

**MINUTES  
FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE  
WORK-SESSION/REGULAR MEETING  
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27, 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  
Chief Timothy Snyder, Police  
Virginia Evans, Board of Education

**Comments from the Public on Agenda Items Only:**

No one from the public spoke regarding Agenda Items.

**Proclamations & Presentations:**

1. Economic Development and Implementation Team (EDIT) – Bruce DeRites – Team Updates

Mayor Koury provided a brief explanation of the Economic Development and Implementation Team.

Bruce DeRites, 119 Locust Grove Road, introduced members of the group that were in attendance and explained that the group consisted of twelve members. He provided a brief history of the group. He explained the group's efforts to seek out clean and sustainable tax revenue and savings in the Township.

He identified the following potential pursuits:

1. Private investment in a single-story Senior Living facility ideally located on a county road.
2. Single contractor for both garbage and recycling collections per recommendation from the Environmental Commission.
3. Siting of a Farmers/Crafters/Specialty services Market, ideally located on the New Municipal Building grounds or in one of the Township's Neighborhood Business Zones.
4. Home and property owners who can expand their living spaces or build additions or barns for rental purposes.
5. Agri-Tourism networking of Township farmsteads, Bed and Breakfasts, and Farms by scheduling venues.

Mr. DeRites expressed his belief that these areas of opportunity could result in increased income for local businesses and stakeholders. He requested assistance with communicating with all Franklin Township residents and property owners. He indicated that the team would like to seek feedback from Township residents via survey. He further indicated that the team would like official status in the Township and have members of the Township Committee and Land Use Board (LUB) serve as liaisons. He explained that the group had been in contact with Marc Saluk, the Hunterdon County Director of Economic Development. He suggested that a round-table be held which includes interested residents, business owners and the County Director of Economic Development. He explained that the team viewed their efforts as a business start-up and reiterated the group's need to begin networking and marketing. He further explained that the group anticipated taking three to five years to draw a profit. He reiterated the group's commitment to the success of the Township.

Mayor Koury expressed his appreciation for the group's efforts and acknowledged the difficulties the group faces in achieving their goals. He offered some outreach opportunities, citing the Franklin Township School, the Township website, and county resources. He commented on efforts to bring fiber-optic high-speed internet to the county, citing internet access difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. He explained the need to work with surrounding towns to groom home businesses. He recommended that Mr. DeRites speak with the CFO regarding opportunities of financial support from the Township. Deputy Mayor Burgess explained that the Township Committee could authorize the creation of an Ad-Hoc subcommittee and recommended that the Committee seek the advice of the Township Attorney.

Upon questioning by Mr. DeRites, Mayor Koury explained the Township's investigation into producing a newsletter created by the Township staff that could be emailed and posted on the Township website with opt-in options for a physical mailer. He further explained that the community advertisement recently circulated in the Township was not authorized by the Township.

Committeeman Homulak expressed his appreciation for the group's efforts and his interest in the Senior Living facility. He recommended that the group strategically focus on one effort. He explained that long-time senior residents on fixed incomes had been contacting him regarding the need for tax relief and advised that unplanned preservation results in higher taxes on individuals. He indicated that such long-time residents were being forced out of the Township due to high taxes even though they did not wish to move.

Committeeman Repmann expressed his appreciation for the group's efforts and explained that the Township did not have a lot of businesses. He briefly commented on identifying properties, expressed his interest in a Senior Living facility, and explained the Township's one parcel of property slated for affordable housing. He further explained concerns regarding supplying water to development projects and that he had been in contact with the county regarding infrastructure improvements.

Committeeman Homulak agreed that water was important to a Senior Living facility. Brief discussion followed. Committeeman Repmann expressed his preference for focusing on a Senior Living facility over agri-tourism. Additional discussion followed regarding some hurdles that development projects face in the Township.

