clark, Engineer, KCE
Lee. Rackus, PZ&D
Peter Terry, Traffic Engineer, Benchmark
Carl Lagler, Township Surveyor
Larissa Bruder, Executive Secretary

OTHER ATTENDEES

Philips Armstrong, Lehigh County Executive
Rick Molchany, Lehigh County
Becky Bradley, LVPC
Tracy Oscavich, LVPC
Christine Frey, PennDOT
Michael Rebert, PennDOT
Mark Jandl

President MARX read the statement on fair housing as required.

The meeting was formally opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and a moment of silence will follow to honor our men and women in uniform and our first responders and the people of Ukraine.

B. COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

No requests received to address the Board.

C. DISCUSSION – RIVERSIDE DRIVE MULTIMODAL REVITALIZATION PROJECT

Mayor Harakal stated that this meeting is being held to give the Board the necessary information for them to make a decision on whether to commit to taking ownership of Riverside Drive.

Tracy Oscavich of the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission gave an overview of the Project which has been six years in the making and will be transformative to the area.

This Project spans 3.5 miles of land from Allentown through Whitehall and would complete a section of the D&L Trail and it would also create an alternative north-south route for vehicular, pedestrian, bike and bus traffic. It will connect several minor east-west streets along the waterfront and resolve traffic conflicts at problem intersections. The project consists of three elements: the Hamilton Gateway, Allentown Riverfront Development and the Whitehall Riverside Drive and Trail.

In November 2021, the LVPC received \$21 million from the federal government for the project through a grant program named Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity or RAISE. The project has 13.8 million in matching funds being provided by the Waterfront Development company with previously incurred costs of 36.8 million.

Becky Bradley, LVPC Executive stated that the main element of concern tonight is the Whitehall section which would continue Riverside Drive as a 28 foot wide road and 12 foot paved trail. The two lane road and 12 foot wide, two lane bikeway would connect into the street grid at Wood Street/Fullerton Avenue at the Route 22 interchange. A transit and emergency services only paved throughway and a pedestrian and bicycle path would continue north and end at Lehigh Avenue. This would result in a commuter corridor connection to the Lehigh Valley's suburban and rural areas.

Ms. Bradley noted that public survey response showed 95% interest in natural resources, roads and bridges and economic development; a 90 – 95% interest in revitalization and emergency services and an 80-90% interest in social, culture, recreation and transportation options. An analysis was also performed that showed the that the project will increase property values for homes within close proximity to the trail. As a result of that increase, the Township would realize increased property tax revenue. Emergency Management will also benefit by having better access along the riverfront. She also noted that over \$195 million have been invested in Whitehall Township for the repair of numerous bridges within the Township.

Commissioner Ginder commented that while grateful for that investment, there were a lot of years that the Township didn't receive any funds

Philips Armstrong, Lehigh County Executive noted that by building the road and trail together, the project will save money and would also work toward completing a 3.5 mile section of the link in the D&L Trail. The LVPC and the County lobbied for this project for 5 years and feels it will be a valuable asset to Whitehall.

Christine Frey of PennDOT noted that they are looking to partner with the Township and that the Township will be fully involved in designing the roadway. Rick Molchany, Lehigh County Director of General Services stated that this would be a neighborhood type road and would be designed with keeping maintenance costs low going forward. Ms. Frey advised that the Township needs to make a decision by July 18th to make sure this is a viable project before accepting funding

President Marx advised that CWSA has an interceptor running through that corridor with easements and a metering station. They have a licensing agreement with the railroad and have been in negotiations with Jaendl for utility easement which hasn't been completed as of yet. He is concerned whether there is enough area to accommodate everything and then having access capabilities as well Mr. Molchany stated that all things will be taken into consideration during the design process. Mark Jaendl was not aware that the easements were not completed. He will contact his attorney to find out the status.

Commission Ginder noted the following concerns: cost of stormwater system maintenance – setting up a

perpetual fund, have deeds for properties along the railroad been researched, how will all three lanes fit, how will this tie into Wood Street, who is maintaining the trail, more policing will be needed especially with the current ATV situation, can Fullerton/First Avenue corridor be improved with this since there are already issues there and adding additional traffic will make it even worse and lastly suggested just connecting trail with no roadway, which cannot be done since the project funding was approved based on the roadway being installed.

Commissioner Warren also noted that the Township purchased property at 3rd and Grape for widening to help with traffic issues and wondered if that was on the TIP. Mike Rebert stated that at this time, it is on the long range plan. It may be possible to try to get it on in the next year or two. He also explained that Wood Street will be relocated to the other side of the American Legion to line up with Park Street and Riverside Drive will tie in at Front Street.

Peter Terry, Township Traffic Engineer questioned if there are any numbers can be provided on the increase of traffic volume. Becky Bradley stated there aren't any numbers as the road has not been designed yet since they first need to know if this project is viable to obtain the funding. Christine Frey reiterated that this roadway is intended to be a low volume road.

Commissioner Warren also asked about stormwater management for Wood Street and would like to see that incorporated into the enhancements. He questioned the status of Wood Street playground as it will be at some time taken by PennDOT.

Commissioner Ginder is concerned to make a commitment without knowing certain costs. President Marx is concerned that there are many unanswered questions and what the legality is by making a verbal Commitment. Attorney Jack Gross advised that he believes that the proper way do this is that initially the Board and/or the Mayor says the township is willing to commit with the project with the understanding that the Township will be participating in the design process, subject to negotiating a mutual agreeable memorandum of understanding which would be approved by resolution at a later date along with an Ordinance dedicating the road.

Commissioner Roman questioned how it will be determined who will be involved on the Township side for the roadway design. Ms. Frey indicated that it would be up to the Township who they would want involved.

It was a consensus of the Board that further time was needed for review and discussion before making a decision.

D. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION – Commissioner ATIYEH moved, seconded by Commissioner ROMAN to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 p.m.