

SPECIAL WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

March 21, 2012 – 6:00 p.m.

The West Amwell Township Committee met on the above date at 6:08 p.m. Present: Mayor Fisher, Committeemen Rich (6:22) and Molnar. Also in attendance were Lonnie Baldino, John Cronce, Hal Shute, Rob Fulper, Jeff Ent, Chris Rose, Phil Rosso, Mike Janoski, Phil Langon, Barbara Pante and Peter Molnar of the Amwell Valley-Ringoes Rescue Squad

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 February 28, 2012, with revised notices faxed to same and posted on March 12 and March 14, 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.

BUDGET WORKSHOP – Meeting with Dept Heads and/or other Township Entities:

Zoning Officer Lonnie Baldino provided an analysis of his workload showing increases by category from 2008 to date. He noted that the office has gotten busier since August 2007 when the allotted 2 hours/week was sufficient. However, since 2008, the time spent has increased from 4 hours/week to almost 7 hours/week. He is pushing for 8 hours/week in order to have time for site visits. Mr. Baldino requested that along with the increased hours that his salary be doubled to \$12,795. A brief discussion ensued over the reason for the Zoning Board's request to have the Zoning Officer's expenses removed from their line. It was explained that that OE line was over-expended due to his and the secretary's course work, the latter of which was not included in the budget. Therefore, he had to quit spending when he had planned on taking classes and purchasing books. Mr. Baldino also noted that he often sits in on Zoning Board meetings but that this amounts to an hour or less per month. He also requested a computer for the office.

Open Space Chair John Cronce relayed that they do not have a budget but that their money comes from the trust fund. As to paying down the debt, Hal Shute offered that the committee has looked at ways to shift this and presented a chart of both the 2011 and 2012 open space debt service options. For 2011, \$500,000 was taken from the trust fund for this purpose. Offsetting reimbursements were not shown. The possibilities for 2012 were then reviewed, noting that with re-assessment, the revenue will decline by approximately 15%. If \$500,000 were used again this year, negative numbers will begin showing up in about 10 years, which is not good for the program long term. With the sale of the former Toll property, it may break even. Mr. Shute noted that a policy as to a specific dollar number is needed so the committee can rely on something from year to year. Dropping to \$450,000 has been discussed with the CFO but the difference would have to be found in the regular budget. The idea of refinancing the debt instead of retiring it (refinance at lowest rate vs calling it) was discussed but rejected for this year, the recommendation being to wait until 2013 to act. The anticipated open space tax receipt for 2012 is \$275,000. The options would be to either use \$450,000 for debt service or split the Calton debt 50/50. In 2015, the Calton debt goes down and there will be \$500,000 for new projects. A discussion ensued over sustainability and bonding if a good deal comes along. Planning for the latter was noted in that bonds are usually bundled to save on marketing costs, etc.

Mr. Shute, as Chair of the Finance committee, noted that last year the Township was able to use an accounting entry for the elementary school to increase the surplus and suggested that this be looked into this year with the high school. Although this does not make for expendable funds, the bond rating will improve which will help out in the subsequent year. Anticipating more from surplus was offered but not embraced. Mr. Shute also cautioned that when the CFO has a cash flow problem, e.g., school payments are due but taxes not coming in, he uses the trust fund money for a temporary inter-fund transfer to meet the required payment schedule. The Finance committee's recommendation to the Township Committee is to keep the budget flat this year. They realize this will be difficult but an honest effort should be made, although they are not looking for draconian cuts, and are still searching for productive ideas on the revenue side. Although initial budget numbers from the CFO look flat, other factors are in play, e.g., the State Police are writing fewer tickets, although the local numbers are up. Revenues are level and anticipating more than currently received cannot be used in the budget. The increase in gas expense due to running multiple cars on the new shifts was also mentioned as making a flat budget unlikely, although the police salary line should be less. Mr. Shute continued that this is not the time to gamble and that there should be improvements next year in both the Open Space and regular budget. Mr. Rich offered that if refinancing occurred, \$300,000 in interest could come off the books and help build surplus.

