

MONTAGUE TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES

**October 19, 2021
7:00 PM**

OPENING STATEMENT

Mayor Innella called the Montague Township Committee meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. announcing that adequate notice has been provided to the New Jersey Herald and the Sunday New Jersey Herald for publication in which notice was given of the date, time, place and general agenda of the meeting according to the Open Public Meetings Act.

FLAG SALUTE

The Pledge of Allegiance commenced.

ROLL CALL

Present were: Ms. Crawford, Ms. Martin, Mr. Merusi, Mr. Zitone, Mayor Innella
Also present was Deputy Clerk Dana Klinger and Municipal Attorney Rob Rossmeissl

Absent: None

VOUCHERS

Mr. Zitone asked Deputy Clerk Klinger to confirm the check number 22792 was not a duplicate payment. Ms. Martin made a motion to approve the vouchers. Mr. Merusi seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

MINUTES

Mr. Merusi made a motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of September 14, 2021. Ms. Crawford seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

ORDINANCES (Second Reading)

2021-17 AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF MONTAGUE, COUNTY OF SUSSEX, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, TO AMEND SECTION 18-76, ENTITLED 'ZONING FEES', AND SECTION 76-12, ENTITLED 'EXTERIOR DESIGN, ORIENTATION AND APPEARANCE OF DWELLING IN RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS', OF THE TOWNSHIP CODE

Ms. Martin made a motion to approve this Ordinance. Mr. Merusi seconded. Mr. Merusi made a motion to open to public for discussion regarding Ordinance 2021-16. Ms. Crawford seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

With no comment from the public, Mr. Merusi made a motion to close to public. Ms. Crawford seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Deputy Clerk Klinger then called the roll, and the motion to approve Ordinance 2021-16 carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

RESOLUTIONS

2021-100 AUTHORIZE TAX TITLE LIEN REDEMPTION (BL 4, LT 30.05)

Mr. Zitone made a motion to approve Resolution 2021-100. Mr. Merusi seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

CORRESPONDENCE

Community Corp. of High Point (CCHP) – Request for Master Plan Considerations

Montague Township Tax Collector – Acknowledge Certification of Mailing of Added/Omitted Tax Bills – The Township Committee acknowledged receipt of this certification.

NEW BUSINESS

Part-Time Temporary Receptionist -

OLD BUSINESS

Approved: November 23, 2021

DPW Equipment – Chipper Quotes – The DPW Foreman received a few quotes for the purchase of a new wood chipper. After a brief review, the Committee had a few questions regarding the quotes that they would like clarification on. This item will be tabled until the next meeting.

Community Center Caretaker Position – Ms. Martin commented that after the interview process was completed for the position of Community Center Caretaker it is her recommendation that the Township consider hiring Mark Lewandowski. The responsibilities of this position will include: showing the space to potential renters, going over the rules and regulations of the building with the renters, and cleaning the building in between rentals. Ms. Martin added that an item the Committee may want to consider for the Community Center is the addition of blinds for the windows. There currently are no blinds and it makes viewing a projection or slide show difficult. Ms. Crawford also added that there needs to be bumper guards installed in front of the Community Center. Ms. Martin then made a motion to hire Mark Lewandowski for the position of Community Center Caretaker on an as needed basis at a rate of \$17 per hour. Ms. Crawford seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

Land Sale Auction – Attorney Rossmeissl mentioned at the last meeting there was discussion regarding the various Municipal owned properties. These properties are lands that the Township has taken ownership of over the years through tax foreclosures. There are numerous lots, which most of them are very low value, so it doesn't always make financial sense to do a land sale auction on each and every one of these. Attorney Rossmeissl has been working with the Tax Assessor, Jason Laliker on which might be the twenty-five highest valued properties. These properties would be the ones that the Township would try to sell at auction, which if all of the properties sold the Township would be adding about \$750,000 in assessed value back to the tax rolls and \$22,000 a year in revenue which would be split up through local taxes, school taxes and county taxes. Attorney Rossmeissl expects about 20-hours of work to complete the land auction. Mr. Zitone asked if there are lots that are neighboring and would it be possible for the lots to be combined and then sold as one single larger lot. Attorney Rossmeissl replied saying it would absolutely be possible. Attorney Rossmeissl will discuss with the Tax Assessor where some efficiency might be able to be found. Ms. Crawford made a motion to have Attorney Rossmeissl proceed with the Land Sale Auction. Mr. Merusi seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

REPORTS

Construction Department – August 2021 – There were 18 permits issued for the month of August 2021 for a total collected of \$3,491.

Tax Collector – August 2021 - Current taxes collected for 2021 for the month of August 2021 totaled \$2,204,504.77. Prior year's taxes collected \$16,027.19. Prepaid Taxes collected totaled \$12,365.08. Interest collected for the month of August totaled \$7,404.42. \$130 was collected in Tax Sale Costs for a total collected for the month of August of \$2,240,431.46.

