



West Pikeland Township

ATTENDING BOARD OF SUPERVISORS	ATTENDING TOWNSHIP PERSONNEL
Noreen Vigilante, Chair	Dorene Guistwhite, Township Treasurer
Harold Hallman III, Vice Chair	Joseph L. Romano III, Township Manager
Steven Costa, Supervisor	Madison Kerr, Township Secretary
Tom McLewee, Supervisor	Sergeant Wayne O'Connell, Officer-in-Charge
Carin Mifsud, Supervisor	Guy Donatelli, Township Solicitor

Ms. Vigilante called the meeting to order on March 17, 2025, at 7:30 PM and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Vigilante moved New Business item "C", "Pippin Family donation to Ms. Betty's Day Camp" to after "Approval of Minutes". Mr. Costa made a motion to approve March 17, 2025, Board of Supervisors agenda with the change. Seconded by Ms. Mifsud. The motion was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Mr. Costa made a motion to approve the minutes of March 3, 2025, Board of Supervisors meeting. Seconded by Mr. McLewee. The motion was unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

Pippin Family donation to Ms. Betty's Day Camp (Pickering Grove Park): Mr. Romano explained that Ms. Kathleen Pippin, the mother of Gavin, an Air Force Airman who died in service, wishes to donate a geodesic dome climber to Miss Betty's Day Camp and the community in his memory. Ms. Ann Dyer was present and represented Miss Betty's Day Camp.

Mr. Romano noted that the climber would be placed near the swing set on the flattest surface and professionally installed by Buzz Burger, Inc., a recreation construction specialist. He also shared the solicitor has reviewed and had no concerns with this donation.

Mr. Costa raised a question regarding the Township's liability. Mr. Hallman made a motion to approve the donation of the geodome climber from the Pippin family in honor of their son, Gavin, and its installation within Pickering Grove Park, which was seconded by Ms. Mifsud. The vote passed 4-1, with Mr. Costa opposed.

REPORTS

Police: Sergeant O'Connell read his report for the month of February 2025. The Board thanked Sergeant O'Connell for the report.

Treasurer Report/Approval of Bills: Ms. Guistwhite provided the written report to the Board. Mr. Costa asked Ms. Guistwhite and Mr. Romano for a forecast. Ms. Mifsud made a motion to approve the bills. Mr. Costa seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with Mr.

Hallman abstained citing a conflict of interest from the WEX Bank check and check number 10440 as it provides payment to Hallman's General Store.

Supervisor Carin Mifsud Remarks:

Good evening, everyone, and thank you for being here once again. I would like to take a moment to address and provide some context for a couple of new business items on our agenda. I will be reading my comments so our secretary can record them for the minutes.

The items on the agenda tonight are centered around a topic many of you have expressed concern about, so let's take the time to address it and clarify any misunderstandings.

It has been mentioned by several residents that West Pikeland is one of Chester County's wealthiest communities. While this may be true in terms of home values and individual wealth, it is important to note that our taxes and the township budget are not among the highest in the county. As we all know, costs are rising, and unfortunately, our township's revenues are not keeping pace. Additionally, our population is aging, and many retirees are choosing to stay in West Pikeland. While this is a testament to the strength of our community, it does have a negative impact on earned income taxes and our budget's bottom line. I'd like to reference the "Did You Know" mailing campaign from 2024.

It is important to understand which taxes we are discussing. West Pikeland does not receive any portion of the large school or county tax bills you receive each year. Additionally, portions of earned income tax and township real estate taxes are earmarked for specific purposes, such as the school, open space, and library, which we cannot repurpose for infrastructure or other township needs, including police services.

West Pikeland operates with an average annual budget of \$2.4 million. Every department is reviewed for cost reduction, containment, and improvement. During our public meetings every fall, we address areas of concern. Last year, we faced a deficit because revenues were no longer covering expenses. This topic was discussed in the public Board of Supervisors (BOS) and budget meetings. It was a difficult decision, but we had no choice but to increase real estate taxes to cover costs for 2025. Even with the increase, we still did not fully cover costs and had to dip into the township's reserve funds.

In our budget discussions, we had lengthy conversations about the future of West Pikeland—our ongoing commitment to safety, maintaining our roads and properties, and preserving the township we all love. The largest portion of township expenses is our police department, which currently accounts for 44% of the budget, and this percentage continues to rise. We are grateful for the dedication of our police officers in keeping us safe, but that doesn't mean we should not review and assess costs.

