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Group questions motive behind proposal for White's Woods

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The controversy over the White's Woods Nature Center in White Township took up an hour of discussion at Wednesday's meeting of the township supervisors.

Robert Lambert of Friends of White's Woods said there had been more than 600 trees marked amid approximately 250 acres in that township park.

"Why has the township allowed defacement of the forest?" asked Sierra Davis, daughter of the group's vice president, Andrew Davis.

Manager Milt Lady said he had been told by consultant Mike Lawer of Millstone Land Management LLC that 250 trees had been marked.

As Millstone announced it last month, its plan is to remove a variety of “non-desirable” trees, such as American beech, black birch, red maple and spice bush, that are dead, decayed or in poor health, along with what the township considers a serious invasive and non-desirable plant issue throughout White’s Woods.

Friends of White’s Woods are concerned that healthy trees also are being targeted. Lady said the plan is not a money grab, and that any money made from plan would go toward recreation in White Township.

FWW members questioned Lawer’s qualifications as a forester. Their leadership has said there is a need for someone who has an essential background in forestry, ecology, conservation and park management.

“I believe Mr. Lawer is trained and trained well,” said Supervisor Gail McCauley, who also was on the board in 2007 and 2008, the last time the township discussed a plan to manage the park’s growth. She said the supervisors then felt White’s Woods needed attention.

The plan — still reportedly in development — will require the attention of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Sierra Davis wondered why the trees were marked before a plan went through DCNR. Lady said the trees had to be marked so they don’t have to be re-evaluated.

The township manager said he expected that a plan could be submitted by the end of the week to DCNR.

FWW has pressed an argument that the township has not been open about its latest White’s Woods plan.

Supervisor Eugene Gemmell denied that the township was hiding behind the coronavirus pandemic.

And board Chairman George Lenz noted supervisors are open to public comment.

“You are questioning how much information you are getting from us constantly,” Supervisor Eugene Gemmell said.

“I welcome input from the community,” Lenz said. “We are sort of a balancing act here. We’ve had the rural part of the township and the suburban part of the township. Any group or all groups would be welcome.”

Lenz again urged residents to take in the various monthly and semimonthly township meetings, saying those with “a real deep interest” in an issue could wind up being appointed to one of the boards and authorities.

“White Township also does not have a real estate tax because we try to keep our overhead costs down as much as possible,” the board chairman said.

Wednesday’s gathering was another virtual meeting of the board, with participants joining in a conference call as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One action by the board was to continue a state of emergency declared because of the pandemic through June 22, a 30-day extension of the declaration set to expire next week.

After the White’s Woods discussion, the board turned to other matters on its agenda, including approval of bids for road material and fuel:

- Blanco Trucking LLC of Rural Valley was low bidder for \$17.40 per ton for 250 tons of AASHTO No. 57 limestone, \$13.89 per ton for 600 tons of No. 2RC limestone, and \$17.40 per ton for 400 tons of AASHTO No. 3 aggregate limestone.
- Lindy Paving of New Galilee was low bidder at \$47.85 per ton for 1,000 tons of Superpave Base Course 25-millimeter and \$57.85 per ton for 1,200 tons of Superpave Wearing Course 9.5-millimeter paving material.
- McClymonds Supply & Transit of Portersville was low bidder at \$23.59 per ton for 1,000 tons of AASHTO No. 8 washed limestone.
- Davis Transport Inc. of Blairsville was low bidder at \$20.15 per ton for 2,000 tons of type AS2 anti-skid material, in state-approved limestone or slag.

- American Natural Satterlee Leasing of Rochester Mills topped three other bidders for 7,000 gallons of unleaded gasoline and for 13,000 gallons of ultra-low sulphur diesel fuel at a cost markup for each of \$0.0610 per gallon.

In other business, Lady said two light poles are in production and being inspected for shipment to White Township early next month. Those are the poles needed to complete the first portion of the new traffic signal at Warren and Ben Franklin roads. The supervisors approved paying the project contractor \$88,822 for the work, the project engineer \$4,200 and \$3,348.80 for the inspection of those poles.

The board approved a \$11,260.60 purchase of 630 feet of fencing to replace fencing around the caretaker's home in the recreation complex.

And it will look into providing minutes of board meetings on the township website.

Also, Lady said a power outage is scheduled in the vicinity of the municipal building along Indian Springs Road on Tuesday from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

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