

PALMER TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING
NOVEMBER 14, 2011

A general business meeting of the Palmer Township Board of Supervisors was held on Monday, November 14, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. in the Community Room of the Palmer Library with four Supervisors in attendance: David Colver, Robert Lammi, Michael Mitchell, and Ann-Marie Panella. Robert Smith was absent. Also in attendance were the Township Manager, Director of Public Services, Police Chief, and Township Solicitor. Jerry Brahm from Patch Internet News represented the news media. Chairman Colver convened the meeting and led those present in the Pledge to the Flag.

2. APPROVAL OF DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS – NOVEMBER 14, 2011

INFORMATION

The report will be provided at the meeting.

DISCUSSION

On motion by Mitchell, seconded by Panella, and agreed by all, the Board approved the disbursement of funds for November 14, 2011.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – NOVEMBER 7, 2011

DISCUSSION

Bruno noted there was a minor change in his report about trees down on the bike path. There were 38 trees down not 28.

On motion by Lammi, seconded by Panella, and agreed by all, the Board approved the minutes of October 25, 2011 with the above change.

4. EASTON AREA HIGH SCHOOL BONFIRE REQUEST

INFORMATION

A representative from Easton High School will be present to request permission for the annual sleep out and bonfire on the grounds of Easton Area High School.

DISCUSSION

Ron Walsh, Senior Class President said they would like permission to have their annual bonfire and sleep out at the school on November 22 and November 23. We have everything in check with the police department and fire department and EMS. Colver said we recently had a request from an area church that we denied. Colver asked about the size of the bonfire. Walsh said it will be big, most likely around the same size as last year. Colver said we always have concern about this event because it wreaks havoc with emergency services each year. Colver

said it's all about safety. Fretz asked if they were holding the parade again. Walsh said yes at 5:30 with the bonfire at 6:30.

On motion by Mitchell, seconded by Panella, and agreed by all, the Board approved the annual sleep out and bonfire at Easton Area High School.

5. DISCUSSION OF UNIFIED FEE SCHEDULE

INFORMATION

The Board needs to approve/disapprove the proposed fee schedule and authorize administration to prepare a unified fee schedule for adoption at the Board's annual reorganizational meeting in January 2012.

DISCUSSION

Colver said this was before us last week and we had one question about the window permits. Colver said at that meeting we talked about reducing the window permit fee from \$10 to \$5. Colver said if someone replaces a bay window \$5 won't cover our expenses. Colver said he thinks a flat \$35 fee for replacing any amount of windows would work and would still cover the large one window jobs. Christman said when he discussed this with the Code Department he was told that this information gets sent to Northampton County for assessment purposes. The Code Department currently charges a percentage of the project but a flat fee should work. The Board agreed to go with a \$35 flat fee and to have the unified fee schedule finalized for adoption at the January reorganization meeting.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

Joan Russell, 4010 Freemansburg Avenue, said she has a septic and cesspool that has big problems. Russell said she was told Palmer Township stopped putting in a sewer system at Stones Crossing because of water flow. We've been pumping yearly but now we have to pump every three weeks. Russell said we were told by Steve Hunsberger at Bethlehem Township that they can hook us up but they need approval from Palmer Township. Colver said he believed she wanted to be at the Palmer Township Sewer Authority meeting that is being held next door in the municipal building.

Doug Janowicz, co-owner of Kasper's Spas and owner of the building, said he read an article about a fire inspection program the township wants to implement and he wanted to voice opposition to the program. Janowicz said he believes it is a knee jerk reaction to the plastics fire that was basically an accident. Janowicz said you are proposing to impose another fee on small businesses that would be a yearly bill. It's a new tax you are proposing on small businesses. Janowicz said there is a recession out there and the economy isn't in a good position and I don't think it's necessary. Janowicz said all business owners have insurance companies that provide these services to us. When we apply for certificate of occupancy permits we are inspected. Why should we have to pay a fee every year when most of us are going to be in compliance? Janowicz said in my business I have to be very careful with chemicals in my building and I'm responsible for that. It's not the governments place to be checking up on us. I would propose you come up with something in plain language that we would need to follow and publish it in a letter to businesses and advertise it in the newspaper. Janowicz said if there is another fire in the

township and the business is not in compliance, fine the business owner. It's too much government. It could be done much more cost effectively.

Colver said we've been through the fire inspection program and it was approved at a previous meeting. It was in the works for years. Colver said it is not because of the National Plastics fire – that was an oddity. Colver said the problem is the fire department is being called to 500/600 fires every year and when they get to some of these businesses they can't get through the hallways of the buildings; when they pull down drop ceilings they have debris falling on them that businesses are storing above the drop ceiling. We previously approved our code enforcement officer going to training so we can begin to get out there and try to educate business owners. Your business has chemicals and could be a danger to fire fighters if your building had a fire. Colver said the inspection fee would be \$50 to \$100 based on your square footage. We have over 500 businesses in Palmer Township and there are a lot of things happening that shouldn't be happening. Panella said if these other businesses are being inspected by their insurance companies why are the hallways overcrowded when our fire fighters get there. Colver said he needed to correct what he said earlier, we previously approved the concept and the actual ordinance is being drafted for our review and will come back to this Board at a future public meeting for adoption. Lammi said you, as a business owner, are trying to do a great job. Lammi said he spent seven years as an insurance company inspector and there are things you say are wrong and when you return to re-inspect you find the same problems. Some companies do a great job in correcting the problems but there are a lot that do not. Lammi said we have to look at it across the board. I've also been in buildings as a firefighter for this township and have found the fire exits blocked. Those are the kind of things that we need to look at. Lammi said if we don't see violations after starting the program maybe we will need to revise the requirements. Colver asked about the time frame for inspections. Christman said three days out of the week would be a combination of general inspections and fire inspections. It may not be every single year that each business gets inspected. Christman said if we would need to go out for two or more inspections at the same business due to violations there would be an additional \$50 fee to cover the time spent to come through and re-evaluate. Colver said there are 500 businesses in the township so we would have to do ten inspections every week to keep up. Christman said it will take time to get through the cycle. It would be a rotating cycle, not necessarily annually. Colver said then the cost shouldn't be a yearly inspection fee it should be when inspected. Janowicz said it is just another burden on small businesses that we really don't need. Colver said you brought up a couple of good points. The ordinance will be brought back to us for review and when it is in approval form the ordinance will be back on the agenda for approval at a public meeting.

7. REPORTS

Township Manager

- Christman said he and Tom Adams attended the PEMA/FEMA kickoff meeting last week. We identified the projects in the township that are a result of Hurricane Irene. Christman said we will now finalize the paperwork and we should expect the funds coming back to us in the early part of 2012.
- Christman said we received an email from a Banner Company for a new banner project. Only difference with this company is our public works department would have to hang the banners. Colver said they are a maintenance problem. Colver said if they could prove they could maintain the banners maybe I'd listen to them. Lammi said some of the banners out there now are getting shabby looking and need to be

taken town. Lammi said the BIP is looking at beginning the process of the updated community map which would conflict with a banner project. The Board agreed not to do another banner project.

Public Services Director

- Adams said leaf pickup was delayed due to the snow storm cleanup but it has started again with earnest this week.
- Adams said a lot of members of the public expressed thanks for the extended hours at the Berks Street Yard Waste Facility. Adams said there were a total of 869 loads dropped off in the two week time period when the fees were waived.

On motion by Mitchell, seconded by Panella, and agreed by all, the meeting was adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher S. Christman
Township Manager