

Minutes of Meeting
Board of Commissioners
Springfield Township

The Board of Commissioners of Springfield Township met in regular monthly meeting on Wednesday evening, January 11, 2023, at 7:30 PM at the Springfield Township Building for the purpose of transacting the general business of the Township. The meeting was also offered in a live streaming feature. Mr. Lee announced that the video would be made available on the Township's website beginning Thursday, January 12, 2023. All members of the Board were present.

Mr. Lee asked everyone to join the Board of Commissioners in a moment of silent reflection honoring the service men and women who have placed themselves in harm's way in order to help preserve our safety at home and overseas.

Mr. Lee led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Motion (Graham-Wilson) carried unanimously dispensing with the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting and approving same as written and recorded in the official minute book of the Township.

Mr. Lee acknowledged the presence of former Commissioners James Dailey and Glenn Schaum.

Mr. Lee announced that the Board of Commissioners conducted an executive session as part of their January 9, 2023 workshop meeting to discuss one personnel matter and one real estate matter.

Mr. Lee provided a brief summary and background information on the matter concerning the logo used by the Springfield Township Police Benevolent Association. Mr. Lee referred to a proposed resolution that the Board would be voting on this evening. Mr. Lee clarified that the resolution would prohibit the display or use of the thin blue line American flag on township property. The proposed resolution does not address the current logo of the PBA.

Mr. Lee asked Mr. Taylor if there were any public comments received electronically prior to the meeting. Mr. Taylor summarized the comments received electronically since the Board's last meeting. There were a total of 18 emailed comments. Eleven of those comments were in favor of the proposed resolution, 3 comments opposed the resolution, and one was a general comment regarding the flag of the United States. Additionally, one resident of Erdenheim summarized the impact of single use plastic bags on the environment, a resident of Orelan thanked the Board for coordinating the installation of sidewalk on a portion of Haws Lane, and a resident of the Falcon Hill Estates development thanked the Board, township engineer and township staff for their assistance through the dedication of public improvements within their development, as well as the transition from private to public refuse and recycling collection.

Mr. Lee opened the meeting to public comment.

Liza Meiris, of the Cheltenham Area Branch of the NAACP, addressed the Board and expressed her position in favor of the proposed resolution.

Neil DiFranco, Flourtown, expressed his appreciation for the police and the work they perform, however, he believes the resolution is necessary

Maureen Baskin, Flourtown, read into the record a letter written by her husband outlining the reasons he believes the resolution should not be adopted.

John English, Oreland, stated his disgust at the language used in the proposed resolution. He is offended by the term “white supremacist”.

Jane Thomas, Oreland, stated that Andrew Jacob was the creator of the flag in question. Ms. Thomas further stated that according to Jacob, the flag was not designed as a white supremacist symbol.

Erin McCrosson, Wyndmoor, referred to the township-wide survey she co-authored concerning police services. She stated that overall, residents are satisfied with the police department, however, African American residents are less satisfied. She stated that many residents, including white residents, are reluctant to call the police department because they are afraid of the use of excessive force. She stated that the Commissioners and Police Department must convey to the community that they are working towards unity not division, and the proposed resolution is a step in the right direction. Ms. McCrosson urged the Board to hire a third party mediator to help facilitate dialog between the Police Department, Board of Commissioners and residents.

Eileen DiFranco, Flourtown, expressed her opinion that if the thin blue line flag is hurtful to anyone, then it should not be used.

John Geliebter, Oreland, stated he spent his entire adult life in police, fire and military service. He believes the thin blue line flag is a symbol of support for police and he is appreciative of that. He believes the resolution is redundant and is therefore not necessary.

Andrew Simpson, Erdenheim, stated he has been in law enforcement for 22 years. He strongly suggests that the thin blue line is not a symbol for white supremacy and he is offended when someone suggests that it is. He said that police officers wear the symbol in support of one another, and they should not be told that they can't display it. He believes the resolution is misguided and should not be adopted.

