

**Millcreek Township Government Study Commission
Regular Meeting**

February 24, 2025

The regular meeting of the Millcreek Township Government Study Commission was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Vice Chairman Art Oligeri in the Assembly Room of the Millcreek Township Municipal Building. In attendance were Commissioners Paul Vojtek (via telephone), Art Oligeri, James DeDad, John DiPlacido, Bill Schaaf and Robert Zonna; Alternates Bob Enas, Douglas Krugger, Marcia Terry, Kim Huff and Suzanne Weber; PA DCED Local Government Specialist Mary Ammann and Sheryl Williams. ALOM/Public Partner Consultants Michael Foreman and Jerry Andree were also in attendance. Absent were Commissioner Donna Shaw and Alternate Nancy Shea.

Following the Pledge to the Flag, Mr. Oligeri called for public comment on agenda items. None was offered.

On motion by Mr. Schaaf, seconded by Mr. DeDad, the minutes of the February 10, 2025 regular meeting were approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Treasurer James DeDad reported that the January consultant bill was received from ALOM Public Partners in the amount of \$10,342.20 for 83 hours of services plus mileage reimbursement. On motion by Mr. DeDad, seconded by Mr. Vojtek, the bill was approved for payment by unanimous roll call vote.

New Business

Michael Foreman, Lead Consultant from Allegheny League of Municipalities (ALOM) Public Partners, presented a draft Resident Survey for discussion. He stated that this is an overview survey/questionnaire and could be the first of two resident surveys, the second one being administered when the Commission decides whether it wants to pursue an optional plan government or recommend no change. Mr. DiPlacido asked about the timing of the surveys, and Mr. Foreman recommended distributing the first survey in latter March or early April, or at the very latest May, when the Commission will begin looking deeper into the specific four optional plans of government. He advised that a second survey could be distributed in June or later. Mr. Foreman stated that both surveys would be posted on the website once finalized, as well as paper copies made available at various locations throughout the Township and via media outlets. Mr. Vojtek asked how they can be sure that only Millcreek residents fill out the surveys. Mr. Foreman replied that the first question asks whether the person is a resident of Millcreek, so they will have to take people's word that they are being honest and see what kind of comments are given as well.

Mr. Zonna commented that the Commission has immersed itself in learning about the various forms of optional plan governments and is still learning. He opined that before sending out a questionnaire, the Commission should do more public outreach and education to inform the residents of the various research and types of government options that are available, and Mr. Foreman agreed. Mr. Zonna asked what percentage of communities usually respond to these types of surveys, and Mr. Foreman replied approximately 25-30%. Mr. Zonna noted that most townships they have studied to date have changed their form of government because the government bodies themselves saw the need for change. Mr. Foreman noted that there have been other townships that have changed their governments because the citizens circulated petitions asking for a change. He emphasized that it is key to inform as many residents as possible about the various government options to get good feedback from the public. Mr. Zonna asked if the consultants have ever talked to voters at primary elections to ask them about the type of government they prefer. Mr. Foreman replied that the normal procedure is to begin several months prior to an election, because most times the questions are presented on the general election ballots.

Mr. Oligeri stated that the plan is for the GSC to further discuss the survey at the March 10th and 24th meetings, and then finalize the survey at the March 24th meeting.

Committee Reports

Budget Committee Chairman Jim DeDad reported that his committee is collecting data from the various Townships they have visited and interviewed, and hopes to visit four or five more Townships to make some comparisons based on similar population to Millcreek Township.

Mr. DeDad also reported that of the \$100,000 budgeted, excluding the bill that was approved this evening, \$98,822.00 still remains, and after the approval of today's bill, the new balance will be approximately \$88,500.00.

Local Government Structure Committee Chairman John DiPlacido explained that his committee is looking at other townships that operate under the four types of optional plan government according to the Second Class Township Code: Executive (Mayor)/Council Plan A, Executive (Mayor)/Council Plan B, Executive (Mayor)/Council Plan C, and the Council/Manager Plan. He reported that his committee went on a fact-finding trip to Cranberry Township on February 18, 2025, and noted that it was a productive meeting in a beautiful facility, and that the consultants and DCED Representative Mary Ammann attended as well. Mr. DiPlacido relayed that they had a prepared list of questions to ask the Township Managers and Commissioner or Council/Supervisors, and that their discussions were positive and very informational. They asked questions regarding the administrators' level of experience and education in their fields, their duties and responsibilities, the type of optional plan of government they operate under, when they changed from one type to another and why, how their current governing body functions as a policy decision making body only, and how they relate to their governing bodies.

