

SPECIAL WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

July 15, 2009 – 6:00 p.m.

The West Amwell Township Committee met on the above date at 6:06 p.m. Present: Mayor Corboy, Committeemen Masterson and Molnar (6:25 p.m). Also in attendance was CFO Luhrs, Jeff Ent, Joe Ent and Randy Hoagland

In compliance with the Public Meetings Act, Mayor Corboy announced that this Special Meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act with notices faxed to the Lambertville Beacon, the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Trenton Times on June 8, 2009. 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 and a copy of the CD is on file in the Office of the Municipal Clerk.

MEETING WITH FIRE COMPANY REPRESENTATIVES ON BUDGET/FUNDING ISSUES:

Jeff Ent referenced the April 5th letter and noted that the Fire Company was disappointed that they were not included in budget discussions this year. A request was submitted as usual but they only learned about the meetings by reading the minutes. He noted that LOSAP has nothing to do with the Fire Company budget and that they do not have \$100,000 in the bank. He explained that part of this money was from the Township for the Scott packs and was carried over to this year due to the latest of the receipt. Mrs. Luhrs relayed that the number was given to her by Rick Carmosino but no documentation has been forthcoming. A brief discussion ensued over the necessity for financial information to be filed with the Township for budget purposes as well as the fact that a financial report is required from any organization that receives public money. This report must show income and expenses broken down by category.

Mr. Ent continued that as of June 30th, there's \$67,000 in their bank account and that the Fire Company spent \$109,000 for operations last year. Their budget requests for the past three years have only been for mandatory items and that the Township, by statute, must provide fire protection to the community. Mr. Ent stated that the Fire Company saved the Township \$70,000 on the Scot packs and fronted \$29,400 of their own funds. They seek reimbursement for the latter as the funds were expended in good faith. He also noted that they have a building project underway at station #2 but that the condition of station #1 is dire, as a/c, electric and the roof need work. In addition, notice was received that tires on the engine scheduled for replacement in 2012 were no good. These were replaced using Fire Company funds so as not to be negligent and bring liability issues to the Township. He also relayed that this year's fund drive netted \$19,882 vs the \$24,460 received last year. This was attributed to the fact that the Committee sent out a letter at about the same time as the fund drive request and cited the fire trust as a cause for budget problems. However, the lawsuit was not mentioned. Mr. Ent understands that there's only so much money that can be given and realizes that times are tough, but the Township's letter may have cut down on contributions. The Fire Company has been hearing for three years that things would be better but this has not happened and things are worse.

The mayor acknowledged that fire services are required; that they can't be substandard; and, that they have to be paid for. If the Township was not constrained by State law, a couple pennies on the tax rate could have been provided. Unfortunately, this is not the case and he hopes things will improve next year.

The discussion turned to a possible fire district. This is currently being investigated by the Fire Company but a fire tax will take a couple of years to implement. They've looked at what East Amwell and Lambertville raise in fire tax and at Franklin Township, which is the most recently formed district. The Committee was alerted that there are other expenses incurred with a Fire District and that all districts mentioned also run fund drives. At this point a fire district does not appear to make sense but the members will

continue to look at the possibility and acquire information. Mr. Corboy offered that if a fire district is not found to be feasible, a solid number should be determined for yearly operation so that the taxpayer can be advised that "x" amount is for the Fire Company. The taxpayer needs to be educated on the cost of fire protection.

Returning to the current situation, Mr. Ent relayed that the Fire Company now purchases its fuel from the County at a discount. Their 2009 budget request showed no increase over the previous year but required flow testing should have increased it by \$1000.

Mr. Ent was requested to review the numbers and speak with the CFO. Mr. Corboy apologized for not inviting the Fire Company to the budget meetings but noted there were just a lot of devastating things to deal with. The Committee will look at any revised numbers presented to see where there may be budget lines with money available. It is hoped that over time the finances will allow for making good on the deficits. Referencing some Township history, Mr. Corboy stated that when the police department was formed, West Amwell had lots of money; estimated that 12.5 million dollars has been spent over the years on police protection; that the Calton suit is costing \$250,000 a year; the money has dissipated; and, now there's the additional burden of a lawsuit.

Mrs. Luhrs re-iterated the need for an expense vs income statement from the Fire Company as the auditor has raised red flags for supporting information. She also explained that once the budget is adopted, checks can be released to the Fire Company and Rescue Squad. Right now, the Township is having a hard time paying the schools, which is a repeat of last year's scenario.

Mr. Ent relayed that another item to be considered is that call volume increases each year. There's also been an increase in motor vehicle accidents. He explained how a determination is made for what vehicles and equipment to take to a fire or accident and stated that only what is actually needed for a particular event is taken. The new truck has been a plus to the department; has worked well; and, is used for mutual aid calls. With new rules and regulations, an elaborate mutual aid plan has been developed based on a time when available volunteers are at their lowest. This is where shared services are needed.

Fire Company members were encouraged to attend Township Committee meetings and report on needs and activities. The Township will do what it can to help and will include the Fire Company in future budget talks.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 6:56 p.m. on motion by Molnar, seconded by Masterson.

Respectfully submitted,

Lora L. Olsen, RMC
Township Clerk