

MINUTES
FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE/BOARD OF HEALTH
WORK SESSION/REGULAR MEETING
THURSDAY, MAY 23, 2024
7:30 PM

Franklin Township Municipal Building, 202 Sidney Road, Pittstown, NJ 08867

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Homulak at 7:30 pm. Mayor Homulak read the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) Statement and led the flag salute.

Roll Call: Sebastian Donaruma (present) Michael Homulak (present)
Craig Repmann (present) Deanna Seiple (present) Alexa Tarby (present)

Also present: Igor Bykov, Attorney (Lavery, Selvaggi & Cohen, P.C.)
Christine Burke, Municipal Clerk
Cameron Keng, Chief Finance Officer/Human Resources (CFO/HR)
Heidi Wohlleb, Nisivoccia, Township Auditor
John Benscoter, Environmental Commission

Mayor Homulak briefly explained the agenda.

Comments from the Public on Agenda Items Only:

Elizabeth Basile, 16 Upper Kingtown Road, questioned the Township Committee on the expiring school bond, the ambulance referendum ordinance, and the grant application resolutions. The Township Committee advised that the school bond was not an agenda item and that the ordinance and resolutions would be explained as the meeting progressed.

Proclamations & Presentations: None.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve the May 9, 2024, Township Committee/Board of Health Work-Session/Regular Meeting & Executive Session minutes: Donaruma Second: Seiple
Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Abstain) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

Payment of Bills:

Motion to approve the Bills List: Donaruma Second: Repmann
Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

Budget:

1. Public Hearing and Final Adoption of Ordinance 2024-04: Calendar Year 2024 – Ordinance to Exceed the Municipal Budget Appropriation Limits and to Establish a Cap Bank.

Mayor Homulak explained that the ordinance was an administrative ordinance and requested that the audience limit any comments to the ordinance as the Budget would have its own public hearing later in the meeting.

Motion to open Public Hearing: Repmann Second: Donaruma All in favor. Motion carried.

Mayor Homulak read the following Summary & Explanation:

This ordinance is a standard good practice that establishes a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) and a Cap bank. The Cap bank preserves the ability to use funds in the future which is used to offset unfunded mandates from the State that can't be planned for. This ordinance provides financial flexibility to the Township.

The Chief Finance Officer (CFO) explained that the ordinance is standard practice and adopted every year.

Upon questioning by John Benscoter, 171 Old Franklin School Road, the CFO explained that there was no balance to be seen and that the ordinance provides room in the Budget.

Upon questioning by Karen Sutton, 103 Upper Kingtown Road, the CFO explained that the aim was to keep the average annual increase between 2% and 2.5%.

Motion to close Public Hearing: Repmann Second: Tarby All in favor. Motion carried.

Motion to adopt Ordinance 2024-04: Donaruma Second: Repmann

Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

2. Public Hearing of CY2024 Municipal Budget.
 - a. Resolution 2024-27: Adoption of 2024 Municipal Budget of the Township of Franklin, County of Hunterdon, for the Year 2024.

Motion to open Public Hearing: Tarby Second: Repmann All in favor. Motion carried.

The CFO gave a brief presentation to explain the 2024 Municipal Budget. He explained the Township's operational expenses and that the Township tries to keep its operational expenses inside the 2% increase limits. He explained how state mandates have caused an increase in Police Department staffing, causing a 7.3% tax increase. He explained that the Township has limited revenue sources in its tax base and that development restrictions made to maintain the character of the township results in the need for the township to increase residential taxes. He explained that the Township's operational expenses include the pension and medical benefits, and the salaries of the Township employees. He explained how the national economy has affected the debt and interest rates. He further explained that the Township does seek to reduce costs by utilizing shared services with other organizations, citing that the school's Police Officer is paid for by the school.

The CFO responded to the questions posed by Elizabeth Basile, 16 Upper Kingtown Road, regarding the expiring school bond. He explained the school's options, that the school's budget is set for the year, and that any tax adjustments made regarding the bond would affect the following year's budget.

Frank Tota, 16 Upper Kingtown Road, stated that should the school seek to renew the bond, it would be taking a tax cut away from the residents.

John Bencoter, 171 Old Franklin School Road, questioned the township's options regarding police staffing, specifying the utilization of the State Police for the township's police force. The Township Committee indicated that they have been examining those options for years and explained the costs of switching to the State Police. In response to Mr. Bencoter's further questioning regarding court money, the CFO explained that the money received from various fines or tickets are utilized to off-set court costs. Deputy Mayor Donaruma explained that the municipal court is a shared service with other municipalities. The CFO explained that the Department of Public Works (DPW) utilizes a shared service for street sweeping.

