

COLLEGE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL

OCTOBER 16, 1978

WORK SESSION

The gathering was called to order at 1:05 p.m. by Council Chairman, John H. Ziegler. Since the meeting is considered a work session, no official action can be taken today nor are Council Members paid.

Council Members present: John H. Ziegler, Clarence E. Trotter, Donald E. Bailey.

Council Members absent: Dolores A. Taricani and J. Carroll Dean

Also present:

Manager Elwood Williams

Postal Service Representatives: Elmer Yetter,
Philip Myers, and John Creighton.

Township Solicitor Reed McCormick

Dan Chaffee from Representative Ammerman's Office

Harold Houtz - owner of present Post Office Building

Gale Witmer - successful bidder for the new building.

The meeting was called as an opportunity to sit down with the Postal Service Officials and discuss the proposed location of the Lemont Post Office. The Chairman introduced the Postal Officials and others present.

Mr. Myers gave some information background material as follows:

Back in 1975, they were looking for a new facility for the Lemont Post Office but because of financial trouble, the project became null and void and was set aside.

In January 1976, the Postmaster and the DuBois Sectional Center, submitted a request to the Allegheny District Office, stating that the current post office was too small; that business had increased - a revenue of \$120,000 last year (1976); no storage space; work area too small; location very bad; not enough parking space, need more lock boxes.

At that point the Allegheny Office requested from the Manfield Real Estate and Building, in Columbia, Maryland, to find some alternatives for a building in the

Lemont area for the facility.

On January 30, 1978, we sent a letter to Mr. Williams stating our intentions, that we were planning on building a 1700 sq. ft. building interior. No change in the number of employees was contemplated in the immediate future.

February 8, 1978, assignment was given to John Creighton for a new lease, construction, or alternate quarters.

On February 28, 1978, they received a letter back from Mr. Williams stating that he had received the correspondence and that they were corresponding with ConRail for acquisition of piece of property and in the immediate location of present facility and of sufficient size for parking.

On March 6, 1978, his letter was forwarded to the Real Estate Office as backup material.

On March 9, 1978, a letter to Mr. Williams acknowledging his letter and referring it to the Colombia Office.

Before June 16, 1978, the Field Real Estate Office in Colombia, Maryland, had referred to them that there were two pieces of property which were available in the Lemont area: one was a site at Walnut Grove area - corner of Pike Street and Walnut Circle, and the second site was the property adjacent to the Veterinary Hospital on 236 Elmwood Street.

The DuBois Management Sectional Center and the Allegheny District Office selected as their first preference the site at Walnut Grove area and the second choice the site adjacent to the Veterinary Hospital. Based on that; the site at Walnut Grove had been eliminated because the owner had requested a Special Exception for this property to place the post office building there but was turned down because the Zoning Hearing Board does not have the authority to grant a Special Exception.

In a letter from the Allegheny District Office and the DuBois Sectional Center, the second site was entirely acceptable to the Postal Service.

On April 28, 1978, they advertised for bids.

In the meantime, Mr. Williams, along with Mr. Creighton had gone over the three choices of sites - one at the Railroad Station in Lemont, one at Walnut Grove, and the third at the property adjoining the Veterinary Hospital on Elmwood Street. At that time, Mr. Williams had informed Mr. Creighton that he felt the Elmwood Street site in no way, would be suitable for a post office. There were too many older people who walked to the post office to pick up their mail and this would be too dangerous and too far for them to do that if located at that site.

On June 16, the selection was made by the postal officials. (No notification in any form or way was given to the Township Officials.) They had 90 days from June 1 to make an award. The award was made on August 29th. Since that time, their Allegheny District office had received 3 letters from residents of Lemont in favor of the Elmwood Street location, owned by Witmer Construction.

At the time of the bidding, the ConRail site was not available but the Township was looking into this. Later Mr. Williams contacted Mr. Creighton informing him the property was available and the Township was able to obtain a long enough lease (10 year lease with three five-year renewals). The question was asked: What determines acceptable property? Mr. Myers stated it has to meet the criteria of the building and in a location acceptable to the Community and the Postal Service; and if relocating, as close to the present location as possible. Up to the time Mr. Williams had contacted Mr. Creighton's office in September, it was not known to the Township that an award had been made. It was felt the residents of Lemont should have been informed that an award had been made and the chosen site so they could state their approval or disapproval. This was not done.

