

SPECIAL WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

July 21, 2010 – 2:00 p.m.

The West Amwell Township Committee met on the above date at 2:10 p.m. Present: Mayor Molnar, Committeemen Masterson (2:15 p.m.) and Fisher and CFO Luhrs. Also in attendance were Hal Shute, Cathy Urbanski, Betty Jane Hunt, Lolly Hoagland, Shirley Skillman, Randy Hoagland and Zach Rich

The meeting opened with the pledge to the American flag.

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 July 13, 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 recorded via digital recording system and a copy of the CD is on file in the Office of the Municipal Clerk.

WORKSHOP TO DISCUSS 2010/2011 BUDGET CONCERNS, STAFFING OPTIONS & RELATED ISSUES:

A list of unfinished items was presented for discussion and possible action as follows:

1) Professional Services: The requirements for a 'fair and open' process under the Play-to-Play law were reviewed. A list of professional positions to be considered was presented and decision made to advertise for Auditor and Engineer this year. The 'competitive contracting' option will be employed for contract award, with proposals evaluated on the basis of the most advantageous, price, and other factors criteria. In preparation for a September advertisement for these positions, the bid package and specific award criteria must be developed. The position of Prosecutor will be brought in-house.

2) Pending Retirements: Mrs. Luhrs has previously revealed her intent to retire but a formal notification to the Township Committee is not required, per the Policy Manual, until October. However, she relayed that she is in the process of working something out. Item held.

3) Shared Services: Discussion centered on the police study with a general consensus that, based on several key points, it needs to be dissolved. A formal resolution is required to do so. A final report, however, needs to be received from the task force so that a resolution can be prepared for the August 4th meeting.

4) Fulper: Not for discussion in open session. Held

5) Perrine Property: The environmental consultant's 2006 recommendation concerning a re-developed well (\$4,000-6,000) vs a new well (\$10,000) on this property was reviewed, as well as a 2008 cost estimate from the environmental counsel for a reverse osmosis system (\$62,500 plus \$7500/yr for maintenance, equipment, pump out and disposal of brine). As the sodium and chloride in the water has climbed since 2007, probably to do with non-use, it could also mean that a RO system more in line with Morandi than Pearson would be required...the former being more expensive. A second opinion will be obtained from Tom Stover, who will hopefully meet with Mr. Molnar or Mr. Fisher prior to the August 4th meeting.

6) Police Contract: Both the patrolman and the lieutenant's contracts expire this year. The mayor will handle the negotiations.

7) Fire District: The purpose would be to take the expense out of the Township budget and create a fire tax. Shirley Skillman offered that this is expensive, initially, as the equipment would have to be purchased from the existing owner; there's a lot involved to create a fire tax; and, the process takes 2-3 years. Mrs. Luhrs offered the perspective of whether the Fire Company can continue to operate on the \$10,000 allotted by the Township budget and, if not, a fire tax would be needed to allow them to raise their own money and to cover their own expenses. She relayed that the East Amwell conversion to a fire district was agreeable to both entities as the Fire Company needed more money than the Township could give by law. Mr. Fisher stated that he will call Mary Sheppard for more insight but the item was placed on the back burner for now.

8) Garbage Truck: Mr. Molnar will deliver truck specifications very soon. Mr. Fisher reviewed his conversations with both the high school and elementary school about a possible shared service to take over their garbage service, which in turn would bring money into the Township.

There is interest at both places and may cut costs in half. If this were to happen, a decision would be needed as to whether to use dumpsters or cans as it is thought that different trucks are required in each case. The high school pays around \$11,000/yr for the pick up of two 8 yard dumpsters a week and the elementary school pays approximately \$3800 for a once-per-week pickup of a 4 yard dumpster. However, these are not compacted and it is unknown if they are full. If this direction is taken, it would mean the purchase of a truck as well as several dumpsters but these would be a capital expense. Discussion ensued over who would drive the truck—a hired part-timer or utilize Road Department staff; how the Saturday operation would be handled; the need for an over-all plan as well as an estimated budget; and, an agreement with a transfer station. An analysis of cost was prepared in 2008 and is available. However, a conversation with the Road Department staff concerning time available for this added duty is needed. Truck types will be discussed further with Paul Cronce. A field trip to locate possible trucks and get an estimate of cost must be undertaken soon as that there are several things that have to be accomplished for this endeavor to happen, e.g., ordinance introduction and adoption, bid packets prepared and advertised, award, or bid out collection/disposal in October for award in January.

To date 366 garbage cards have been sold, which is a decline from the last period of 401 and the initial offering that garnered 436. A brief discussion followed about number of times in a month residents come and if the numbers are recorded weekly. Waste Security Officer Hoagland will be asked about the latter and the deputy clerk has a chart showing the flow of purchasers for the three time periods involved. This information will be disseminated. Mr. Shute inquired if the goal is to eliminate the fee as residents may come back and the mayor advised in the affirmative.

