

Open Space Board Meeting – OPEN SESSION

Tuesday, January 22nd, 2019 – 10:00 am

Intermediate Meeting Room, County Administration Building

4 Moore Road, Cape May Court House, New Jersey

Board Member Attendance:

Neil Byrne

David Craig

Peter Lomax

Freeholder Will Morey

Leslie Gimeno

David Clemans

Others In Attendance:

Barbara Ernst

Scott Mullen

Katelynn Wintz

Others listed on the attendance sheet

Call to Order:

Mr. Lomax called the meeting to order at 10:04

Pledge of Allegiance:

Mr. Lomax led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Open Public Meetings Act:

The Open Public Meetings Act Statement was read by Mr. Lomax

Roll Call:

Neil Byrne, David Craig, Peter Lomax, Freeholder Will Morey, Leslie Gimeno, and David Clemans were in attendance.

Approval of Minutes:

Mr. Byrne made a motion to approve the minutes; Mr. Byrne seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

Chairman's Report:

Mr. Craig said that in the interest of time, he would forego the report.

Director's Report:

There was no Director's Report.

Financial Statement:

Mr. Lomax said that the current available fund balance is \$8.8 million.

Correspondence:

Mr. Lomax said that correspondence dated 12/24/18 from Deb Poillon, Library Director to Leslie Gimeno expressing the Library's appreciation for funding and the guidance and support provided by the Planning Department throughout their grant application process for the Pocket Park. She said that the park looks very nice and is well-used by the community.

Presentations:

PR#18-04 – Woodbine EcoPark – Phases 2 & 3: Mayor Pikolycky introduced himself, Bruce Graham, and Mike Zumpino, and thanked the Board for the opportunity to attend to describe the project. Mike Zumpino provided an overview of Phase 1 of the project, which had been completed using \$700,000 in Open Space Funds. He and Mr. Graham described those improvements which included a pavilion, gravel paths, small parking area, and small gazebo. He said that the Borough was pleased to present Phases 2 and 3 for consideration. Phase 2 is estimated to cost \$773,000 and will entail the completion of the trail system (including the paving of gravel trails established in Phase 1). Phase 3, which will cost approximately \$400,000, includes the site amenities such as playground, fitness stations, benches, bike racks, trailhead improvements, lighting, interpretive signage, rain garden, and post/rail fence to define the northern edge of the park. He said that the entire 30 acre tract has been mindful to the Open Space Board's Creative Placemaking effort, and further described the anticipated use of the site as an outdoor classroom for both the community school and Stockton University, who has a presence in the Borough.

Discussion ensued regarding the use of the multi-purpose field and the connectivity with the larger bike path system. That connectivity was an important factor in the Borough's decision to pave the paths, according to Mr. Graham. He added that the asphalt surface also enhanced accessibility, will result in reduced maintenance, and was more aesthetically pleasing than the gravel surface. In response to a question from Mr. Byrne, Mr. Graham said that the project has all of its approvals, including Pinelands, and is ready for construction. Ms. Gimeno asked for confirmation that in return for park/recreation development funds, the Borough would be deeding the property (with equivalent value to the grant) over to the County; Mayor Pikolycky said that it would.

With no further questions from Board members or the public, Mr. Lomax thanked the Borough representatives for their attendance.

PR#18-02 – Lower Township Aquatic Center: Colleen Crippen, Grants Coordinator, introduced herself, Township Manager Ridgway, and Mayor Simonsen. She said that the purpose of the project is to establish a regional aquatic center at the Cape May County Airport. She said that the Township had embarked on this endeavor recognizing the lack of indoor swimming facilities in the area, and that they recognized both the safety benefits and the lifetime opportunities that a multi-generational facility can bring to residents and visitors. Ms. Crippen said that the Township had spent \$64,000 on a feasibility study which included market analysis, preliminary concept design, and operational analysis. She indicated that the Township was requesting \$1 million per year from the Open Space Program for a period of 15 years in support of the project.

Jim Ridgway, Township Administrator, introduced himself and said that the concept for the pool had arisen over the course of many years of planning by the Township. He said that the need/desire for a community pool had been discussed for many years by the Recreation Advisory Board, and that it had been identified in the Recreation Master Plan. Based on this, the Township hired a consultant to conduct a feasibility study, and the effort had included a presentation at Town Hall during a public meeting. He said that if the project receives the grant from the Open Space Board, then the Township would commit to funding the \$850,000-\$900,000 annual operating costs. He said that this would be a regional project, with a commitment to multi-generational programming, and that a goal of the project would be to ensure that every student in the Lower Township school system would learn how to swim. He said that the facility would be a catalyst for the area, and likened its potential impact to that of the Wildwoods Convention Center.

When asked about potential involvement in the project by the YMCA or similar entity, Mr. Ridgway said that the Township had explored the idea with that organization, but that they said they were not building any other pools in South Jersey.

Mr. Ridgway said that the Township and the County have a positive working relationship, and gave examples of the Public Safety Building, County-wide Dispatch, and the PILOT Program for the new Tech Village site. He said that he hoped to build on this with the new Aquatic Center.

