



# Stan Ropski

Email: [sjropski@aol.com](mailto:sjropski@aol.com) Phone: 215-643-8212

## Your Ward 7 Commissioner

Summer/Fall Double Edition 2015

### Office Park Update

Township officials have been making progress in updating transportation infrastructure projects to keep and attract new businesses in the Fort Washington Office Park (FWOP), a major source of tax revenue to our community. At our June Stated meeting, the Board of Commissioners (BOC) approved resolutions for two grants.

The first is a \$250,000 Greenways Grant. If awarded, this grant will be combined with a previously applied for Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Grant (DCNR) at \$500,000. These grants will be used to offset the township's commitment of \$3.4 million to reconstruct a portion of Commerce Drive, Delaware Drive, and Virginia Drive. This improvement or road diet will soften curves, reduce travel lanes to two with a center lane for turns only, and add a new multiuse 10-12 foot paved trail that will connect the office park to the Septa train station at Pennsylvania Ave. This trail will also be linked to a planned countywide trail system.

The second grant is a Commonwealth Financing Authority Multimodal Transportation Grant for the amount of \$2.6 million. If awarded, this grant will be earmarked to build a quick exit (zip) ramp from the PA Turnpike's Fort Washington interchange directly into the office park at Commerce Dr. According to Jack Smyth, Principal of Boles Smyth Associates Inc., the engineering firm that is currently working on several office park projects, the zip ramp's estimated cost is \$2.6 million. This would be a major improvement to access into the office park.

The township manager, Paul Leonard, Jack Smyth, and former Commissioner Bob Pesavento, chair of the office park redevelopment committee, met with the Turnpike Commission to discuss the zip ramp. This exit would be immediately after the tollbooths and next to the Best Western hotel. The folks in Harrisburg offered some constructive comments, primarily about signage, and will be evaluating content for the necessary engineering. A further discussion was held concerning the completion of the Virginia Drive slip ramp from the turnpike (entrance

and exit for east bound traffic). The cost to the turnpike is estimated to be \$30 million, with the expectation that the turnpike will be expanded to four lanes in each direction. However, the turnpike commission is considering expanding the highway to FIVE lanes in each direction, which would increase the cost of the slip ramp. In any case, the township is working hand-in-hand with the County on the completion of the Virginia Drive slip ramp as well as a potential slip ramp at Welsh Road (Prudential).

Mr. Smyth was present at our June meeting to answer any questions the BOC and made a presentation to the BOC detailing grant allocation strategies and construction schedules. Later that meeting, the BOC unanimously approved Professional Services Agreements to his firm totaling \$708,560.00 This was for the final designing of several bridges over Rapp and Pine Runs and the preliminary engineering work required for the county trial / road diet reconstruction project. He noted the township is required to put up a 30 percent match and recommended the board combine the two projects, which would total \$8.8 million — \$6.25 million for Commerce Drive road diet/trail system and \$2.6 million for the zip ramp. A 30 percent match would be \$2.64 million.

If the township is awarded the \$2.6 million CFA grant and gets the Greenways grant (\$250,000) those with the DCNR grant (\$500,000) would cover the match. So if all grants are awarded at the amounts applied for, the township will need to contribute around \$2.6 million dollars to fund \$8.8 million worth of in construction improvements in the office park. Remember that to-date, the township has been awarded \$7.41 million for transportation related work in the office park.

While I am writing about the office park, just a note that Lifestyle Fitness is moving forward with its plans to spend tens of millions of dollars to construct a country club-like fitness facility in the office park. This will bring new tax revenue to the township and the school district.

# New Bamboo Nuisance Ordinance Approved



For those who are not familiar with Phyllostachys Bambuseae - or commonly known as running bamboo, you are lucky. This invasive type of grass native to China spreads like wild fire through underground runners to produce more canes that then can grow up to 20 feet in height. Township officials as well as commissioners have received many complaints about this plant spreading uncontrolled from neighboring properties that have planted it for the purpose of privacy screening. After looking into recently passed ordinances that restricted or regulated the planting of bamboo in nearby municipalities township officials felt that township residents were ready for such an ordinance. During the winter months, the township's Environmental Board, Code Enforcement Dept. and Solicitor wrote a draft ordinance that was presented to the Public Works and Safety Committee meeting of which I am a member for discussion. After increasing the removal time from thirty to sixty days after being notified by code enforcement of non-compliance, members sent the draft ordinance to the full board for approval.

The BOC at their February Stated meeting unanimously approved Ordinance No. 15-1298 - Ordinance to Regulate the Planting, Growth and Maintenance of Running Bamboo. **It is now illegal to plant running bamboo in Upper Dublin Township.**

However if you currently have bamboo growing on your property and you still want to keep it, there are several conditions that you need to meet and maintain annually.

