

SPECIAL WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

January 21, 2009 – 6:00 p.m.

The West Amwell Township Committee met on the above date at 6:05 p.m. Present: Mayor Corboy, Committeemen Masterson and Molnar. Also in attendance were John Ennis, Tim Vanselous, Randy Hoagland, Bernie Meader, Ron Shapella, Betty Jane Hunt, CFO Jane Luhrs and reporter Linda Seida

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, the Trenton Times and posted on the township bulletin board on January 14, 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.

BUDGET WORKSHOP:

The primary purpose of the meeting was to meet with PBA patrolman representative, John Ennis, concerning a possible willingness to forego the contractual 4% raise this year. Mr. Corboy relayed that the Township is facing dire circumstances this year; State aid is questionable due to State budget problems; that the Township will not receive what it did last year; and, that it may be March before the Township has any idea about State aid numbers. The question about foregoing the slated 4% raise is just a request, not an attempt to re-open negotiations, and it was hoped that there could be a deal to simply waive the increase.

Patrolman Ennis stated that any change requires that there be a re-negotiation; otherwise, it would violate Article XXIV of the contract. In addition, talks would have to be limited to the stated request prior to re-negotiation, otherwise the concern is that the Township could perhaps exclude something like medical coverage.

Mr. Corboy acknowledged that the patrolmen have a contract and that the Township will honor it. However, he had to ask to see if there had been a decision to comply out of respect to the community and those on staff who will not be getting a raise. He requested that this measure be taken to the membership for a vote. That professional staff will also be asked to provide a reduction in cost to the Township was also noted. Mr. Corboy thanked the patrolmen for coming out this evening and stated that he would have been remiss by not raising the question.

Patrolman Vanselous acknowledged that the Township's position was understood and commented that everyone is feeling the pinch. Patrolman Ennis relayed that the question had been put to an unofficial vote but without a give and take, the answer was no. A more formal vote will be taken and the decision forwarded.

The focus of the meeting turned to other budget issues with CFO Luhrs. A revised temporary budget amendment was presented and reviewed. Several new line items have been added per the discussion at the last budget meeting and funds re-allocated. This will have to be adopted at tonight's regular meeting as movement of funds can be made during the first 30 days of the year. A transfer resolution for 2008 funds was also provided. Mrs. Luhrs explained that the Township is out of money in last year's budget to cover all bills due to legal expenses. She has been able to cover more bills than initially thought, but as not all professional bills are in, the total shortfall is unknown although it looks to be in the neighborhood of \$10,000. Whatever the final difference, it will need to be raised in the 2009 budget. She indicated that Attorney Cohen will have to be advised that he will not be paid his full December billing until the budget is adopted.

Mr. Molnar stated that he disagrees with the requested budget for the Farmers Market committee. His position was that the Township shouldn't subsidize this venture; that the charter members should be charged; and, that the Township is supplying the land. Mrs. Luhrs explained that the money was allotted as it will be needed during the first three months of this year; fees can't be used to cover expenses; that the request was for \$500; if money is expended there has to be a line item to charge; and, revenues cannot be anticipated.

Bernie Meader agreed that the Township should not be underwriting this market. He commented that he had hoped that it would be held at the high school with the FFA; that the Township shouldn't get involved with a for profit entity; and, that the group has had all fall to get an organization together and charge dues/fees. Mr. Meader noted that the Township has enough problems without adding a line item for a for-profit organization; that the farmers market should supply a Certificate of Insurance as they have no business encumbering the town with this venture; and, that not a single penny for mailing, literature or printing thereof should be spent on it. They need to form their own organization and do everything through that entity. Although these points were well taken, Mr. Corboy stated that the Township needs to have oversight. This could be accomplished by the Farmers Market committee, according to Mr. Meader, as the Township is not in the real estate or purveying business.

