

MINUTES
FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE/BOARD OF HEALTH
WORK SESSION/REGULAR MEETING
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2024

Meeting time changed to 7:00 PM

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

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Homulak at 7:02 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: Lawrence P. Cohen, Attorney (Lavery, Selvaggi, Abromitis & Cohen)
 Igor Bykov, Attorney (Lavery, Selvaggi, Abromitis & Cohen)
 Christine Burke, Municipal Clerk
 Bradley Patkochis, Chief, Quakertown Fire Company/Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
 Christopher Vallat, Deputy Chief, Quakertown Fire Company/Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

Executive Session: (01)

Mayor Homulak 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 Township Clerk, and the Township Attorneys.

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: Seiple Second: Donaruma
 All in favor. Motion carried.

Committee entered Executive Session at 7:03 pm.

Lawrence P. Cohen, Attorney (Lavery, Selvaggi, Abromitis & Cohen), arrived at 7:03 pm.

Topics discussed:

1. Attorney-Client Privilege/Potential Litigation/Contractual – Lease of Township Owned Property – Quakertown Volunteer Emergency Medical Services (QVEMS)

Lawrence P. Cohen, Attorney (Lavery, Selvaggi, Abromitis & Cohen), left at 7:56 pm.

Committee exited Executive Session at 8:00 pm.

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

The Township Attorney explained the topics discussed in Executive Session, that action would not be taken, and that minutes would become available once the need for confidentiality was no longer required.

Mayor Homulak explained that the meeting had been scheduled a half hour earlier than the regularly scheduled time and entered Executive Session immediately due to scheduling conflicts with the Township professionals. He briefly explained the agenda.

Comments from the Public on Agenda Items Only:

No one from the public spoke regarding Agenda Items.

Proclamations & Presentations:

1. Quakertown Fire Company – Status Update

Chief Bradley Patkochis, Quakertown Fire Company/Emergency Medical Services (EMS), introduced himself and other members of the fire company, and explained that a state report had been completed regarding volunteerism in the state. He further explained that the report concluded that volunteerism had declined throughout the state, that emergency volunteerism required hundreds of hours of training, and had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. He briefly described the state taskforce's recommendations and the number of Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) that live in Franklin Township, are active in the community, are in training and are preparing to reinstate their certifications. He further described efforts to continue training EMTs, including online and high school training. Recommendations were made for giving tax credits and other incentives to volunteers as an encouragement to continue volunteering. He indicated that Franklin Township is doing well for a small municipality and was in a better position than other municipalities. He expressed his desire to remain ahead of the issue. He indicated that the Quakertown Fire Company also retained a small but dedicated career staff that helps to maintain a level of consistency in the company.

Chief Patkochis proceeded to explain that the company has two ambulances that serve the community and that one of the ambulances had blown an engine the previous day and would need either replacement or repairs. He further explained that the fire company is paid to provide EMS services to the township at an amount of \$26,000 per year, supplemented in recent years by a COVID-19 grant. He explained that the cost of an ambulance had increased and that a plan was needed to repair or replace the company's current equipment. He indicated that a plea for assistance had been presented to Alexandria Township and Union Township in addition to Franklin Township, and that he was requesting an increase in the township's EMS budget.

Deputy Mayor Donaruma advised that an increase in the EMS budget would require a subcommittee discussion and that budgets of prior years had not contained increases since none had been requested.

He indicated that the Township Committee would now seek out ways to increase the EMS budget and provide additional support for the service.

Mayor Homulak explained that the issue had been “kicked down the road” for years and that EMS funding was not provided in the same manner as the fire department, which is its own taxing authority. He indicated that the township must seek both short- and long-term solutions and it is appropriate to share the burden with other municipalities that utilize the service.

Brief discussion followed regarding the fifteen years of Quakertown Fire Company’s emergency medical services, diversifying funding sources, the EMS capital budget, purchasing new versus used vehicles and equipment, staggering the maturity of vehicles to ease the burden on the budget, and incentives to increase volunteerism.

Upon Deputy Mayor Donaruma’s recommendation to read the state report, the Township Clerk confirmed that she could provide the report upon request to anyone who was interested.

