

Upper Makefield *Township*

Bucks County, Pennsylvania

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-03-19-01

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF UPPER MAKEFIELD TOWNSHIP, BUCKS COUNTY, FORMALLY ARTICULATING GRAVE CONCERNS REGARDING THE INTENTION OF THE DELAWARE RIVER JOINT TOLL BRIDGE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE REPLACEMENT OF THE HISTORIC WASHINGTON CROSSING BRIDGE AND INSISTING UPON INVOLVEMENT IN ANY FURTHER DELIBERATION

WHEREAS, The Delaware Valley Joint Toll Bridge Commission (“Commission”) has published a request for proposals for engineering and environmental studies in support of replacing the historic Washington Crossing Bridge which connects Upper Makefield Township and Hopewell Township, New Jersey; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors, the governing body of Upper Makefield Township, is charged with the acting in the best interest of the health, safety, and welfare of the Township residents and as a protector of the historic and environmental resources of the Township; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors recognizes that the Township, and particularly the village of Washington Crossing, is a national historic treasure; and

WHEREAS, the Washington Crossing Bridge is a historic bridge which was put into service in 1904 and represents a form of bridge architecture which requires preservation; and

WHEREAS, the Delaware River, in the area of Upper Makefield Township is replete with environmental resources, the protection of which is paramount to the continued health of the river and the Township residents; and

WHEREAS, the Delaware River, in the area of Upper Makefield Township, is prone to destructive flooding, and the demolition of the historic Washington Crossing Bridge and the replacement of the existing bridge with a larger, wider bridge has the potential to exacerbate the flooding of the river; and

WHEREAS, the transportation infrastructure in the village of Washington Crossing is designed to enhance the walkability of the Village and to promote and accentuate the site of General Washington’s historic crossing and the Washington Crossing Historic Park; and

WHEREAS, the transportation infrastructure of the Village of Washington Crossing cannot accommodate the increased traffic flows that a larger, wider bridge will generate; and

WHEREAS, there exists, just three miles to the south, a wider, larger bridge across the Delaware capable of safely transporting residents in this area across the river; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors objects to the lack of communication from the Commission and insists that the Board and public be afforded the opportunity to immediately participate in every Commission consideration involving the Washington Crossing Bridge;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board of Supervisors of Upper Makefield Township that the Board has grave concerns with the Commission's plan to replace the Washington Crossing Bridge, which concerns include, but are not limited to the following:

1. The Toll Bridge Commission has communicated ineffectively, if at all. The Upper Makefield Township Board of Supervisors learned of the Toll Bridge Commission's plan to replace the Washington Crossing Bridge only after it published a formal request for proposals for engineering and environmental studies. The Toll Bridge Commission did not provide the Township with even a courtesy notice that it intended to issue the request for proposals. The lack of communication compelled the Board of Supervisors to respond to the very real, valid concerns of its constituents with only the information it could glean from public documents.

The Toll Bridge Commission website emphasizes that the project is in the very preliminary stages and no decisions have been made yet, but the first contact of the Commission should have been with municipalities whose support of the bridge is essential to its success. It is imperative that the Commission understand and consider carefully the information that can be provided by the townships on each end of the Washington Crossing Bridge.

2. The Village of Washington Crossing and Washington Crossing Historic Park are inimitable national landmarks. The Village of Washington Crossing is a small, quaint village that celebrates and honors General Washington's historic crossing of the Delaware River. Upper Makefield Township has devoted untold hours, energy and tax dollars to the preservation of this area. The Township carefully tailored local ordinances to the preservation of this historic area. Both the state and the township have invested tens of millions of dollars into streetscape programs and park improvement to keep the Village walkable so that residents can authentically enjoy Washington Crossing Historic Park, which spans both sides of the river and is a focal point of the Village. The walkability of the village, and specifically the ability of residents to walk easily across General Washington Memorial Boulevard, is essential for the continuation of numerous community event, including, but not limited to the reenactment and rehearsal of General Washinton's historic crossing, the community tree lighting, the Revolutionary Run which serves as a fundraiser for municipal organizations, and an annual community carnival.

Washington Crossing Historic Park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its place in that Register is not merely because it is emblematic of a period of American history; it is hallowed ground, incapable of replication or duplication anywhere else in the United States. The impacts and outgrowths of a modern bridge in a district, uniquely historic, cannot be remedied by token concessions or superficial nods to historic architecture. A Section 106 Review should be undertaken by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and all comments issued directly to the relevant agency head. General Washington Memorial Boulevard is also historically significant and is so noted

on the historic map of the Battle of Trenton. Likewise, there is a trail between River Road and the Delaware River that once served as River Road and is noted on the map of the Battle of Trenton.

3. The Village has been developed and planned to preserve walkability. The Village is zoned and improved to be a walkable community, allowing residents and visitors to explore the historic area and the Washington Crossing Historic Park. Far from being the “bane to generations of motorists,” the width of the bridge contributes to the traffic calming so that pedestrians can safely explore the Village. The bridge’s weight limit allows passage of only passenger vehicles, relieving pedestrians of sharing the streets of a colonial village with oversized industrial vehicles. Widening the bridge will increase traffic exponentially, endangering pedestrians in the Village. Allowing truck traffic on the bridge will not only imperil pedestrians, it will also contribute noise and exhaust in the Village. The safety and serenity of Washington Crossing would be sacrificed at the foot of a widened, modern bridge.
4. The proposed bridge replacement fails to consider the consequential infrastructure improvements that will be required. Westbound Washington Crossing Bridge traffic will soon encounter another bridge – the Delaware Canal Bridge – which is of a similar width and is weight-restricted to 29 tons. The bridge monitor, which prohibits overweight vehicles from utilizing the Washington Crossing Bridge, serves a dual purpose of preventing overweight vehicles from crossing the Delaware Canal Bridge. If weight restrictions on a replaced Washington Crossing Bridge exceed 29 tons, it will invite overweight vehicles to cross the Delaware Canal Bridge where there is no monitor and no recourse.

