

TOWNSHIP OF WASHINGTON, WARREN COUNTY

Regular Meeting
August 19, 2014

The regular meeting of the Township Committee was held on this date at the Washington Township Municipal Building, 211 Route 31 North, Washington, N.J. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm by Deputy Mayor George Willan.

SUNSHINE LAW COMPLIANCE – Mr. Willan noted that this meeting was being held in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Law of 1975 in as much as a notice had been published in the Star-Gazette and transmitted to the Express-Times, posted at the Municipal Building and a copy is on file in the Clerk's office. This agenda is subject to change by order of the Washington Township Committee before and/or during the scheduled meeting.

ROLL CALL

Iacobucci, present; Kovacs, present; Rossi, present; Willan, present
Klingel, absent

STAFF PRESENT

Ann Kilduff, Deputy Township Clerk; Peter deBoer, Township Administrator/Certified Public Works Manager; Attorney Katrina Campbell; Deputy Chief Cicerelle; Dave Evans and John Mooney, Township Auditors; Kevin McCarthy, CFO; Jeff Cooper, Assistant Municipal Supervisor of Public Works; Bill Heerwagen, Fire Official; and Joseph Rossi, Construction Official

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Iacobucci, seconded by Rossi, to approve the minutes of the regular meeting held July 15, 2014.

ROLL CALL: Iacobucci, yes; Rossi, yes; Kovacs, yes; Willan, yes

A motion was made by Rossi, seconded by Kovacs, to approve the Executive Session minutes from the regular meeting held July 15, 2014.

ROLL CALL: Rossi, yes; Kovacs, yes; Iacobucci, yes; Willan, yes

DISCUSSION

D. Evans spoke about the property tax increase. He stated the Washington Township municipality has the responsibility for collecting local property tax, local school tax, regional school tax and the county tax; however, they have no control over the amount of taxes that are levied by those entities. In 2013, the regional school levy inadvertently omitted a debt service in the amount of \$700,000 causing the levy to drop. In 2014, the levy included both the 2014 and the 2013 debt service payments. This resulted in a severe spike in local property taxes. Warren Hills agreed to amend their levy and spread it over the next seven years. The omission was not the fault of the municipality.

Mr. Willan opened the meeting to the public for anyone wishing to speak regarding the tax discussion.

Victor Costa, 12 Candlewood Drive, feels those responsible for the mistake should not have a job. He had questions regarding the need for a regional school and issues with the quality of the schools. D. Evans stated concerns regarding the school system and their employees should be addressed to the Board of Education.

D. Evans noted the omission was only made in Washington Township, not in the other districts attending the regional school district.

Cathy Witte, 159 Cemetery Hill Road, stated her taxes went up approximately 10%. D. Evans explained this is due to minor increases across the board, but the majority is from the omitted debt payment. C. Witte questioned the debt service. Mr. Willan explained she would need to discuss that with the school board. C. Witte questioned the purchase of a DPW Garage. D. Evans directed her to discuss this with the governing body after the tax discussion. Mr. Kovacs noted on the average \$250,000 home, taxes increased \$805.00; however, the Township's portion was \$40.00. Township residents are seeing a double increase this year. Mr. Willan stated the municipality's portion of the increase is less than \$4.00 per month on the average \$250,000.00 home. Mr. Kovacs read each entity's increase/decrease to the audience. C. Witte questioned the shuttle. Attorney Campbell stated most of C. Witte's concerns are with the county and the school board. The municipality has no control over those expenses.

Paul Sararo, 15 Mill Pond Road, pays taxes to the schools although he has no children in the school system and asked if that could be changed. D. Evans stated one would have to lobby the State Legislature. P. Sararo asked is there is anything the Committee can change. Mr. Willan explained the Committee and school board worked together to spread the tax increase over a seven year period. This will be reflected on a revised tax bill which will be mailed in September. Mr. Willan explained the tax appeal process and Attorney Campbell explained assessed values.

Tressa Lau, 3 Cider Lane, questioned why an analysis wasn't done to uncover the fact that something was missing. D. Evans explained that can only be verified through an independent verification at the regional school board as there is information from various municipalities. T. Lau asked about the decision to spread the increase over seven years and if

the school is doing any financing to recover the money. D. Evans explained the school has been paid by the Township with money from the sale of the old municipal building. The Township is now waiting seven years to recover the \$700,000.00 and cash flow needs will need to be reviewed to ensure there is sufficient money to run the municipality. D. Evans explained tax payments will be adjusted beginning with 4th Quarter 2014. T. Lau would have liked to see more information on the website and a postponement of the mailing of the tax bills.

Chuck McDaniel, 10 Deer Run, feels someone should have asked questions when they received the invoice. D. Evans stated the Township is statutorily obligated to pay quarterly payments to the schools. C. McDaniel asked when notices were first sent. K. McCarthy stated the Township became aware shortly before the tax bills went out. Mrs. Iacobucci stated checks and balances are being set up for all seven entities. She stated the Committee is listening to the public and thanked them for coming to express their concerns. The Committee is finding better ways to serve the community without increasing the costs.

