

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING I

SWATARA TOWNSHIP

MAY 1, 2024

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

1. **Call to Order:** President Ellis called the Regular Meeting I of the Swatara Township Board of Commissioners to order at 7:00pm on Wednesday, May 1, 2024. The meeting was held at the Swatara Township Municipal Building, 599 Eisenhower Boulevard, Harrisburg, PA.
2. **Pledge of Allegiance:** President Ellis led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. **Moment of Silence**
4. **Roll Call:** Commissioners Michael Tuckey, Christine Zubeck, Tom Connolly, Shane Steele and Shacla Ellis were present. Also present: Manager Jim Fosselman, Solicitor Scott Wyland, Lieutenant Krehling, Deputy Police Chief and Sergeant-At-Arms Thomas Stauffer, Treasurer Brittany Yarzinsky and Secretary Jen Yesavage.
5. **Announce Executive Session:** An Executive Session was held prior to the meeting to discuss personnel and litigation matters.
6. **Awards Presentation:** Lieutenant Krehling presented 25 Years of Service Awards to Sergeant Brian Karcesky – who is actually approaching 30 years of service, Warrant Officer Michael Bowser and Deputy Chief Thomas Stauffer.
7. **Visitors Requests and Comments:**
  - A. **Debra Noles, 6080 Hocker Drive:** she spoke out against the potential closing of Friendship Fire Company and the manner in which the situation was handled
  - B. **Joe Craig, appearing for parents who live at 239 Luther Place:** he spoke about fire services being affected by the closing of previous Fire Houses and how closing Bressler would do the same, he also spoke out against the placing of the fire truck out for bid that was done at the previous meeting
  - C. **Joanne Cibort, 799 High Street:** she spoke against the manner in which the situation with the Friendship Fire House was handled
  - D. **Gary Harvey, 105 S. 47<sup>th</sup> Street:** he spoke again about putting firefighters back on the equipment at Paxtang
  - E. **Mary Klaus, 447 Pritchard Court:** she spoke about the negative handling of the situation with the Friendship Fire Company, she asked that item #14 be dropped from the agenda for the evening
  - F. **Deb Harvey, 105 S. 47<sup>th</sup> Street:** she complained about not being able to get answers from the Commissioners when questions are being asked
  - G. **Lisa Neiter, 6140 Hocker Dr:** she questioned personnel matters and the hiring of a Public Information Officer for Emergency Management Agency Department

MINUTES

SWATARA TOWNSHIP

REGULAR MEETING I

MAY 1, 2024

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

- H. **Jeremy Saul, Elizabethtown, appearing for his parents who live at 5111 Erie Road:** he spoke against the handling of the Friendship Fire Company situation
  - I. **Brian Beistline, Manager, Wal-Mart on Grayson Road:** he thanked the first responders who responded to a fatal incident that happened at the Wal-Mart
  - J. **Joanne Cibort, 799 High Street:** she spoke in defense of the Bressler Social Club and funds that they have raised over years to support various charities
  - K. **Joe Craig:** he spoke about the releasing of the investigative report and calling a special meeting after the public has an opportunity to review the report
8. **Motion to Approve Agenda:** Vice President Steele made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Connolly. Commissioner Zubeck then made a motion to remove Item #14 from the agenda due to a lack of information regarding the investigation of Friendship Fire Company, which was seconded by Commissioner Tuckey. Commissioner Zubeck and Commissioner Tuckey both wanted more time given to allow the Attorney General's office to complete a thorough investigation before a vote is taken to close a fire house.

Commissioner Tuckey – yes  
Commissioner Zubeck – yes  
Commissioner Connolly – no  
Vice President Steele – no  
President Ellis – no

As that motion was defeated, on the original motion to approve the agenda:

Commissioner Tuckey – no  
Commissioner Zubeck – no  
Commissioner Connolly – yes  
Vice President Steele – yes  
President Ellis – yes

9. **Motion to Approve Items on Consent Agenda:** Vice President Steele made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda, seconded by Commissioner Connolly. President Ellis gave a brief overview of items A and C and asked Manager Fosselman to give an overview of item B which is a Tax Assessment Appeal for Harrisburg Hotels LLC. In regards to item D, Commissioner Zubeck asked how many times the EMA Director was activated over the past few years and questioned the need to fill this position at this time when other positions within the Township are vacant and should be prioritized over this position. Commissioner Tuckey questioned the amount of money being given to this person based

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING I

SWATARA TOWNSHIP

MAY 1, 2024

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

on the financial situation that the board has spoken out about over the past several months.