He said that the pedestrian safety project on Beach Avenue had been a tremendous success and that the local real estate market was booming. He stated that Lower Township continues to "pay handsomely" into the Open Space Trust Fund, with \$800,000 in contributions during 2018. He said that

this project meets the objectives of the Open Space Program, and that the Township would be willing to meet again to discuss the financing in further detail.

Mayor Simonsen said that the Township has 6 schools providing education for students ranging in age from Pre-K to High School. He said that all students would benefit from pool access. He said that swimming was a popular activity in the Township, and the Escape the Cape event had drawn worldwide attention. The Mayor indicated that swimming is an activity that can be undertaken by individuals of a wide range of age and abilities, and said that the construction of the 8-lane pool would enable the Township to host USA Swimming Tournaments. He stated that the High School has traditionally used the pool at the US Coast Guard Base for practice and meets, but that security concerns had severely limited that arrangement in recent years.

The Mayor said that the Township had done its due diligence with respect to the feasibility of the Aquatic Center, and that the Township is currently in great financial shape, so they would be able to support the maintenance of the facility. He asked if Mrs. Kobik, a Lower Township resident, could add to his comments. She introduced herself as an active member of the Lower Township Senior Citizen community, and said that her health and well-being improved dramatically when she learned to swim at the age of 60. She said that she knows of many seniors who would have the same benefits if the facility were to open.

Mayor Simonsen said that there is simply not enough availability of pool space in the County, and that the design of the Aquatic Center would be multi-generational to accommodate a wide range of programs and activities. Mrs. Kobik said that she uses the pool in Wildwood Crest, but it would be much better from a transportation standpoint to be able to have a facility within the municipality. Mr. Simonsen added that NJ Transit was conducting a feasibility study to determine if service to the County Airport was warranted due to the relocation of the court facility and new businesses in the area.

Mr. Ridgway said that the Township had surveyed its residents regarding recreational amenity needs, and that the pool was at the top of the list. He said that the Township was exploring the possibility to work with other municipalities to see if they would be interested in participating and contributing to the facility's projected maintenance costs.

Mr. Lomax asked Mr. Ridgway to explain the operational costs, as there were discrepancies between what was listed in the Open Space Program application and the feasibility study. Mr. Lomax said that the feasibility study had \$900,000, but that the application form was much lower. Mr. Ridgway said that the original assessment of costs included in the feasibility study included services that the Township already had, such as janitorial services. He said that the salary ranges identified by the consultants were high and out of line with current municipal expenses, and that \$864,000 was the actual annual estimation of operating expenses.

In response to a question from Mr. Byrne regarding user fees, Mayor Simonsen said that residents of municipalities who participate in the operations and programming would be given the same rate as Lower Township residents. Mr. Byrne said that if the funding is coming from the County Open Space Program, then all County residents should be charged the same rate. With respect to programming, the Mayor said that the property would always be open to the public, with the exception of when the participating schools had practice or swim meets. Mr. Ridgway added that certain programming may

function to reserve sections of the facility, and cited the example if Cape Regional Medical Center contributed for the purpose of specific health-related activities.

Mr. Byrne asked for clarification on the funding request. Ms. Crippen said that they were asking for \$1 million per year for 15 years from the Open Space Program. She said that the Township would pay the balance of any debt service over the Open Space funds. The total cost of the facility, including the 8-lane pool that would allow them to host tournaments, and the parking lot is \$17.2 million.

Mr. Lomax asked about the outdoor programming that was shown in one of the renderings accompanying the feasibility study. Mr. Ridgway said that the cost estimate is only for the Aquatic Center and does not include the lacrosse and soccer fields on the drawing. Ms. Crippen clarified that the walls of the Aquatic Center were designed to open to make it an indoor/outdoor facility, and listed the components of the project that were included in the \$17.2 million: 3 pools (including the alternate design for the 8-lane pool), parking, landscaping, lighting/signage; water slide, splash pad; bleachers; and locker rooms.

Mr. Lomax asked if the Township was seeking other partners for the project. Mr. Ridgway said that they would reach out to other municipalities and the LTMUA for contributions and partnerships to fund the operational costs, but that they were not seeking any other funding source for the bricks and mortar to build the facility. Freeholder Morey said that of the \$900,000 in annual operating costs, the Township had estimated that they could get partners and user fees to contribute \$600,000, which left \$300,000 annually as the balance. He asked the Township how they planned to remedy that deficit. Mr. Ridgway said that the Lower Township MUA would be asked to contribute (last year they provided funding for police salaries), and that the current scenario did not take into account the multiple partners that the Township hoped to secure.

Mr. Craig asked the Township to identify the importance of Open Space funds to the project, on a scale of 1 – 10. Mr. Ridgway said that it was above 10, and that the project would not happen without the Open Space funding. With respect to the \$300,000 in projected operations costs needing to be paid by the Township, Mr. Ridgway said that the Township anticipated cost savings from the participation in the joint dispatch program, and that these savings would be used to help pay the operations costs for the Aquatic Center.

