

LEHIGH TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

June 13, 2023

- I. CALL TO ORDER. The Lehigh Township Board of Supervisors held their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, May 23, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. The meeting was held at the Lehigh Township Municipal Building, 1069 Municipal Road, Walnutport Pa. 18088. Vice Chairman Cindy Miller called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance and roll call.

Present: Cindy Miller
David Hess
Phil Gogel
Jerry Pritchard (via telephone)
Attorney David Backenstoe
Mike Muffley
Alice Rehrig
Liz Amato
Scott Fogel
Frank Zamadics

Absent: Mike Jones

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

- A. Minutes of May 23, 2023. David Hess made a motion to approve these minutes. Phil Gogel seconded the motion. Two corrections were noted to the minutes. Page 1, Last paragraph, “rant” should be “grand”, and Page 16, Cindy Miller spoke with DCED, not CFA. All voted aye to approve minutes as corrected.

III. APPROVAL OF BILLS.

- A. General Fund Checks 26807 to 26856. David Hess made a motion to approve these bills. Phil Gogel seconded the motion. Jerry Pritchard questioned what was the highest bill was. Alice Rehrig commented it was our insurance bill to Selective Insurance for \$15,031. All voted aye. Motion carried.

IV. PLANNING RELATED ITEMS

A. Extension of Time for Plan Recording

1. J & T Enterprise. Although Brad Rock from Lehigh Engineering was not working on this plan, he was willing to represent the plan. The deadline to record this plan is June 14, 2023. Attorney Backenstoe commented after speaking with the Township Engineer, it was his understanding that all the engineering comments have been addressed and the only outstanding item was the abstract of title. He recommended the Board grant a 60 day extension of time to give him an opportunity to speak with Lehigh Engineering to see where things are with the

title. He also noted DEP has been citing him on a regular basis. The only way he can comply with DEP is to do grading and in order to do that, he needs to come to the Township. David Hess made a motion to grant an extension of time until August 31, 2023, for the plan to be recorded as recommended by Attorney Backenstoe. Phil Gogel seconded the motion. All voted aye. Motion carried.

2. Top of the Mountain Estates. Attorney Stephanie Kobol and Brad Rock were present to represent this plan. The Owner of this property, Bruce McGregor, has been having major health issues and has not been able to devote the time needed to complete the plan. He currently is on the mend and is requesting an extension of time until December 31, 2023, to get the plan recorded. Phil Gogel made a motion to grant an extension of time until December 31, 2023, for plan recording. David Hess seconded the motion. Cindy Miller commented she would agree with the motion if a caveat was added that this is the last extension that will be granted to this plan. She is understanding of Mr. McGregor's health issues, but the plan has been in progress since 2016. Phil Gogel did not amend his motion. Phil Gogel and David Hess voted aye. Cindy Miller and Jerry Pritchard were opposed. Motion **did not** carry.

Cindy Miller made a motion to grant this plan an extension of time until December 31, 2023, with the caveat that this would be the final extension of time that would be granted. Jerry Pritchard seconded the motion. All voted aye. Motion carried.

B. Extension of Time for Plan Approval

1. Melo Enterprises LLC Land Development Plan. The developer granted the Board an extension of time until October 31, 2023. Sal Melo was present to represent this plan. Cindy Miller noted this plan was before the Planning Commission for the first time last evening. Phil Gogel made a motion to accept the extension of time until October 31, 2023, as recommended in the Planning Commission's letter dated June 13, 2023, and Burget Associates letter granting the extension dated May 30, 2023. David Hess seconded the motion. All voted aye. Motion carried.
2. 4209 Lehigh Drive Land Development. The developer granted the Board an extension of time until September 30, 2023. Woody Howells was present to represent this plan on behalf of Bulldog Properties. They have resolved all the sewage enforcement issues and will be getting the grease trap installed shortly. Once that is installed, they can complete the parking area and stripe it. After this is completed, they will finalize the plan. Phil Gogel made a motion to accept the extension of time until September 30, 2023. Jerry Pritchard seconded the motion. All voted aye. Motion carried.

- C. Engineer's Report. Mike Muffley reported that Bill Jones provided the Planning Commission with a letter indicating he is withdrawing his minor subdivision because of zoning issues.

The Planning Commission reviewed two lot line adjustment plans on the agenda. One was for 642 Cottonwood Road and the other was for Daniel DeSanto off Riverview Drive. Both plans will be coming to the Board of Supervisors for approval. The third plan they reviewed was Melo Enterprises Solar Project which was tabled.

They continued with their discussions on ordinances.

The Northwoods project continues to move along. They have started some of the infiltration beds in the roads this week and there were some meetings and discussions to make sure they get installed correctly.

Cindy Miller commented she had several residents question whether a brake retarder restriction could be placed in the area of Walnut Drive and **North** Granger Road. Route 946 is also another area where people have complained. She knows a study needs to be done and there are some restrictions in addition to needing permission from PennDOT. She asked Mike Muffley to look at the area to see if it is even feasible to move forward with the necessary studies. It was also noted that with the way the laws are written, trucks cannot be prohibited from using a road without doing engineering studies and PennDOT approval. Rick Hildebrand commented the brake retarders are an important safety feature on trucks. The problem comes in when the exhaust systems are modified.

V. DEPARTMENTAL/ORGANIZATIONAL REPORTS.

- A. Recreation Board. Sandy Hopkins reported that everything has been finalized with Dr. Shelly for the Pet Inoculation Clinic on Saturday. It will be held at the Township Building from 9 AM to 1 PM.
- B. Public Works Report. Frank Zamadics reported that they have cleaned up the site for the construction of the Maintenance Building. They have completed the street sweeping and are now starting with the roadside mowing and are also starting their drainage project.

