

**TOWNSHIP OF BLAIRSTOWN
SPECIAL COMMITTEE MEETING
MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2009 – 5:00 PM
TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL BUILDING**

M I N U T E S

OPENING; ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Mach. Those present were Mayor Mach, Mr. Anderson, Mr. Lance, Mr. Lascari, and Mr. Seal. Also present were Clerk Pizzaia and Township Attorney Robert Benbrook.

The **FLAG SALUTE** was conducted.

Mayor Mach explained that a personnel matter listed for closed session is a matter that involved several employees and positions within the township. All involved personnel have been given a RICE Notice, and with the exception of one person, all have expressed a desire to have the matter discussed in open session. For this reason, the matter will be discussed in open session prior holding the closed session. The individual wishing to have a discussion in closed session will not be discussed.

Mayor Mach explained the reason for this personnel matter is because of the 2009 budget and the cuts needed in order to avoid a municipal tax. The reduction of state energy revenue was a significant blow to Blairstown and the Committee is faced with making up for this loss in revenue. At this point, he turned the meeting over to Mr. Lascari to explain his staffing proposal.

Mr. Lascari's proposal includes a 12.3% reduction in staffing hours with a July 1st starting date and is summarized as follows:

Office of Emergency Management – to be determined

Police Department – Director reduced one full day, to work four days a week, 28 hours

COAH/Municipal Housing Liaison – unchanged at 7 hours a week

Recycling Coordinator – No Wednesday hours, Saturday hours remain unchanged

Zoning Officer/9-1-1 Coordinator/Flood Plain Admin. - Unchanged at 17 hours a week

Recreation – Director reduced ½ hour per day for three days for a total of 15 hours a week

Welfare – Unchanged

Assistant Tax Assessor – Reduced one hour, to work five hours a week

Tax Collector/Assistant – Move Tax Collector to Thursday and Friday; Assistant to Monday and Tuesday

Construction – TACO reduced from five days to three days a week; one day at front desk and

one day as needed in office

Office Assistant – Position to be eliminated

Receptionist – Reduced from five days to three days a week

Finance Assistant – From five days a week in Finance to four days in Finance, one day at Reception

CFO – Reduced from 3 ½ days to 3 days a week; with an option to cover one of the three days at remote location

Clerk and Deputy Clerk/Planning and Zoning Board Secretary – No change

Mr. Lascari proposed a change in the health benefits policy to include single coverage for any employee who works 21 or more hours per week and has completed four years of service. Married or family benefits would be paid out of pocket by the employee.

Barbara Emery, CFO, expressed a concern that a reduction in her hours would present a hardship on Michaeline Wozniak, the Finance Assistant. She feels that with the other reductions in staffing, her office will be overloaded.

Patricia Williams, Receptionist, explained the various duties entrusted to her, specifically the continuity in taking in checks and cash.

Rita Bernstein asked Mr. Lascari why he did not have a money savings figure available. She also expressed her displeasure in the Committee announcing the possibility of personnel being let go at a previous public meeting without informing these employees in advance.

Theresa Tamburro, MHL, urged the Committee to consult their department heads before making these changes, since these people are most familiar with the day-to-day operations of the township and may be able to suggest alternatives.

As there were no further comments from the employees, Mayor Mach opened the meeting to the public as well.

Rosalie Murray stated that she believes that this proposal will overload existing employees which will affect efficiency. She also stated that she believes that a municipal tax must be introduced, as she feels these measures are only stop-gap. Mr. Lance strongly disagreed, stating that when a municipal tax is introduced, the rate will accelerate at an uncontrollable rate. Mayor Mach agreed that when the door is opened, it will be out of control.

Mr. Lance explained the budget that was introduced and the need to drastically cut expenses. He stated that without drastic cuts, the surplus will be spent down to zero in three years, which will necessitate a municipal tax.

A resident on Heller Hill Road said that he appreciates the Committee's attempt to cut the budget, but is not sure it has to be done at the expense of employees, especially in light of the fact that the dollar savings is not known. He would like the Committee to make a similar presentation at a future meeting with actual cost savings figures available.

Fred Cook, Four Corners Road, suggested using 1 cent from Open Space Tax for Municipal Tax. Mayor Mach reiterated that the Committee is committed to having zero municipal tax in Blairstown. Mr. Cook stated that he feels it is wrong to do this at the expense of township employees. Mr. Cook asked what the Committee is sacrificing in this budget. Mr. Lascari replied that he has suggested a 5% pay cut for the Township Committee members.