Commissioner Tuckey – no  
Commissioner Zubeck – no  
Commissioner Connolly – yes  
Vice President Steele – yes  
President Ellis – yes

10. **Consideration of Minutes:**

A. **Regular Meeting II of April 10, 2024:** Vice President Steele made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by President Ellis. Commissioner Tuckey asked about Commissioner Zubeck’s comments and where it was placed in the minutes. He also asked that the print for that portion be increased. President Ellis explained why the comments were placed at the end of the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

11. **Presentation by HRG, Inc: Highland Street Pipe Relocation:** Mike Hess, stormwater engineer with HRG, Inc. and while this is a Stormwater Authority decision, he felt it necessary to give this presentation this week to allow for review and time to come up with questions prior to the Stormwater meeting next week. He spoke about the key drivers for all stormwater projects: maintaining aging infrastructure, resolving existing stormwater issues and regulatory compliance. Highland Street is a top priority due to the flooding that occurs. The plan in place would redirect the water around an existing wall and upgrade the pipes. There is also a plan in place to make improvements at the Donald Taylor Park. The next step is to ask the Stormwater Authority to place out for bid the work for the Highland Street project. The full presentation is available for view on the Township website.

12. **Approval of Request to Waive Building Fees for Rutherford Fire Station Building Improvements:** President Ellis made a motion to waive the building fees which was seconded by Commissioner Connolly. The motion carried unanimously.

13. **Consideration of Resolution: Approval of PennDOT Right-of-Way Acquisition – Rosewood Lane:** Vice President Steele made a motion to approve the resolution, seconded by Commissioner Connolly. The motion carried unanimously. R-2024-23

14. **Consideration of Resolution: Removal of Friendship Fire Company as Fire and Rescue Emergency Service Provider:** Commissioner Connolly made a motion to approve the resolution, seconded by Vice President Steele. Brian Caffrey, Esq., appeared

MINUTES

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SWATARA TOWNSHIP

REGULAR MEETING I

MAY 1, 2024

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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on behalf of the Friendship Fire Company and addressed the Commissioners about the charges and the investigation that took place leading to the potential shutting down of the Fire Company. Commissioner Connolly read a timeline of events and a letter from the Attorney General's Office, both of which are available in full on the Township's website. Commissioner Zubeck made a motion to table indefinitely to allow the Friendship Fire Company's representation time to review the documents from the investigation and the Township to receive a response from the Attorney General's Office, motion was seconded by Commissioner Tuckey.

Commissioner Tuckey – yes  
Commissioner Zubeck – yes  
Commissioner Connolly – no  
Vice President Steele – no  
President Ellis – no

During the ongoing discussion, Solicitor Wyland stated that he had received a phone call and letter from the previous Solicitor to the Attorney General's Office stating that the recommended updates to the by-laws had been completed. The letter included a screenshot of what was believed to be a Township webpage with the recommended verbiage. There was no evidence that the fire company had posted and maintained the information requested by the Attorney General's Office. Solicitor Wyland also reiterated that the Fire Company and the Social Club are one legal entity.

On the original motion to approve the resolution:

Commissioner Tuckey – abstain  
Commissioner Zubeck – abstain  
Commissioner Connolly – yes  
Vice President Steele – yes  
President Ellis – yes

Resolution R-2024-24

15. **Appointments to Boards and Commissions:** Commissioner Connolly deferred to Deputy Chief Stauffer who nominated Ted Biedrzycki to the Citizen's Advisory Council. Motion was made by Vice President Steele and seconded by Commissioner Connolly to approve this nomination. The motion carried unanimously.