Mr. Bailey asked who chose the site. Wasn't it to remain in the present village of Lemont? It is now located in the State College Delivery District. Doesn't that make a difference in your selection?

Mr. Myers said all the Lemont area residents have a choice of State College delivery. He stated it is very, very difficult to them to place a post office in the middle of a town anymore because of the conditions they work under - criteria of space and also financially almost impossible.

Bailey also asked if it was the amount of mail that goes through the post office that determines that or is it the finances that go through?

There was \$120,000 gross sales in 1976.

Ziegler discussed the postal situation in Lemont. It does need improvement, also, that traffic is a problem. Lemont is a Village and is being restored for community development. In the middle of Lemont is an eyesore - the ConRail property. The Township is eager to develop this and this is primarily why, when they found out what had happened, the residents were upset and if it had been known of the selected site, there would have been more residents in to voice their objections to it. It had been asked where they should write or call and this was not known by the Township officials at that time.

He mentioned that at the Council Meeting held on 10-12-78, the members had considered taking legal action against the postal service.

Trotter asked if anywhere in their documentation they could find that the Township, through the Manager, was notified of deadlines. The Township had continued to pursue the idea of the ConRail Property and thought they were operating within the time constraints.

Mr. Myers stated that the deadline for bids was June 1, 1978 and after that date it would be closed off and nothing would be considered after that. That was in the advertisement.

Elwood Williams spoke in response to this. He stated they agreed the deadline was June 1, 1978 but up to that time Council had not been able to get ConRail to agree to lease the property for the time periods needed, to take care of the post office. He further stated that the Solicitor had been asked to write to the postal officials delaying the deadline from June 1 so that the Township could work out something with ConRail. He did not have a copy of this correspondence with him. McCormick stated he acknowledged possibility of receipt.

Mr. Williams asked about the variances in dimensions. Mr. Myers stated that this is the requirements or criteria they have to work with.

Mr. Williams thought that after the Hurst bid was withdrawn because of the property variance being turned down, that the postal officials would have to go out for rebids. That was the reason the Manager pursued the lease of ConRail property.

Mr. Creighton answered that they felt the ConRail property was not wide enough and would not allow egress and ingress because the building would have to be 60 feet wide, according to their criteria. It should have at least a 98 foot frontage.

Trotter felt this piece of property could be adapted to all types of buildings.

Ziegler asked the question of whether someone could construct a colonial type building as long as the basic floor plan is available? Mr. Creighton answered yes. The size of the building is considered according to the amount of business, etc., that the postal end of the building would have to be separate from the customers' end. Council felt this could be possible since there would be two accesses to the building - from Mary Street and from Mt. Nittany Road.

It was asked if anything could be done legally to stay the construction of the building at the present site on Elmwood Street?

Ziegler stated that this was an unfair question; that the Witmers were also involved, that they had submitted a bid, it had been accepted by the postal officials, that the majority of the townspeople don't want it there, he felt the people would be real happy to have the Witmers do construction and look at another facility plan. Can we back up and all parties get together and work something out to the satisfaction of all people, in the center of Lemont, if they have another site?

Creighton asked if the Township had a copy of such a plan as they are talking about, at another site? The answer was yes.

McCormick responded to the question of legally putting a stay on the construction of the building at the present proposed site on Elmwood Street. He suggested that Council and the residents not rely on legal salvation. If all were in agreement to consider another plan, site and with the Witmer Construction Company doing the work, this would be a lot better.

Creighton asked about the ramp on the property, the lease and fee. It was stated ConRail did not want this torn down but it was about ready to fall down anyway so eventually they might be able to remove it. This would not interfere with the postal building if placed there. The amount of the lease for the ConRail property would be \$1800/year, for a ten year period with renewal periods.

