

MINUTES
FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE
WORK-SESSION/REGULAR MEETING
THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 2022
7:30 PM

(Location Changed to Online Application: Zoom - <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86123578881>)

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Koury at 7:30 pm. Mayor Koury read the OPMA Statement and led the flag salute.

Roll Call: Mayor Philip Koury (present) Deputy Mayor Diane Burgess (present)
Sebastian Donaruma (present) Mike Homulak (present)
Craig Repmann (present)

Also present: Katrina L. Campbell, Municipal Attorney
Christine Burke, Municipal Clerk
Cameron Keng, Chief Finance Officer/Human Resources Officer
Captain Timothy Snyder, Police Department
George Reichert, Office of Emergency Management (arrived 7:40 pm.)
Virginia Evans, Board of Education (arrived 7:35 pm.)
Mike Chabra, Project Manager, New Municipal Building

Comments from the Public on Agenda Items Only:

Upon questioning by Mayor Koury, Elizabeth Shaw, 18 Locust Grove Road, indicated that she was attending the meeting to see who had been appointed as Mayor and congratulated Mayor Koury on his re-appointment as Mayor.

Proclamations & Presentations: None.

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the January 6, 2022 minutes Re-Organization & Work-Session/Regular Meetings:

Donaruma Second: Homulak

Roll call: Burgess (Aye) Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Koury (Aye) Repmann (Aye)

Payment of Bills

Motion to approve the Bills List: Repmann Second: Burgess

Roll call: Burgess (Aye) Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Koury (Aye) Repmann (Aye)

Ordinances: None.

Resolutions: None.

Staff Administrative Reports:

NEW MUNICIPAL BUILDING PROJECT MANAGER: Mike Chabra, Project Manager, reported on the results of the meeting he had with the New Jersey Department of Corrections (DOC) the previous week along with the Township's project architect and the CFO, indicating that the meeting had gone well.

ADMINISTRATIVE: The Township Clerk reported on the status of the new finance employee, Ibrahim Keita, indicating that he had taken over processing requisitions, dog licenses, deposits and had begun learning tax collection. She also reported that the Deputy Clerk continues to learn the duties of the Technical Assistant in the Construction Office.

CFO: The CFO praised the efforts of the new employee, Ibrahim Keita, indicating that he had accepted extra hours the previous week and has been helpful in the tax collection process and the shift in staff duties. He reported that the Finance Department had completed turning over the new year, applying the Temporary Budget, and had begun working on the Annual Budget. Upon questioning by Deputy Mayor Burgess, the CFO indicated that Mr. Keita had expressed a serious interest in taking Finance Officer and Tax Collector classes but was focusing on his current duties in the Township. He further indicated that Mr. Keita had investigated the possibility of taking courses later in the year. Mayor Koury praised the efforts of the administrative staff during the transition process.

BOE: Virginia Evans, Board of Education, reported that the Board of Education had begun working on the school's Annual Budget, anticipated to be completed in March or April. She provided an update on the repair of the school's oil tank.

OEM: George Reichert, Office of Emergency Management, reported that he had attended a meeting regarding the Raritan River Basin Plan for flooding. He indicated that he had expressed concerns about South Branch flooding. Mayor Koury explained to those present that Mr. Reichert had indicated that he would be retiring and thanked Mr. Reichert for his years of service to Franklin Township.

Board of Health: None.

Old Business:

1. New Municipal Building (43 Lower Landsdown Road) – Status Update

Mayor Koury indicated that Mike Chabra had reported on this subject earlier in the meeting during the Staff Reports and agreed to maintain the status updates on the New Municipal Building as an "Old Business" item on future agendas.

New Business:

1. Proposal for Professional Services: Oak Grove Road Improvement Project – Phase II

Mayor Koury explained that this proposal was for the approval of Phase II for the project and that Phase I of the project had been placed on hold pending the approval of Phase II. The CFO responded to Deputy Mayor Burgess' questions regarding possible work to straighten or widen the blind curve on Oak Grove

Road, indicating that he would speak to the Township Engineer but that the proposal was mainly for the maintenance and repair of the road.

Motion to approve Proposal for Professional Services: Oak Grove Road Improvement Project: Burgess

Second: Repmann

Roll call: Burgess (Aye) Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Koury (Aye) Repmann (Aye)

2. Discussion Item: Request to Change Meeting Location of February 10th Town Committee Meeting and Public Hearing for Ordinance 2022-01 to an In-Person Meeting.

Mayor Koury explained that the Township had received a request to change the meeting location of the February 10th Town Committee Meeting and Public Hearing on Ordinance 2022-01 from an online Zoom meeting to an in-person meeting. The Committee discussed moving the meeting to the school or fire house, COVID-19 concerns, technical concerns regarding online and hybrid meetings, and the Committee's meeting procedures for the past two years. The Township Attorney advised the Committee on how to address technical concerns regarding attendees speaking over one another and placing time limits on individual statements.

Elizabeth Shaw, 18 Locust Grove Road, recommended posting guidelines on the Township website before the meeting and expressed her preference for an online Zoom meeting, citing the ability to include more people and maintain civility.

Upon further discussion regarding a possible hybrid meeting that includes both online and in-person opportunities for the public to speak, Committeeman Donaruma indicated that there was not enough time to set up the hybrid technology and the Township Attorney advised against using a hybrid system without the proper technology. Mayor Koury recommended that a hybrid meeting system be installed in the New Municipal Building. Committeeman Homulak indicated that there needed to be a conscious effort to make sure people were addressed when utilizing an online meeting. Mayor Koury indicated that he had requested that the Township Planner attend the Public Hearing to avoid problems with misinformation as experienced by Alexandria Township.