For example, bamboo must be kept it at least forty feet from a traveled street or twenty-five feet from a property line. You will also have to prevent it from spreading by digging a trench and installing an impenetrable material so that the runners cannot spread.

If you have bamboo growing on your property and it spread from an adjacent property that had planted it, that adjacent property owner is the owner of said bamboo growing on your property. In this situation, you should contact code enforcement. When the owner of the bamboo is notified by the township in writing (certified mail), they are then responsible to remove the bamboo plants from your property at their cost within sixty days. If the bamboo owner does not remove the bamboo and will not work with the township or neighbor reasonably, Township forces will remove the plants and bill the owner for the cost thereof, plus an administration fee of 10%. As a landscape manager who has a lot of experience with running bamboo, I know that this is a problem plant. However, it can be controlled and killed over time. Township officials will work with any bamboo owner as long as there is an effort to remove bamboo plants permanently.

## 43 years of Dedicated Service

That is how many years Public Works Department Head, Dan Supplee has worked for Upper Dublin Township. Starting in the Highway Dept., Dan earned himself promotion after promotion until reaching his current position as Head of Public Works and Fleet and Facilities some eight years ago.

Besides overseeing 43 full time personnel, the major task of which Dan is responsible for is the scheduled maintenance and care of our entire township owned buildings, streets, sidewalks and storm water facilities as well as maintenance and replacement schedule of over 100 township owned vehicles - most types are listed below:

- 10 – Police Patrol
- 7 - Twp. staff cars
- 20 - Light pick-up trucks
- 8 - Rubbish/Recycling trucks
- 12 - Dump trucks
- 20 – Special Equip, loaders, sweepers etc.

The average annual fleet budget purchases for the past five years is a little over \$600,000. Over the years I have recognized and approved the fleet department's vehicle maintenance program. For example, included in the



above mentioned budget amount was the purchase of two Tahoe police patrol cars at a cost of \$38,000 each. The twp. squeezes an average of four years out of these heavily used all weather vehicles before they are sold at auction. The last patrol car sold at auction went for \$9300. I believe Upper Dublin taxpayers are getting their money's worth with our fleet and facilities department's five full time people maintaining all of the twp.'s vehicles. The current estimated replacement cost of all township owned vehicles at \$8 million.

In addition to these responsibilities, Dan has overseen several vital transitions in the Sanitation Department. For example, we switched from the labor-intensive manual rubbish and recycling collection system to a fully automated system. This transition massively reduced manpower costs and worker's compensation claims. Researching and applying for grants is another task that Dan excels at. In 2015, the township received a grant of \$245,000 to cover 90% of a recently purchased recycling truck, which cut the costs of an automated sanitation collection even further. Another alteration to Sanitation Department overseen by Dan is the transition to hauling our own trash to the Trash to Steam Facility in Plymouth Meeting. For years the township's rubbish was hauled to a Transfer Station site off of Fitzwatertown Rd. During our 2015 budget hearings, we learned that the firm managing this facility was going to raise their tipping rates 10% for each of the next five years, costing us an additional \$150,000 dollars over 2014 costs alone. However, thanks to the determined effort of the Sanitation Department, a plan was presented to and approved by the BOC that called for modifications to some sanitation trucks, which enabled the trucks to handle additional weight and minor time schedule changes. This switch has saved Upper Dublin approximately \$214,000 a year.

After several rough winters, Dan and his departments have worked to find strong and cost-effective ways to keep roadways clear. Currently, Upper Dublin can put up to 25 plows on the road in a major storm. We have also added salt brine capabilities, which has been cost effective and physically effective. Another impressive winter change has been a new winter services agreement with the state to raise the 2014 reimbursement rate at \$873 per lane mile to \$2100 in 2015. This figure is a 140% increase in reimbursement from the state for the lane miles that we cover, which means an additional \$88,000 to Upper Dublin Twp.

I believe the Public Works Dept. under Dan Supplee has evolved to meet the BOC's demands to remain competitive with the private sector services

while continuing its high standard of service to the residents of Upper Dublin Twp. I would like to thank Dan and the rest of our skilled Public Works department for all of the dependable and hard work they have done for Upper Dublin.

## UDPL Is Picking Up "STEAM"

In the past year, the Upper Dublin Public Library (UDPL) has flourished. The UD community has embraced self-checkout stations, library programs featured several renowned authors, and Friends of UDPL received the Upper Dublin Medal for Outstanding Non-Profit. Amidst all these successes, the UDPL workers and volunteers continue to provide new opportunities for library patrons in 2015. One of the most exciting changes to the library is the new UDPL STEAM lab. Thanks to a grant provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the UDPL created the STEAM lab, which stands for science, technology, engineering, art, and math. This lab goes beyond the library's existing utilities (i.e. computers with internet access) to provide library patrons with free access to cutting edge equipment, software, and programs. For instance, the STEAM lab gives patrons the chance to use technology such as robotics kits, drawing tablets, video editing software, and several iPads!