Linda Roman noted there is still some wood that needs to be cleaned up from last year. Frank Zamadics commented they will be doing some grading in the area of Teak Road and will be cleaning up at that time.

- C. Zoning Report. There were 38 permit applications received in May. 35 permits were issued. There were also 28 new complaints received in May.

The May Zoning Hearing Board was canceled because they didn't have a full Board and one of the cases was continued from the previous month. Last week they had three hearings. One for rear setback relief for a single family dwelling which was granted, one for the storage of commercial vehicles which was granted with conditions, and one was a special exception for a communication tower which was denied. The Medical Marijuana facility hearing will be held on August 24 at the Fire Company. She also received an application for a use variance which is contingent on the sale of a property. Since they were not able to hold a meeting in July because of vacations, they have scheduled this hearing for June 29. It is a use variance for three multi-family apartment buildings.

David Hess heard the hearing last Thursday went long and questioned if this happens often. Liz Amato commented that was the longest one they had since she is here. Most times the latest they go is 10:00 PM. David Hess questioned if the length of the meeting was due to having three hearings. Liz Amato commented the first two were done within an hour. It was the third hearing that took along time. Typically, if she expects that there will be a lot of people attending a particular meeting, she will try to make it the only one for that evening.

- D. Police Report. There were about 10 arrests that occurred last month. The biggest issue they are dealing with right now is staffing because they are two officers short. Finding good applicants, full time or part time is difficult right now. Based on the advertisement he ran last month, he received three applications and only one followed up on the position.

The Department is getting ready for National Night Out which will be August 1 from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM.

Jerry Pritchard commented the Board accepted the resignation of Officer Edwards at the last meeting. Without that gap in the schedule, how are the shifts being covered? How is this effecting the departments overtime? Chief Fogel commented the openings in the schedule are being covered by overtime, but at the same time, there are two salaries that are not being paid which will help offset some of the costs.

- E. Municipal Authority. No one was present from the Municipal Authority.
- F. Planning Commission. Cindy Miller commented the only additional information she had beyond the Engineer's Report is the two ordinances that are being looked at are

Principal Solar Energy and Recreational Marijuana in preparation of the State passing laws permitting recreational marijuana. It will be structured similarly to the Medical Marijuana Ordinance.

Stacy Wagner, 4905 Coatbridge Lane, commented it was stated a few meetings ago about having a consultant come in and look at our ordinances and how they are aligned with where they should be for a future use. Has there been any movement on this? Cindy Miller commented the Board made the motion to put this to bid. Alice Rehrig commented she is in the process of developing the Request for Proposal. Phil Gogel commented any ordinances that are changed will not affect anything that has already been submitted.

- G. Fire Company. Rick Hildebrand commented the deadline for the price freeze on the ladder truck proposal is coming up. After that deadline, there will be an \$86,000 increase. He was wondering where the Board stood on this matter. Cindy Miller commented she doesn't believe there has been any change from the Board as to where they would be getting the money to move forward with the purchase. Cindy Miller questioned if the Fire Company had a plan. Rick Hildebrand commented the Township supports the Fire Company by providing the apparatus and the Fire Company supports the community by providing the free labor; that's the plan.

Phil Gogel made a motion to appropriate \$700,000 of the COVID Relief Money to the Fire Company for the purchase of a ladder truck. David Hess seconded the motion. David Hess questioned how we can use \$700,000 from the COVID money if we don't know what the final costs will be for the maintenance building. Phil Gogel commented when we went over the math before, \$600,000 will put us in the ballpark but \$700,000 will be less burden on the Fire Company. The truck will not be ready for at least two years, most likely three years. Three years at \$200,000 give another \$600,000 in the truck fund. There currently is \$300,000 in the truck fund now which is \$900,000. The \$700,000 will put us at \$1.6 million. There is a 2 percent loan that the Fire Company can get. Rick Hildebrand commented he believes it is \$130,000. Phil Gogel commented this will put us real close at \$1.73 million and the truck is \$1.834 million which will put us right in the sweet spot. The COVID relief money was put out there for the good of the community. He thinks this is the exact reason it was given; not to waste on pet projects or doing things that don't benefit the community as a whole. This is why he will continue to make the motion and hopefully one day it will pass. If they don't get the truck, and the current one breaks down, you have nothing. It is aging and falling apart as was pointed out several meetings ago. It is eating money like there is no tomorrow. Rick Hildebrand commented the truck is 32 years old which is some of the problem. There are no parts available for it. Phil Gogel commented it will become very expensive in the future if you don't act. That is the problem. The Board tends to procrastinate and

