

LOWER POTTS GROVE TOWNSHIP BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**April 22, 2021**

The Board of Commissioners of Lower Pottsgrove Township held their regularly scheduled meeting on Thursday, April 22, 2021 at The Sunnybrook Ballroom, 50 Sunnybrook Road, Pottstown Pennsylvania. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. The following were in attendance:

Board of Commissioners: Bruce L. Foltz, Earl Swavely, Raymond W. Lopez, Robert Mohollen and Michael McGroarty were all present.

Edward C. Wagner, Manager; Charles Garner, Solicitor were also present.

Kathryn Vlahos, Secretary was also present though live video feed.

Commissioner Foltz stated the meeting will be recorded, he asked any speakers to give their name and address for public comments. The township is following social distancing guidelines recommended by the Center for Disease and Control to limit exposure.

Solicitor Garner stated that in accordance with the Sunshine Act prior to the meeting the Board met in Executive Session at 6:00 PM to discuss a matter of personnel, no action or decision was made.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner Lopez made the motion to approve the minutes of the April 5, 2021 Board of Commissioners meeting. Commissioner Swavely seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Vote was 5-0 in favor.

COMMENTS BY VISITORS:

Katherine Coppa 630 Stern Drive— Ms. Coppa stated that she stood before the board tonight to discuss the notification that was sent to the Pottsgrove School District expressing the intent of termination of the School Resource Officer (SRO) agreement between the township and the school district. Ms. Coppa stated that she has had some discussion with the township administration and she asked what the reasoning was behind the termination of the program. She was informed that it was due to funding concerns as well as a recent study that was completed which recommended the decision. Ms. Coppa completed a right to know request and received a copy of the study. After reviewing the study Ms. Coppa did not find that it concluded to terminating or discontinuing the SRO program, but from page four it is recommended to add one additional full time sworn patrol officer position to the police department, this position will replace the school resource officer in the patrol schedule. Ms. Coppa also stated that the recommendation was also found in the study on page 33 and 42 of the study. On page 42 of the study, the SRO position is currently paid for by the school district when the officer is in the school building. The study also said that this officer can have a positive impact on the safety of school facilities, ability to establish rapport with the students, teachers and administrative staff

and sometimes lead to the prevention and solution of crimes within and outside the schools. As a parent she is concerned for the safety and well-being of her children, their classmates, teachers, and staff in the schools. There have been many horrible stories over the years that have taken place in schools, with the SRO program in the place the officer is already at the school or very close by and will be at the school within minutes. Ms. Coppa urges the board to reconsider their decision to terminate the SRO program at the Pottsgrove School District.

Roxanne Murgia 419 Black Matt Road—Ms. Murgia stated that she graduated from Pottsgrove in 1981 and she was fortunate enough to get hired by Pottsgrove Highschool in 1986. She is a health and physical education teacher and currently in her 35th and final year at Pottsgrove School District. She cannot believe that the township would consider getting rid of the SRO and she is here tonight to speak on the importance of having an SRO. The schools are the most valuable structures in our communities because they house the most precious treasures of society, the children. They should receive the protection that they deserve, school safety should be valued at the level that we put place our children.

Jane Sutera 911 N Washington Street – Ms. Sutera stated that she was a high school administrator at a sister high school of Columbine, CO., which from that event changed the way many things that occur in schools. After this tragedy the SRO program became much more active in schools and more developed for what is needed. Ms. Sutera stated that she spent 34 years in administration and worked hand in hand with a number of SRO's. The decision of whether to continue the SRO program should only be judged on by what is best for the kids.

Robert Sutton 1985 Summit Way—Mr. Sutton stated that he is police officer from a different department and has been an officer for 24 years he understands all of the points that were made tonight. Mr. Sutton stated that he has a number of people come up to him wishing that Phoenixville still had the SRO in the school district. He does not want the board to look back and realize that they could have prevented something if they had the SRO officer in the schools. Mr. Sutton stated that he is a taxpayer, and he is willing to pay increase taxes for public safety in the schools as well for the manpower on the streets. The SRO is a valuable tool for the safety of the kids.

