

SPECIAL WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING  
April 5, 2010 – 8:30 a.m.

The West Amwell Township Committee met on the above date at 8:37 a.m. Present: Mayor Molnar, Committeeman Fisher, Attorney Faherty and CFO Luhrs. Committeeman Masterson was out of town. Also present were Randy Hoagland, Frank DeFazio, Michael Pearson, Glenn Baran, Lolly Hoagland, Melody Anderson, Sandy Haberle, Catherine Park, David Gill, Bill Donnerstag, Mary Hoagland, Bob Gordon, Lt. Stephen Bartzak, Tony Goccia, John Ennis, Kelly Kendig, and Tim Vanselous

In compliance with the Public Meetings Act, Mayor Molnar announced that this Special Meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act with notices faxed to the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Trenton Times on March 29, 2010. A copy of this notice is and has been available to the public and is on file in the office of the Municipal Clerk.

The meeting was not recorded.

**CLOSED SESSION:**

**RESOLUTION #60-2010**

WHEREAS, Section 8 of the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975, permits the exclusion of the public from a meeting in certain circumstances, and

WHEREAS, this public body is of the opinion that such circumstances presently exist,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Committee of West Amwell Township, County of Hunterdon, State of New Jersey, as follows:

1. The public shall be excluded from discussion of and action upon the hereinafter specified subject matter.

2. The general nature of the subject matter to be discussed is as follows:

**PROTECTING THE SAFETY AND PROPERTY OF THE PUBLIC**

3. It is anticipated at this time that the above stated subject matter will be made public when the matter has been resolved.

4. This Resolution shall take effect immediately.

The Resolution was unanimously approved on motion by Fisher, seconded by Molnar.

*The Committee entered Closed Session at 8:40 a.m. returning to Open Session at 9:58 a.m.*

**POSSIBLE CONTINUED BUDGET DISCUSSIONS:**

Mayor Molnar relayed to the gathered staff members that the Committee just met with members of the Police Department and that more homework is needed. He acknowledged that Mrs. Luhrs and Mr. Fisher have been working the numbers but things are not pretty and could get much worse.

All staff received a RICE notice last week but no one in attendance requested a closed session prior to the following discourse.

Mr. Fisher reviewed the problem of reduced State aid to the township and that the difference between last year's and this year's budget is close to \$500,000. He relayed that calls were placed to the legislators last year to try to head off this tsunami but Governor Christie did it anyway. The bottom line is that the \$306,000 lost this year when added to the increased cost of insurance and pensions, has ballooned the number to \$500,000. Everything has been squeezed out of the budget, so it is down to people in an attempt to balance the budget. Negotiations are ongoing with the police and something will happen—either they agree to cut or cuts will be made—less salary or less of them—so that the pain is spread throughout the township. He explained that the plan is to cut administration and then lobby the State for a waiver, which could be futile. As of May 1<sup>st</sup>, salaries will be down 15% via the use of three furlough days per month per employee. Longevity will be eliminated as well as the positions of Assistant Treasurer, Assistant Tax Collector, Deputy Court Administrator, and Solid Waste Assistant. These positions are scheduled for termination as of May 1<sup>st</sup>. The Construction Department is also slated to be closed by either having the State take it over or finding a shared service arrangement. A portion of the cost of a roadman will be moved to the Open Space budget as maintenance of parks can be taken from that account. These measures have to be done as there is no tax base to support the cost and the State doesn't allow tax increases. There will also be some police layoffs. The legal and planning board lines have been cut and social security contributions adjusted by position. There is no surplus left, as \$480,000 was used last year and, of the \$300,000 left, only \$150,000 is available to use this year.

Mr. Molnar added that he spoke with the administrator at East Amwell and they are looking to close their construction department, although this has yet to happen.

