

SPECIAL WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING May 9, 2012 – 7:00 p.m.

The West Amwell Township Committee met on the above date at 7:00 p.m. Present: Mayor Fisher, Committeemen Rich (7:09 p.m.) and Molnar. Attorney Faherty joined the meeting at 8:00 p.m. Also in attendance were Auxiliary members Robin Deal, Josephine Weiss, Betty Jane Hunt, Julia Kerr and Fire Company members Jeff Ent, Joe Ent and John Cronic. Housing Official Barbara Walsh and Keith Hamilton of SERV joined the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

In compliance with the Public Meetings Act, Mayor Fisher 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 May 4, 2012. 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 recorded via digital recording system.

DISCUSSION WITH FIRE COMPANY & AUXILIARY re: Building & Possible Fire District:

Mr. Fisher noted there are both financial and community concerns this evening and opened the dialogue.

Jeff Ent, on behalf of the Fire Company, relayed a request to include them in the Township's temporary budget due to the late adoptions in recent years and \$5000 was suggested. He will also see about providing more financial information to the Township Committee but stated that they have no paid audit performed. Concerning the creation of a fire district, this has been discussed several times in the past but it has always been their position to 'survive' in the present course and only ask for what has to be done. The sentiment expressed was that the Fire Company does not want a fire district; that a fire tax would be burdensome to taxpayers; that there's a lot involved with such a move, including voter approval; and, it would take around three years to accomplish. This would also mean that fire inspection duties would be taken over by the fire district which would then get the money, instead of the Township. Mr. Ent acknowledged that a fire district would be great for the Township, and the Fire Company has not said 'never' but this would have to be sold to taxpayers. He sees this as a hard sell; one that is not necessary; the status quo is cheaper; a fire district would hurt their fund drive; a board of fire commissioners has control over certain aspects of the operation; and, if something is needed outside the budget, it's a hassle.

Mr. Fisher listed the items that are currently paid through the Township budget in support of the Fire Company, which run \$500-\$800/month, and took the position of fire district over the tax base for operations; however, if selling a fire district would be difficult, he was not favorably inclined, especially if it would not be monetarily advantageous. A review of equipment owned by the Township, and for which there was bonding involved, was given by Mr. Molnar. It was also noted that all vehicles are registered under the Township's policy for insurance purposes. The possibility of retro-fitting an existing fire truck is still under investigation.

Robyn Deal questioned the energy assessment audit that was performed; was advised that this was through Direct Install; and, that the purpose was to be more energy efficient. Lights bulbs, heaters and air conditioning units were swapped out in all municipal buildings. The next step in the process is through the local government energy audit program whereby items such as the building envelope, heaters, windows, insulation and roofing are evaluated. The draft results have been received; a meeting with the engineers is needed to discuss it and how the program would proceed from this point; and, that it is hoped that there will be grant money available to fund the projects identified.

Ms. Deal noted that the Auxiliary has been paying for much of the maintenance costs and that over \$4000 was expended on air conditioning alone. Betty Jane Hunt added that the Auxiliary has spent thousands of dollars over the past 5 years on inside upgrades for which they do not expect the Township to pay. However, they've also covered electrical and plumbing expenses and was curious whether they would have to continue to fund these repairs. What entity is responsible for what costs was questioned by Ms. Deal and also whether some costs should be split with the Fire Company. She also urged the governing body to investigate how taxpayer dollars are spent by the Fire Company.

Mrs. Hunt relayed that consideration is being given to new doors to separate the dining room from the fire bays to quell concerns over children climbing on the trucks but couldn't move on this item because of a leaking roof. She has recently learned that a new roof has been authorized and noted that communications between all three entities is key to the concerns being raised this evening. Mrs. Hunt also commented on the need to paint the building and that

the utility room has been padlocked by the Police Department. She is not sure who has a key. Another item needing communication between Mr. Ent and herself is the ice machine. Apparently the Auxiliary has paid for repairs, to the tune of \$1000, as well as repairs funded by the Fire Company. Between them, they probably could have purchased a new one.

Mr. Molnar inquired about the possibility of receiving Fire Company minutes and was informed by Mr. Ent that these contain information about procedures and policies, which are a priority to the Fire Company, as well as homeland security and public safety issues, and cannot be released. Items concerning the building and their activities, however, could be shared. Returning to the proposed new doors, he questioned who would be paying for them and what was envisioned. Mrs. Hunt relayed that the cost would be in the neighborhood of \$5500.00; may be of the roll up variety, which would help with space issues; and, would help keep truck fumes out of the dining room, in addition to securing the Fire house side. The only exception to this would be the handicapped bathroom.