The volume and type of traffic conveyed by a replaced Washington Crossing Bridge would soon permeate throughout Upper Makefield Township, over its numerous bridges and crossings. The Washington Crossing Bridge may be the focal point of the Toll Bridge Commission’s attention, but Upper Makefield Township is liable to bear the burden of keeping up with the downstream effects of increased traffic and overweight vehicles.

5. The bridge replacement will cause hazardous environmental consequences. The communities at each end of the bridge are in the best position to understand the unique environmental features in our area of the Delaware River. The project has the potential to impact threatened and endangered species including the shortnose sturgeon, the Atlantic sturgeon, peregrine falcon, red-bellied turtle, yellow lampmussel, the tidewater mucket, and the triangular floater. It is not possible to demolish the existing bridge and replace the footings and abutments without harming the delicate environment of the river.

Upper Makefield Township was stunned to read that the Commission’s request for proposals contained a foregone conclusion that only an Environmental Assessment would be necessary. Equally concerning, the Commission stated a “goal” to obtain a finding of no significant impact. There should be no “goal” in an environmental study; the objective should be to arrive at the conclusions dictated by the data. In an area as environmentally sensitive as the Delaware River, data

should be gathered only through a full Environmental Impact Statement. In the event that this project moves forward, Upper Makefield is resolute that an Environmental Impact Statement is imperative.

6. The bridge replacement will increase flooding in an already dangerously flood-prone area. Flooding is a grave concern for Upper Makefield Township, for communities on both sides of the river, and for those areas immediately south of the bridge. Flooding is a real and serious threat to both life and property. Increasing the size of the bridge and bridge abutments would exacerbate the flooding threat to the communities along the Delaware River.

Upper Makefield Township is committed to reducing the flood risks. In the last twenty years, the township has purchased conservation and agricultural easements over thousands of acres in the township. These acquisitions have allowed the Township to retain infiltrating soil rather than accommodate impervious surface. To accomplish this objective, the residents of Upper Makefield voted to incur more than thirty million dollars of debt. A remarkable number of residents have donated their development rights for the good of the community. The township has steadfastly battled any project that had the potential to increase the risk of flooding in this area.

7. The bridge replacement is a convenience for the Toll Bridge Commission, not a necessity. The Toll Bridge Commission spent \$534,000,000 to complete the Scudder Falls Bridge replacement. Now it proposes to spend an additional \$146,000,000 to replace the Washington Crossing Bridge, just three miles upstream from the Scudder Falls Bridge. No great need is served by the replacement of the Washington Crossing Bridge that justifies an additional \$146,000,000 on top of the \$534,000,000 already spent on the Scudder Falls Bridge. Upper Makefield Township is a community of about 8,500 where more than 40% of the land is permanently preserved. Hopewell Township is a community of about 17,500 where more than 70% of the land is agricultural, forest, or wetlands. Neither community has ready access to major thoroughfares that are not already better served by the Scudder Falls Bridge.

The primary concern publicly advanced by the Toll Bridge Commission has been that the bridge is narrow and not convenient for travelers. It has not pointed to any imminent population growth which the bridge will need to serve. It has not pointed to any bottleneck created by the bridge. Rather, the Toll Bridge Commission seeks to undertake a massive public works project because travelers are unwilling to heed weight restriction signs in advance of the bridge and unwilling to slow down to assure safe passage across the bridge. These concerns do not merit a project of this scale where a state-of-the-art alternative exists only three miles away. If the Commission has concerns with the structural integrity of the bridge, it should exhaust all efforts towards rehabilitation and restoration before resorting to replacement.

8. Not only is Washington Crossing Village historic, but the bridge itself is historic. The bridge is a rare long, multi-span example of a double-intersection Warren through truss. The Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission lists the Washington Crossing Bridge as eligible for the National Historic Register. The bridge contributes to the heritage experience of the site of General Washington's crossing. Replacement of the Washington Crossing Bridge is not only ill-advised, but also

unnecessary. When improvements were made to the Scudder Falls bridge and that bridge was reopened to the public in 2022, the Commission assured the communities in this area that the Scudder Falls Bridge was being improved so that smaller bridges, like the bridge in the historic Village of Washington Crossing, could retain their character. The desire to construct a new bridge is not sufficient to degrade historic resources.

For the reasons set forth above, the Upper Makefield Township Board of Supervisors insists on being provided all information regarding the need for a bridge replacement that is in the possession of the Toll Bridge Commission and that the Township be consulted prior to any future discussions, deliberations, and decisions regarding the bridge that is such an important part of our community.

SO RESOLVED by the Board of Supervisors of Upper Makefield Township this 19th day of the month of March, 2024.

**UPPER MAKEFIELD TOWNSHIP
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

ATTEST:

Judy Caporiccio
Judy Caporiccio,
Assistant Township Manager

BY: Yvette E. Taylor
Yvette E. Taylor, Chair

BY: Ben Weldon
Ben Weldon, Vice Chair

BY: J. Braun Taylor
J. Braun Taylor, Treasurer

BY: Thomas F. Cino
Thomas F. Cino, Member

BY: Tim Thomas
Tim Thomas, Member