

MINUTES
FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE
WORK-SESSION/REGULAR MEETING
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2022
7:30 PM

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

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: Igor Bykov, Attorney (Lavery, Selvaggi, Ambromitis & Cohen)
Christine Burke, Municipal Clerk
Cameron Keng, Chief Finance Officer/Human Resources Officer

Comments from the Public on Agenda Items Only:

Luanne Lange, 107 Sidney Road, requested a tour of the New Municipal Building. Mayor Koury advised that he needed to confirm the Township's liability with the insurance company and requested that she contact him after the meeting to further discuss scheduling a tour.

Elizabeth Basile, 16 Upper Kingtown Road, questioned the status of Mike Chabra as an employee of the Township. The Township Committee indicated that Mr. Chabra is a contracted professional and not an employee of the Township.

Proclamations & Presentations: None.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve the August 11, 2022, minutes Work-Session/Regular Meeting & Executive Session:
Donaruma Second: Burgess

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

Motion to approve the September 8, 2022, minutes Work-Session/Regular Meeting & Executive Session:
Homulak Second: Donaruma

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

Payment of Bills:

Motion to approve the Bills List: Burgess Second: Homulak

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

Ordinances: None.

Resolutions: None.

Board of Health: None.

Staff Administrative Reports:

CFO: The CFO reported that the collection rate for the 3rd quarter tax period was 96%. He further reported that the Finance Department had begun planning for a more expensive financial year due to the State's 24% increase in health insurance rates. He explained that the increase would place a large financial burden on smaller municipalities. Upon questioning by Deputy Mayor Burgess, the CFO explained that the size of the Township's work force makes alternative options cost-prohibitive and that continuing with State health benefits remains the most financially beneficial option. Upon questioning by Committeeman Repmann, the CFO explained that the impact on schools was slightly lower. He advised the Committee that the increase would make it difficult to stay in the 2.5% Budget cap limit. Mayor Koury requested that residents contact their legislators regarding unfunded mandates on smaller municipalities.

ADMINISTRATIVE: The Township Clerk reported that the Clerk's Office continues working on the increase in licensing associated with local events and the more complicated Open Public Records Act (OPRA) requests received over the past two months.

Old Business:

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

Committeeman Homulak reported on the efforts being made to reduce costs and stay in budget. He explained that supply chain issues and cost increases had resulted in a need to adjust the plans. He further explained that the area designated for the community was considered important and would not be cut from the plans. The CFO explained that further discussions with the New Jersey Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Police Department had proven fruitful and supplied some cost saving options. The CFO further explained that Mr. Chabra, the Project Coordinator, had also found significant cost saving options. Committeeman Donaruma clarified that DOC standards could be given waivers if the Township could prove the costs of full compliance were overburdensome, but the Township's compromises would still bring an improvement to the Police Department. Mayor Koury indicated a need for a dedicated file space. Mayor Koury explained that the increased costs and supply chain shortages were not anticipated at the time the property was purchased. He further explained that additional improvements could be made in the future.

2. Discussion Item: Private Sale of 185 Whitebridge Road

Mayor Koury explained that the address listed on the agenda (170 Whitebridge Road) was a typographical error and that the subject property was 185 Whitebridge Road. He indicated that the State had expressed some interest in the property due to contact from a party interested in purchasing the property. Brief discussion followed regarding property owner versus interested party and how that information may affect the Township's discussion regarding preservation. Committeeman Homulak indicated that the State had supplied a list of properties they had prioritized for preservation and expressed concern that the list comprised approximately 55% of the Township. He requested that the list be narrowed down. The Township Committee discussed the State's priority list, how to apply the Township's preservation and development goals, the State's ability to preserve without Township approval, zoning restrictions, design standards, school capacity, development restrictions and how they affect market values, and the limitations of farmland preservation in controlling commercial sized farms. Committeeman Homulak commented on the need for more public information for educational purposes. Mayor Koury indicated that Stephanie Miller from the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) would not return to the Township to make a presentation.

3. Discussion Item: Zoning Complaints – Corner of Croton Road and Quakertown Road

Mayor Koury read the Zoning Officer's response to complaints regarding a perceived perpetual yard sale on the corner of Croton Road and Quakertown Road. He indicated that the Township may wish to consider placing a Yard Sale and Garage Sale definition in the Zoning Ordinance. Upon expressed interest by Committeeman Donaruma, Mayor Koury indicated that he would contact the Zoning Officer for recommendations.

New Business: None.

Comments from the Public:

Elizabeth Shaw, 18 Locust Grove Road, expressed her support for making some parameters on garage sale restrictions. Mayor Koury indicated that he would have the Zoning Officer research the matter and supply recommendations.