16. **Visitors Requests and Comments:**

MINUTES

SWATARA TOWNSHIP

REGULAR MEETING I

MAY 1, 2024

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

- A. **Joanne Cibort, 799 High Street:** she asked that the attorney representing the Friendship Fire Company be given all the of information from the investigation
- B. **Debra Noles, 6080 Hocker Drive:** she spoke about some of the recent decisions made by the board
- C. **Paul Yesavage, 630 Barbara Drive:** he spoke out against the antics of the board
- D. **Joe Craig:** he voiced his disappointment for the decision that was made and for the actions of the board towards residents, those speaking at the meetings and one another, he also spoke about employees at the Township Building not having information about events that are happening, he continued by speaking out against the wording of the recent press releases
- E. **Zoe Loftus, 5631 Plainview Drive:** she spoke against the report that was released
- F. **Greg Taylor, 541 Walnut Street:** he spoke about the lack of experience that comes with discrimination as those that are speaking out in favor of the club are defending something that is illegal
- G. **Gary Harvey, 105 S. 47<sup>th</sup> Street:** he spoke about putting Paxtang back in service and hopes that Commissioner Steele will speak with the other Commissioners and the Fire Chief to allow Paxtang to run in the Township
- H. **Maria Marcinko, 2704 S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street:** as a previous elected official, she was disappointed in the actions of the board during the meeting, she spoke in favor of the fire company as a member of Steelton and asked if the PSP was brought in to investigate the social club if in fact the allegations were accurate

*\*\*Additional public comment submitted via email – see Attachment A*

- 17. **Possible Stormwater Violations for Investigation:** Nothing at this time.
- 18. **Commissioners Requests and Comments, Additional Business and Correspondence:**
  - A. **Commissioner Tuckey:** he spoke about his concerns regarding putting Paxtang back in service and feels that this should be addressed soon, he thanked those who helped with the Senior Fair for making it a huge success, he feels that the Township should have waited for a completed report from the Attorney General before making a decision about the Friendship Fire Company
  - B. **Commissioner Zubeck:** she spoke out that she wanted more information about this whole situation and wished that the panel had given the other side more time to respond to the allegations that were raised against them, she loves this community and wants to be a voice for everyone, she asked for better transparency and asked that the board do better in the future, she thanked everyone for coming out to the meeting

MINUTES

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SWATARA TOWNSHIP

REGULAR MEETING I

MAY 1, 2024

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

---

- C. Commissioner Connolly:** he spoke about student government day scheduled for May 8<sup>th</sup>, where the students will handle the Stormwater Meeting and the beginning of the regular Board of Commissioners meeting, he spoke about a previous comment that this is one board regardless of the year and who was president, this is and always has been the Swatara Township Board of Commissioners and he appreciated the action that was taken with the letter in 2022, he spoke out against discrimination of any type in this community and the fact that it is still happening in this community in 2024, he spoke about the recent graduation of the Citizen's Police Academy, he thanked Commissioner Tuckey and everyone who helped organize and execute the Senior Fair, he concluded by saying that this a fairly new board and that they are open to many different viewpoints but racial discrimination is not one of them
- D. Commissioner Steele:** he spoke out against the Commissioners who didn't vote on matters at the meeting, he thanked Commissioner Tuckey and those who worked to put on a great Senior Fair, he thanked everyone who came to the meeting and those that spoke at the meeting
- E. Commissioner Ellis:** she congratulated those that participated in the Citizen's Police Academy and thanked those that came out to the Earth Day Clean-Up, she reminded everyone that there were victims in this whole process and many who were turned away simply based on the color of their skin, she votes in a manner that she feels is right, she thanked everyone for attending and those that spoke
19. **Adjournment:** Vice President Steele made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:29pm, seconded by Commissioner Connolly. Motion carried unanimously.



Jennifer Vesavage  
Township Secretary

MINUTES

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REGULAR MEETING I

SWATARA TOWNSHIP

MAY 1, 2024

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

---

**Attachment A:**

Public Comment submitted to President Ellis via email from Meghan O'Neill, 5870 Bell Road:

I would like to formally ask that the Removal of Friendship Fire Company as Fire and Rescue Emergency Service Provider not happen. I understand there is allegations on the social club. I am curious as to what percentage of the fire company is under investigation? I understand it's not the entire fire company under investigation, why would you punish those that did not nothing wrong? What happened to people being innocent until proven guilty for those under investigation? I would ask that we do not remove any more fire services in the township especially with the construction that will be happening over the next several years. Fire companies through the township allow them to provide local service for those living near the fire company. I fear if we continue to shut down fire companies that our fire personnel will only be able to service calls from part of the township. I do not want our township to rely on mutual aid. Over the years I have been watching or attending meetings and have seen other fire halls close locally. This needs to stop happening. I feel that our township needs to focus on recruiting better. I would also like to understand more from the chief as to our training requirements for both volunteers and paid fighters. Does our training requirements mirror similar townships? Are we asking too much of the volunteers that we can't get volunteers? Where have we been recruiting and what has been going on to get new fire personal without adding more paid personal?