Road Supervisor Hoagland arrived and was asked about distance to and time for the disposal facility in Oxford and relayed that Lambertville makes the trip every day but Mondays and it takes about 3 hours per day. He also noted that Lambertville has 4 public works employees; employs prisoners for the garbage detail; and, that garbage and recycling is their primary task. Mr. Hoagland's crew is involved in a variety of different activities that the City is not and expressed concern that garbage collection could eventually turn into curbside, as this was part of a recent primary campaign. He is of the opinion that garbage should go away as it would be just one more job for his crew and that less than half of the residents are using the service now but, should that number increase, another truck (and manpower) would be needed. Mr. Hoagland also noted that not all blue cans in the Township belong to new-comers. Mr. Molnar acknowledged that the Road Department has saved the Township a lot of money by doing equipment repairs in-house.

9) Website: Earlier this year, a resident submitted suggested improvements for the website. Other comments have been received from time to time as well. Discussion ensued over possibly getting the high school to revamp the site and that the Clerk's office on the up-loads to keep it current. Mr. Molnar indicated that he spoke with the webmaster who indicated that he was not ready to retire but as been over-burdened at work. Vince Cifelli at South is interested in helping but it is unknown if this would be for pay or as a volunteer. It was acknowledged that the website needs work; is dated, which is not good; and, doesn't stack up well against others that have been visited. Mr. Molnar will speak with the webmaster about the need for a re-vamping and whether this can be accomplished by the end of the summer.

10) Five Person Township Committee: Originally slated for possible action on the August 4th meeting, the decision was not to move forward due to difficulty in implementation, i.e., finding people to run for office. Discussion ensued about the difficulty of a three-person committee but the thought was to hold workshop meetings for the rest of the year. Mrs. Luhrs relayed that the money budgeted for the proposed extra meetings would not be sufficient. The decision was that any workshop would be held on an as-needed basis.

11) Open Space Tax: This is a dead issue in that the 6 cents covers current debt service. Hal Shute noted that there is an expectation among the residents for this ballot question. The explanation for the non-reduction is obvious per the results of the investigation by Mr. Fisher.

12) Activities for Stormwater Annual Report: There is a recent requirement for a local public education component, which was a surprise when completing the 2009 report. Fourteen items, with points assigned to each, must total a minimum of 10 points per year. There is no stormwater committee to carry out these activities, or prepare the report, so how this should be handled was the topic of discussion. The 2009 report was handled by Road Supervisor Hoagland and Clerk Olsen. The annual residential notification requirement will be accomplished through the upcoming tax bill mailing. Flyers were made available at the last Fire Company dinner, which will count as a local event. The ramification of not complying with the requirement

was questioned but unanswered. Although stormwater regulations are from the federal government, it was suggested that legislators be contacted to ascertain whether the point system is something added by NJDEP and therefore an unfunded mandate.

13) Water Buffalos: The consensus was that these should be sold. As these are public property, an advertisement similar to the one used for the houses is required. An auction price needs to be set. CFO Luhrs will research original cost once the year and vendor is identified. This will be an agenda item for August 4th.

14) Tax Map Update: An estimate has yet to be received from the Township Engineer. The update would require the use of a special emergency to fund. A discrepancy between the tax book and the tax map was recently discovered in that a lot listed in the former is not found on the latter. This appears to date back to 1985.

15) DPW Garage Doors: The question posed was if the Committee was ready to move forward with the ordinance to replace the doors. The basic specifications are available; can be faxed around for quotes; and, that \$15,000 was allocated in the capital budget for this improvement. Mr. Hoagland stated that new doors are desperately needed as the DPW is a wind tunnel and heat is lost. The consensus was to prepare a funding ordinance for introduction at the August 4th meeting. Mr. Hoagland was requested to supply the names of five vendors so that quotes can be obtained.

16) Firehouse Roof: An earlier offered to do this for free has not materialized. The roof was patched up but as there's been no rain, it is hard to tell whether all the leaks have been fixed. \$25,000 was allocated in the capital budget but the ordinance needs to provide details as to scope of the project. Mr. Hoagland will follow-up for an initial estimate and scope so that specs can be developed and quotes requested. Possible vendors also need to be identified.

17) A/C at Firehouse: As neither Township nor the Fire Company has the money for the needed repair/replacement of the system, the Auxiliary is paying for the work. It should be completed next week.

18) Meeting Frequency for 2011: Held for November discussion.

19) Calton Mowing: It was explained that too much manpower, needed elsewhere, is being lost due the required mowing. The suggested remedy is to bid out this activity and charge it to Open Space. Road Supervisor Hoagland will solicit quotes for possible award at the August meeting. If the decision is to move in this direction, the Open Space Trust would also have to be amended. Another aspect to be considered is that if this change is made and the activity contracted out as a maintenance item under the Trust, there will not be enough money to pay the Road Department by November. Money would have to come from elsewhere in the budget as the \$20,000 in salary would no longer be contained under that category. Direction approved for August 4th agenda.