Deputy Mayor Burgess agreed with the group's approach to reach out to a broader audience and recommended that the group reach out to the Township Clerk to place information on the website and email to website subscribers. She explained that developers did not see the benefit of coming to the Township. She recommended that the group complete a cost-benefit analysis and start by focusing on one or two items on the group's list that would provide the best benefit for the available resources.

Committeeman Donaruma advised that with some planning, developers could be drawn to the area as a place where people can invest. He and Mayor Koury expressed their support for a farmer's market. Committeeman Donaruma explained that transportation infrastructure was lacking in Hunterdon County and that he had mentioned his concerns to the county. Brief discussion followed regarding the creation of a farmers' market in a central location. Deputy Mayor Burgess advised that a local farmstands resource link was located on the Township website.

Upon questioning by Mr. DeRites regarding fee schedules, Mayor Koury explained that there was no fee schedule for farmers' markets and that it would have to be included by ordinance. He explained that the Township Committee would be entering Executive Session later in the meeting to discuss potential zoning regulations regarding yard sales and Air B&Bs with the Township Attorney.

Liz Shaw, 18 Locust Grove Road, commented on transportation in Hunterdon County, specifying the County's Link bus. She expressed interest in utilizing grants to expand the service.

Mr. DeRites briefly discussed a timeline to proceed, seeking to advertise in early winter with a newsletter mailing.

The Township Committee thanked Mr. DeRites and the EDIT group for the presentation.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve the October 13, 2022, minutes Work-Session/Regular Meeting & Executive Session:  
Repmann                      Second: Homulak

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

Payment of Bills:

The CFO and Mayor Koury explained that though the Bills List contained a reduced number of checks, a large check to the school for the transmission of taxes was included.

Motion to approve the Bills List: Donaruma                      Second: Burgess

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

Ordinances: None.

Resolutions: None.

Board of Health: None.

**Staff Administrative Reports:**

**POLICE:** Upon questioning by Committeeman Repmann, Chief Timothy Snyder reported that the Police Department was prepared to assist with the Township's Trunk-or-Treat Halloween event. Mayor Koury requested that Chief Snyder prepare a public safety notice that could be e-mail blasted to residents, warning runners and bicyclists that it now gets dark early and that they should wear reflective clothing when traveling on the Township's roads.

**CFO:** Upon questioning by Mayor Koury, the CFO reported on efforts to plan the 2023 Budget, indicating that cost increases would make it difficult to keep the Budget within required limits. He explained that decisions were being made on where to accept increased costs and where to reduce services. Discussion followed regarding utilization of cooperative pricing options, the failure of efforts made by municipalities and other organizations to challenge the State's increased health insurance rates, examples of how cost increases cause reductions in services, and the importance of maintaining the Capital Budget Plan.

**ADMINISTRATIVE:** The Township Clerk reported that the Township's Bulk Waste Day would take place on Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, and would include an opportunity to recycle electronic waste. Mayor Koury read the flyer advertising the electronic recycling event. The Township Clerk reminded those present that Election Day would take place on Tuesday, November 8<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 AM to 8:00 PM in the Quakertown Fire Company and that the Vote-By-Mail ballot box would remain open until 8:00 PM on Election Day. Deputy Mayor commented on early voting options available in the County. Mayor Koury confirmed that the Clerk would be providing refreshments for the poll workers. The Township Clerk also reported that there are only three more meetings left in the year and that she was preparing the year-end and new year items.

**OEM:** Mayor Koury indicated that George Reichert was still the Township's OEM Coordinator and continues to supply reports on the Township's Emergency Management activities.