Municipal Updates – Deputy Clerk Dana Klinger announced to all in attendance that beginning on Monday, September 27, 2021 paving of New Mashipacong Road will commence. Residents should expect delays. The road will remain open for local thru traffic only. Paving will be from River Road to about Cole Haven Terrace. The work is expected to be completed in one week. If any residents would like millings, they can contact Cory Flynn with Schifano Construction at 908-239-0628. Ms. Klinger also announced that the Township Committee will only be holding one meeting for the month of October, which will be held on October 19, 2021 at 7:00 pm at the Municipal Building.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (limited to three minutes per person)

Mr. Merusi made a motion to open to the public. Mr. Zitone seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Joe Krumpfer – Deckertown Turnpike – Mr. Krumpfer asked if the Township has conducted a market analysis of the market value of the proposed lots for the Land Sale Auction. Attorney Rossmeissl responded, saying no this has not been done yet. Mr. Krumpfer then asked if any of the GP7 lots will be included with the auction. Attorney Rossmeissl replied saying they will not be included. Attorney Rossmeissl further added, that the Township is not in possession of any of those lots, they simply hold tax sale certificates for these lots, they would all have to go through the foreclosure process before they would be eligible for land auction. Mr. Krumpfer asked if the Township has considered consolidating the GP7 lots into one parcel. Attorney Rossmeissl

commented saying, considering the amount of tax sale certificate held on these lots the foreclosure process would be a very onerous foreclosure process and then only after this process would the Township be able to combine all of the GP7 lots into one single lot, if they wanted to do so. Mr. Zitone added that most of the GP7 lots aren't even on an improved road. Mr. Krumpfer added that, that is why he would like to see those lots sold to a developer. Attorney Rossmeissl added, that without the promise of a developer being interested in the properties it would be difficult for the Township Committee to want to proceed with this very arduous and costly process. Mr. Krumpfer then stated if the Township, the County and the School Board were to agree to write off or accept a lower amount on the back taxes of these properties then they would have some value and could be sold, but currently the delinquent taxes alone far exceed the market value. Mr. Zitone added that most of those lots are only 1/3rd acre lots. Mr. Krumpfer would like to see all of the zoning be changed to R4 for those lots as a part of the Master Plan and then combine all of the lots and possibly sell the land to a developer, but the only way any of that will happen, in Mr. Krumpfer's opinion is to get some sort of concession on the taxes. Mr. Krumpfer said if the Committee would be in support of a concession, then he could approach the School and County requesting the same. Mayor Innella asked Attorney Rossmeissl if a concession would be allowed. Attorney Rossmeissl said he doesn't think there could be a tax abatement, but there could possibly be a pilot program of some sort, but in Attorney Rossmeissl's experience he has not been a part of or heard of all three entities agreeing to something like this. Mr. Krumpfer commented that he would be willing to do the leg work, if the Committee would say they are in support of it and then he could go to the School Board and hopefully get their support and then with the Township and School Boards support ask for the County. Attorney Rossmeissl replied saying there really isn't any formal action for the Committee to take on this request, if the individual members would like to express their support they could do so, but there is no formal action at tonight's meeting regarding their support. Attorney Rossmeissl added that the Township does have the power to allow redemption at the price that the tax sale certificate originally sold for before interest accrued, but only certain parties can redeem. The Township is looking to creatively work on this, but there are forty-five separate lots. Each lot will require a separate title search at a cost of \$500 each, plus the hours to do the foreclosures. This process will be very costly to the Township, so if there were a promise of a large payoff when ultimately the land was sold on the other side by a developer, then it would make more sense for the Committee to do that. Mayor Innella added that the Township would be the ones having to lay out all the money and all the work to begin this process, but when it all comes down to it the Township only gets 12-14% back through taxes. Mr. Krumpfer expressed his understanding in this matter and added that the bigger thing for the HPCC is that these properties are putting them over 10% delinquency. Therefore, they cannot get capital improvement loans, there is a bridge that needs to be replaced that they cannot get a loan for. People cannot get FHA Mortgages in the community because of the delinquency rate, at this point it is pretty detrimental to the community, so if there is anything that can be done with the lots they would be happy, even if the Township wanted to donate them to the State.

Mr. Krumpfer also discussed the idea of appointing an investigative Committee for short-term rentals. Mayor Innella added that there will be some movement on the short-term rentals, but they still have to work out some kinks. Mayor Innella will forward the information that has already been received to the other members of the Committee and they will be discussing short-term rentals at the next Township Committee Meeting.

There being no further comment from the public, Ms. Crawford made a motion to close to the public. Mr. Merusi seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

ADJOURN

Mr. Zitone made a motion to adjourn at 8:27 pm. Ms. Martin seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully submitted:

DANA KLINGER, RMC
DEPUTY MUNICIPAL CLERK