For those who may not have attended prior meetings, over the last six months, we asked our police chief, township manager, and police liaison to explore regionalization options with neighboring townships to see if any savings could be realized. Unfortunately, there was no interest. At the same time, given the chief's pending retirement, we took advantage of a free analysis from the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to evaluate

the police department. We wanted an objective, independent study to clearly assess what is truly needed to run a successful department in the future. This report, which was discussed at multiple public meetings with police present. Nothing was done secretly. We wanted our officers to understand and participate to add value to the findings. With all the challenges ahead, we wanted more information and guidance to develop the path forward. The report provided valuable insights and was part of a continuous improvement effort for a department the board had not previously had full visibility into.

The analysis, completed by the DCED, was published in mid-January, and the board received it just a few days before the findings were shared publicly at the second meeting in January. The presentation of the report to the public was confusing, to say the least. However, what resonated with most residents were the three potential options presented:

- 1) A regionalized plan to share costs with other townships, which had been explored by Chief Clark before his retirement.
- 2) A more extensive use of state police services, which, while free, raised concerns from residents about response times and coverage.
- 3) The option to invest in and continue with our local part-time police force, supplemented by the Pennsylvania State Police. Just to be clear, this is not a new model; the PSP has always been involved in policing our township.

Since the release of the report, a campaign supporting Option #3 has emerged, advocating for the maintenance of our local police force. Thank you. We sincerely appreciate the support from residents who have voiced their opinions. As we've stated before, we value and respect your input.

What I want to make clear to address any frustrations is this: no decisions are being made outside of these meetings. We are engaged in a process of fact-finding and gathering all necessary information. This is exactly what you would expect from your elected officials—asking questions and bringing all relevant facts to light. Attacking that effort does not help the situation. To clarify, a vote to defund the police has never been on the agenda, and if it were, the public would be fully engaged in a meeting with ample notice.

We have heard calls to move this issue to a referendum vote, and while everyone at this table supports that direction, unfortunately, due to legal constraints, we may not make that happen. However, that doesn't mean the idea is dead. We are exploring ways to conduct a vote to capture the opinions of all residents. We are committed to hearing every concern, and we ask for your patience and respect for the process.

We have great township employees, both uniform and non-uniform, work tirelessly for the benefit of this community. We understand that times of uncertainty are unsettling, and we are working quickly to assess the situation and determine what can be done. However, we cannot make commitments that are not supported by a sound financial plan. Personal attacks and hostile environments will not help us achieve a solution. We are all neighbors here, we care deeply about West Pikeland, and we are committed to creating a plan that reflects all perspectives.

What is before us tonight is what we've been promising since our first meeting in February: we are taking action and working toward a solution. There is no secrecy or hesitation. We needed time to thoroughly understand the report, consult with experts, and develop the next steps. It takes time to gather resources, develop plans, and establish milestones.

In February, we immediately provided Sergeant O'Connell with the necessary resources to address the urgent gaps identified in the report. Over the past six weeks, Sergeant O'Connell has worked closely with our legal counsel on these issues. While we cannot go into further detail, we've expended significant time and resources to improve the department and mitigate the township's liabilities. Sergeant O'Connell can attest to this.

As for the other findings, we are working to validate them and determine appropriate corrective actions and costs. Tonight, we will be discussing some of the critical items from the report that were not addressed during the budgeting process but are essential to the proper operation of the police department. These items involve investment in equipment, systems, and support.

The first agenda item is to utilize the Pennsylvania Police Chiefs Association to help validate some of the findings from the report and provide cost-based recommendations. One key component of this proposal that I hope everyone will appreciate is a mechanism for community input, so your concerns and comments can be captured. While engaging the Chiefs Association will incur costs, we believe it is a worthwhile investment, given the community's desire to support local policing. This engagement will be phased, and further steps may be necessary. The ultimate goal is to develop a solid plan for staffing, training, and equipment, both for the present and future. Once we have that data, we can provide clearer answers and a more accurate cost assessment, along with an illustration of the potential tax implications in the years to come.

We ask for your patience and understanding as we work through this process. We are committed to transparency, and any comments to the contrary are not only false but destructive to the efforts at hand. We all live here, we share your concerns, and we respect your opinions. Please join us in respecting those who work on your behalf, and let's move away from personal attacks and accusations. Together, we can work toward a financially stable, safe, and beautiful township.

To summarize: We are listening, asking questions, and exploring all possibilities. We are collecting public feedback but are not yet in a position to address every comment. Please understand that no response at this point is simply an indication of our ongoing process of gathering information. Everything that can be shared with the public will continue to be disclosed. No decisions or expenditures are made without being openly discussed in public meetings, except in rare cases involving legal matters or employment-related issues.

Finally, I want to close with a reminder: We are governed by the laws of Pennsylvania's second-class townships. While we would like to put this matter to a ballot vote, it may not be legally possible. That said, we are exploring all avenues for gathering input.