Throughout the day, the committee interviewed representatives from four townships. The first virtual interview was with the Manager of Lower Macungie Township, a Township of the First Class operating under the First Class Township Code. It was converted from working Supervisors and organized under the Council/Manager model with five Commissioners in 2002. He noted that the chief functions of their Managers are master planning and policy development, and that each Commissioner receives an annual stipend of \$4800 per year. He concluded by relaying that Lower Macungie Township has no in-house solicitor or township engineer, but utilizes a labor attorney for negotiations and spends less than \$200,000 annually on that attorney's legal fees, including payment to that attorney.

The second interview (in person) was with the Cranberry Township Manager and one of its Supervisors, and another Supervisor virtually. Cranberry Township is a Township of the Second Class operating under the Second Class Township Code and voluntarily implemented the Council/Manager and five non-township employee Supervisors model after their Government Study Commission recommended that model in 1983. They explained that the Supervisors set policy and the Manager carries out the policies they set. The Supervisors receive a \$4200 stipend but no benefits, and that they employ a law firm to do solicitor work at a cost of up to \$100,000 annually.

The third interview (virtual) was with the Manager of College Township in Centre County, a Township of the Second Class that implemented the Optional Council/Manager plan of government in 1976, as recommended by their Government Study Commission. He stated that he runs the day-to-day operations guided by policy set by Council, and they have no elected auditors and no in-house solicitor, but contract out legal services totaling less than \$10,000 annually.

The final interview (virtual) was with the Manager of Indiana Township, a Township of the Second Class that implemented the Optional Council/Manager plan of government as recommended by their Government Study Commission in 1976. He explained that the Council elects one of its own to serve as the Mayor who presides at the Council meetings. Indiana Township has no in-house solicitor on

staff, and they pay a law firm approximately \$40,000 annually in legal fees. He stated that there are five Council members who are paid \$2400 annually with no benefits.

Mr. DiPlacido reported that the committee plans to virtually interview two more townships on March 10, 2025, as well as the Millcreek Township Supervisors in the near future.

Mr. Vojtek thanked the committee and also Ms. Weber for her notes from the meetings and suggested that the committee review the notes and make them a part of the public record. Mr. Zonna said he has no problem with making the notes a part of the record, but Mr. Schaaf opined that Mr. DiPlacido's report was sufficient. Mr. Foreman stated that the report should be made a part of the public record, and Mr. Vojtek suggested that the committee review the report and then vote on this at the next meeting on March 10th.

Public Outreach, Public Relations, Public Education and Promotions Committee Chairman Art Oligeri reported that they held a sub-committee meeting to discuss IT updates and noted that the website is up and running, and now displays the organizational charts of the optional governmental plans, the GSC meeting schedule, and a visitation report to inform residents on what the GSC has been doing. Mr. Oligeri explained that the committee is working on a \$10,000 budget, as follows: January – March: \$500/month, April – June: \$1000/month, and September – October: \$2500/month, which can be adjusted as needed. He reported that they have also been working with Joe Ferralli on the best ways to disseminate information to Township residents, and discussed possible ideas, such as: Facebook, links to “A Better Millcreek,” “All Things Millcreek” and the Township’s web page, posting progress reports on social media, and producing a spot about February’s highlights with the GSC’s activities by March 1st. Mr. Ferralli also suggested that each committee member be a spokesperson for the GSC for one month, beginning in March. Mr. Oligeri reported that the committee plans to contact the media to possibly appear on “Inside Erie Politics” and “The Blue Couch” in mid-March, as well as doing an article for the *Erie Times News* to educate residents on why the Township is considering other forms of government. They are trying to prioritize community groups where they can speak to and educate the public on the optional forms of government and penetrate the market. Mr. Schaaf encouraged residents to contact the GSC to contact a committee member to come and speak at their organization.