then things get out of control with pricing, like the building did. The Board didn't jump on the building and it got out of control. Cindy Miller did a good job getting the grant funding. Jerry Pritchard commented the whole building situation was discussed 20 years ago. We are now at a point where we can do the building. He wants the Fire Company to understand that by no means is he against them having a fire truck, but we are in a situation where we could be short a fire truck and a maintenance building and have nothing. Why don't we complete the project in front of us, the maintenance building and fuel island, and then see where the finances are. We are operating on loans and grants. That is not hard money; it's borrowed money. You can't run off this as it creates a debt and deficit. He doesn't want to put the Township in that position. It does not mean that he doesn't want a firetruck, but if you take the COVID money as suggested, you end up short on the firetruck and if we come up short on the maintenance building, we don't have anything on either side. Why don't we complete the one task in front of us with the fuel island and then start working on the ladder truck rather than borrow and borrow. Phil Gogel commented he is not suggesting borrowing; the Fire Company had given that information to the Board to help get the truck over the finish line and were willing to accept that burden. Rick Hildebrand commented they have taken the 2 percent loan out in the past and combined it with a lease program from Kansas City State Bank and the Township has repaid those loans for them for other pieces of apparatus. He also noted he misspoke regarding the 2 percent financing. It can go as high as \$378,000. Linda Roman commented it was stated during a previous meeting that the State changed how they look at things and communities who work together are the first in line for grants. We will continue to lose out if we are not working with other communities. Phil Gogel commented the problem is that we have one of the largest volunteer fire companies around. If you start forcing them to merge, you will not have the same amount of volunteers as you have today. Rick Hildebrand commented they had a State consultant come in several years ago and it was noted that there was no way to merge and go any smaller than what they are. Cindy Miller commented no one is talking about merging. It is about working together with other communities. Phil Gogel commented they currently do work with other fire companies. Rick Hildebrand commented they do work with other companies. Any time there is a house or structure fire, it is a combined effort. They support Northampton, Walnutport, Slatington, Washington Township, Moore Township; they go everywhere. These companies also come to us when we have a need. They are already working together. The problem is the volunteers are dwindling. With 11,000 residents and 30 square miles to cover, relying on a neighboring department to bring a piece of equipment is not a viable option. That is why in 1944, they stopped using Northampton and Walnutport for fire protection because the citizens wanted a better system to protect them locally. Waiting for apparatus to come from a neighboring community is not a primary answer; it is a supplemental answer. They have what is needed to protect this community in their garages. They do not have apparatus that is designed for anyone

else. What they have is for what they experience here in Lehigh Township. The other side of it is we need to get a plan together because there is another truck that has been getting pushed back and back and that too has maintenance issues; it is a 1998. It has aged very hard although they treat it well and spend a lot of money on it. That is where all their funds are going, into the apparatus to keep them running. The ladder truck is a Pierce and it does not have parts available for it anymore which is where they are up against a wall. In the past 15 months, the increases on pricing have gone up 18 ½ percent. That's an ugly number on \$2,000,000. Cindy Miller commented we don't have the money. We keep going through this, we don't have the money, the Fire Company tells the Board they need the truck, and the cycle repeats. She made a phone call to Tom Cook, Deputy State Fire Commissioner, and asked his office if he would come out and assist with putting a community plan together for the fire needs of Lehigh Township. We need a plan. We can't sit here going back and forth and not move forward. They are looking for strategic plans at the State level to approve grants and other items. Until we get strategic plans and get things down on paper, we are going to keep having this conversation. At this point, we have to get the Public Works building done. It is a high priority and everyone knew it was a high priority. It has been going on for 25 years. It has to happen. We didn't get the grant for the fuel island; that is something that needs to go in and will be \$100,000. If we use all the COVID Relief money for a firetruck, where will we get the \$100,000 for the fuel island. That is not included in the grant money we got for the building; that is in addition. That is why she thinks Jerry Pritchard is saying can we get the building done before we move on to another major capital expense. That is all he is saying. They all want the truck. Jerry Pritchard commented he would even be willing to make a motion that the next major capital expense will be a ladder truck at the moment were are done with the maintenance building. He is concerned if we take this money, we could not have enough money for a ladder truck and also not be able to finish the maintenance building. He has no problem moving onto the next project, but he thinks we should get the first one completed. Phil Gogel commented with the maintenance building fund, grant money, and loan money you are around \$6 million. Cindy Miller commented the rest of the Board and the community really don't want the Township to do loans. Phil Gogel commented it is at 4 percent and you have to if you want to build a building. Cindy Miller commented the loan is to be used as a bridge while we wait for the grant money to come in. We wouldn't carry a loan if we don't have to. Kristin Soldridge commented the maintenance building does impact the community. She understands what Rick Hildebrand is saying, but the maintenance building needs to be done. They need a place to do their work, to fix their equipment so they don't need to go out and replace the equipment. Money is tight for everyone. She doesn't agree with spending all the COVID money. She thinks we need to pay one thing off and then move forward. That is the most conservative thing to do. You don't want to get in a position where you've committed all the funds and then something comes up and you

can't do both. There may be plenty of money, but until everything is completely set in stone, you don't know. There is also a difference between what you need and what you want. Maybe there needs to be some type of compromise. It may not be exactly what you want, but it will get the job done. Phil Gogel commented that is what he is looking at. We have a 32 year old ladder truck and a brand-new school building that is pretty high and some tall houses in the area where you would need a ladder truck to get to the roof. Kristin Soldridge commented there are also other communities who come in and assist us. She is looking at it as you can't do both and the maintenance building has been waiting longer. Phil Gogel commented he agrees with what is being said, but when you add everything up, you have \$7 million for the building and it shouldn't cost that much. Sometimes you have to parallel projects to get them done cheaper. If you keep pushing it down the road it becomes more expensive. Kristin Soldridge questioned how you would do that if you don't have the money. Phil Gogel commented the loan is for \$2 million and set at 4 percent. There is plenty of money without having to touch the COVID money. Anne Breidenbach, Steven Lane, commented she understanding the maintenance building has been there for a long time and understands the aging of the trucks. As a community, we are continuing to evolve. We heard tonight that there is a possibility of three apartment buildings being developed. Our community will continue to grow. There is a possibility that we will be getting 16 grow houses and there is a possibility of fires in those houses. As a homeowner, she is not willing to wait for a firetruck, but is willing to wait for a building. Cindy Miller commented we do have a ladder truck now. Ms. Breidenbach noted that ladder truck is as old as most people in this room and it takes so long to get them. There is a volunteer pool that is decreasing and the better the equipment is, the better it is. Taxpayers also need to realize that without a fire company, your insurances go up. We need to come together rather than have a sandbox fight. Cindy Miller commented the Board needs to have a meeting with the Fire Company. The Board needs to sit down with them and come up with a plan. This is what they have been saying for the past few meetings. Ms. Breidenbach commented the Board has the obligation to talk about it, not fight about it. Katherine Mack commented she has attended a lot of meetings and it is always discussed about used equipment and having to repair them all the time. We also talk about grants, loans, and COVID money. You are not only talking about using the COVID money for the building, for the fire truck, and other projects. You are nickel and diming the COVID money. The greatest amount of revenue coming into the Township is your Earned Income Tax. If that is the biggest revenue, we are not a poor Township. The Board needs to raise taxes in the form of the Earned Income Tax, the property tax, or a tax for the fire company in addition to what you are obligated to provide them. The Township isn't getting smaller. It is getting more populated and there are more coming in. She knows the Board doesn't want to raise taxes because it is a point of election. Cindy Miller commented she does not raise taxes because of election; she takes insult to that comment. She listens to the community, she knocks on the door, and people tell her