Melanie Summer, Flourtown, stated her belief that the issue of the thin blue line flag is a waste of time and energy. She advocated for togetherness not divisiveness.

Bill Mahoney, Oreland, referred to the resolution, and asked what the source was of some of the information in the resolution. Mr. Mahoney also asked Mr. Graham why he didn't bring

members of the police department and the PBA together with concerned residents in order to have a meaningful discussion. Mr. Graham responded that he did invite members of the police department and PBA to participate in a community meeting, but they declined.

Jim Griffin, Wyndmoor, and an elected Constable, was in attendance in support of fellow law enforcement individuals. He outlined several reasons why he is in opposition to the proposed resolution and urged the Board to either table the motion or to vote no on it.

Michael Gottlieb, attorney representing the FOP Lodge 14, addressed the Board and stated he supports the police, but does not support racism. He stated the Southern Poverty Law Center does not identify the thin blue line as a hate symbol. He stated his belief that the proposed resolution violates the first amendment. Mr. Graham disagreed with Mr. Gottlieb and stated the Southern Poverty Law Center does indeed identify the thin blue line as a hate symbol.

Lauren Camper, Oreland, supports adoption of the proposed resolution. Ms. Camper asked the Board to hold the police chief and the officers accountable. She stated there have been times when she has reached out to them, but received no response.

M. J. Bonnum, Wyndmoor, stated she is a Philadelphia police officer. She wears the thin blue line flag as a symbol of brotherhood/sisterhood. She believes it brings officers together in memory of those officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

Angelina Banks, Wyndmoor, stated her opposition to the adoption of the proposed resolution. She opined that the resolution violates first amendment rights of all citizens. She called for the social media posts on both sides of the matter to stop. In conclusion, she urged the Board to take the resolution out of consideration and get back to the business of ensuring the prosperity of the township.

Donna Graham, Oreland, stated she has been an employee of the US Department of Defense for the last 38 years. As a government employee, there is a Code of Conduct that states she is not permitted to wear any clothing that someone may find offensive. Springfield Township employees are obligated to follow that same Code of Conduct. In conclusion, Ms. Graham stated that she and her family fully support the Springfield Township Police Department.

Neil DiFranco, Flourtown, readdressed the Board and stated that the matter before the Board is not about supporting the Police Department or the PBA, but it is about supporting the entire community.

Ray McMahan, Oreland, a retired Springfield Township police sergeant, suggested that the PBA chose their symbol out of respect for the thin blue line organization, and without any intent to injure or harm anyone. He opined that the division in the community is growing due to this conflict.

Mr. Graham wished to clarify that he fully supports the traditional thin blue line symbol, but he opposes the blue lives matter flag which is a black and white version of the American flag with a thin blue line.

Jerome Rosebury, resident of Cheltenham Township, stated that perception is reality and urged everyone to get along.

John Sinkaric, Oreland, stated he grew up in North Philadelphia. He described how he was the victim of racism during his childhood in a predominantly black neighborhood.

Kathy Foulkrod, Central Avenue, questioned why the discussion was taking place. She advocated for unity among all people, and asked for love and peace.

John Gross, Fort Washington, served as a Springfield Township police officer for 42 years. Mr. Gross opined that the proposed resolution is a solution looking for a problem. He takes offense to the language used in the resolution, specifically the term "white supremacy". Mr. Gross urged the Board to take the resolution out of consideration.

Kathy Trinkle, Flourtown, stated she is not a racist and finds the term "white fragility" offensive. She stated her opposition to the proposed resolution. She then read into the record an excerpt from a letter written to the Board from Madeline Watson, of Wyndmoor. In summary, the letter states that the Watson family is a mixed race family that does not support the proposed resolution.

Jim Dailey, Flourtown, and a former commissioner, stated that the Township has always had top-notch police officer candidates. He is concerned that the Township will have difficulty attracting the best candidates if the resolution is adopted.

Mr. Graham clarified that the resolution is not an anti-police movement.

Leah Abrams, Wyndmoor, asked if the emblem in question is used by any other PBAs or police departments in the area.