Continuing with the plan, Mr. Fisher relayed that a cap waiver of at least \$115,000 will be applied for but that if the waiver is denied, the deputy clerk, a roadman, and another full time officer would be eliminated. He intends to try and convince the State that the township needs relief, as the hit taken as a percentage of the budget is second highest in the State, and that he will put together a presentation with the ammo available.

Questions and comments were taken as follows:

Donna Griffiths asked that the position of assistant tax collector be kept even without a salary attached so she can keep her certification and be the back-up.

Catherine Park noted that coverage for the tax office is needed during vacation time.

Bob Gordon inquired whether recycling was to be retained and offered to do this on a volunteer basis as he enjoys it.

Bill Donnerstag noted that he holds two positions with the township. He questioned how the open permits in the Construction Office would be handled and who would get the money. He expressed concern that the residents will look to the department for help and the State won't give answers. Mr. Donnerstag suggested keeping the Construction Official and perhaps cutting salaries to the level of permit money coming in as one is suppose to cover the other. Mrs. Luhrs noted that with only \$7000 taken in so far this year, no one would work for that.

As for his other position as Fire Official, he asked about proposed cuts. He has brought in money for the past two years and is willing to go down to that number so as to not effect the citizens of the township. Mr. Fisher acknowledged the permit problem and again mentioned the number of households comprising the township. A \$500,000 reduction is horrendous and he questioned whether the township can even continue to operate.

Lolly Hoagland stated that she cannot hold court alone and will provide documentation.

Catherine Park asked about Friday closings. Mrs. Luhrs advised that the proposed furloughs are different than what was done last year and the effect will be different in each department. Mr. Molnar stated that his conversation with the Road Department was that perhaps they could stagger the days. He also inquired about any upcoming retirement plans.

Donna Griffiths asked about the 1.5 percent contribution to health benefits. Mrs. Luhrs advised that the logistics have not yet been disseminated but that the money for this would go to the State. Mrs. Griffiths also stated that whatever is done to the non-union employees, there has to be at least a match by the union members in order to be equitable.

Mary Hoagland questioned if garbage and trash collection would continue through the end of the year. Attorney Faherty noted that he has placed a call to Central Jersey but is not holding out hope that this could be discontinued prior to the expiration of the contract. Mr. Molnar offered that he has reviewed the contract; would like to get out of it as that there have been problems with lateness; and, would like to buy a truck for this purpose. Attorney Faherty advised that lateness would not be enough to break the contract and that the company will not go away quietly.

Catherine Park mentioned that some towns are auctioning off land for cash and wondered if this is something that has been considered. Mr. Molnar advised that this is being worked on and specifically mentioned the Perrine and Connaught Hill properties. Attorney Faherty explained the process by which vacant land can be sold; however, the catch is that a title search is needed and this is costly. As for the Perrine property, Mrs. Luhrs noted that money was borrowed for the purchase and the note would have to be paid back. Mr. Molnar relayed that there's a couple initiates with solar power in the works and Mr. Fisher noted that there are other ideas floating around as well. However, none of this will help the current situation.

Mrs. Luhrs relayed that if the request for a cap waiver is successful, it will hurt the township next year. There has to be a plan to address the budget situation as a waiver for police salary and wages won't fly a second time. Also, if the State cuts more aid next year, the hole just gets bigger. Right now the township has to have a balanced budget for introduction.

Melody Anderson asked if the township could declare bankruptcy. This is something the State won't allow but a merger could be instituted, according to Mr. Fisher. Attorney Faherty added that the State is on the path to eliminate or combine small municipalities. This is also true of school districts, so be aware.

Continued budget discussion will be an agenda item for the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting. In the meantime, police, construction, State Police and shared services will be pursued. An ordinance to transfer the construction office to the State will be added to the agenda for possible introduction, with Mr. Molnar volunteering to contact the Construction Official.

**OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:**

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 10:44 a.m. on motion by Molnar, seconded by Fisher.

Respectfully submitted,

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Lora L. Olsen, RMC  
Township Clerk