do not raise our taxes. Katherine Mack commented what else would you expect them to say; everything costs money. If you want to live in a quality community, you need to be able to have the services. Rick Hildebrand commented he knows that it was stated we need to have a plan. We have a Capital Replacement Plan for the apparatus and everything is spelled out in there. Within 15 months and 18 ½ percent increases, he doesn't believe the plan kept up with what reality is. We have another truck that is in need of replacement that is right behind this one that will cost \$1 million. We don't have a plan for this one; is there a plan for the next one? Cindy Miller commented that is her question to the Fire Company, what is the Fire Company's plan? Rick Hildebrand commented they have the Township carrying the capital replacement plan; they don't have that plan. They provide the personnel to operate the equipment. They are the advocates for the community for fire protection and fire services and emergency services. There are telling what the community needs, not what the Fire Company wants. They are at a threshold where if they tinker with this too much longer, one of them is going to break down and not be in service and if the other one breaks down, we are in trouble. If the Board has lives on their hands, that is not his problem. It is going to be an issue in a very short order. Cindy Miller commented we need to sit down and come up with a regional plan; Lehigh Township alone cannot provide three firetrucks within five years. This was stated last year. Rick Hildebrand commented we can't even provide one at this point. Cindy Miller commented that is correct. We have been buying vehicles. The question is what else is the plan. Rick Hildebrand commented there is 11 pieces of equipment at the Fire Company. How would they all be staggered out? Cindy Miller questioned if all 11 pieces are needed. That is why she is suggesting sitting down and discussing this. Rick Hildebrand questioned if the Board knows what is needed. Cindy Miller commented that is why she wants to bring the state in. Rick Hildebrand questioned why do that at the 11th hour. You are taking the work on the truck and shoving it down the tubes. Cindy Miller commented the Board has been telling the Fire Company for weeks and months that we don't have the money. We don't have \$1.8 million. Rick Hildebrand questioned if there was nothing else being planned or worked on while the maintenance building was being planned for 20 years. Cindy Miller commented she fought for a long time to get a capital improvements plan. It was at least a year with the prior board. Prior to the plan, there was no savings taking place. The Board didn't know what type of equipment they had in the Township. They didn't know the age of the equipment or what needed to be replaced. They did it for every department. During a budget meeting, the departments would come into a meeting and say this is what they need for the year and the Board would react. That is how budgeting went on in the past, but that is not how it is done today. The Board would scramble as to how they would be coming up with the money to pay for what needed to be done that year. If the plan has only been in effect for eight years, how could any department expect the Board to have all kinds of money. The Fire Company is looking to have two pieces of equipment within five years which will

come to \$3 million. How can we possibly do that? Even if we were to raise taxes or start a fire tax, there is not enough money. Rick Hildebrand commented there are rules for a second class township as to how you should provide or allow for fire services. The Board can implement up to a 3 mill fire tax which would more than satisfy the need. Cindy Miller commented there are no municipalities that have a 3 mill fire tax. Rick Hildebrand commented Slatington and Northampton have fire taxes to provide for the fire service. Cindy Miller commented they also didn't have a capital plan where they were saving \$200,000 each year. Rick Hildebrand commented we apparently do not have a plan because we are not saving for anything right now. Cindy Miller commented we have been saving. Rick Hildebrand commented the work that went into the truck will be flushed down the toilet because it is not only time sensitive to price, but also to design and engines. They are changing the engines. Once that engine manufacturer changes in months, the whole design will have to be scrapped and started over again. Michele Cassale, 3368 Church Road, commented she is fearful sitting at the Township meeting, which she never had before in her years of living here. Rick Hildebrand is telling the Board they have a 32 year old firetruck that is ready to break down. How is the Board planning on protecting the residents? Are they basically alleging that they will have a defunct fire department if the equipment breaks down? The ladder truck won't work if it breaks down. She has been told because she lives at the far end of the Township, she should take care of herself because by the time the volunteers get to her farm, her barns will burn down. They would put the fire out to keep it from spreading. What she is hearing at this meeting is that we are an unsafe community if these trucks break down before we have a plan. It's like you're building a garage but don't have a fire extinguisher for it. Cindy Miller questioned what was done before the Fire Company had a ladder truck. Rick Hildebrand commented the ladder truck is more than just a ladder. It is a pumper and carries many functions. Unless you are in the fire service you couldn't quite understand; they would take the time to explain it, but they don't have the time right here and now. Cindy Miller commented the Board and the Fire Company need to sit down and figure it out. She has been saying that over two months now. Rick Hildebrand commented they have been saying this for a year and the plan has been in place for eight years so obviously someone's been missing the mark. Cindy Miller questioned if they realize how much the Township has bought for the Fire Company. You act as if the Township has not purchased anything for the Fire Company. The Township bought an \$850,000 rescue truck, the used ladder truck that the Fire Company currently has, the truck didn't fit in the building so the Township gave another \$50,000 to put the addition on the fire station to house the truck. Rick Hildebrand noted that saved \$385,000. Cindy Miller commented you make it sound like the Township has not contributed. Every time they have expended money for the fire company, they have asked them if they wanted to spend this money at this time for this equipment and the Board has been told yes. Rick Hildebrand commented this equipment is not just equipment. It is payment for