**BOE:** Upon Mayor Koury's questioning, Deputy Mayor Burgess explained historic procedures that would allow the School Board Budget to be voted on by the residents and discussed by the Township Committee if the Budget failed to pass on the School Board Election Day. Virginia Evans, Board of Education, explained that the School's Budget presentation takes place in the spring. She reported on discussions with Chief Snyder regarding the hiring of a Special Class III Officer for school safety and provided a history of access safety to the school, indicating that gates had to be erected to keep drivers out of locations where students had frequent outdoor access. She indicated that the next School Board meeting would take place on November 14<sup>th</sup>. Mayor Koury expressed his appreciation for the school's efforts to increase school safety and reminded those present that rural communities were not exempt from tragedy. Upon Mayor Koury's questioning, Ms. Evans updated those present on the status of school renovations, indicating that the school was waiting on Department of Education approvals and local permits. She provided a brief update on the status of renovations to the One-room Schoolhouse and explained that the school was still waiting for the oil tank to be removed. Mayor Koury reminded

those present that the Township provided some fund assistance for the renovations to the One-Room Schoolhouse via the Open Space Trust Fund. Upon Deputy Mayor Burgess' questions regarding the number of current students versus the maximum capacity of the school, Ms. Evans explained that the school was not at capacity and had room for additional students. She further explained how the school anticipates the number of students likely to be enrolled per year. She provided a brief overview of the School Board's efforts to investigate regionalization options. She advised those present that her term with the School Board was ending. Mayor Koury expressed his appreciation for her efforts.

**Old Business:**

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

Committeeman Homulak reported that Mr. Chabra, Project Coordinator, had received the positive feedback from the Department of Corrections (DOC) and that the plans had been returned to the architect to make the necessary revisions. Committeeman Donaruma explained the efforts to receive DOC approval and that the plan included current and future phases. They indicated that the revised plan had resulted in significant savings, and that once the plans were finalized with official DOC approval the Township would go out to bid. They further indicated that some of the work could be done by the Department of Public Works (DPW) to reduce costs.

**New Business:** None.

**Committee Member Reports:**

Committeeman Donaruma indicated that he had already provided an update on the status of the New Municipal Building.

Deputy Mayor Burgess reported that the Environmental Commission would be meeting the following Monday and that she would be meeting with the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) on Wednesday, November 9<sup>th</sup>.

Committeeman Repmann indicated that he had already spoken regarding the Trunk-or-Treat Halloween event earlier in the meeting.

Mayor Koury commented on the Township's electronic recycling event and supplied a status update on the resident who had complained that they did not have power and needed the Township's assistance to restore power to their home. He indicated that Jersey Central Power & Light (JCP&L) had turned off the resident's power, that the Township had performed the necessary inspection and supplied documentation to the power company, and that the issue now had to be handled by the power company. He explained the efforts of the Land Use Board (LUB) to address a solar panel installation application. He further explained concerns regarding the Township's current solar panel ordinance, that he had been in contact with the LUB chairman, and that the Township Planner had been contacted regarding the current ordinance wording that makes solar panel installations more expensive for residents. He reminded those present that Daylight Savings Time ends on November 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Comments from the Public:**

John Benscoter, 171 Old Franklin School Road, questioned the Police Staff Report. Chief Snyder explained that the detailed monthly report was provided in the first meeting of the month. Mr. Benscoter requested that a detailed plan for the New Municipal Building be supplied to the public. He indicated that the plan should include the start of the plan, costs, changes, accounting, and reconciliations. He criticized the lack of details in the Township Committee meeting minutes. Committeemen Homulak and Repmann briefly explained negotiations with the Department of Corrections (DOC) and costs. The Township Clerk explained that minutes are meant to be a record of the actions taken at a meeting and not a verbatim transcript of the words spoken.

Bruce DeRites, 119 Locust Grove Road, stated that the current Municipal Building was not Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. Citing Linda Peterson's difficulties in navigating the stairs, he requested that all future Township Committee meetings be moved to the Franklin Township School. The Township Committee briefly discussed and supported moving the Township Committee meetings to the Franklin Township School.