NEW BUSINESS

Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association (Organizational Review): Mr. Romano introduced Scott Bohn, Executive Director and Jerry Simpson, Consulting Services Coordinator, both with

the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association (PCPA). Mr. Romano shared the subject organizational review will evaluate the West Pikeland Township Police Department's structure, operations, and overall effectiveness in serving our residents. The goal is to ensure our police force is well-organized, properly trained, and suitably equipped to operate efficiently, fairly, and in accordance with best practices.

Mr. Hallman inquired about the funding source for this review and suggested adding another officer to the department instead of conducting the study.

Ms. Mifsud moved to approve the contract with the Pennsylvania Police Chiefs Association for \$20,800.00 to conduct an organizational review of the West Pikeland Police Department, commencing March 18, 2025, and ending on or about May 2, 2025. Mr. McLewee seconded the motion, and it passed with a 4-1 vote, Mr. Hallman opposed.

Police Department: Purchase Power DMS (Law Enforcement database software): Mr. Romano highlighted that Power DMS offers specific tools to enhance police officers' effectiveness. He noted that the system's design caters to law enforcement requirements by optimizing personnel scheduling, centralizing training records, and ensuring departmental compliance. Mr. Romano mentioned discussing the program with Sergeant O'Connell, who supports its implementation. Ms. Mifsud moved to approve a one-time purchase and set up of Power DMS for \$7,500.00 to support police operations, which Mr. Costa and Mr. Hallman simultaneously seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Vigilante stated that comments would be limited to ensure the meeting remained orderly and on schedule.

-Resident, Suzanne Kaplin thanked the Board. Ms. Kaplin questioned why a ballet referendum was not an option.

-Mr. Donatelli advised Ms. Kaplin that the referendum on the ballot is for revenue purposes. He also noted that the township is required to follow specific rules set forth by the Second-Class Township Code.

-Resident, Thomas Dunn questioned the timing for the Chiefs Association Study.

-Mr. Jerry Simpson disclosed that the study would begin right away and be completed within 30-45 days.

-Resident, Diane Dunn questioned the plan once the study concludes. She also raised points about how residents can submit their comments to the township and stay informed about the study's progress.

-Ms. Vigilante stated that the communication will be on the township's website and the announcements made at Board meetings.

-Mr. Romano advised the residents to send their comments, concerns, etc., to office@westpikeland.com.

- Resident, Paul (last name inaudible/unclear) questioned if the part time police officers' hours were going to be cut back? He also questioned if the Township has an "emergency fund" and if the Township was actively looking for a new chief.

-Ms. Vigilante stated that the hours were going to be adjusted to fit the budget and stated that the residents would have police coverage.

-Mr. McLewee further shared that the Township police schedule is being shared with the State police, allowing them the visibility necessary to ensure police coverage.

-Resident, Kevin Diaz voiced his concerns regarding the State Police's response time and the increase in speeding incidents. He believes that the police presence is crucial for preventing issues within the township.

-Resident, Mary Jane Bobyock questioned the budget regarding the general fund and the reserve. Ms. Bobyock questioned whether the residents could sign a petition to hire/not hire police officers as it states in the Second-Class township code.

-Mr. Guy Donatelli stated it is his understanding that the taxpayer's petition would not override the decisions made by the elected officials. He clarified that the petition would be presented to the Board, who would then make the final decision regarding hiring or termination.

-Resident, Andrew Vaskas has stated that he does not want any further increases to the current tax rates, nor does he support the implementation of any new taxes.

-Resident, Lisa Karl inquired whether the \$20,000 allocated for the police study could be sourced from a different area within the budget.

-Resident, Ara Chalian stated that he believes time to make a decision is slipping away and suggested a presentation for the residents would help the residents feel involved in the process.

-Mr. Jerry Simpson (Police Chiefs Association) stated that once the police study is complete, a presentation could be put together and displayed to the residents.

-Resident, Paul Roach recommends that the Board address the underlying issues and rethink the tax structure.

-Resident, Diana Sisum shared her concerns about the potential impact of disbanding the police department on her children's safety. As a parent with children at the Montgomery School, she emphasized that the sense of community engagement might diminish if the state police were to take over. Further added West Pikeland Police know Montgomery School property and are first on the scene.

-Resident, Donna (last name inaudible/unclear) of Art School Road, asked Mr. Jerry Simpson from the Police Chiefs Association whether he had assisted other municipalities in maintaining their police departments.

-Mr. Simpson clarified that such decisions are beyond his purview. He explained that his role is to present the relevant facts, enabling the Board to make the ultimate decision.

Donna inquired whether the Board could reevaluate other areas of the budget.