Ingrid Taff, 41 Upper Kingtown Road, questioned the CFO's statements regarding development in the township. The CFO further explained tax revenue to the municipality, and that single family homes would result in a small amount of revenue that would help pay for, but not off-set, the cost of an additional police officer. Committeeman Repmann explained the percentage of a municipal tax bill that remains with the Township. Mayor Homulak explained that the 7-acre zoning limits development, giving the Township no other choice but to raise taxes.

Upon further questioning by Ms. Taff regarding the affordable housing development project behind the Cracker Barrel Restaurant, the CFO explained the Township's affordable housing development obligations, citing court order and state mandates. He further explained that the land would be paid for by the developer and that there was a need for affordable senior housing in the county. The Township Committee commented that Committeeman Repmann was making progress on the project. Committeeman Repmann explained the affordable housing project, citing the Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program that would be implemented with the development. He further explained that the PILOT program would provide additional revenue that doesn't have to be shared with the school. The CFO clarified how the PILOT program works. Mayor Homulak added that Committeeman Repmann had been making great progress in getting water and sewer rights for the project.

Motion to close Public Hearing: Donaruma Second: Tarby All in favor. Motion carried.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2024-27: Donaruma Second: Seiple

Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

Mayor Homulak introduced Heidi Wohlleb, Nisivoccia, the Township Auditor.

Heidi Wohlleb, Nisivoccia, the Township Auditor, left the meeting at 8:03 pm.

Ordinances:

1. Introduction & First Reading of Ordinance 2024-05: Ordinance of the Township of Franklin, County of Hunterdon, State of New Jersey, Petitioning Mary H. Melfi, Hunterdon County Clerk, to Place on the Ballot a Referendum to Gauge Public Sentiment for Raising Taxes to Fund an Appropriation, to be used for the Purchase of an Ambulance by the Quakertown Fire Company.
 - a. Public Hearing and Final Adoption scheduled for June 13, 2024.

Mayor Homulak explained the discussion with Chief Bradley Patkochis, Quakertown Fire Company (QFC), regarding the need for a new ambulance for the township's Emergency Medical Services (EMS). He indicated that the original plan to replace the company's aging ambulances would have resulted in a significant increase in taxes. He further indicated that further discussion on financing options had made the cost significantly less. Deputy Mayor Donaruma and Committeewoman Tarby further explained that the township makes an annual donation to the EMS and that other towns pay more for less service. Deputy Mayor Donaruma indicated that the township would increase its annual donation. The CFO explained that the donation increase would not be represented in this year's budget. The Township Committee briefly discussed the costs of placing a referendum question on the ballot and agreed that there was no need to spend money on a referendum. Committeeman Repmann explained that the ambulance financing donation would be held by the township until needed.

Rick Conley, 17 Landsdown Road, advised those present that the school board may be placing a referendum question on the ballot.

The Township Committee agreed not to proceed with Ordinance 2024-05. The ordinance was not introduced.

Resolutions:

1. Resolution 2024-28: Hunterdon County Municipal Law Enforcement and Emergency Shared Services Mutual Aid Agreement.

Mayor Homulak explained that the mutual aid agreement had been requested by Chief Snyder, Police Department. Deputy Mayor Donaruma briefly explained the mutual aid agreement. The Township Attorney advised that the township could leave the agreement if necessary.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2024-28: Repmann Second: Donaruma

Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

2. Resolution 2024-29: Resolution Authorizing Participation of Franklin Township, Hunterdon County, in the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (State Plan) Cross-Acceptance Process.

Mayor Homulak explained that the State had created a Development and Redevelopment Plan, and that the county was seeking representatives from its various municipalities. He indicated that the county

had also requested that the municipalities pass a resolution authorizing participation in the cross-acceptance process.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2024-29: Seiple

Second: Donaruma

Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

3. Resolution 2024-30: Resolution Authorizing the Application to the NJ Clean Energy Program Community Energy Planning Grant Program.

Mayor Homulak explained that the grant was designed to help municipalities plan their compliance with the State Energy Plan. John Benscoter, Environmental Commission, further explained the grant's purpose, and that the money would be utilized to work on the Township's energy plan.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2024-30: Donaruma

Second: Repmann

Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

4. Resolution 2024-31: Resolution Authorizing the Application to the Hunterdon County Infrastructure Grant Program (HCMIG).