the volunteers who do what they do. They do it for free; they don't want a penny. They do it as their compensation to have decent equipment to work with. The Board has no plan for this community. How do expect to retain people who are getting zero in the first place, having to take hundreds or thousands of hours of training? Who do you expect to do this? There is a crisis in Pennsylvania for volunteers because there is no back bone to support them. They are not retaining volunteers. Right now, everyone is lobbying the state for paid firefighters because they do not have the staffing. There are people who are not happy with this Board and they are at the fire house. You need to have a backup plan for your fire truck because if this doesn't go down well, there are people who are not happy. Cindy Miller questioned if the reason they are at the fire company is because of a new firetruck? Rick Hildebrand questioned if the Board would want to work with lousy equipment? Cindy Miller commented the truck was just bought a few years ago. Every truck that has been purchased has been what the Fire Company requested. Rick Hildebrand commented the Township has been put on notice for what they need and how people feel. The Board is responsible for taking care of this. Cindy Miller commented the Board is responsible for providing fire services to Lehigh Township. Rick Hildebrand questioned what happens when they don't show up. Cindy Miller commented what will happen is it will end up going regional. That is the way the State is thinking. Rick Hildebrand commented the Township is 30 square miles. Where would a regional department come from? Rick Hildebrand commented he has put 41 years into the fire department and has never been so frustrated that he wants to quit. The Board doesn't realize the age of the people keeping the place together or understand what it takes to do what they do. They are at the fire company every day of the week. This is total incompetence. Paul Nikisher commented people don't understand, and as much as no one wants taxes, he believes a fire tax needs to be started. Cindy Miller commented a tax cannot be started in the middle of the year. Paul Nikisher commented it can be worked on. It doesn't need to be a three mill tax, but at least start with something. Cindy Miller commented the Township is already giving the fire company the equivalent of the millage they are talking about. Charlie Perich commented the fire tax would be in addition to what they are already given. He came from a township that did the very same thing. They were giving the fire company \$50,000 per year and it wasn't enough to keep them going. Katherine Mack commented a per capita tax could be started. Cindy Miller commented the State only permits townships to implement certain taxes. Linda Roman commented to say the Township is not safe is untrue. There is more than one fire company in the area. If there is a fire in our community or anywhere else, there are how many different companies that respond. It is not just one company or our company. There are a lot of fire companies in the area so we are not without fire service. The problem is the money is not there. If we hit the lottery, we would gladly buy a fire truck. A tax is not the answer either because there are people who are on social security and that is what they live on right now. She doesn't believe there is anyone in the room who

could live on what she is living on. Jerry Pritchard wanted everyone to understand that the purchase of a firetruck will not drag on like the maintenance building. It is a hot topic with the Supervisors. It is not true that they do not want the truck. We do live in a very safe township; probably one of the safest communities in the State. We have a great Fire Company and a great Police Department. We are safe; let's not plant the seed that we are not. Cindy Miller commented once we get the building done and the money that was being saved can be allocated to other places because the building will be done. Jerry Pritchard commented he believes we need to sit down and iron out the numbers whether it be a fire tax or something else. Then, when we are done with the maintenance building, we go straight at the truck. Phil Gogel voted aye to allocate \$700,000 from the COVID Relief funds for the purchase of a firetruck. Jerry Pritchard, Cindy Miller, and David Hess were opposed.

Cindy Miller commented she still believes a meeting between the Board and the Fire Company needs to take place and they need to talk and iron this out. The Board knows a truck is needed. She has never heard anyone on the Board say they don't want the ladder truck; they all want it. We just need to figure out how we are going to do this. Jerry Pritchard commented he believes it can be done. It will happen. Cindy Miller commented she agrees. Alice Rehrig was asked to coordinate a meeting.

Cindy Miller commented the man from the State will be going around regionally throughout Pennsylvania and will be meeting with the fire departments. She had said to their office, wouldn't it make sense to include the municipalities in these meetings so everyone is hearing everything at the same time.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Cherryville Intersection. Cindy Miller questioned if we were close to getting everything closed out for this project. Alice Rehrig commented she sent the final item, which was a copy of a canceled check, to DCED today so she is hoping that we will receive the final payment in the next six weeks.

Phil Gogel questioned if it was ever discussed about putting lines on the section of Route 248 by the Bodish property so people know where to drive because of how wide the roadway is. Cindy Miller commented it was discussed several meetings ago that we wouldn't be doing the striping because it is now Turkey Hill's responsibility to complete the work. PennDOT has pushed that over to Turkey Hill to complete because their portion of the work was not done when we did our work.

- B. Maintenance Building. Alice Rehrig commented we are currently waiting for all the signed contracts to come back. Once they are all back, the contractors will be able to move forward. A date for the groundbreaking ceremony should be set shortly because the contractors will be eager to get started.

