

# Ronald Feldman

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## Fort Washington Office Park

The key non-residential component of the tax base of Upper Dublin is the Fort Washington Office Park. The Township gets nearly 17.6% of its revenue from the Office Park.

### Fort Washington Office Park

**Real Estate Tax: \$1,379,564**  
**Earned Income Tax: \$2,806,125**  
**Local Service Tax: \$662,476**  
**Total: \$4,848,167**

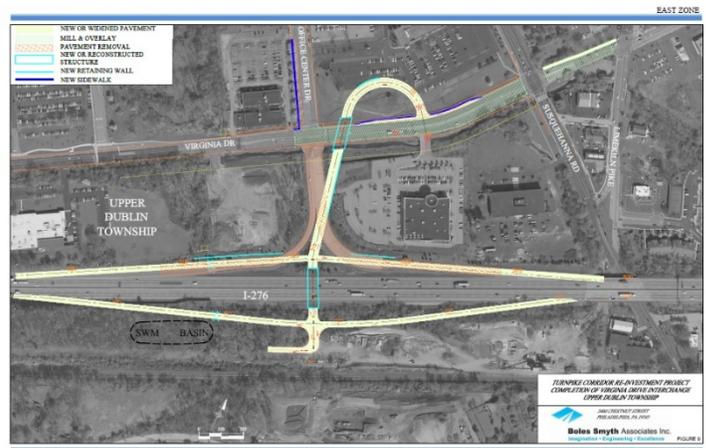
**Add to this that the School District receives in taxes about \$8,777,534 from the Office Park.**

Over the years, the Township has not invested sufficiently in the infrastructure in the Office Park. But Investment is necessary to maintain and improve the tax base of the Township. At the September Commissioners meeting, we will be voting on creating a Municipal Authority for the Office Park in order to reduce the tax burden placed on the residents. This Authority will only carryout the projects assigned by the Board of Commissioners and could assess the business property owners in the Office Park for the improvements only within the boundaries of the authority.

Authorities are a common method to target improvements and pay for them. Improvements to traffic flow, storm water management and so forth are expected to be included in their charter. If the ordinance creating the Municipal Authority is passed, I will insist on being a member of the new authority because I know intimately the financial needs of the Township and have been serving on the CORE committee seeking to improve the Office Park. While the Township (and its residents) have a responsibility to improve the Office Park to maintain/increase our tax base, it is incumbent upon the business property owners to have "skin in the game". They will also benefit from improved Office Park infrastructure and will likely be able to

increase their rents because of these improvements.

The Turnpike Commission is planning on widening the Turnpike in the next few years. The likely expansion will be from Willow Grove to Norristown and will expand the highway from 6 lanes to 8 lanes and possibly 10 lanes. There is already a very preliminary design ordered by the Board of Commissioners to complete the slip ramp on to Virginia Dr (next to WaWa) so that eastbound off and eastbound on will be possible. At the present time, the Turnpike Commission does not have the \$30 million necessary for this improvement. The Township and the potential Municipal Authority will seek to get this work scheduled. The preliminary design is shown below:



This would be a very big project for the Turnpike Commission but it would greatly help the Office Park and Upper Dublin. Hopefully in the future, funding will become available.

**By LAW Upper Dublin is not allowed to have a gross receipts (business) tax like most of our neighboring communities.**

Why? Because when Act 511 was passed in 1965 (and later amended) there was a prohibition of enacting business taxes if not in place already

when a local Earned Income Tax (EIT) was started. Upper Dublin enacted the EIT in 1987 but did not have the business tax. To put it another way, the tax structure of most other communities is like a 3 legged stool (Real Estate, EIT, business tax) but Upper Dublin is trying to stand on a two legged stool. This obviously causes problems.

So a way to increase the business tax base and not put all of the strain on the residents is to improve the Office Park to make it more inviting for businesses. If new buildings are constructed there or existing ones improved, then more tax revenue can be obtained, decreasing the burden on residents. The Municipal Authority can help do this.