Zoning Board Chair, Rob Fulper distributed a letter concerning the Board's review of the secretary's compensation package and provided pertinent information for raising same. The recommendation is to change the range to \$5500 - \$8000 and set the salary at \$6100. A brief exchange over the amount requested for the operating budget ensued as it's not much when salary is excluded. The largest amount last year was for training and that there will not be a requirement for CEUs. The question about including the Zoning Officer's expenses in the Board's budget was then discussed. Mr. Fulper noted that these expenses should be separate and Mr. Cronic agreed that it is not good to bundle the two departments. That the Board only requires Mr. Baldino's presence at meetings when needed to provide information on a particular application was relayed and a brief discussion ensued over the appropriateness of the Zoning Official sitting on the Planning Board and attending Zoning Board meetings. Mr. Fulper stated that Attorney Palilonis explained that the official is not voting at the latter; however, concern was noted that his presence could influence the Board. Mr. Cronic relayed that when he was Chair, he didn't want the Township Committee to attend Zoning Board meetings as their presence could be a problem and Attorney Palilonis supported that position at the time. The CFO will be consulted about whether the Zoning Official can be made a separate unit on the Flexible Chart of Accounts.

Fire Chief Jeff Ent noted that there's one new recruit who is currently attending fire school. The budget request was then reviewed. Mr. Ent relayed that the operating request was just for required items. Truck maintenance is up due to the age of the equipment and the repair of their generator cost \$4000. They are still playing catch-up from when things were tight whereby the Township still owes them \$24,402. Re-furbishing a truck to reduce cost is still under consideration but the rules have changed and it is unclear at this point if this is a viable idea. However, they will continue to look into it. A loaner vehicle would be made available should a re-furbishment become a reality. He noted that the KME is pushing the limit, age-wise, and there's better re-sale value at 17 years than at 20. Also to be considered is that there is 15 year full replacement on apparatus per the insurance policy. Once a truck is over that mark, the blue book won't cover repairs and the vehicle would most likely to be totaled. A lease-purchase option is being explored but the Township used to be able to put aside money so that a purchase could be made up front. Mr. Ent stated that the presented budget is bare bones and covers fuel, equipment, etc. A capital request for replacement of turn out gear to replace those going out of compliance this year was noted. Although the Fire Company holds a fund drive, last year was tough due to the storms. They are trying to prepare for the next one as they have to be ready.

Mr. Rich offered that the morale at the Police Department is good and resources were given to make this happen. He now wants to see the Fire Company do the same and relayed that the Township Committee stands with them and wants to provide the resources. As to a comment recently heard about the work of the Fire Company not being appreciated by the Township Committee, he extended, on behalf of the Committee, thanks for what they do and relayed appreciation for it.

Chief Peter Molnar and Assistant Chief Barb Pante of the Amwell Valley-Ringoes Rescue Squad provided a copy of their 2012 budget. Last year West Amwell provide a donation of \$1500. Ms. Pante noted that their building has had no addition or refurbishment since it was originally built and currently their response truck sits outside. Their hope to build two new bays and relayed that their ambulance took a hit during the storms. The squad covers East Amwell, West Amwell, Hopewell and Raritan in addition to providing cover calls to Lambertville. West Amwell runs approximately 130 calls per year, or 15-17%, and has remained steady. They do fund raising, look for grants and keep an eye out for used tools but their turn-out gear is expiring. Donations from Raritan Township run between \$5000-\$6000/year; Hopewell Township gives between \$1000-\$1500; West Amwell gave \$1500 last year; and, East Amwell keeps cutting their amount.

Jennifer Andreoli inquired about the discussion with Mr. Shute and Mr. Cronic concerning taking open space trust fund money for debt service; if this was permitted; and that the general public says that this is lawsuit debt. Mr. Fisher indicated that there is no lawsuit debt; that the Township bought a 400 unit development to reduce it to 100 and purchased the open space. Loans and grants from Green Acres were secured for funding the purchase. A brief discussion ensued about principle and interest payments; that the Township was buying and bonding but the path is not sustainable; that there is an established schedule of payments; and, that the bonds are callable next year. The re-assessment will result in a 10-15% short fall but the Committee is trying to keep taxes flat. However, the schools are 76% of taxpayer dollars.

Tim Lelie offered his help if people are needed to chase down money for work on George Washington Road. He also inquired how a road gets on the priority list and if a counter could be installed to verify the increase due to the park. He mentioned that there's a potential hazard by going off the road as there are not guide rails and that there are reasons that people go in the parking lot, although the Police and Rangers do patrol. It was explained that the Township attempted to get a grant based on the Overlook by working with Congressman Holt; that a conversation with Congressman Lance is next; and, that the Township Engineer will be asked to look for grants. As for the priority list, it's the thru roads. The problem with George Washington Road is the small number of houses involved and that there's only \$50,000 for Roads. Mr. Lelie suggested that wooden gates are a workable solution to stop traffic and that this should be a dawn to dusk park. He also stated that a new culvert/bridge is being installed on the road. Mr. Rich offered to speak with John Glynn at the County to see if they can help with the road and also relayed that there will be State funding for a Supervisor for Washington Crossing Park this year. Mr. Lelie continued that he cleaned the road of trees after the storms and requested that the Township run the grader through to push dirt around to allow passage of emergency vehicles. There is also someone on the Weeden Street end that puts boulders in the roadway.