Jerry Pritchard questioned what would be entailed in the groundbreaking. Cindy Miller commented it would just be a little ceremony where you would invite the legislators who helped get the funding, the contractors. It would basically be a kickoff to the project.

Jerry Pritchard questioned if the Board was going to try to do the fuel island at the same time as the building. Alice Rehrig commented the fuel island would have to be put to bid. Phil Gogel commented he doesn't know that it would be a good idea to have too many contractors trying to work in the same area.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Acknowledgement of Retirement and approval of Pension Application. Alice Rehrig commented Officer D'Alessandro has submitted his application for pension benefits. When the State Auditors review the pension files, they require that the Board acknowledge the retirement and approve the application for benefits. Phil Gogel made a motion to acknowledge Officer D'Alessandro's retirement and approve his pension application. Jerry Pritchard seconded the motion. All voted aye. Motion carried.
- B. Welcome to Lehigh Township Signs. The Welcome to Lehigh Township sign in Treichlers is in poor condition and should be replaced. Alice Rehrig was asked to get a quote from Scribbles and Drips for replacing the sign. David Hess suggested getting a second price on the sign. Phil Gogel commented he would prefer to go to the individual who did it the first time since they seem to have held up well. Frank Zamadics will check the condition of all the signs.

Patrick VanderPloeg questioned if the same type of grant that was received for the park signs could be used for this sign. Alice Rehrig commented the grant application period for 2023 has closed, but she doesn't believe these signs would meet the requirements of the Chamber. Cindy Miller commented the grant was a Main Street Grant.

- C. Manager's Report. Alice Rehrig provided the Board with a copy of the revised Comprehensive Plan map that was received from the consultant. She also provided the Board with the list of changes that were supposed to be made to the map. The Board was asked to review the map to make sure all the necessary changes were made. She will also be contacting the consultant to get the complete final version so

the plan can be adopted. Cindy Miller questioned if another hearing needs to be held or can the Board just vote on it? Attorney Backenstoe commented he will need to speak with the consultant to verify where things are in the process; another hearing may be needed. Alice Rehrig commented she believes that if it is determined that the changes that were made were substantial, another hearing would be needed. If they are not substantial, then it can just be adopted. She can review the changes that were made with Attorney Backenstoe so he can make a determination as to whether another hearing is needed. Phil Gogel questioned if it was approved at a meeting regarding the change that was requested in the zoning along Birch Road. Alice Rehrig commented it was discussed and included during the meeting when all the corrections that were needed to the map were before the Board.

D. Solicitor's Report. Attorney Backenstoe did not have anything additional to report.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT. Patrick VanderPloeg questioned if the Public Works Department was doing any roadside mowing. Frank Zamadics commented they started the roadside mowing on Wednesday and are working their way around the Township through various intersections.

Joe Winkelbauer, 1159 Oak Road, questioned what the outcome was of the firetruck discussion. He missed the discussion because of a fire call. Cindy Miller commented the Board decided they need to have a meeting with the Fire Company to discuss how to fund the fire truck and move forward because we don't have the money to fund it at this time. Mr. Winkelbauer questioned, as a citizen of the Township, how do the funds get allocated year after year so they don't run into the situation of having 30 and 40 year old trucks. Cindy Miller commented years ago, the Township didn't really give money to the Fire Company for equipment, but knew there was an issue with the Fire Company equipment. When she came on the Board 12 years ago, she noticed we would have budget meetings, Departments would come in and every year they would ask for their needs. The Board would try to figure out how to budget the money and spend it for who would get what. There was no savings going on. About eight years ago, a Capital Plan was created listing all the equipment and assets of each department. Everything was included. They looked at everything, age of equipment, and created a timeline as to when each piece would need to be replaced. It was something the Board never looked at in the past. It's a perpetual 10 year plan and it is allocated what will be spent each year for capital. Initially, there was nothing included for the Fire Company because there was a fund and a little bit would be contributed into the fund. Then the Fire Company was added and they started saving more and more for Capital Equipment. She was explaining to Rick Hildebrand that the Township is trying to catch up money wise and working with funding and then they are also looking at the future for trying to buy equipment. The rescue truck was purchased, the ladder truck the Fire Company has today was purchased used, and then

there were also a few other pieces of equipment that were purchased along the way. Every time something is purchased, it depletes the account. Money is put into the account each year. It started at around \$125,000 each year and is now up to \$200,000. They have been trying to increase the funding through the Capital Plan. Joe Winkelbauer commented the escalators that should be in place are not there so it is hard to catch up. Cindy Miller commented even with the escalations in place, the Fire Company is coming to the Township telling them they want to purchase two or three pieces of equipment totaling \$3 to \$5 million. She and the Board doesn't know how the Township could do that. Mr. Winkelbauer commented the ladder truck was \$1.6 million, but the cost increased throughout the process. If you figure the escalator and earmark those funds, they should grow along the way. Cindy Miller commented they were, but in the meantime, you are taking money out, and the Township can't put in fast enough for what is being bought. The Township knows equipment is needed and they are trying to figure it out. We are being told \$1.8 million for the ladder truck and in two to three years, there is another million dollars needed, and then a few years after that, there is another million that is needed. They are trying to figure out how to do this. People say implement the fire tax. Even if a fire tax is implemented at 1 mill, it will generate \$250,000. Joe Winkelbauer commented it would be money that is allocated specifically for the Fire Company. Cindy Miller commented the money that is in the truck fund is specifically allocated for the fire company. That money doesn't get touched. With a 1 mill tax, the Township still wouldn't be able to catch up fast enough. That is why we have been trying to get grants to try to get us to the point where we can catch up faster which is why they applied for a \$750,000 grant, but we didn't get it. Now, we need to pull back and figure out what we are going to do. We can apply for the grant again in the fall, but you cannot contract for a truck while the grant is pending. You have to wait to see if the grant is awarded. If you contract before the grant is awarded, you will lose the grant. Now it comes down to what do we want to do because we know we can't keep on waiting; we need to figure it out. She and Alice Rehrig have talked to the person in charge of DCED about what grants to apply for, how can they help us get a truck and put things together because there may be additional grants that we are unaware of that they may be able to help us get. That is where we are at and why they are saying let's sit down and try to figure this out. Every Board member wants to get the equipment; it's not that they don't want to. It's how are we going to get it and not put the community in debt. The community doesn't want to be in debt, and they have to answer to the community financially. Joe Winkelbauer questioned how do we get out of the vicious cycle of trying to save and budget and be ahead of the game. Cindy Miller commented it's like your budget at home, how do you do it? Mr. Winkelbauer commented you need to raise more revenue. Cindy Miller commented as a municipality the only revenue we can generate is a tax, a real estate tax. The State regulates what kind of taxes the Board can generate. There are only so many kinds of taxation that a Township is permitted to do. One of them is a fire tax. Joe Winkelbauer commented he knows it can be up to a certain mill so