As you know one of the major problems in the Office Park was been flooding. With the flood retarding structures (dams) the incidence of flooding should be reduced but will not be eliminated. Upper Dublin received \$11,800,000 in state grant money for these. But much more work is necessary. Over the past few years another \$10 million of grant money has been received to improve

the roads, bridges and flood control. One of the bridges is shown below (at the exit of DeVry University on Virginia Dr). It is currently being replaced and will help water flow to reduce flooding. The detour is currently in effect and should be ending in June 2017.

Most recently, Upper Dublin was approved for a \$2 million grant to build a “zip” ramp from Route 309 into the Office Park. This ramp would be built immediately after the toll booths but will only be into the Park and not out of it.

Next to the zip ramp location are two new members of the Office Park. TruMark Financial Credit Union has moved their headquarters and added a branch office to the office park. Currently under construction next to TruMark is Lifetime Fitness which is a high-end fitness club.



Admittedly, the Commissioners were hoping for a business which would bring more tax revenue but we can't control who buys land. Lifetime will be providing upwards of over six hundred thousand dollars to improve the roads and help pay for a traffic light at the end of the zip ramp.

Ashfield Healthcare LLC will be leasing 82,000 square feet in the Office Park and bring in high paying jobs. This is good for the Township by potentially bringing in high paying jobs but there are also problems with the increased tenancy in the Office Park.

**Traffic on Dreshertown Rd is a nightmare and getting worse.**

Dreshertown Road is a state road and it is the responsibility of PennDOT to maintain the road. We all have seen the backups on the road and SOMETHING needs to be done. I am afraid it will be getting worse with new developments.

The Township is seeking grant funding to completely rework the traffic flow pattern in the Dresher triangle. The goal is to get vehicles moving more quickly through this bottleneck and reduce backups on Dreshertown Road, Susquehanna Rd and Limekiln Pike. Unfortunately, the railroad bridge next to the Turnpike cannot be replaced without MAJOR federal funding (tens of millions of dollars) and this really slows down all traffic. All improvements will be incremental but any improvement is better than none.

Are you registered to vote? This is a big election year and not only is the Presidency at stake but also many of the down ballot positions.

If you are not registered, just call me and I can get you an application, or go online to fill one out. Same thing for absentee ballots applications.

Vote and let your voice be heard.

## Land Developments

Many of us have been dreading the traffic which will come with the new developments on Dreshertown Road. The Toll Brothers housing under construction on the former Zieger farm is just the tip of the iceberg. The Commissioners and Planning Commission put a lot of requirements on the builders including the berms you see along Welsh Rd. I still have many concerns for this property including the soil conditions but the builder has followed state regulations dealing with the chemicals in the ground from the rose growing. I don't know anyone who likes the fact that the soil was buried beneath those berms but all the Township can do is to ensure the developer follows state guidelines.

There are two proposed developments across Dreshertown Road. One is the age restricted development and the other is the mixed use development on a 25-acre site at the corner of Dreshertown and Welsh Roads. The mixed use center would consist of apartment units (on the upper floors), offices, retail spaces, restaurants, a coffee shop and a two-acre park. The retail stores would NOT be big-box retail like supermarkets but a smaller scale. These are currently subject of multiple meetings of the Planning Commission but the Commissioners will be intimately involved in being sure these are done for the benefit of Upper Dublin. This property is zoned for office buildings and a land development plan was approved (seemingly) eons ago before I was on the Board of Commissioners. I don't know if the traffic expected with the new developments will be less than the massive office buildings envisioned previously. Traffic information is posted on the Township web site.

<http://www.upperdublin.net/bt-dreshertown-mixed-use-proposal-the-promenade/>



But to my point earlier in this newsletter, the traffic along Dreshertown Rd is horrible. Small changes may help but there are many problems that need to be solved. The Dresher family cemetery would have to be moved to widen the road and that work is not easy or cheap. The bridges would have to be replaced at considerable expense as well. And none of us wants to see a 4 lane road along the whole route. I want the Township to fund a complete study for this road, not something piecemeal. Even though it is a State road and PennDOT is lacking serious funding, they have to be involved in any work which would be done both from financial and planning standpoints.