In response to Committeeman Donaruma's concerns that the Committee would be criticized either way, and his request to postpone the Public Hearing, the Township Attorney indicated that the New Municipal Building would not be available for use until the end of the year. Mike Chabra, the New Municipal Building Project Coordinator, confirmed that the earliest the building could be available would be late summer to early fall, depending on the HVAC order. Mayor Koury expressed his concerns that the public were confusing the ordinance with an application, explained the tax benefits and controls set by the ordinance, and indicated that he did not want to pull the ordinance now that it had been introduced. Committeemen Donaruma and Repmann expressed different interpretations of the statewide referendum question that led to the legalization of cannabis in New Jersey. The Township Attorney advised that discussion regarding the ordinance should take place at the public hearing.

John Benscoter, 171 Old Franklin School Road, expressed his belief that the public hearing of Ordinance 2022-01 would be "explosive" based on events that took place two years ago. He indicated that the

Township needed to include as many residents as possible with additional Town Hall discussions. Committeeman Donaruma agreed that the entire Township needed to be involved and criticized the website for not pushing out new material.

Bruce A. DeRites, 119 Locust Grove Road, stated that his neighbors did not know about the ordinance and questioned the ordinance notice. The Township Clerk explained how the ordinance notice relates to the Annual Meeting Notice and Sunshine Notices regarding Town Committee meetings.

Mayor Koury briefly explained the Township's efforts in the previous year regarding the State's deadlines to opt in or out of cannabis business legislation and responded to Mr. DeRites' questions regarding state limits on cannabis business licenses and attendance at online meetings versus in-person meetings.

Kelly Hoff, 320 Quakertown Road, indicated that there needed to be more public awareness.

The Township Attorney responded to questions by John Bencoter regarding how many licenses were being issued by the State. Mayor Koury reiterated that the public hearing was for an ordinance and not an application from a business.

Elizabeth Shaw expressed her support for more communication with the residents. Committeeman Repmann questioned what further efforts could be applied as the notice was placed in the official newspaper and on the Township website. The Township Clerk explained that her office would be sending out an e-mail blast regarding the ordinance once information was finalized. She further explained the difference between e-mail blasts and auto-push notifications from the website, an add-on option that was not selected when choosing the new website module due to cost. The Township Attorney advised the Committee that they needed to choose whether to carry the public hearing or not that evening. Deputy Mayor Burgess expressed her support for an e-mail blast and questioned if additional background information should be included. The Township Attorney offered to work with the Township Planner to create a Fact or Summary Sheet with a map and instructions.

Mayor Koury responded to Mr. DeRites' concerns that placing information on the website would not make the information accessible to some residents by indicating that they could acquire the information from the Municipal Building. Committeeman Repmann expressed his appreciation of Mr. DeRites' knife-sharpening business. Mr. DeRites and Mr. Bencoter indicated that the Township needed to get the opinions and statements of all residents and not just those on Zoom meetings. Mr. Bencoter recommended that statements be dropped off or forwarded to the Township Clerk to provide to the Committee. Mayor Koury reminded those present that e-mail blasts would only go to those who had signed up on the website.

Upon conclusion of the discussion, Mayor Koury indicated that the Committee would continue with the scheduled online Zoom meeting for the February 10th Town Committee meeting and public hearing of Ordinance 2022-01. He further indicated that comments could be sent to the Municipal Building prior to the meeting to be read into the record and that rules on how to participate would be posted on the Township website.

Committee Member Reports:

Committeeman Donaruma reported that he had begun working on the PBA (Police Department) contract.

Committeeman Repmann reported on his attendance at a 78/22 Coalition Zoom meeting and advised the Committee of an initiative to promote home based businesses.

Deputy Mayor Burgess updated the Committee on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Township. She indicated that the Township had 499 positive cases reported and that the past two to three weeks consisted of 25% of reported cases. She explained that case numbers were decreasing but remained higher than it had been. She further reported that the Environmental Commission would hold their Re-Organization and first meeting of the year on Monday, January 31st, 2022.

Mayor Philip Koury updated the Committee on the status of Bridge F-82 on Lower Landsdown Road, indicating that the County was still waiting on backordered steel before they could begin repairing the bridge. He reported that the Land Use Board did not have a meeting the previous night and that he had met with Amy Overman, the Township's new JCP&L representative earlier in the day. He indicated that the Township's previous representative, Stan Prater, had retired. He further provided an update on the status of the pending weekend storm and explained how residents could report power outages. Mayor Koury advised the Committee that he had been contacted by a company regarding the affordable housing lots behind the Cracker Barrel Restaurant. Mayor Koury thanked the Clerk for scheduling an appointment to pick up the Township's reserved Salem Oak Sapling and indicated that plans should begin on where to plant the sapling. Mayor Koury advised the Committee of correspondence received at the Municipal Building which included the Public Works Department's (DPW) inclusion in the Teamsters Local Union No. 469 and advised those present of changes to the DPW Subcommittee made to accommodate contractual negotiations. He indicated that Committeeman Repmann would replace Committeeman Donaruma on the DPW Subcommittee.

The Town Committee agreed to place a copy of Zoom participation rules and a summary of facts regarding the proposed Ordinance 2022-01 on the Township website.

Comments from the Public:

No members from the public came forward to speak.

Executive Session: None.

Action by the Committee: None.

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: 2/10/2022