20) Stream Corridor Ordinance: An e-mail was received earlier from a Zoning Board member that the current ordinance is unworkable in that the lines of authority are unclear. Cathy Urbanski requested that the information be forward to the Environmental Commission for review and possible amendment.

21) Possible Revenue Enhancements: A suggested was made at a recent staff meeting to access a vendor fee at the local flea market as there is considerable police and fire company time expended there. The market is open Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday and table rents running \$20, \$30, and \$50/day, respectively. Calls have been placed to Hopewell Township and the municipality that houses the Columbus market to see if they charge a vendor fee. The former does not and the latter has not responded. Concern was expressed that should a fee be instituted on the West Amwell side, the table activity would shift to the Hopewell side. Assessor Gill will be contacted concerning the property assessment. The League of Municipalities has available for \$14.00 a booklet on flea markets, garage sales and auctions. The Clerk was instructed to obtain a copy.

22) Salt Testing: The ongoing cost of maintenance was discussed. Mrs. Luhrs noted that only \$19,000 was budgeted, which will not be a good number as \$10,000 has already been spent. This item will be discussed further at tomorrow evening's Board of Health meeting.

CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION FOR 'MUNICIPAL TOOLKIT' AND MANDATE RELIEF:

RESOLUTION #105-2010
RESOLUTION CALLING ON THE STATE LEGISLATURE AND THE GOVERNOR
TO ENACT PROPERTY TAX REFORM WITH PASSAGE OF THE “MUNICIPAL
TOOLKIT” AND MANDATES RELIEF

WHEREAS, difficult times demand difficult choices, and facing an unprecedented revenue gap this year, Governor Christie introduced, and the Legislature passed, a budget that cut municipal property tax relief funding by about \$450 million, from last year’s already reduced totals; and

WHEREAS, realizing that a 20% cut in revenue replacement funding, instead of the statutorily required increase, would present a serious challenge to local budget makers, Governor Christie intended to provide local officials with meaningful tools to limit the, otherwise devastating, impact of the cuts; and

WHEREAS, the Governor’s “Tool Kit to Meet Today’s Fiscal Challenges” was supposed to accomplish six objectives: collective bargaining reform; pension and benefits reform; civil service reform; management reform; a constitutional cap on increases in spending for direct State government services; and a constitutional cap on property tax increases; and

WHEREAS, Governor Christopher Christie and the State Legislature have agreed on and enacted a 2% statutory cap for annual property tax levy increases; and

WHEREAS, the Governor was correct when he said, ‘New caps without the toolkit are unworkable.’ and

WHEREAS, with the cuts assured in the State’s new budget and with bi-partisan agreement reached on new property tax caps, New Jersey Mayors - from municipalities, large and small, and from all around our Garden State – still wait for Trenton policy makers to enact meaningful local government cost containment reforms; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, by the Township Committee of the Township of West Amwell calls for immediate passage of the “Toolkit” reforms and mandates relief, including, but not limited to interest arbitration reform, civil service reforms, public employee pension and benefits, disciplinary procedures, school and special district elections, reforms to the Fair Housing Act and the Council on Affordable Housing and mandates relief; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that statutory arbitration reforms must limit the full economic impact of awards to conform to the 2% cap; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that statutory Health benefit reforms must conform future health benefit costs to the 2% cap; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that municipal revenues, such as the Energy Tax, which are now collected by, and diverted to, the State, but which are legally intended for municipal property tax relief, must be constitutionally dedicated for their original purpose; or in the alternative, those taxes should be reformed to allow collection directly by municipalities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Administration and Legislature must advance immediate mandates relief initiatives to assist municipalities in managing within the 2% cap; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Administration and Legislature must advance reforms to the Fair Housing Act and the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a cap exception for the costs associated with tax appeals should be included, and costs mandated by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) should be excepted from the 2% cap or the costs of new AOC mandates should be capped at 2%; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that copies of this Resolution be forwarded to New Jersey Governor Christopher Christie, to Senate President Stephen Sweeney, to Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver, to our State Senator, to our two Representatives in the General Assembly, and to the New Jersey League of Municipalities.

Fisher motioned to approve the Resolution and Masterson seconded. Motion unanimously carried.

RESOLUTION #102-2010 AMENDMENT – 3RD QUARTER TAX EXTENSION:

**RESOLUTION #106-2010
Amending Resolution #102-2010**

WHEREAS, the 2010 third quarter tax bills are payable August 1, 2010; and

WHEREAS, it has been deemed necessary to extend the grace period for payment due to the late mailing of the 2010 Tax bills

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Committee of West Amwell Township that the grace period for payment for the 2010 third quarter tax **bills is extended to reflect statutory requirements**. Interest will be charged back to the original due date of 8/1/10 **for payments received after that time**.

Fisher motioned to approve the Resolution and Masterson seconded. Motion unanimously carried.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:

Mr. Shute suggested that more of this type of meeting be held, if same can be accomplished without busting the budget.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 4:12 p.m. on motion by Molnar, seconded by Fisher.

Respectfully submitted,

Lora L. Olsen, RMC
Township Clerk