it can be increased if need be. Cindy Miller commented we don't have a fire tax at this time. If the Board chooses to implement a fire tax, they then set the tax rate and there is a maximum of 3 mills if the Board choose. Based on the money that the Township is currently giving the Fire Company, they are already at 1 mill.

John Noblach, 4315 Katlyn Drive, commented he used to live in Lower Nazareth. They have state of the art equipment and a fire tax, but they had no bodies. There were 18 people who were running full time. Here we are blessed with a lot of people, but the equipment is unfortunately aging. There are a lot of people who are attempting to do developments here. Is there any way that the people who are doing the developments can be taxed? Attorney Backenstoe commented the Municipalities Planning Code dictates what type of fees a municipality can charge a developer. You would need to go to your legislators and have them amend the municipalities planning code so that a township could garnish funds from a large development to help underwrite police and fire coverage. Right now, it is prohibited under the MPC. Developers call it an extraction of fees and file a lawsuit if you try to do it. The only thing the Township can do, which Lehigh Township did, for capital improvement is a traffic impact fee which is set after a study has been done based upon what impact development may have on certain roadways and intersections. Cindy Miller commented she also contacted Tom Cook from the State Fire Commissioner's Office and asked if there was a way that someone from the office could come up and talk to the Township or help us develop some type of plan about how we can go about looking at the needs and wants of the community so we know how to put his plan together. This was also brought up at PSATS and it was stated you are already doing what you can beyond regionalizing. Unfortunately, that is the direction the State is pushing. Joe Winkelbauer commented he has been in other areas and with other companies; he knows how it works. If you have four different departments in one area, they can regionalize and come together. With the size of this Township, you are as together as you can be. There have been studies in the past that suggest the need for a substation because of call volume in this Township. Regionalization here doesn't help. As far as working together for grants, they do that. They are working with Northampton and other departments in Northampton County as much as possible. It is unfeasible to be looking for some type of County system to come in and save Lehigh Township. It's just not happening. He's been a part of county systems and the 20 to 30 minute response time for a house fire is unreasonable. That's when people die and people don't get out of the house. Cindy Miller commented the other point they told us at a state level as far as how some areas are handling their equipment is the municipalities are talking with their fire departments and working very closely together and jointly plan as far as which municipality will have what pieces of equipment and each one maintains their equipment and they share. This is a new concept. Some municipalities in this area are doing that. Joe Winkelbauer commented that is a double edge sword because it is like going back to the regionalization that that is not what you are looking for. Cindy Miller commented she is not saying they want to regionalize. She's just saying this is what is taking place and

that the state wants to push regionalization like they did with EMS. Joe Winkelbauer commented the matter of having the appropriate resources for the area has been answered. This Township has the right resources and apparatus for the area. Cindy Miller commented the problem now is people are afraid because the message was sent to them that if there is a fire, we don't have the equipment to handle it. Joe Winkelbauer commented if there is no money in the budget, they should be scared. It was said that there is no way to fund this truck. Cindy Miller commented the Township does not have \$1.8 million right now to fund the truck. Most municipalities don't have \$1.8 million to fund their trucks. Joe Winkelbauer commented there are several in Northampton County: Northampton, Palmer, most of them have fire taxes. Kristin Soldridge commented the demographics between Palmer and Lehigh Township are different.

Allen Doan, Linden Road, commented he knows the Board doesn't want to raise taxes because that is not what the people want, but what business provides the same rate of labor for a service at the same rate that they did ten years ago? They would be out of business by now. He has lived in the Township for a little over 10 years. There was a meeting at the fire company several years ago to discuss this same thing. He brought it up then than the equipment cost increases 5 to 7 percent every year. What he sees here is that nothing was done to plan for that. Cindy Miller disagreed; we did plan for it. Mr. Doan commented you keep spending the money and then all off a sudden there is no money in the fund. Cindy Miller commented there is \$300,000 to \$350,000 in the fund for the fire company. When the rescue truck was purchased, it was \$700,000 to \$800,000 and was paid cash. When that happens, the account starts at \$0 again, and then that year another \$100,000 went in, then another \$200,000, the next year. The fund hasn't had time to grow back. Mr. Doan questioned if lease purchasing was looked into, discounts for prepaying. There is a two percent loan program through the State that is available for the purchase of equipment. Was that looked into? Phil Gogel commented Rick Hildebrand did provide that information where you can loan around \$375,000 at two percent. His proposal with that amount would have put us at the mark, but the rest of Board already has that money spent on something else, in theory, potentially. He would rather do the \$700,000 of COVID Relief money towards the Fire Company. Mr. Doan commented the older the apparatus gets, the more the insurance rates go up. ISO comes in and does studies. Based on the age of the apparatus there is a designated life time for apparatus. Some of their trucks have exceeded that designate life time. Based on that your insurance rates go up. Cindy Miller commented that is what she was trying to explain earlier. We are playing catch up. We didn't have the Capital Savings until about 8 years ago. Until then there was no saving for the Fire Company taking place.