Chief Patkochis further commented on the Junior Firefighters team of eighteen- and nineteen-year-old volunteers, explaining that though the team is being trained they often leave the township due to lack of affordable housing opportunities.

Bruce DeRites, 119 Locust Grove Road, commented that his son had started at the age of 15 and questioned the fire company’s current outreach methods. Chief Patkochis explained that social media had been the company’s best recruiting tool and provided an example of junior volunteers that had come from outside the community due to the positive reporting placed on the social media platform. He further explained community day events at the local area high schools and that training did take place at Polytech. Upon further questioning by Mr. DeRites, Chief Patkochis explained how other municipalities determine their EMS budget.

Committeewoman Tarby commented that volunteers gain contacts and experience if they are seeking to turn their positions into career paths. Chief Patkochis confirmed the networking advantages of volunteering.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve the January 25, 2024, Township Committee/Board of Health Work-Session/Regular Meeting and Executive Session minutes: Donaruma

Second: Repmann

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

Ordinances:

1. Introduction & First Reading of Ordinance 2024-01: An Ordinance of the Township of Franklin, County of Hunterdon, State of New Jersey Authorizing the Lease for Hunting Purposes of Certain Property Owned by the Township and Not Required for Public Purposes.
 - a. Block 5, Lots 2 & 3 (approximately 11 acres), more commonly known as the municipal property behind the Cracker Barrel.

b. **Public Hearing and Final Adoption scheduled for March 7, 2024.**

Mayor Homulak, the Township Attorney, and the Township Clerk briefly explained the purpose of the ordinance and how it interacted with the proposed and contracted development of affordable housing on the site.

Motion to introduce: Donaruma **Second: Repmann**
Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

Resolutions:

1. **Resolution 2024-20: A Resolution Authorizing the Township of Franklin to Enter a Cooperative Pricing Agreement with the Hunterdon County Educational Services Commission (HCESC).**

It was explained that the Department of Public Works (DPW) supervisor had recommended the agreement as another purchasing source.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2024-20: Repmann
Second: Seiple
Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

2. **Resolution 2024-21: Tax Sale Redemption of Lienholder – Certificate #23-00005 – Block 28, Lot 35 – 241 Quakertown Road.**
3. **Resolution 2024-22: Tax Sale Redemption of Lienholder – Certificate #22-00017 – Block 49, Lot 32 – Route 12.**

Motion to adopt Resolutions 2024-21 and 2024-22: Repmann
Second: Tarby
Roll call: Donaruma (Aye) Homulak (Aye) Repmann (Aye) Seiple (Aye) Tarby (Aye)

Payment of Bills:

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

Old Business: None.

New Business: None.

Committee Member Reports:

Mayor Homulak updated those present on a zoning violation complaint made against 24 Baker Road, which was explained at the previous meeting. He explained that the Zoning Officer had issued five summonses with a court date of Monday, February 12th, 2024, and that the matter was now in the hands of the court. He further explained the efforts of the Police Department to address traffic concerns on Baker Road due to the large trucks going to and from 24 Baker Road. Deputy Mayor Donaruma and the Township Attorney explained that the violations were now accumulating an ongoing

daily fine. Mayor Homulak explained that the Zoning Officer was grateful for the assistance of the public in addressing this ongoing matter.

Mayor Homulak further reported on the following:

- Volunteer retention and recruitment.
- Township newsletter and community engagement to be provided by Committeewoman Seiple.
- Status update on the New Municipal Building to be provided by Committeeman Repmann.
- Status update on the Capoolong Creek Trail to be provided by Deputy Mayor Donaruma.
- Township budget is being prepared by Mayor Homulak, Committeeman Repmann and the Chief Finance Officer (CFO).
- Status update on the affordable housing development behind the Cracker Barrel Restaurant to be provided by Committeeman Repmann.
- Scholarship opportunity to be provided by Committeewoman Seiple.

Deputy Mayor Donaruma reported on the Police Department's efforts to address tractor trailer traffic on Baker Road and that no additional burglaries had been reported in the area. He further reported on his attempts to contact the State representative regarding the Capoolong Trail and indicated that efforts were progressing to address the trail's repairs.