Mayor Homulak explained that the Township Committee had discussed what to apply for regarding the Hunterdon County Infrastructure Grant Program and that the submission deadline was June 28th.

Committeeman Repmann explained that he had followed up with the county to determine how to get the best result and was guided towards focusing on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. He further explained that the Township Committee had already approved some work to be done at the New Municipal Building regarding ADA compliance, specifically improvements to the sidewalks, paving, parking, and future police sally port areas. He indicated that he had met with the Township Engineer at the New Municipal Building to discuss the grant and that the Township Engineer would work with the Township Attorney and Township Clerk to submit the grant application. Committeeman Repmann commented on the fortunate timing of the grant in relation to the township's New Municipal Building project. He indicated his anticipation of a favorable result. Mayor Homulak and Deputy Mayor Donaruma indicated that the recommendation for hybrid meeting technology presented by Elizabeth Basile was not included in this grant but that the Township Committee was still looking into implementing hybrid meeting technology.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2024-31: Repmann

Second: Tarby

Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

5. Resolution 2024-32: ABC License Renewal – Clinton Elks Lodge No. 2434.

Mayor Homulak explained that the resolution was an annual resolution for the maintenance of the license.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2024-32: Repmann

Second: Donaruma

Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

Board of Health: None.

Old Business: None.

New Business: None.

Committee Member Reports:

Deputy Mayor Donaruma reported he had contacted the State representative regarding the Capoolong Creek Trail inquiring about the results of the meeting with the State's Engineer. He explained that the representative had indicated that the meeting had taken place, that the report had been reviewed, and that the meeting had gone well. Deputy Mayor Donaruma explained that the state had some short-term and temporary ideas to make the path safer. He further explained that he would request that a community member be included in any follow-up meetings so that the state could coordinate with the municipality. The Township Attorney requested that he be kept updated.

Committeeman Repmann advised those present that Music Fest would take place at the Clinton Elks on June 15th. He explained that Music Fest was an event to support special needs.

Committeewoman Seiple reported that she had been contacted by parties interested in the newsletter and advised that "Tap Into North Hunterdon" had contacted her with a request for articles.

Committeewoman Tarby reminded those present that the Polo Match would take place on June 8th and that the Hunterdon Games would take place in August. She indicated that an opportunity to sign up for the Hunterdon Games would be posted.

Comments from the Public:

Elizabeth Basile, 16 Upper Kingtown Road, questioned the contributions made by other municipalities to the Quakertown Fire Company (QFC) Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Deputy Mayor Donaruma indicated that Chief Patkochis had explained those donations at a prior meeting. Upon further questioning by Ms. Basile, the CFO explained that the cost of the ambulance was anticipated to be higher than the \$250,000 as initially requested by the fire company, citing that the additional amount would have been paid for by grants, donations, and other sources of revenue.

Karen Sutton, 103 Upper Kingtown Road, questioned how to get her road chipped and oiled as the road needed to be repaired. Upon confirming that Ms. Sutton was requesting to have her road chipped and sealed, the Township Committee forwarded her request to the Department of Public Works (DPW) supervisor.

Executive Session:

The Township Attorney explained the need to enter Executive Session, that action may be taken, and that all attendees of the meeting could wait outside of the meeting room except for the Committee, the Chief Finance Officer/Human Resources (CFO/HR), the Township Clerk, and the Township Attorney.

Upon confirmation of the absence of all but the required attendees, the Township Clerk stopped audio recording of the meeting.

Motion to enter executive session: Repmann
All in favor. Motion carried.

Second: Donaruma

Committee entered Executive Session at 8:29 pm.

Topics discussed:

1. Personnel – Police Department – Staffing.
2. Attorney-Client Privilege/Litigation/Contractual – Lease of Township Owned Property – Quakertown Volunteer Emergency Medical Services (QVEMS).
3. Personnel/Contractual – Department of Public Works (DPW) – Stipend Request.

Committee exited Executive Session at 8:51 pm.

Motion to exit executive session and resume regular meeting: Tarby
All in favor. Motion carried.

Second: Donaruma

The Township Attorney explained the topics discussed in Executive Session, that action would be taken, and that minutes would become available once the need for confidentiality was no longer required.

Action by the Committee:

Motion to authorize the hiring of the individual as discussed in Executive Session, contingent upon his passing the necessary pre-qualifications: Donaruma
Second: Tarby

Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn: Repmann
Second: Donaruma

All in favor. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:53 pm.

Prepared by Christine Burke, Township Clerk



Adopted: 06/13/2024