Pete Basile, 14 Kinnaman Avenue, feels money should be taken from the sale of the old municipal building to pay the taxes. He doesn't feel there is a need for a new DPW building. Attorney Campbell advised him to discuss this later in the meeting.

Bernie Vittie, 42 New Hampton Road, thanked Mrs. Iacobucci for her concern for the citizens; however, he still needs to find a way to pay the bill. He stated his taxes increased \$11,000 over the 25 years he has lived in the Township. B. Vittie would like more advance notice of his tax bill and information. He would like the Township to review and discuss payments to the schools and find ways to cut back to help the residents.

Harold Teabo, 226 Washburn Avenue, feels the schools need to reduce spending. As a retired resident he has limited income.

Frank DiBella, 14 Candlewood Drive, questioned the 2% CAP. M. Kovacs explained the CAP is based on the budget, not on the taxes. Warren Hills did make the 2% CAP. F. DiBella feels this error should not have happened and that the school needs to communicate better with the Township.

Frank Molenda, 95 Skyview Drive, feels whoever is responsible for the mistake should not be working. Mr. Willan asked him to address his concern to the school board.

Karen DiNapoli, 2 Candlewood Drive, pointed out to the Committee an error in the newsletter. K. McCarthy explained it is a rounding of the numbers error. K. DiNapoli previously received the total number of students from each sending district and noted Mansfield's and Washington Township's numbers are similar. Washington Township's levy is significantly higher. D. Evans explained regional equalization, which the School Board has no control over. K. DiNapoli and D. Evans discussed having checks and balances. She questioned the Superintendent and School Business Administrator having a salary of over \$100,000.00 yearly. K. DiNapoli feels the Township's solution is not a solution. The residents need to see a bigger savings.

Paul Sararo, 15 Mill Pond Road, asked what the Township is doing to support the residents. D. Evans replied he will work with the CFO to prevent this type of error from happening again. P. Sararo wants someone who will stick up for the residents.

Lisa Whitmore, 12 Port Colden Road, asked D. Evans when he will be helping the Township. D. Evans replied he will be helping before the next tax bill. L. Whitmore stated the DPW has been working at the Port Colden School and asked who is paying for that. Mr. deBoer stated they are working on a bus ramp as the Township has a shared service agreement with the schools. Taxpayers are paying for this work at a reduced rate rather than if they had a contractor complete the work.

Joel Schnetzer, 240 Cemetery Hill Road, feels the township's tax rate has increased more than the county and regional and township schools. He encouraged the residents to attend budget meetings. J. Schnetzer stated there is no money for a farmland preservation program or to buy open space and that 20 Township employees make over \$100,000.00 yearly. Attorney Campbell explained this is a discussion for later in the meeting.

Nancy Anderson, 11 Kinnaman Avenue, would like the school district work with the Township towards a common goal to keep the taxes and debt service down. She feels the person responsible didn't acknowledge the mistake and should have spoken to the Township Committee to find a solution. N. Anderson feels the money from the sale of the old municipal building should be used to pay the taxes, an independent verification should be done, and salaries, benefits and bills should be reviewed. N. Anderson would like the homes in Mansfield reassessed and budget cuts made.

Bill Schroeder, Auditor for Warren Hills Regional School District, stated questions to the School Board can be answered at Tuesday's Board of Education meeting at 7:00 pm at the Board Offices.

Phillip Chappa, 5 Cider Lane, asked if the person who made the mistake is still employed. D. Evans suggested P. Chappa attend the School Board meeting next week. He stated his taxes increased from \$9,000.00 to 15,000.00 and questioned where people are to get the money to pay them.

Jennifer Nemeth, 16 Douglas Lane, asked if there was supporting documentation that this is indeed a township error. D. Evans explained he saw through levy certifications that in 2013 the debt service amount was left off and reemerged in 2014. It is clearly an error on the township.

Hearing no further comments, Mr. Willan closed the public portion of the tax discussion at 9:00 pm.

A motion was made by Kovacs, seconded by Rossi, to authorize the Tax Collector to do a re-billing during September for the November 2014 taxes, to waive interest accordingly on adjusted tax appeals at the discretion of the Tax Collector, and an explanation for the revised bill is to be included in the November 2014 tax re-bill.

ROLL CALL: Kovacs, yes; Rossi, yes; Iacobucci, yes; Willan, yes

Mr. Willan thanked the residents for their time and comments. The Committee understands the issues and stated the Township Auditor will be working with the CFO on checks and balances, which, to the best of his knowledge, does not occur in other towns.

The Committee took a ten minute recess and resumed with all members present.