Construction Official Chris Rose, along with Sub-code Officials Rosso, Janoski and Langon came to re-visit their budget proposal for increased work load from the last meeting. The three sub-code officials would like their current salary increased by 1/3 while increasing their weekly hours to six for building and electric and three for fire. A request for \$20/week for mileage for these individuals was re-iterated. This will increase the S&W line by around \$6500 and OE \$3120.

A brief discussion over the status of the solar installation resulted in the notation that the Township is still waiting to hear and that all proposed arrays are tied in to the overall project.

Mr. Molnar spoke about the Parks & Recreation budget and the goal of re-doing Hewitt Park. There are a lot of volunteers from the baseball league that have been painting and making repairs. Using open space trust fund money for a walking path is desired. Sweet Valley will deliver 26 yards of playground mulch @ \$30/yard for free but as the Township is still working on a temporary budget, they may not be enough money at this time. There was also discussion about the oft-proposed, never materialized, field at Calton.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTION AWARDING TUB GRINDING QUOTES:

RESOLUTION #61-2012

WHEREAS, the collection of resident brush due to the October 2011 snow event has reached epic portions; and

WHEREAS, it has been determined that additional assistance is needed to reduce this recyclable commodity to produce a viable product for use by the residents; and

WHEREAS, quotes for tub grinding were solicited with the following results:

L & S Contracting	\$ 2,800.00
J.H. Reid On-Site Recycling, Inc.	\$ no response
ATA Landclearing	\$ no response
Elite Tree & Excavating	\$ no response

WHEREAS, the apparent low bidder is L & S Contracting and a Certificate of Insurance will be required prior to the start of any work; and

WHEREAS, a Business Registration Certification has been received; and

WHEREAS, the CFO has certified that sufficient money is available in the Clean Communities grant for this activity

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the quote for the tub grinding of brush is hereby awarded to L & S Contracting, subject to the submission of a Certificate of Insurance.

The Resolution was unanimously adopted on motion by Fisher, seconded by Rich.

COPIER LEASE: New Ricoh copier leases for the administrative and police offices were approved.

VERIZON APPEAL DISCUSSION & POSSIBLE RESOLUTION: Clerk Olsen spoke with Martin Allen and the case is in limbo waiting on the judges to rule. He indicated that it's up to the Township whether or not to continue but to receive any benefit from a favorable court ruling, the Township has to file each year as each year is considered a separate tax year and a separate tax court case. A petition has to be filed by April 1st, or since West Amwell is a Reassessment district, by May 1st. Mr. Allen's rate is \$175.00/hr plus costs and expenses.

RESOLUTION #62-2012

WHEREAS there exists a need for the hiring of various professionals without competitive bids as a non-fair and open contract process; and

WHEREAS the Local Public Contracts Law, N.J.S.A. 40:11-1 et. seq. allows governing bodies to execute agreements without competitive bidding for professional services; and

WHEREAS these executed agreements must be available for public inspection; and

WHEREAS sufficient funds are available in the 2012 Temporary Budget and will be made available in the 2012 Municipal Budget for the Township of West Amwell

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Committee of the Township of West Amwell, that an agreement be executed with the following professional:

Martin Allen of DiFrancesco, Bateman, Coley, Yospin, Kunzman, Davis & Lehrer, P.C.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this agreement is awarded, subject to contract discussions, without competitive bidding as defined under the appropriate section of the Local Public Contracts Law, because each of the above mentioned individuals is authorized by law to practice a recognized profession.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a Business Entity Disclosure Statement be placed on file with this resolution; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the notice of this action shall be published in the newspaper of general circulation within the Township of West Amwell not more than ten days from the enactment thereof.

The Resolution was unanimously adopted on motion by Molnar, seconded by Rich.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:

N/A

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:15 p.m. on motion by Fisher, seconded by Rich.

Respectfully submitted,

Lora L. Olsen, RMC
Township Clerk