The Auxiliary has extra money and Mrs. Hunted noted that they are currently in the process of determining how much more to give to the Fire Department, what will be needed for building maintenance, and other projects. They do not want to keep a big balance in their account but stressed again that better communications are needed, especially since the Auxiliary has no clue as to what the Fire Company needs/requires, their operating costs, or how much is raised from the Chicken Bar-B-Q. She stated that the Auxiliary tries to support the Fire Company and give back to the community through the dinners and providing a central meeting place for organizations. This they are doing to the best of their ability and noted that they've had the cooperation of the Township Committee and several members of the Fire Company with the dinners. Although she understands the time commitment and dedication of the Fire company members, the communication between them and the Auxiliary is awful. She suggested a PR person for this.

Mr. Ent relayed that both he and Randy Hoagland have agreed to attend the upcoming Auxiliary meeting but stated that the matters under discussion this evening have nothing to do with the Township Committee as the two entities are volunteer organizations. As for a PR person, he finds that the reporters on nj.com just stir things up and that those with opinions should have the guts to sign their name.

A lengthy exchange ensued over such things as why there are two command vehicles; why these are seen out of the Township on what appears to be personal business; and, why a shared service arrangement was not used when purchasing the ladder truck. The Auxiliary fields questions from the public and wants to defend the Department but is not privy to this information. Mr. Ent suggested that questions of this nature be directed to the Fire Company but offered that a shared service with Lambertville was discussed whereby a contribution would be made and mutual aid supplied, but what was ultimately obtained was sized to serve the residents, and driveways, of West Amwell. As for the two command vehicles, it was explained that this is due to the number of calls and the working hours of the personnel involved. In addition, the idea is to get to the scene first with an officer. Both vehicles are fitted with appropriate gear for fire, heart attacks, as well as management tools, and that their value outweigh any bad publicity received. As for their SOG (standard operating guidelines), these spell out their operations, something that is not public information and will not be released.

Ms. Deal stated that the Township should look at a possible conflict of interest concerning the use of public funds; that Fire Company finances should be available for review; and, questioned the legal basis of privacy as this is a public organization. She called for more transparency to help quell the perception problems, noting that this would go a long way to help them respond to questions that the Auxiliary feels is their obligation to answer; such as, where's our money going?

The lack of help from the Fire Company at the Auxiliary dinners was broached by Julia Kerr. She would like to see more firemen come out in support of their efforts. This was expanded upon by Mrs. Hunt to include that it would be nice if the Auxiliary thought that the Fire Company cared. Although she realizes all the training that is involved and acknowledged what the men do for the community, her goal is for better communications between the two organizations as well as to have the ability to stand up for each other. She hopes that this evening has provided a start.

As the Country Fair is coming up, Mr. Fisher offered that it would do well to have the Fire Company in attendance and to use the opportunity as an outlet for information. That the kids

like fire trucks would be another plus. Also noted was that there will be a small fire for a scout flag ceremony.

As time is needed to mull all this over, Mr. Fisher suggested that the two groups come to a Township meeting and give a brief update at a later time, although Mr. Ent believes that the matter has been blown out of proportion.

With expressions of appreciation all around, the two groups left at 7:57 p.m. and a short break in the meeting was taken.

DISCUSSION WITH SERV re: GROUP HOME PROPOSAL:

As adequate notice was given of the open meeting, the discussion with SERV was determined to be best held in closed session.

RESOLUTION #100-2012

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:
PURCHASE, LEASE OR ACQUISITION OF REAL PROPERTY
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 Molnar, seconded by Fisher.

PRESENTATION OF HERITAGE BILL FOR PAYMENT:

The escrow check from Creekside was not received in time to pay Heritage at the last meeting. Mr. Lorentz requested that payment be considered if there was to be a special meeting prior to the regular May meeting.

Payment in the amount of \$3,064.00 was unanimously approved on motion by Molnar, seconded by Fisher.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:

Mr. Molnar suggested that the proposed shared service with Delaware Township for plumbing inspections be a temporary one for 2012. He also noted that the old Hewitt Park bleachers will be modified to stand less than 30 inches high and returned to service.

Mr. Rich noted that he's working on recognition plaques for the Country Fair.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:00 p.m. on motion by Molnar, seconded by Rich.

Respectfully submitted,

Lora L. Olsen, RMC
Township Clerk