Ms. Gimeno asked if there was widespread community support for the project, and asked Mr. Ridgway to describe the vetting process that the project had undergone locally. Mr. Ridgway said that 90-95% of the people in the Township are in favor of the project, so long as taxes would not be raised to bring it to reality. Mr. Lomax asked about the specific efforts to brief the public on the project. Mr. Ridgway said that the administration had reached out to the Chamber of Commerce and had attended 2 meetings, and had been involved in many conversations with swim coaches, teachers, and the Township Recreation Department. He said that there were people who were against the project who would write in to Spout Off, but that the public sentiment was not anything like what the Township had faced during the proposed Beach Drive walkway project. He said that all of the 6 Township schools and school boards were 100% behind the project, as are the Federation of Senior Citizens and the health care professionals they had spoken with.

Mr. Craig asked how the DRBA (as operators of the Airport) felt about the project. Mayor Simonsen said that the DRBA Executive Director Tom Cooke expressed his full support for the project at a meeting of

Township Council. Mr. Ridgway said that in exchange for land rent, the Township would be providing its police force to provide security at the Airport, and that the DRBA looked very favorably upon this partnership. Mr. Lomax asked if there had been at least 1 public meeting which reviewed the findings of the Feasibility Study conducted by LAN; Mr. Ridgway confirmed that there had been.

Mr. Lomax asked if there were any members of the public who wished to comment on the application. Mrs. Marilyn Kobik (Tabernacle Road, Lower Township) said that she has been a Township resident for 47 years and has put 4 children through the local school district. She said that she had been to the Township Council meetings where the project was discussed, and that the comments were very positive. She said that there were some nay-sayers, but that the health of the community was too important to give much weight to their comments. She said that when more taxpayers understand the benefits of the facility, which include outlets for stress and keeping kids busy, there will be overriding support.

Ms. Seward (Shawmount Ave, Lower Township) said that she thinks that the pools are a good idea, but the slides are not necessary for the health-related benefits and they are more like amusements. She said that she is fine with spending funds on the pool; just not the slides. Ms. Crippen said that the slides enhance the multi-generational appeal of the facility and that they are also a key design feature for aesthetic purposes.

Ms. Johns said that she was former Chair and member of the Lower Township Recreation Advisory Board. She said that the Recreation Advisory Board unanimously supports the construction of an indoor pool and fitness facility, and that the construction of this building had been desired by the public for a long time. She said that the pool would offer new opportunity for year-round recreation, and that the additional programming that the facility would allow would have recreation, health, and safety benefits to multiple generations.

Mr. Poussart (Shawmount Ave, Lower Township) said that he had attended the Township meeting where the consultants (LAN) had presented. He said that he is not opposed to the project, but he has concerns regarding the maintenance and user fees. He said that he would like the project to be put up for a public vote in the community and to be sure all of the facts are open to the public. He said that with the potential County funding, perhaps it should be a county-wide vote. Mr. Poussart indicated his belief that the slides are an insurance liability, and that he is concerned with security at the site, as well as traffic on Breakwater Road. He said that the site should be selected so as not to disturb trees and degrade the environment.

With no further public comment, Mr. Lomax asked about the number of parking spaces required for the site. Ms. Crippen said that there is no exact number yet and further clarified that the site was selected by the DRBA. Mr. Lomax asked if all of the building costs were included in the cost estimate; Ms. Crippen said that they were. Mr. Byrne asked what would happen if the cost estimates for either construction or the operation of the site were wrong. Mr. Ridgway said that they have the largest surplus in the history of the Township, and although they were looking at a number of large projects, the Township could handle it. He said that the projected revenues for the project did not include participation by Middle Township, so he thinks that the numbers can only get better. Mr. Lomax asked about insurance costs, which did not seem to be specifically identified in the cost estimates. Mayor Simonsen said that they eliminated the diving pool because of liability concerns; Ms. Crippen said that the insurance costs would be bundled into the Township's regular insurance costs.

Mr. Ridgway said that the Township had brought LAN Associates in as project planners so that the Township would have the best information available, and that they were selected out of a group of 5 proposals based on their references and the quality of their work. He said that this project is the chance to come out of the gate with something new. Freeholder Morey complemented the Township on their planning process.

Closed Session:

The Board went into Closed Session at 11:44 am, upon a motion by Mr. Craig, seconded by Mr. Byrne.

Return to Open Session:

The Board returned to Open Session at 12:56, per motion by Mr. Clemans, seconded by Ms. Gimeno

Decisions on Applications:

PR#18-04 – Woodbine EcoPark – Phases 2 & 3: Mr. Craig made a motion to approve the application in an amount not to exceed \$1.173 million, which is the value of the land that will be transferred to the County; Mr. Clemans seconded the motion. A Roll Call vote found all members to be in favor.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment.

Adjournment:

Mr. Clemans made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:57. Mr. Byrne seconded the motion. All in favor.