Ziegler felt that a little discussion could be held from the audience at this meeting and felt it would be unfair to ask Witmer for a decision right at this time.

John Olverio - he stated the community would like to keep its identity alive and felt that 95% of the residents of Lemont would oppose the proposed location.

Jack Mitchell - had a question regarding the requirement of leasing additional land to fill the requirement at the proposed site of ConRail property.

Mae Smith stated that since yesterday she had acquired 225 signatures, all of Lemont people who were opposed to the proposed location on Elmwood Street.

Ziegler stated that as he had indicated before, he was sure this petition would have been in Mr. Meyers' folder if they had known where to write.

Chris Exarchos - he stated the proposed site was so unacceptable, because of the location, the traffic problem, etc.

Creighton stated that one reason this was so acceptable was that it was in a Commercial Zone. If the Post Office should terminate the contract, Mr. Witmer would have a building that he could use for something else.

Myers felt the Walnut Grove location would have been the most desirable but because it could not be rezoned it was not considered.

Ziegler stated that it could not be rezoned because it would create spot zoning which is illegal. He felt that problems such as traffic, would also be present.

Roger Johnson had a question regarding the bid itself. He said he had picked up a bid form but had only a 30 day time period which did not allow him time to work out anything. Lemont is not spread out like most towns, and the area should be clarified, that the signs indicating the boundaries of the town were both torn down and never replaced. (It was indicated the matter of the signs is being looked into.)

It was stated the proposed site on Elmwood Street would be .07 mile from Lemont.

Pam Fetteroff - mentioned about the Zip Code and also that there are sidewalks in most of Lemont for the older people to walk to the post office where there wouldn't be if they had to come to Elmwood Street. They would also lose the close community feeling if moved from Lemont.

Leslie Peters - she enjoys walking to the post office to pick up her mail and would like to continue to do so.

Lynn Pretzler - her daughter had gotten a petition of 15 to 20 names of students at here school because this is a very special thing to them to be able to walk to the post office.

Ed Narehood felt it was rough getting across the road in bad weather and if it were located at the railroad station this would be so much better.

Mr. Myers stated that it was their basic premise to get the residents something that would be useful to them. He was sorry that this thing has gone the way it has. He had no reason to know it would at the time they had selected the site. Things he had heard about the post office were somewhat different from what had been related to him just before the meeting. He said they are almost to the point that if ConRail is not viable, Lemont probably will have what they have now.

Dan Chaffee from Rep. Ammerman's Office asked what Council plans to do from here on.

Ziegler answered that Council had decided on Thursday night to pursue this further and felt a few quiet meetings would be better and hoped that the people trusted them enough to allow them to pursue this, on whatever level is required.

Mae Smith asked if the residents, as individuals, should continue to call or write to those seven individuals?

Ziegler felt they should and send duplicate copies to Mr. Myers so he is aware of the feelings of the residents.

Alan Stuart felt it might help to have a master plan of that area. ConRail might be more cooperative.

Trotter answered that he felt they would be very happy to do this; but they just couldn't do it on their own, they would have to get approval from PUC. That possibly a year from now we won't have them involved here at all; that possibly by that time it might be possible to buy that land. All we can do is hope. We felt it was a great hurdle we got over when we got them to agree to a long term lease that would meet the requirements of the postal department. We'll keep working on it.

John Olverio stated he would feel a lot better and was sure the rest of the residents will, if they would be willing to make a public comment that they would do everything they could to help us, the residents. Mr. Creighton said they would.

Mrs. George Beatty asked about the remark made about an injunction, is that necessary? Is that a possibility? It would be a shame if the Witmers started working and then were stopped.

Ziegler state that Council was still exploring the possibility.

Elvira Meyer suggested that, since it is getting late and some of us have to get back to work, the postal men, Council, get together and look over the ConRail situation, see what you can come up with and call another meeting for the residents to attend. I feel that these gentlemen and you now know our feelings and how we feel about this situation.

Ziegler thanked Mrs. Meyer for her suggestion and her confidence, and that Council will do everything they can.

Session closed at 2:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Elwood G. Williams, Sr.
Secretary

EGW:bh