Anita Ardia, Dry Road, stated that a dollar savings is needed in order to have a meaningful discussion on this matter. Mr. Lascari said that he would work up an approximate amount for discussion later on in the meeting. Mrs. Ardia also expressed that it was wrong to announce job cuts and the possible closing of the recycling center at a public meeting without first discussing it with affected employees.

Al Costanza, Blairstown resident, felt that the Recycling Center could be a money making venture. Mayor Mach stated that this used to be the case, but the days of making money off of recyclables are past.

Carol Cook, Four Corners Road, expressed her concerns in the township selling the Water Company, as she believes the new owners will raise the rates to levels unaffordable by the village residents.

Christopher Boone, East Avenue, spoke about his experiences in dealing with the township employees and always being assisted in a friendly manner. He asked the Committee how long a municipal tax could be avoided, and if this was worth hurting employees. Mr. Lance said it was the hope of the Committee to push this tax off as far in the future as possible.

Theresa Tamburro, MHL, asked if the budget, as introduced, included any municipal employee cuts. The Mayor responded that it did not. Mrs. Tamburro asked if the trigger for these cuts was the loss of the Energy Tax monies, to which Mayor Mach replied in the affirmative.

Rita Bernstein expressed her objection to the employees getting a 2% raise when she is losing her position. Mr. Lance said that the rationale for this is that the remaining employees will be taking on more responsibilities and that it is an incentive.

In response to the many requests for a dollar amount in cost savings by his proposal, Mr. Lascari said that it would be approximately \$50,000 per year. He emphasized that this is a rough approximate. Mr. Lance said that he estimates the amount to be closer to \$60,000.

Gary Nemeckay, DPW employee, asked the Committee to reconsider their proposal to reduce Patricia Williams to part-time status with the loss of family benefits. Mrs. Cook also asked the Committee to reconsider this decision, as did several other people in the audience.

Jeff Jablon, Hope Road, expressed his displeasure in rural municipalities, such as Blairstown, not getting their fair share of State funding. He would like answers on why our tax dollars are not distributed equitably.

As there were no further comments from the employees or public, Mr. Lascari made a motion to institute the changes he outlined as of July 1st, with the inclusion of a 5% decrease in salary of Township Committee members. Mr. Lance seconded the motion. Mr. Seal said that he needed more time to review this information. Mr. Lascari withdrew his motion and Mr. Lance withdrew his second. The Committee was in agreement to defer this matter to the May 13th meeting.

CLOSED SESSION – Possible Acquisition of Property; Possible Sale of Municipal Property – Water Company

Mr. Lance made a motion to enter into Closed Session, which was seconded by Mr. Anderson, with all members in favor.

WHEREAS, the Blairstown Township Committee needs to discuss matters relating to the issues as listed above; and

WHEREAS, the Township Committee believes it to be in the best interest of the public to discuss such matters in closed session;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Committee of the Township of Blairstown, County of Warren, State of New Jersey that it shall meet in Executive Session to discuss only the matters mentioned above, the results of which may be made public immediately thereafter or at a later date.

Dated: April 27, 2009

Attest:

Phyllis E. Pizzaia, RMC
Municipal Clerk

RESULTS OF CLOSED SESSION, if any

Mr. Lance made a motion to come out of Closed Session, which was seconded by Mr. Seal, with all members in favor.

Mayor Mach announced that it was necessary to make an addendum to the bid documents for the sale of the Water Company. Mr. Lance made a motion to authorize the addendum, which was seconded by Mr. Seal.

Roll call vote: AYE – Anderson, Lance, Lascari, Seal, Mach

SUNSHINE STATEMENT

Mayor Mach read the following statement: Notice of this meeting has been sent to three newspapers of general circulation noting the date, time and agenda thereof in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act.

ORDINANCE NO. 2009-05 – AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND “AN ORDINANCE TO CREATE THE POSITION OF MUNICIPAL HOUSING LIAISON FOR THE PURPOSE OF ADMINISTERING BLAIRSTOWN’S AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM PURSUANT TO THE FAIR HOUSING ACT”

Adoption, Second Reading

Public Hearing

Mr. Lascari made a motion to open the Public Hearing on Ordinance 2009-05, which was seconded by Mr. Seal, with all members in favor.

