

APPROVED MINUTES

**UPPER MILFORD TOWNSHIP
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS & OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE
TOWNSHIP BUILDING, OLD ZIONSVILLE, PA 18068
MAY 11, 2016 AT 7:00 P.M.
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

ATTENDANCE: Supervisors; George Devault, Daniel Mohr, Robert Sentner, Township Manager, Daniel DeLong; Asst. Township Manager, Timothy Haas; Planning Coordinator, Brian Miller; Open Space Committee; Chairman, Francis Caputo; Vice Chairman, Philip Vanim; Jessamy Killingsworth; Joyce Moore; Houstin Lichtenwalner.

Meeting called to order at 7:08 P.M.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

This meeting is being recorded principally to aid in the preparation of minutes and for such other purposes as the Board sees fit. For that reason, will each person wanting to give any comments during this meeting, please state your name for the record and address the Board of Supervisors.

The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss an Open Space Program and for other purposes that the Board deems necessary.

PUBLIC INPUT: None

NEW BUSINESS: None

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

- 1.) Proposed Goals of an Open Space Program (Discussion).
- 2.) Impact of an Earned Income Tax Levy (Discussion).

Supervisor Sentner summarized the past 100 year history of farmland in Lehigh County. The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission has set a goal to preserve 25% of the land in Lehigh County. UMT would need to preserve an additional 2,129 acres to meet the goal of 25%. Currently, UMT has 735.46 (6.4%) acres of land preserved. Lehigh County would need to preserve an additional 34,000 acres to meet the goal of 25%. Currently, Lehigh County has 21,659 (9.71%) acres preserved. There is 54,000 acres of unpreserved farmland in Lehigh County. He and Supervisor DeVault asked a few opening questions:

How many farmers are in the room? 11 +/-
How many property owners of active farmland in the room? 22 +/-
How many people are interested in preserving their farm? 18 +/-

Resident, Loren Hulber doesn't want to see over development. It's a matter of economics. What is the value of land in UMT today? How much is being paid to preserve land? What's anticipated to be the cost of preserving that same land in the future?

Supervisor Sentner answered that farmland preservation is around 5-7 thousand dollars per acre.

Planning Coordinator, Brian Miller mentioned that the value of preserved land is rising, so that is raising the price to preserve land.

Manager, DeLong summarized Lehigh County's land ranking process. He also mentioned that Lehigh County has around 1.5 million dollars available to preserve land.

Resident, David Lobach is a member of RenewLV, a non-profit group dedicated to farmland and open space preservation within the Lehigh Valley. He summarized the real interest that people have in preserving property. The Township has to start somewhere. He is encouraged to see the Township pursuing an Open Space Program.

Resident, Susan Smith asked what the tax consequences are if you sell development rights.

Resident, David Lobach answered that RenewLV is currently looking at that because the sale of development rights is income that can be taxed. They are reviewing options to alleviate the tax burden on the sale of development rights.

Supervisor Sentner mentioned that the lack of public utilities throughout the Township has kept rapid development at bay.

Manager, DeLong summarized the County and State funds matching program that is available to assist the Township increasing their available funds to acquire open space. These funds expire if not spent in two (2) years.

Supervisor DeVault notified those in attendance of an upcoming land auction in Upper Saucon Township. It will provide a good gauge on the current value of land.

Francis Caputo stressed the importance of starting an open space program to avoid future lost opportunities, like that of the Kohler property.

Resident, William Weber asked what types of open space is the Township interested in preserving.

Supervisor Sentner answered that the Board is interested in preserving all forms of open space.

Manager DeLong explained that the Township is interested in buying development rights, but would also consider outright purchase.

Houstin Lichtenwalner stressed the importance for the Township to also preserve aquifers.

Discussions ensued regarding the pros and cons of an increase in Property Tax vs. Earned Income Tax (EIT).

Resident, Charles Peters Jr. mentioned that he has looked at the history of successful open space referendums in other townships and they predominately included an increase in an EIT.

Philip Vanim and Joyce Moore promoted a raise in property tax. Joyce Moore wants to do whatever possible for the referendum to pass to accomplish the greater good. Philip Vanim questioned the Board's past commitment to acquiring or preserving open space.

Supervisor Sentner promoted a raise in EIT. He wants to preserve the quality of life and doesn't want to increase taxes on a resident that may be on a very small fixed income. He doesn't want to raise taxes too much that the referendum would fail, but he wants to raise it enough so the Township can actually acquire open space. He believes that a good start would be an increase of .1385 in EIT, which would equate to 360 thousand dollars at the current 2016 projected EIT revenue rates.

Resident, Sandra Lapp asked how the money is protected for the sole purpose of an open space program.

Manager DeLong assured her that the money is solely set aside for the open space program. It cannot be used for anything else.

MOTION:

Supervisor Sentner made the motion to develop a draft referendum question ordinance with a 0.1385 percent levy on Earned Income Tax. Supervisor DeVault seconded the motion. Any questions or comments, all were in favor, and the motion carried unanimously.

Manager DeLong summarized the Open Space Program. The Township has no intention to condemn properties. The goal will be to identify available properties, including woodlands, and also to preserve high quality farmland. The Township will want to form a committee to review and provide input to the Board of Supervisors on proposed property/development right acquisitions.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

The Board of Supervisors held an executive session from 8:34 to 8:40 P.M. to discuss real estate matters.

OTHER ISSUES:

Philip Vanim asked the Board if there was any progress on alleviating certain zoning/storm water requirements for farmers, specifically those brought up during the last special joint meeting of the BOS and the OSC (4/13/16). He wants to see the Township be proactive in trying to remove unnecessary burdens placed on farmers.

Planning Coordinator, Brian Miller and Supervisor Sentner answered that the Township can only do so much regarding storm water as it is further regulated by State and Federal requirements.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:50 P.M.

George D. DeVault, Chairman

Date

Timothy A. Haas, Asst. Twp. Manager/Secretary