Gary Vandewegne 1963 Deer Ridge—Mr. Vandewegne stated that he is a Pottsgrove District School Employee' and he agrees with all the comments that have been stated. He is at the high school every single day. You can tell when the SRO is in the school and when there is not an SRO at the school. It makes the kids at ease to know that the SRO is in the school. He feels that there is enough trouble in the world today and questioned why the township would take away the safety net that the students have.

Stephanie Rowe 1290 Whitespire Circle—Ms. Rowe stated as an employee and a parent of a student at Pottsgrove School District she feels that SRO is an asset to the schools. Ms. Rowe also stated that she has done de-escalation with the SRO and has been in crisis situations with the

SRO at an elementary level and the patience, compassion and the calm shows the kids that police officers are there to help and support you. The relationship that is built at the elementary level, it goes with them as they grow, the SRO is a constant while the student will change schools as they get older. She feels that it is very important that we do not skimp on the safety of the students and the staff.

Margaret Kushner 2158 Foxtail Drive—Ms. Kushner stated that she had three quick points that she wanted to bring up to the board. She stated that obviously the safety of the staff and the students is paramount. It is not just the students who use the SRO also guidance counselors who use the SRO as mediation between the students. Parents who may have a teenager who experimenting with substances, the SRO is a resource that parents can use to help with an issue as such. The SRO promotes responsible citizenship to all of the students starting at the elementary level all the way up to the high school.

Commissioner Foltz stated that there has not been a final decision made in regard to terminating the SRO program with Pottsgrove School District. The board will take in consideration everything that was stated tonight. Commissioner Foltz stated that he has grand children in the Pottsgrove School District and he is concerned for their safety.

Commissioner McGroarty stated that he lives in the township and tonight at the meeting they allowed residences from other townships to speak since this was an emotional issue. Commissioner McGroarty informed everyone that he is the one that started the discussion on the SRO program. When Chief Foltz left, they conducted a study so that they had a better understanding of what the Police Department needs. He said that the board needs to move forward with what is the best decision for the Police Department and the residences of Lower Pottsgrove Township. He does not dispute anything that was stated tonight, he has children that went through the district and also has family members that work in the district. The way that he was looking at the SRO program from the township perspective was this is what the study states and the board is responsible for the safety of the residents of Lower Pottsgrove Township. The study did state to add another police officer to supplement the SRO. The financial issues were a small one for Commissioner McGroarty, if the SRO program goes away, it is a bigger burden for the residents of Lower Pottsgrove. The most important thing for the board is to have bodies on the street and currently we do not have enough Police Officers to staff Lower Pottsgrove Township. He was thinking long term that if the township could do something now to help in the future. He looked at another way to go about then to hire another officer at this time, as the township grows, they could look into more officers but at this moment in time he looked at the township's options. Commissioner McGroarty asked Manager Wagner to look at what surrounding school districts and if they had an SRO program. Mr. Wagner's found that most schools surrounding Lower Pottsgrove do not have a municipal supplied SRO, they have either their own police force or they have a security force somewhere in their district. Commissioner McGroarty stated that the district has to have some responsibility for the safety of the students if that means hiring a police officer or someone who possess those skills. This position should be

used as a training position where you rotate people around and give them experiences with interviewing and interactions. The board is concerned with safety but as a board they have to be concerned primarily with the safety of the residents of Lower Pottsgrove Township. Not to say they are not considered with the safety of the children regardless of what township they are in, the board was elected for the residents of Lower Pottsgrove Township.

Commissioner Lopez thanked everyone who came out tonight to voice their opinion and voice their remarks, it has been very helpful. He stated Mr. Wagner and himself met with the administrators of the school district to discuss the SRO program. In that meeting they were in complete agreement with what was suggested from the township.

Robert Sutton 1985 Summit Way—Mr. Sutton stated that the boards points are all valid points but there are many reasons that the SRO would be more beneficial than any other option.

Jane Sutera 911 N Washington Street—Ms. Sutera asked for clarification on the outcome of the meeting with the school district. She wanted to reiterate what the SRO does for the schools and for the children.