A member of the audience asked what this ordinance was about. Mayor Mach explained that this ordinance added administrative agent duties to the Municipal Housing Liaison.

Mary Flynn, Conrad Court, asked if someone was being hired to fill this position. Mayor Mach reiterated that this added marketing responsibilities to the Municipal Housing Liaison already employed by the township.

As there were no further comments from the public, Mr. Lascari made a motion to close the Public Hearing, which was seconded by Mr. Lance with all members in favor.

Mr. Lance made a motion to adopt Ordinance 2009-05 on second reading, which was seconded by Mr. Seal. There was no Committee discussion.

Roll call vote: AYE – Anderson, Lance, Lascari, Seal, Mach

ORDINANCE NO. 2009-06 – AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND CHAPTER 19-609 OF THE CODE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BLAIRSTOWN ENTITLED “DEVELOPMENT FEES FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING”

Adoption, Second Reading

Committee Discussion

In response to Mr. Seal's question regarding non-residential development fees, Mayor Mach explained that this ordinance sets the amounts to be charged for both residential and non-residential development fees to the maximum amount allowable by COAH. There is some action taking place in an attempt to hold off on the non-residential fee that has gone through one of the Houses at the State level, but at this time, the fees are still in place.

Public Hearing

Mr. Lance made a motion to open the Public Hearing on Ordinance 2009-06, which was seconded by Mr. Seal, with all members in favor.

Anita Ardia, Dry Road, asked for a clarification on the development fees. Mayor Mach explained this to her.

As there were no further comments from the public, Mr. Seal made a motion to close the Public Hearing, which was seconded by Mr. Lance with all members in favor.

Mr. Seal made a motion to adopt Ordinance 2009-006 on second reading, which was seconded by Mr. Lance.

Roll call vote: AYE – Anderson, Lance, Lascari, Seal, Mach

CONSENT AGENDA

R.2009-065 Authorization to Enter Into Contract with an Administrative Agent for the Administration of Affordable Houses

R.2009-066 Petitioning with an Amendment to a Housing Element and Fair Share Plan

A motion to approve the Consent Agenda was made by Mr. Lascari, which was seconded by Mr. Seal. There was no discussion by the Committee.

Roll call vote: AYE – Anderson, Lance, Lascari, Seal, Mach

DISCUSSION: Bid Specifications for purchase of fire tanker

Richard Cook of Blairstown Hose Company No. 1 was in attendance to discuss the bid specifications they have submitted to the Committee for approval. Mr. Lascari explained that Mr. Cook has been asked to attend tonight's meeting due to some concerns by Mr. Benbrook on the specifications.

Mr. Benbrook explained the State report he has distributed to the Committee, which essentially states that competitive bidding on fire vehicles in the State of NJ does not happen. The widespread practice is to write specifications

specifically for a certain make and manufacturer of fire apparatus. Mr. Benbrook suggested hiring a design engineering firm to look at the specifications and edit them to make them lawfully generic. Mr. Benbrook said another possible action is to ask the DCA for a solution to the problem, but he is not suggesting that the Committee take this course of action. In his opinion, the best course of action is to have a design engineer make the specifications as generic as possible without compromising the end result of the fire company getting the tanker they want. The Committee will have a level of protection if an independent engineer reviews and rewrites the specifications instead of using the manufacturer's specifications.

Mr. Lascari made a motion to hire an independent expert to review and rewrite the fire tanker specifications for a cost not to exceed \$2,500.00. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion.

Roll call vote: AYE – Anderson, Lance, Lascari, Seal, Mach

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mary Flynn, Conrad Court, asked the Committee to consider closing the Municipal Building on Fridays to save money. She would like the work hours increased from Monday through Thursday to serve the public later each day.

Theresa Tamburro, Municipal Housing Liaison, reported to the Committee that she recently met with COAH representatives in Trenton to go over our audit numbers and that they have been accepted by COAH. Dan Burton from COAH has told her that we will be on the COAH June agenda for approval. Mayor Mach thanked Theresa for making the trip to Trenton to get this matter put to rest.

As there were no other comments from the public, Mr. Lascari made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Mr. Lance, with all members in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Submitted by:

Phyllis E. Pizzaia, RMC
Municipal Clerk