-Ms. Vigilante assured her that the Board conducts these reviews annually.

-Resident, Neil Vakil inquired about the police hours and whether they are posted anywhere.

-Resident, Barb Powers thanked the Board and expressed her satisfaction with the budget process. She did note that the DCED report was confusing.

-Mr. Costa echoed Ms. Powers' sentiment, adding that the Board was not pleased with the report's presentation.

Ms. Powers inquired about how the Township determines the amount in the reserve.

-Ms. Guistwhite explained that she advises the Board on the appropriate reserve levels. She emphasized the importance of maintaining a substantial reserve to address unforeseen circumstances.

-Resident, Laura Woerner asked about the current operating hours of the police department. Additionally, she wanted to know if the Township anticipates hiring any new police officers in the near future.

-Ms. Mifsud raised a concern that the current police force requires updated equipment and additional training opportunities before any new officers are hired.

To ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute, Mr. Guy Donatelli suggested we prioritize those who have not yet spoken before opening the floor to questions from others.

Mr. Steven Costa asked the staff for a financial analysis of getting back to the original twenty / four hours.

-Mr. Hallman stated that part-time police hours need to be filled with additional officers.

-Resident, Talar Chalian questioned how many hours the police worked the past week.

-Sergeant O'Connell stated that the police department worked for 20 hours last week.

-Resident, John Fiorillo inquired about the rationale behind not posting police department hours, especially if the coverage provided by the local department and the state police is equivalent. Additionally, Mr. Fiorillo raised a concern about the appropriate point of contact for residents in the event of police-related issues if the state police assume responsibility. Mr. Fiorillo has expressed that he values the township's lower taxes but is open to a tax increase to maintain the local police department and further commented that local police are in essence an insurance policy.

- Resident, Karen Zmuida questioned about regionalization. Mr. Jerry Simpson mentioned that it is a possibility. However, he noted that finding a suitable partner would be necessary, which may present a challenge.

-Resident, James Dale inquired about the potential loss of life if the local police department were not able to respond as quickly as they do now. Shared Chief Clark saved neighbor's life with CPR. He noted that many officers have saved the lives of residents and expressed his concern that dismantling the department would prevent them from continuing to do so.

-Resident, Michael Lambo inquired whether the potential cutbacks are due to manpower or budget constraints. He also raised a concern that officers may seek employment elsewhere if there are reductions in pay or hours. Mr. Lambo questioned what a referendum can be used for.

-Mr. Donatelli shared that referendums can be a way for communities to approve funding for public emergency services, helping to ensure that adequate resources are available when needed. Mr. Donatelli further stated that while these referendums can authorize revenue generation for such services, they don't specify how the services are provided and who will carry them out. Instead, the goal is to secure the necessary financial support, leaving the management and delivery of emergency services to the elected officials.

- Resident, Rachel Kramer stated she was unaware of the extent of our existing police services and inquired about the possibility of establishing 24/7 coverage. She indicated a willingness to explore options for funding increased services to ensure the residents receive the desired level of coverage.

-Mr. Costa stated that there is not a number figure, however, he is interested in hearing from the residents and awaiting the findings of the new study.

-Resident, Andrea Fiorillo inquired about the possibility of starting a petition to save the local police department, and she wanted to know how many signatures such a petition would require.

-Resident, Margurite Gripton mentioned that her fellow neighbors in the Twin Hills Development have been attending Board meetings to show their support for the police department. Ms. Gripton said that she and her neighbors depend on the local police department's quick response times. She also expressed her concerns regarding the current hours being worked by the police department.

-Ms. Mifsud assured Ms. Gripton that the department has been working twenty hours with four hours of coverage by the state police. Mr. Hallman stated that the township needs to ensure we keep the part-time officers they currently have.

-Resident, Ed Gallen suggested that the Board demonstrate to residents how the police department's budget will affect taxes over the next 1, 2, and 5 years. He stated that the state police are currently funded out of the general fund, motor vehicle fund, and most recently, the turnpike funds. He further shared that there are initiatives at the state level for the state police to be funded by residents. Mr. Gallen asked that the Board of Supervisors look into and understand how state police services will be funded in the future. Knowing this will ensure an informed decision. Mr. Gallen also stated he believes that the state police would not respond to a majority of calls in the Township.

-Mr. Jerry Simpson shared that if the state police was to be funded by the residents, it would

Ms. Vigilante reminded residents to email any questions to office@westpikeland.com.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The next Board of Supervisors meetings are scheduled for: Monday, April 7, 2025, at 7:30 PM, and Monday, April 21, 2025, at 7:30 PM

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Mifsud made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:24 PM. Seconded by Mr. Costa. The motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Madison Kerr
Township Secretary