The subject turned briefly to the Fulper lawsuit and funds expended. Mr. Meader encouraged the Township Committee members to sit down with the Fulpers before this matter goes to court. He believes that it can be settled; hates to see hundreds of thousands of dollar spent on something the Township can't afford; and, urged that the two parties sit down without the attorneys as resolution is worth a shot. Mr. Corboy noted that attempts to resolve the matter have been made but the litigant wants the right to come back...something that cannot be. Resolution needs to be arrived at now or the Township will be in jeopardy for years. He also commented that that offers have been made and that this needs to come out.

Ron Shapella added that sitting with the Fulpers was the first thing that was done. He then commented that the Farmers Market decided to have a municipal identify; is not a for profit effort as the money is rolled back; the money is needed for mailing postcards; and, that control is needed as a separate entity would be using Township property.

Returning to the Temporary Budget situation, Mrs. Luhrs noted that there are three attorneys that will be paid over the course of the first three months; that there's a Combe's settlement of \$52,000 in February; and, that the allocation of \$150,000 to the legal line is not a lot considering these expenses. It was decided that the allocation to the Farmers Market would be reduced to \$100 with the remainder added to Legal. This would keep the former line open so that money could be added in April, if needed.

Another exchange ensued over funding the Farmers Market with Betty Jane Hunt stating that there's no justification for it and hopes that the market will be held in the parking lot as opposed to the front yard.

Mr. Meader again commented that the Committee is asking the taxpayers to subsidize hobby farmers when the Township's involvement should be limited to providing space. The market should also be self-sustaining and he urged that this be re-thought. He supports the concept but not a Township underwriting. The group needs to pay their own way in order for this to be sustainable agriculture.

An Appropriate Summary was presented by the CFO that reflects the \$107,000 in cuts made at the last meeting. The sheets show what was originally requested and what was approved. With this information applied to the Revenue sheet, the tax rate was reduced by \$.02 cents. Additional revenue numbers have come in. Court exceeded original projections but Construction and other Fees were down. With the adjusted revenues, the increase in tax rate stands at \$.05 cents and a local tax rate of \$.21.

However, it was noted that this assumption is based on the receipt of the full CMPTRA money. The sheet with CAP calculations was reviewed. At this point, the budget is \$102,503 over the 3.5% allowed with the adoption of a cap ordinance. Available options include reducing appropriations or finding additional revenues. A brief discussion ensued on budget process and extraordinary aid. In order to apply for the latter, the budget has to be introduced and has to be under cap. The three biggest line items are Legal, Garbage/Trash, and Salaries & Benefits. Mr. Shapella commented on the escalator clause in the fuel purchase and asked that the County's program also be investigated.

A discussion ensued concerning the choices mentioned. With the Township now responsible for the Calton development, Mr. Molnar commented that this is not the time to reduce manpower at the DPW. Mr. Corboy offered that an explanation to the residents is needed as to the budget situation. Garbage runs approximately \$8000/month and clean up has been cut. The former is already in the budget for the first three months and charging a fee for the latter is under discussion. However, these revenues cannot be anticipated. Concern was also expressed over the effect on the recycling program should garbage be discontinued. Attention turned to salaries. It was noted that police salaries run approximately \$550,000/year and \$500,000 covers the salaries of all other full and part-time employees. The possibility and viability of shift changes for police was briefly touched on.

Mr. Molnar requested that Randy Hoagland speak about his line painting and chip seal programs. Mr. Hoagland indicated that although the roads will deteriorate without chip sealing, it is not needed at this time. As for the lines, once the roads have been lined, it must be maintained. This is the third year that no painting was done and the lines are starting to disappear. Rocktown-Lamb., Corsalo, Rock Road East & West and Goat Hill need to be done. Mrs. Luhrs indicated that line painting has been removed already and that chip seal has not been discussed yet as it is a capital project.

Mr. Corboy offered that lay-offs and a reduced work week be considered...possibly by 10%. As the Township has many part-time employees that work different days and hours, any reduction would need to be structured carefully.

The Committee has some homework to do and another special meeting is needed. The next meeting will be held January 27th at 4:30 p.m.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:08 p.m. on motion by Molnar, seconded by Corboy.

Respectfully submitted,

Lora L. Olsen, RMC
Township Clerk