Katherine Mack questioned if the meeting between the Fire Company and the Board will be public. Cindy Miller commented it wouldn't be. The Board needs to have the discussion with the Fire Company and try to figure this out. They need to have the discussion without people questioning things while they are trying to have the discussion.

They can't have people interjecting constantly as they are trying to work through this. Katherine Mack commented that she appreciates the history of the Capital Plan, but if the Board would have initiated a fire tax, there would be \$250,000 more each year to put into it. Cindy Miller commented if a fire tax is initiated, that is the money that they get. Katherine Mack commented the fire tax should be above what they already get. The Board doesn't have to give them just a fire tax. Cindy Miller commented it would depend upon what else we would need to pay for. Katherine Mack commented then make the tax 3 mills and give it to the Fire Company. You don't have a better group of people working for nothing for the community. If you have a meeting with the Fire Company and you talk about what equipment they need, you still have to be able to pay for it. Somewhere along the line in that conversation, you will need to come up with a financial plan that develops money, not just grants or taking money from whatever fund you take it from. Cindy Miller noted a fire tax will generate \$250,000 per year. It still will take four to six years. We need to have a joint financial plan. The Board needs to understand the Fire Company's revenues and expenditures as well as the Township's. David Hess commented if a meeting was held with the Fire Company where the majority of the residents were present, he would be open to considering a fire tax. He wants to make sure the residents are informed of that consideration.

Joe Winkelbauer questioned if the money that is in the account is invested in any way, such as a mutual fund so that it can grow. Cindy Miller commented the money is in a separate account through PLGIT. Attorney Backenstoe commented the Township cannot invest Township funds in an open stock market. There are very specific requirements.

Mar Kacsmar commented both parties, volunteers and the Board, can't come in here with an us versus them approach. It needs to be everyone on the same level. What is your equipment, what is the age, what do you need, what's the two year plan, five year plan? That is the key factor. If that doesn't happen, everyone is lost already.

Joe Winkelbauer commented whatever plan is developed, it needs to be super aggressive because as stated, we are behind the eight ball. Cindy Miller commented the Fire Company also need to remember there are other departments and areas that the Board has to look at as well. The Board's responsibility is to look out for the entire Township and make sure everything is getting done.

Michele Cassale commented safety should come first. We need the firetrucks to get to the home. The Township is evolving. It is growing in leaps and bounds. As plans get approved, it's more responsibility for the fire company. Their jobs have skyrocketed in the past few months because everything is getting approved. These guys are here to protect us; we need to make sure they can get there. They are saving our lives. To her, as a member of the Township, safety has to come first, no matter what. We need to be safe. We are asking these guys who are risking their lives to save us, to do it with faulty

equipment. They just told everyone it is about to break down. If it was us, we'd buy a new car. We need to come up with something solid to make this work whether is it putting it out to the residents or selling a bond. She believes most people would be willing to buy a bond to make sure their homes are safe. Cindy Miller commented what is really sad is that when the Fire Company sends out their annual fund drive, they are only getting about a 20 percent response. That is a shame. Marc Kacsmar commented he faithfully sends his donation when he receives his fund drive letter. To learn that only 20 percent of the community participate in the fund drive is absolutely ridiculous. Janet Sheats commented the whole problem is the community turns a blind eye and doesn't know what is going on. Michael Cassale commented it needs to be put out to the community and inform, the Fire Company needs help. Katherine Mack commented it shouldn't be a matter of asking the community; they need to be told. People will say they don't want their taxes to go up; that is the natural reaction. Linda Roman commented the Board is trying to run a community. People need to come to the meetings and find out what is going on. You can say tax all you want, but there are older people who live here. Jerry Pritchard commented both parties need to meet, bring the information, and then be able to come to the public and say this is what we worked out.

Michelle Cassale commented the Planning Commission was looking at different options for solar and were looking to remove it from all areas except for Industrial. She is asking that the Board not remove it from agriculture. She is asking it to remain as a dual use where they can continue to farm. She provided the Board with information on a dual use solar program where farmers can continue to farm the land with solar panels on it. It will help keep farmers farming and provide them with supplemental income. Solar can't go everywhere because not all areas will get the sun. Out of her 84 acres, only 25 can have solar. Cindy Miller commented the concern of the Planners is that the for profit companies are coming in and trying to put it everywhere. The Planners are looking at where do we want the solar to go. The companies don't care what the Township will look like. The Planners know they need to allow solar so they are looking at where it will best fit. Michelle Cassale commented she wanted the Board to be aware that there is a dual option and requested that the ordinance does not change so that farmers can have this option, keep farming, and not end up selling their farms for development which would add additional stress to the Township's infrastructure and schools.

- IX. EXECUTIVE SESSION. The Board went into Executive Session to discuss personnel. No action was taken.
- X. ADJOURN. David Hess made a motion to adjourn. Jerry Pritchard seconded the motion. All voted aye. Motion carried.