Commissioner McGroarty stated that the agreement with the school expires at the end of August 2021, the township is required to give them 90-day notice. After the study came out the board started to have a discussion and decided to let the district know what the townships intentions may be. The township has given them more than the 90-day notice.

Katherine Coppa 630 Stern Drive— Ms. Coppa referenced the study that was conducted and stated that she thinks it was misinterpreted as they need to rotate the SRO program, what the study says that if the SRO program is terminated to rotate that position though the investigations unit. There is no mention in the study to rotate the SRO. The second point Ms. Coppa wanted to address was the comment about Lower Pottsgrove residents being the boards main concern. She pointed out that three buildings for the Pottsgrove School District are in Lower Pottsgrove Township. The safety and security of all residents should be the boards top priority.

Joe Zlomek from the Sanatoga Post—Mr. Zlomek asked Commissioner Lopez if he was correct in understanding that the Police Committee and the members of the administration met and had some sort of agreement as a way to move forward. If so, would he be able to speak more on the agreement.

Commissioner Lopez replied that he was correct that there was an agreement that the SRO program would be discontinued and in lieu of the police department would whenever warrants send an officer there several times a day to check on students, offices, and staff.

Mr. Zlomeck followed up by asking that it was a tentative agreement between the administration and the township that this is how it was going to work. Commissioner Lopez replied yes, it was a gentleman's agreement at that point so they knew how to move forward.

Commissioner Foltz clarified that this decision was never voted on by the Board of Commissioners.

Mr. Wagner stated that the agreement for the SRO program expires August 31, 2021, if the school district and the township don't do anything the agreement expires.

Mr. Zlomek asked if anything has come of the meeting with the Police Committee and the administration of the school district, or some kind of agreement on how to move forward. Is there any paper work to document it? Mr. Wagner replied that there is no paperwork from the administration.

Commissioner Foltz thanked everyone for their comments and he will personally take all of the comments into consideration.

Commissioner Mohollen stated that he has a child in the school district and her safety is obviously paramount, there was a lot of great points that were made tonight. At some point something has to be done, at this time the township is really just a subcontractor. It is up to the school board to tell the township what they want to do. They can bring a proposal in front of the board and the board can consider it. In August, the contract terminates, and the school board needs to submit a proposal of what they are looking for and the board will review it.

Commissioner McGroarty wanted to make sure that everyone understood that at the April 5, 2021 meeting the board instructed Mr. Wagner and the Police Committee to meet with the administrators from the school district to let them know what the boards intentions were. There was an agreement but the townships are the ones who started it.

Solicitor Garner commented that the language in the agreement with the school states that the agreement is three years then it will automatically terminate August 31st. There is no notice needed it just ends on that date. The language in the agreement that states the 90-day notice is only in the event that the school district or the township for other reasons want to end the contract before the expiration date.

Russel Knoll 734 Dogwood Court—Mr. Knoll wanted to bring to the board's attention that the intersection at High and Sunnybrook Road there is traffic light and there is a lot of traffic that comes to that intersection. The light does not allow many cars coming off of Sunnybrook Road to go onto High Street pass though. Mr. Wanger will assess the situation with our Public Works Director and give him a call.

Commissioner Mohollen thanked the Emergency Management Team, Fire Departments, all of the surrounding communities for all their help during the trench collapsing on a person the other week at Sanatoga Greene.

Commissioner Foltz—Commissioner Foltz stated that Moove in Storage is a concern of his with the new plan that they have coming forward. They still have not completed everything that they said that they were going to do when they started the project. There have been a few large pole barns that have been approved by the Zoning Hearing Board and then the property sell years later He feels that the board needs to be cautious on what they approve. Commissioner Foltz stated that the Zoning Hearing Board does a great job with the hearings but if the board objects a project, they should send a representative to the hearing to express their concern.

Mr. Wagner— Mr. Wagner had no comments.

Solicitor Garner – Solicitor Garner had no comments.

There being no further business, the public meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m. The next meeting will be on Monday, May 3, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. at Sunnybrook Ballroom.

Respectfully submitted,



Kathryn Vlahos
Township Secretary