Committeewoman Tarby reported that she had attended governing official training over the weekend and indicated that the township had great staff that addressed all that she had learned. She indicated that she was working on the township newsletter with Committeewoman Seiple and had met with the Chief Finance Officer (CFO), and had spoken with County Commissioner Soloway, regarding community uses for the New Municipal Building property.

Committeewoman Seiple reported that Committeewoman Tarby was spearheading efforts to utilize township property for community purposes and explained that the township portion of the New Municipal Building property was smaller than the county's portion. She indicated that it would be better to utilize the county's open space for community purposes. Committeewoman Seiple further reported that she was working with the high school on advising of a scholarship opportunity via essay submission. She indicated that she would supply further details through the Clerk's Office.

Committeewoman Tarby further reported that the Community Easter Egg Hunt was scheduled for March 23rd, 2024.

Committeeman Repmann reported on the progress of the New Municipal Building renovations project, explaining the status of current construction and the anticipated completion date. He further reported on the affordable housing development project behind the Cracker Barrel Restaurant, explaining that he had conversations with Ingerman and that he anticipated a response in the coming week. Upon Deputy Mayor Donaruma's questioning, Committeeman Repmann clarified an anticipated completion timeline for the New Municipal Building seemed to be on target with a two-to-three-month completion if the permits were quickly approved.

Comments from the Public:

Bruce DeRites, 119 Locust Grove Road, requested an update on the natural gas leak that had taken place on a property located on Locust Grove Road in August of the prior year. He indicated that he had attempted to call the fire marshal but had not received a response. Deputy Mayor Donaruma explained that he would have to follow-up with the fire marshal. Chief Bradley Patkochis explained that no product remained on the site, but some equipment might remain. Mr. DeRites questioned the delays to the completion of the New Municipal Building. Committeeman Repmann advised Mr. DeRites to contact the Construction Department.

Shirly Sakos, 10 Baker Road, questioned the response to violations made against 24 Baker Road. Chief Bradley Patkochis explained the fire department's response and the directive not to enter the buildings in the event of a fire due to safety concerns. He further explained that the efforts to address the violations were a two-pronged approach in conjunction with the Zoning Department. Upon Ms. Sakos' expressed concerns regarding the safety hazard of the property, Chief Patkochis indicated that the fire department had a good understanding of the challenging atmosphere. He further explained that the property was privately owned, and that the township had to go through the legal process to have it addressed. He encouraged patience. Upon Ms. Sakos' further commentary regarding calling the police regarding the trucks on Baker Road and a clogged drainage pipe, Deputy Mayor Donaruma explained the Police Department's response and confirmed with Committeeman Repmann that the Department of Public Works (DPW) was aware of the clogged pipe. Bruce DeRites commented that Locust Grove Road had signs installed regarding truck traffic and recommended the same for Baker Road.

Jane Bowers, 32 Baker Road, questioned the affordable housing proposed behind the Cracker Barrel restaurant. Committeeman Repmann explained that the affordable housing was slated to be a 55 and over community. Mayor Homulak explained that the decision was made to avoid stressing the school and because affordable senior housing is needed in the county. Ms. Bowers further commented on the need for additional housing in the township and housing options on acre zoning. Deputy Mayor Donaruma explained that some housing options were not prohibited in the township but would require a variance.

Christina Faragalla, 205 Sidney Road, commented on public interest in accessory dwellings.

Deputy Mayor Donaruma expressed his gratitude for Elizabeth Basile's assistance in addressing the Capoolong Trail repairs and maintenance.

Executive Session: (02)

Mayor Homulak 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 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 9:05 pm.

Topics discussed:

2. Personnel – Department of Public Works (DPW)

Committee exited Executive Session at 9:22 pm.

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

Second: Seiple

The Township Attorney explained the topics discussed in Executive Session, that action would not be taken, and that minutes would become available once the need for confidentiality was no longer required.

Action by the Committee: None.

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn: Seiple Second: Repmann

All in favor. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:22 pm.

Prepared by Christine Burke, Township Clerk

Christine J. Burke

Adopted: 02/22/2024