Two of the most impressive pieces of technology in the STEAM lab are the 3D printers. The two 3D printers are the Cube 5 and the MakerBot Replicator 5. Through the use of various web-programs, the 3D printers can be used to create small objects out of PLA, a biodegradable polymer. Many of the web programs allow you complete creative freedom but several are more guided. For instance, the website Cookie Caster helps you create custom cookie cutters! If you want to print from the 3D printer, for the time being, your files will have to be created during STEAM lab programming.

As of now, the STEAM Lab is only open during scheduled programs and events, but in the future there will be open house opportunities for patrons to check out the STEAM Lab technology. In the meantime, summer is a great opportunity to partake in the UDPL's kid, teen, and adult summer reading clubs! You can learn more about Lab and other UDPL programming through the their website, [www.upperdublinlibrary.org](http://www.upperdublinlibrary.org).

# Burn Brae Fire Station Renovation Planned

During our 2015 budget discussions, representatives for the Fort Washington Fire Company (FWFC) stressed that current conditions and facilities did not meet the evolving demands that the volunteers and public now require. The BOC approved the funding for the design and planning of the renovation of a sub-station built in 1976. After months of meetings with twp. officials, FWFC members, D'Huey Engineers (Construction Manager) and GKO architects, Arif Fazil presented the team's design approval, construction schedule, and budget at our August Stated Meeting.

New for the Burn Brae Station:

- full-length apparatus bay addition
- 5 bunk rooms for storm duty
- ADA compliance
- facility wide natural gas generator
- Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing up-grades throughout
- vehicle exhaust removal system
- new gally, radio and scrub rooms

In short, the total cost for the complete renovation of the Burn Brae Station looks to be around \$2 million. To fund the financing of this project will come from the Fire Protection Tax, which currently stands at .571 mils or \$111 dollars annually for typical Upper Dublin home assessed at \$195,000. Construction bid requests will go out in September, with construction planned to begin in late October. If all goes as planned, the FWFC's Burn Brae site will be a newly updated station for its membership and our residents to use.

## Two Terms in Review

As I mentioned in my last newsletter, I will not be pursuing a third consecutive four year term as your Commissioner. These eight years have gone by fast and I would like to touch on the highlights of what my constituents elected me to do.

I came into office at the very start of the "Great Recession", where tax revenues, interest income and construction spending took a dive. I, as with rest of the BOC and twp. staff, had to consistently come up with budgets that stayed in line with revenues without cutting services or jeopardizing scheduled capital and infrastructure improvements.

One of the first big issues that Upper Dublin residents put on the table was the passing of two voter approved referendums – one to spend \$120 million dollars to build a new high school, the other to allow twp. officials to spend up to \$30 million to preserve open

space. BOC and twp. staff worked with Upper Dublin School District (UDSD) to keep construction on schedule and to pay attention to the project's stormwater management plan where none had existed before.

The first major open space purchase under the voter approve referendum was the 27 acre Braccia Tract, now known as the Rose Valley Preserve, at a cost of around \$5 million dollars. Answering to the Kane Dr. neighborhood flooding issues, part of this park was turned into one of two newly constructed township regional storm water detention basins located in Ward 7. The other site located off of Limekiln Pike handles storm water in the Bell Lane area.

Besides the total renovation of Rt. 309, two other major construction projects completed during my term was the building of a new \$8.26 million dollar Fort Washington Fire Company Fire House and the Pine Run/Rapp Run Flood Retarding Structures. The latter cost \$15.3 million dollars of which \$11.8 million was paid through grants. Both projects came in under budget and on time.

I worked hard to put programs in place to promote efficiencies (for example, RecycleBank), completely automate rubbish collections, remove unwanted buildings from our responsibilities, and apply for as many grants as possible. I helped renegotiate the 2011 Township Solicitor's Retainer contract that added detailed monthly billing schedules and quarterly special project reports that keep the BOC up to date on litigation issues and costs. In an effort to cut engineering costs to both taxpayers and developers, we are in the process of phasing out the current Township Engineer, Metz Engineers, and hire our own township employed engineer. Current data supports a substantial savings in this category.

Although I did approve to raise taxes in each of the seven budgets that I worked on, I did my best to keep costs down without cutting services or quality of life.

As promised when elected, I kept you informed with newsletters and worked hard on constituent and Ward 7 issues. However, what I am most proud of is my 100% attendance to Commissioner meetings, where my attendance was required in the almost 8 years as your local elected official.

Although my commissioners duties will be ending soon, be certain that if community leaders were to call on me to again serve the interests of Upper Dublin residents in some capacity, with support from my family and Upper Dublin residents, I will answer that call.

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to serve you.

Stan

Paid for by Stan Ropski