Committee of the Whole

Consultant Michael Foreman reported that he and his colleagues will be initially presenting educational workshops to the Government Structure Committee in March on each of the optional forms of government and will then present to the Committee of the Whole. He also reported that on March 10, 2025, the committee will conduct virtual interviews with townships with similar populations as Millcreek, such as Bensalem Township, which has a Mayor/Council optional form of government, and Northampton Township, which has a Council/Manager form of government.

Mr. DiPlacido emphasized that it is important to look at various types of government as well to compare to Millcreek Township’s government.

Mr. Zonna commented on the amount of trust he observed between Managers and Councils on the trip to Cranberry Township. He was also impressed with the level of education of the Managers, noting that most of them had at least a Bachelor’s Degree, with many of them also having a Master’s Degree and dozens of years of experience in the field.

Other Business

Mr. Vojtek reported that he has been tasked with reaching out to the Millcreek Supervisors to set up interviews, but that they are reluctant to be interviewed at a public meeting. He relayed that he

discussed the option to present them with written questions, but some committee members felt that was not the best way to proceed. After a discussion with Mr. Oligeri, he suggested that the committee invite the Supervisors to a meeting with a small representation of committee and commission members and treat them just like any other Township Council and Managers that they have already interviewed, asking them the same questions with the consultants facilitating, thereby allowing the commission to compare “apples to apples” so to speak. The consultants indicated that they are trying to facilitate this for March 10th and/or March 24th. Mr. DiPlacido opined that the questions should be similar to those that have been asked of everyone else. Mr. Oligeri noted that their “interviews” in Cranberry were more like a casual dialogue and supported that format as well for interviewing the Millcreek Supervisors. Mr. Vojtek added that they are just trying to get the best information that they can, and Mr. Zonna opined that it is really important to speak to Millcreek’s Supervisors to be able to get the same type of information as from the other Townships that were interviewed.

Public Comment

Millcreek Resident Gerald Servidio stated that he was having trouble accessing the links on the website to obtain more information about the GSC. Mr. Oligeri replied that they are trying to make it as easy as possible for any Millcreek resident to access the information. Mr. Servidio asked if Mr. DiPlacido’s report will be available for anyone to see now on the website and would like more information for Cranberry Township regarding the salaries of the various positions. He also asked for clarification on whether Home Rule and Mayor/Council forms of government are “off the table.” Mr. Oligeri stated that Home Rule was not on the ballot, but that Mayor/Council government is still a possible choice. Mr. Servidio suggested that the GSC also interview Harborcreek and Fairview Townships because they have the same government structure as Millcreek and it would involve less traveling. He also wondered why a First Class Township was interviewed since Millcreek is a Second Class Township, to which Mr. Oligeri replied that they are trying to gather as much information as possible, and Mr. DeDad added that the manager they spoke with also had previous experience working for a Second Class Township as well. Mr. Servidio stated that he still feels there is a “slant” toward a Manager/Council government.

Millcreek resident Dennis McAndrew stated that he attends a lot of Supervisor meetings and suggested that the GSC members attend some Supervisor meetings to see what really happens there. He commented that a lot of people who voted for the study were under the impression that the purpose of forming the GSC was to save the Township money, and not necessarily to change the form of government, and that many people were surprised to learn that \$100,000 was allotted to fund the study. He cautioned the commission against overspending.

Mr. Oligeri replied that the commission is spending a lot of time to learn about how other townships operate and gather as much information as possible to pass along to residents, and will be transparent about costs.

Alternate Sue Weber stated that the last Government Study did not have a professional facilitator and was not done properly. She explained that she has faith in these consultants and that it is necessary to spend the money to do a proper study. She explained that Millcreek residents were informed, through written and broadcast media, approximately how much the study would cost prior to having the study question appear before them on the November ballot.

Mr. Vojtek commented that the GSC is conducting the study as outlined by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

There being no further business nor anything for the Good of the Order, the meeting was adjourned at 6:42 pm on motion by Mr. Schaaf, seconded by Mr. DeDad.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheryl A. Williams,
Recording Secretary

Approved March 10, 2025

MILLCREEK TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSION

John DiPlacido, Secretary