Commissioner Lee replied that the symbol is very popular, but it is rare in Montgomery County. There are other police departments in the state and country that have banned the use of the symbol.

Chris Hillstreich, Oreland, a lifelong Springfield Township resident, stated that he believes Mr. Graham when he says the resolution is not an anti-police movement, just as he believes the police when they say the symbol is not racist. He opined the argument is childish, and he believes this is an attempt to suppress free speech.

M. J. Bonnum, Wyndmoor, readdressed the Board and asked for clarification on the thin blue line and the thin blue line American flag.

Rob Baiada, police detective and Flourtown resident, stated that Springfield Township is a great place to work, live and raise children. He stated that he is responsible for the majority of community outreach programs conducted by the police department. He does it because he wants residents to meet the officers outside of a call for police assistance. He explained why the thin blue line flag means so much to him. He stated there is no racist intent whatsoever. He urged members of the public to get to know the officers better in order to understand what the flag means to them. As far as the resolution goes, he doesn't believe the resolution solves too much. He stated that no matter what happens with the resolution, the PBA will continue to hold as many events as possible and will give back to the community as much as possible.

Commissioner Ratsavong asked Det. Baiada about previous meetings regarding the PBA logo. Det. Baiada confirmed that there were various meetings held over the past year or so.

Drew Hines, Glenside, opined that the Township does have the right to restrict employees from using the thin blue line flag.

J.M. Lee, Chairman of the Public Safety Committee, reported:

Motion (Lee-Ratsavong) to adopt Resolution No. 1592 prohibiting the publicly visible display or use of any image that depicts the Thin Blue Line American Flag symbol by any Township employee, agent or consultant. In an effort to be clear and as reasonably limited as possible, the resolution specifically prohibits the following:

- (1) The publicly visible depiction of the symbol on the clothing or skin of any Township employee, agent or consultant while on duty, during the workday of the individual or while representing the Township in any way (specifically including the off duty time of any such individual if still wearing the Township uniform),
- (2) The publicly visible depiction of the Thin Blue Line American flag symbol on any personal property of a township employee, agent or consultant, which is brought into the township building, and which, in the reasonable opinion of the Township Manager, is placed in a location likely to be seen by a member of the public while visiting the township building, and
- (3) The display, by installation or affixation of a publicly visible depiction of the symbol on township owned property (including township vehicles) by any person.

Mr. Wilson stated it was clear to him that the symbol in question is perceived by some in the community as representative of hate groups associated with white supremacy. It is also clear to him that the police and many community members feel equally strong that the symbol is a positive one. However, the symbol should not exist if it is offensive to anyone in the community. Mr. Wilson stated he will vote in favor of the resolution.

Mr. Graham stated that while he does not agree with all tenets of the resolution, he believes it is a small step towards bringing the community together. He is hopeful that in the future, the police department and residents can come together and voice their opinions rationally.

Mr. Standish stated he has been wrestling with the issue for over a year. He read a portion of a comment he received from a teacher-constituent of his. The teacher said that in education they teach students about intent vs. impact when communicating. There may be positive intent, but the impact must also be considered. Mr. Standish opined that it was clear to him that the PBA's intent is not malicious or racist, however, the impact has landed on members of the community as disrespectful and racist. As for the resolution, Mr. Standish believes the language is fairly innocuous, and somewhat redundant, but it does send a message to the people who are impacted. With respect to the PBA logo, Mr. Standish stated he is against litigating this matter, and expressed his hope that this is the end of the debate and advocated for better communication in the future.

Ms. Ratsavong read from a prepared statement and listed many of the reasons why she is against the thin blue line flag. She reiterated her belief that if one person is impacted, that something needs to be done. She added that the flag in question is in violation of the US Flag Code. The thin blue line being merged with government materials like the American flag sends a conflicting message to some members of the community. Ms. Ratsavong believes the symbol is an obstacle to good faith dialog. She hopes that the community can move towards equality and safety for all. In conclusion she stated she is in favor of the resolution.

