

## St. Davids Sidewalk Vote: Rationale Refuted

At the Feb. 8 Tredyffrin Board of Supervisors meeting, board chair Robert Lamina offered an apology for the board's decision on releasing escrow to St. Davids Golf Club—an act effectively relinquishing the township's leverage over the club to build a sidewalk along its Upper Gulph Rd. property. *"The process we utilized was...less than perfect,"* Lamina said, in describing the board's hurried 4-3 vote. Ms. Richter and Mr. Kampf, two of the other 3 board members making up that majority, followed with their own apologies.

While acknowledging failure in process, the members responsible for that decision did not seem inclined at all to rectify the result. Despite leaving the township in legal and enforcement jeopardy in other development agreements, they promised no steps to correct that outcome.

Community dismay has prompted Tredyffrin supervisors to rehash reasons for the vote of the 4-member majority. Following is an examination of the rationale they have presented, but squared with the facts in contrast.

### Sidewalk Not Integral to the Club's Project

Mr. Lamina: *"In this case they were building a clubhouse that is 500 yards from the north side of Upper Gulph Rd. that had nothing to do with the sidewalk."*



Fact: St. Davids Golf Club comprises 124 acres on both the north and south sides of Upper Gulph. The road runs straight through the club property. Golf carts and club utility vehicles cross the roadway at a protected blinking-light crosswalk. The golf club made improvements not only to the clubhouse but also to the cart barn just north of Upper Gulph Road.

The township commonly requires developers, businesses, even homeowners renovating their property to make infrastructure improvements as part of their projects. There was nothing unusual in the plan and agreement reached between the club and the township's planning commission.

### Nothing Special in St. Davids Treatment



Mr. Lamina: *"I would have made the same vote, were it John's Hogie Shop or John's Barbershop."*

Fact: You have only to go one block west from the St. Davids' property along Upper Gulph, to the corner at Mt. Pleasant Ave. to find a business treated differently. When that building was recently renovated, a new sidewalk and curb cuts were required.

A resident from the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood gave several examples at the board meeting of projects underway in her community, asking if they would be required to complete their sidewalk improvements. The township solicitor was not able to answer her question.

On the other hand, when asked by a citizen to explain why she voted to free the escrow, Supervisor Richter said, *“The whole plan was not fair to put upon a business, especially in these economic times.”*



**Fact:** With a C91 land use designation, a recreational property assessment, and a 501C(7) non-profit recreational club tax exemption, the golf club can hardly be considered a business. While they do pay municipal and school tax on their 124 acres, their township tax is about \$100 an acre. Most individual homeowners pay about 7 times that rate. [[St. Davids real estate fact sheet](#)]

The St. Davids clubhouse renovation alone was a project costing over \$6.5 million. Installation of sidewalks is a minor expense in the overall project.

### **Sidewalks Don't Belong There**

Supervisor Olson's characterization is *“sidewalks to nowhere.”* Board chair Lamina has summarized at 2 board meetings: *“Sidewalks weren't meant for that community,”* and *“who are we to insist that a business, a resident, anyone put a sidewalk where one was never intended? Yeah, it's out there in a Comprehensive Plan, which isn't a binding document. It's a visionary document. [A sidewalk] that wasn't intended and the community didn't want.”*

**Fact:** The [Township's Comprehensive Plan](#) is a document of significance to the community. Its creation is the result of serious labor by the township staff, many volunteer boards, and citizen comment. The Township Comprehensive Plan is not old and dusty. It was just adopted by the Board of Supervisors in March 2009, and is prominently available at the township website. It is sad to find the Board Chair dismissing a planning mechanism arrived at through so much work and care.

The [Green Route Network](#) is a system of planned trails and paths to make Tredyffrin more livable and walkable. This network is also showcased in the [township planning](#) and implementation papers. A walkway along Upper Gulph Road is clearly delineated in those plans—including a section to be built along the St. Davids Golf Club property.

### **It Is About Public Safety, ...It Is Not About Public Safety**

Leading to the Jan. 25 vote, Supervisor Olson described traffic as a reason not to build the sidewalk along Upper Gulph Rd.: *“Some drive too fast between King of Prussia Rd. and Old Eagle School Rd. And it's dangerous.”*



In contrast, a few days later, Supervisor Lamina mounts a long defense of the board vote in the local paper in which he says there is no public safety priority to this walkway: *“...we should only be expending resources from our taxpayers for sidewalks”* that will keep the public safe.

**Fact:** There is no shoulder on Upper Gulph. The road is a major east-west thoroughfare in the panhandle section of the township. More students are using the road to walk or bike to nearby Cabrini College.

A dangerous road, as Mr. Olson describes, would seem to argue for the safety of a sidewalk—at least to most minds. The sidewalk could be built by St. Davids Golf Club, as established in the development agreement. Releasing the country club from that responsibility has returned the cost of installing a sidewalk or adding a shoulder to the roadway to ...Tredyffrin taxpayers.

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In summary, this is an act undertaken disregarding required public notification, justified with tortured logic, and followed with hollow apologies.

Further, Tredyffrin supervisors who fancy themselves barons of fiscal conservatism led this effort to help out a private country club, forgoing a planned community enhancement.

Warned of the risk and precedent they were setting, including prudent comments from the dissenting 3 voters, the board majority plunged ahead anyway.

The only way out of this jeopardy is for enough board members to reject the faulty rationale presented and reverse this deed.

Video postings are available to see the above supervisor quotes entirely in their context, and importantly to watch citizens express their concern and displeasure over this board action. Pattye and Jeff Benson have posted long-running segments of the board meetings at YouTube. You can search by "Tredyffrin" at YouTube, or a convenient listing of the Benson-posted video is listed at <http://pattiebenson.wordpress.com/youtube-video/>

<http://www.ttdems.com/pdf/StDavidsRationaleRefuted.pdf>