Frank Tota, 16 Upper Kingtown Road, requested clarification on cost saving measures regarding the New Municipal Building. The CFO and Township Committee provided a brief explanation on required and optional items, and where the Township can apply cost savings via waivers. Mr. Tota commented on the current percentage and criteria of farmland preservation. Mr. Tota further commented on perpetual yard sales, running a business as a reseller, and perpetual wood sales as an eyesore. Committeeman Donaruma indicated that the sale of wood could be covered under Right-to-Farm depending on the size of the operation. Mayor Koury responded to Mr. Tota's questions regarding farmland preservation criteria, indicating that the Township was attempting to keep development rights along County roads to address traffic concerns and that criteria would change as Committees change. Deputy Mayor Burgess indicated that there was no official check list for preservation criteria. Mayor Koury reminded those present that farmland preservation was permanent and that the Committee needed to make smart preservation and development decisions.

Ingrid Taff, 41 Upper Kingtown Road, questioned how many people were affected by the insurance rate increase. The CFO explained the number of Township employees, that only full-time employees had access to insurance benefits, and provided additional figures. He further explained that the State has full control over State health benefits. Mayor Koury and Deputy Mayor Burgess commented on State mandates, the State's control over a variety of services, and the State's focus on urban centers.

Upon questioning by Committeeman Homulak, the Township Clerk confirmed that Mr. DeRites would be attending the October 27th Township Committee meeting to provide a status update on the EDIT group.

Ingrid Taff, 41 Upper Kingtown Road, questioned if farmland preservation and Right-to-Farm included cannabis. Mayor Koury and Deputy Mayor Burgess indicated that cannabis was not included in Right-to-Farm at this time. Mayor Koury further indicated that hemp was included in Right-to-Farm.

Deanna Seiple, 593 Cherryville Road, recommended opening the New Municipal Building to start renting space to the public as a source of revenue for the Township. She questioned if the \$1 Billion in COVID-19 relief money could be utilized to offset the cost of health insurance. The CFO explained that the State would not allow the relief money to be utilized to off-set health insurance rates. Mayor Koury indicated that the Township had received some COVID-19 relief funds, but the available funds were significantly lower for Hunterdon County.

Jim Parker, 255 Oak Grove Road, indicated that he had looked at the Bid package for the Oak Grove Road paving project and questioned the length of Phases I and II. The CFO explained the phases for the project and how the Engineer's planning goes through phases. Deputy Mayor Burgess explained that the phases were broken up based on the amount of funds being provided. Mr. Parker expressed concerns regarding speeding on Oak Grove Road after the road is repaved. Committeeman Donaruma indicated that Chief Snyder would assign officers when complaints are received. Committeeman Donaruma further indicated that the Township was still working on acquiring signs. Upon Mr. Parker's expression of concern over a blind curve on Oak Grove Road, Deputy Mayor Burgess explained that the concern had been mentioned in the past. Committeeman Donaruma indicated that he would reach out to Chief Snyder.

Elizabeth Basile, 16 Upper Kingtown Road, questioned if speed bumps could be placed on Oak Grove Road to address the speeding concerns. Committeeman Donaruma explained that the State only allows the use of speed bumps in limited situations. Ms. Basile requested that the CFO explain Tax Sale Redemption of Lienholders. The CFO briefly explained the tax sale process.

Christina Faragalla, 205 Sidney Road, read a statement regarding Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and explained that someone had contacted her regarding experiencing difficulties in accessing public meetings. She questioned what could be done to make the meetings more accessible. Mayor Koury explained that meeting locations could be changed with adequate notice. The Township Clerk explained that the resident would need to contact her to address the issue.

Committee Member Reports:

Deputy Mayor Burgess reported on the results of the Environmental Commission meeting, specifying dry wells in the Croton Road and Quakertown area, and informative items that had been placed on the Township website regarding the Emerald Ash Borer and an upcoming presentation at the Commission's next meeting. She briefly discussed locations for a collection box to recycle candy wrappers. Mayor Koury reminded those present that there was a collection box for recycling printer ink cartridges in the Municipal Building lobby.

Committeeman Donaruma reported that he had been working with the Police Department regarding the New Municipal Building and that he would have more information regarding a special officer for the school at the next meeting.

Mayor Koury reminded those present that they should call Jersey Central Power & Light (JCP&L) when they lose power.

Executive Session:

Mayor Koury explained the need to enter Executive Session, that action could be taken, and that all attendees of the meeting could wait outside of the meeting room except for the Committee, the CFO/Human Resources Officer, 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: Homulak Second: Repmann
All in favor. Motion carried.

Committee entered Executive Session at 9:03 pm.

Topics discussed:

1. Personnel/Contractual – Department of Public Works
2. Attorney/Client Privilege – Legal Advice – OPRA, Zoning Regulations
3. Real Property – Status of Township Owned Lands

Committee exited Executive Session at 9:56 pm.

Motion to exit executive session and resume regular meeting: Repmann Second: Burgess
All in favor. Motion carried.

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

Action by the Committee:

Motion to advertise for the Department of Public Works (DPW) position as discussed in Executive Session: Burgess Second: Repmann All in favor. Motion carried.

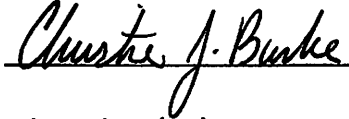
Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn: Donaruma Second: Repmann

All in favor. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:56 pm.

Prepared by Christine Burke, Township Clerk



Adopted: 10/13/2022