## Beware of Scams

There are always people trying to scam you. One of the current phone scams is someone claiming to be from the IRS and that you need to send money or be charged with criminal act. DON'T BELIEVE THEM. The IRS will only contact you by US Postal mail. Just hang up.

Another scam involves someone coming to your door selling books claiming to be a former convict trying to get on his/her feet. This is a new scam from a company called Mailbox Media in Glendale, AZ. If you wrote a check to them, cancel it. If someone comes to your door asking for a check for that company, ignore and report them to the police.

Never be afraid to call the police if you suspect someone is not legitimate. As a reminder, the Township ordinance and code (Chapter 171 Peddling and Soliciting) states that charities do not need a permit and can knock on your door until 9PM. Non-charities need a permit.

§ 171-2. Registration and identification card required.

No person shall engage in peddling and soliciting in the township without first having registered with the Police Department and obtained an identification card from the Chief of Police, or his designee...

Those under 16 who are soliciting for Boy/Girl Scouts, newspapers etc are typically exempt. Just beware of anyone who might be scamming you.

## Burn Brae Fire Station

The Burn Brae Fire Station on Susquehanna Rd at the golf course was built in 1974 and not much was done to it since. The building houses several apparatus but when it was built the depth of the bays was such that it could not house the current standard (large) size trucks. Something had to be done to bring the building up to the capabilities need for Upper Dublin.

In November of 2015 the Board of Commissioners approved contracts of over \$1.7million to reconstruct the building and add a new bay (plus design and inspection costs). One of the requests of the Commissioners is that the Fort Washington Fire Company (FWFC) increase recruitment of volunteers for this reconstructed station. It is important to have fire trucks deployed from this location to serve that section of the Township. The building is now complete and under budget.



All the buildings used by the FWFC are owned by the Township as well as all of the vehicles and major equipment. Operating funds and capital expenditures are provided by the Township. For 2016, the Township budgeted nearly \$2.6million for all fire related services, purchases, construction, and contracts.

I, along with my fellow Commissioners, feel it is one of our most important responsibilities to provide the necessary funds to support all of our protection services – fire as well as police.

**If you would like to become a volunteer firefighter you can check out their webpage at:**

**<http://www.fortwashingtonfc.org/content/JOIN/>**

## Water Quality

There has been quite a bit of concern about the quality of our drinking water. The military base (Joint Base NAS Willow Grove) had used a fire fighting foam which contained chemicals that leached into the ground water. These chemicals are carcinogens and are in the same family as non-stick cooking items such as Teflon. In areas around the base (and the former NAWC Warminster) the amount of the chemical in drinking water was very high.

Horsham has a water authority which owns the pipes and purchases water from various sources, primarily Aqua Pennsylvania and North Wales Water Authority. The water comes from wells drawing from the aquifer in the area. The water purchased from Aqua Pennsylvania had high levels of the contaminants PFOS and PFOA. The Horsham water authority will now buy water from sources providing no more than 1 part per trillion (ppt) of those chemicals. The current EPA standard is 70 ppt so Horsham is seeking a very low concentration. Until a few years ago, those levels could not be determined with the technology available so we don't know how bad our water was.

Upper Dublin gets its water from three providers - Aqua Pennsylvania, North Wales Water Authority and Ambler Borough. **Upper Dublin does NOT own its own pipes and they are owned by the various water providers.** The Township cannot determine where the water comes from other than to insist that it follow the requirements of the Pennsylvania Utility Commission, Department of Environmental Protection, EPA, Centers for Disease Control and other agencies with oversight.

The level of PFOS + PFOA in the Aqua provided water to Upper Dublin is less than 20 ppt. North Wales Water Authority and Ambler claim their levels are very low or cannot detect those chemicals.

The Upper Dublin Township website has the most current information and will be updated as more becomes available. Please check there from time to time or ask me for updates.