Mr. Cobb thanked everyone for their input, and noted that it is a very difficult topic for many reasons. He stated that the debate is not just over a symbol but a legacy of this country as well. He believes there may be value in hiring mediators to facilitate conversations between the Board, the police and the community. He stated that prior to the pandemic, we had a history of really good community outreach on the part of the police department, and he hopes that can be resumed. He stated that while he disagrees with how the Board chose to address this issue, it doesn't mean he has not listened to what everyone has said. He expressed his disappointment that they would be voting on the resolution because he believes it is antagonistic and further divides the community. He thanked Commissioner Lee for his leadership. In conclusion he stated he will not vote for the resolution, but said there is more work to be done.

Mr. Lee commented that the first time he saw the symbol in question he was not offended, and he is not offended now, however, he has listened to what others had to say and realizes it is problematic for some. He stated his belief that if people are fearful of the symbol, that fear must be taken away. Mr. Lee suggested that as government officials, the commissioners have responsibility to act with empathy towards all citizens. Mr. Lee referred to two national incidents that took place in 2020 involving white police officers and black individuals and how those two incidents affected him. He noted that this entire process has been painful for him and he reiterated that he is not anti-police. In conclusion he stated he is in favor of the resolution.

Vote on the motion to adopt Resolution No. 1592: 5-2, Cobb and Maxwell opposed.

Mr. Standish, Chairman of the Community Development Committee, reported:

Motion (Standish-Ratsavong) carried unanimously to adopt Resolution No. 1593, a resolution accepting the Deeds of Dedication for public use of the area within the public rights of way of the newly constructed Starr Lane and Henry Way, and the area within the public right of way of the newly constructed portion of Ranch House Lane in the new development known as Falcon Hill Estates at Wyndmoor. Authorization is also hereby granted for the proper Township officials to execute the Maintenance Agreement for the newly constructed public improvements at the Falcon Hill Estates at Wyndmoor development.

Motion (Standish-Graham) carried unanimously to accept a letter dated December 20, 2022 from Patrick J. Deacon extending the 90-day subdivision/land development plan review period up to and including March 31, 2023. The subject of the subdivision/land development is the creation of four separate parcels upon which three new single family dwellings will be constructed at 902 Pleasant Avenue, Wyndmoor. The extension of time will provide the applicant the opportunity to revise their land development plans to be in compliance with the Springfield Township Code.

Mr. Standish excused himself from the meeting.

Mr. Wilson, Chairman of Environmental Resources Committee, reported:

Mr. Wilson announced that during the month of December 2022, Springfield Township residents recycled 185.7 tons of material with a householder participation rate of 76.5%. The net cost for the month was \$28,354.54. For the year ending December 31, 2022, residents recycled a total of 2,102.4 tons of single stream recyclables, which was 94.2% of the projected tonnage. The weekly householder participation rate was 70.4%, and the average pounds per stop was 16.0.

Mr. Graham, Chairman of Cultural Resources committee, had not report.

Mr. Maxwell, Chairman of Public Works and Facilities Committee, had no report.

Mr. Cobb, Chairman of Administrative, Fiscal Affairs and Zoning Committee, reported:

Motion (Cobb-Maxwell) vote 6-0, to approve the December check reconciliation in the amount of \$653,386.64, and the January bill listing in the amount of \$721,281.67.

Mr. Cobb announced that the Springfield Township Zoning Hearing Board is scheduled to meet on Monday, January 23, 2023 at 7:00 PM at the Springfield Township Building. Mr. Cobb summarized the Zoning Hearing Board Agenda, in which one application was to be heard. Mr. Cobb informed all that the applicant has since requested an extension of time. The

application is on file in the Code Enforcement Office and may be viewed during normal business hours.

Ms. Ratsavong, Chair of Parks and Recreational Resources Committee, had no report.

Mr. Lee opened the meeting to public comment. No additional public comment was received.

Motion (Graham-Cobb) vote 6-0 to adjourn the meeting at 11:39 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Taylor,
Secretary