RESOLUTIONS

A motion was made by Kovacs, seconded by Iacobucci, to approve Resolutions 14-131 through and including 14-133.

14-131 Redemption Resolution – Block 82, Lot 4.01

14-132 Redemption Resolution – Block 40.05, Lot 2

14-133 Redemption Resolution – Block 85, Lot 4

ROLL CALL: Kovacs, yes; Iacobucci, yes; Rossi, yes; Willan, yes

A motion was made by Kovacs, seconded by Iacobucci, to approve Resolution 14-134, Reduction of Performance Guarantee for Pinnacle Hawk Point Developers, LLC.

ROLL CALL: Kovacs, yes; Iacobucci, yes; Rossi, yes; Willan, abstained

STAFF ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

J. Cooper previously submitted a report. Mrs. Iacobucci asked if the work on Mill Pond Road is complete. J. Cooper replied that it has been completed without funding from the County.

J. Rossi updated the Committee on the pot holes in the A&P parking lot. After going to court, the owner of A&P has a contract to fix the holes by September 15th per the Township Engineer's specifications. Mr. Kovacs would like the letter and ordinance regarding Continuing Certificate of Occupancy inspections on the next agenda with J. Rossi present. The Committee agreed.

K. McCarthy had nothing to report.

Mr. deBoer previously submitted a report. He stated he attended an Environmental Commission meeting and has been working with the Chairman of the Environmental Commission and K. Benscoter of the Highlands in regards to the ERI. He is hoping to have it endorsed by the Commission at their September meeting.

Deputy Chief Cicerelle had nothing to report.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business at this meeting.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Mr. Willan opened the meeting to the public. Seeing no one, Mr. Willan closed the public portion of the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

George Hueber, 1202 Butlers Park Road, discussed flooding issues on his property. He provided pictures to the Committee. He would like to know who is responsible for the runoff that runs into the ditch and down the roadway. Mr. deBoer stated G. Hueber has a Butlers Park Road address but lives on a private road. There is a pipe under the road that G. Hueber would like to have replaced with a larger pipe. Rebecca Lunger, 1223 Butlers Park Road explained the property is not flooded by the river, but by the ditch. She has been maintaining the property but believes the drainage ditch goes through Township property. The Committee discussed the situation with G. Hueber and R. Lunger. Per Attorney Campbell, Mr. deBoer will contact the Township Engineer to verify who owns the property. The residents provided Mr. deBoer with their contact information.

Mr. Willan acknowledged a letter from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection regarding the Township's Wastewater Management Plan. He wished to defer this matter to the September 16th meeting in order to include Mayor Klingel in the discussion.

A motion was made by Kovacs, seconded by Rossi, to approve Eileen Parks to attend Fundamentals of Real Property Appraisal classes on September 16, 23 and 30, October 7, 14, 21 and 28, November 3, 11, and 25, and December 2, 2014 in New Brunswick, NJ.

ROLL CALL: Kovacs, yes; Rossi, yes; Iacobucci yes; Willan, yes

A motion was made by Iacobucci, seconded by Rossi, to approve the Service Order Requests for 92 Windemere Terrace, 4 Kayharts Lane, and 33 Port Colden Road. J. Cooper explained the service orders were received from the County. These are the only properties the DPW is maintaining this year.

ROLL CALL: Iacobucci, yes; Rossi, yes; Kovacs, yes; Willan, yes

PAYMENT OF BILLS

A motion was made by Iacobucci, seconded by Rossi, to approve the payment of the bills.

ROLL CALL: Iacobucci, yes; Rossi, yes; Kovacs, yes; Willan, yes

REPORT FROM OFFICIALS

Mr. Kovacs appreciates the residents attending the meeting and trying to find solutions to the tax situation. He shares the same frustration.

There were no further reports from the Committee.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A motion was made by Kovacs, seconded by Rossi, to approve Resolution 14-135, Resolution Authorizing Executive Session for a Meeting Not Open to the Public in Accordance With the Provisions of the NJ Open Public Meeting Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 at 9:48 pm. All were in favor. Attorney Campbell explained the Committee will be discussing a litigation matter regarding DP Warren, a litigation matter regarding a TORT claim notice, and a contractual matter dealing with an interlocal agreement.

A motion was made by Iacobucci, seconded by Kovacs, to come out of Executive Session at 10:34 pm.

ROLL CALL: Iacobucci, yes; Kovacs, yes; Rossi, yes; Willan, yes

Attorney Campbell stated the Committee discussed a litigation matter regarding DP Warren, litigation matter regarding a TORT claim notice, a contractual matter dealing with an interlocal agreement, and other attorney/client privilege matters. No official action was taken. Copies of these minutes will be available at such time the Committee determines there is no harm to the public interest.

ADJORNMENT

Hearing no further business to come before the Committee, a motion was made by Rossi, seconded by Iacobucci, to adjourn the meeting at 10:35 pm. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Kilduff
Deputy Township Clerk