Linda Peterson, 438 Quakertown Road, expressed interest in the scheduled meeting between the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) and Township officials on November 9<sup>th</sup>. She questioned how the Township would inform the public of the meeting's results as the meeting was not open to the public. Deputy Mayor Burgess explained that the meeting was being hosted by SADC staff and provided a list of attendees. Deputy Mayor Burgess indicated that she would offer further information on the results of the SADC meeting at the Township Committee meeting scheduled for November 10<sup>th</sup>. Upon further questioning by Ms. Peterson, Mayor Koury and the CFO explained that preservation percentages were established by the Master Plan and discussions over the past four to five years regarding the difficulties the Township is facing in balancing the Budget due to reduction in taxable properties. Ms. Peterson briefly commented on her difficulties in navigating the Municipal Building stairs. Mayor Koury and the CFO explained efforts to address the ADA compliance concerns in the current Municipal Building, citing the costs of installing a chair lift in the building. Ms. Peterson commented on the Quakertown Solar Farm Application currently being addressed by the Land Use Board (LUB) and the stormwater impacts of such solar farms. Mayor Koury requested that she bring her concerns to the LUB, and Deputy Mayor Burgess indicated that the Environmental Commission would be doing an environmental impact study on the application. Mayor Koury further explained that the LUB must address applications based on current State Law and that current State Law views solar power as an inherently beneficial use.

Sharyn Sawczak, 7 Nixon Farm Road, questioned why the Township would consider wasting money on upgrades to the current Municipal Building. Mayor Koury and the CFO indicated the investigation into installing a chair lift was a due diligence effort to explore all options in response to public concerns. They explained that the Township had been exploring the cost effectiveness of renting equipment rather than installing permanent upgrades.

John Rolfe, 170 Whitebridge Road, questioned why video feed could not be added to Township meetings to include more members of the public. The Township Clerk and CFO explained legal, technical, and financial issues regarding hybrid online and in-person public meetings. Upon questioning

by Committeeman Homulak, it was indicated that hybrid meetings were being conducted in Ocean County. Committeeman Donaruma explained that online meetings were allowed due to an emergency order by the Governor and anticipated that such meetings would no longer be allowed once the emergency order was lifted. Mr. Rolfe questioned if the agenda for the SADC meeting scheduled for November 9<sup>th</sup> would be placed on the Township's website. Deputy Mayor Burgess indicated that an agenda could be placed on the Township's website if one was provided and reiterated that she would provide a report on the meeting at the November 10<sup>th</sup> Township Committee meeting. Mayor Koury read an email from the SADC member that was coordinating the meeting and indicated that no agenda had been provided.

Bruce DeRites, 119 Locust Grove Road, questioned how preservation of the farm on Whitebridge Road would affect the preservation percentage goals of the Master Plan. Committeeman Donaruma indicated that preserving the farm would bring the Township's preserved land percentage above 30%. Mayor Koury explained that the meeting with SADC and the County was intended to discuss a prioritization plan for preservation in the Township. Mayor Koury reminded those present that most recently built homes in Franklin Township had been built on historic farmlands. Upon Mr. DeRites' commentary that not all farmland was equal, Mayor Koury indicated that preservation requests were historically approved without strategy and acknowledged that preservation in the Township needed to be done strategically.

Executive Session:

The Township Attorney 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 Chief of Police, 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: Burgess Second: Homulak  
All in favor. Motion carried.

Committee entered Executive Session at 9:32 pm.

Topics discussed:

1. Personnel/Contractual – Police Department
2. Personnel/Contractual – Department of Public Works (DPW)
3. Contractual – Township Software
4. Attorney/Client Privilege – Legal Advice – Zoning Regulations (Garage Sales, Yard Sales & Short-term Rentals)
5. Attorney/Client Privilege & Contractual – Special Officer for School

Committee exited Executive Session at 10:26 pm.

Motion to exit executive session and resume regular meeting: Homulak Second: Repmann  
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 authorize the CFO to enter into the software contract as discussed in Executive Session:  
Burgess            Second: Donaruma


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

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn: Repmann    Second: Unrecorded                    All in favor. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:29 pm.

Prepared by Christine Burke, Township Clerk

  
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Adopted: 11/10/2022