

MONTAGUE TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES

March 22, 2022
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: Mr. Krumpfer, Mr. LeDonne, Mr. Merusi, Deputy Mayor Zitone. Also present was Municipal Clerk Eileen DeFabiis and Municipal Attorney Robert Rossmeissl

Excused: Mayor Innella

Deputy Mayor Zitone amended the Meeting Agenda to include under “New Business” Zoning Permit – 127 River Road.

PROCLAMATION – CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH – APRIL 2022

Deputy Mayor Zitone read a Proclamation recognizing and declaring the month of April as Child Abuse Prevention Month in the Township of Montague.

MINUTES

Mr. Merusi made a motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of March 8, 2022 with the correction to the spelling of Sandy Hill to Sandy Hull within the public participation section. Mr. Krumpfer seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

Mr. Merusi made a motion to approve the Executive Session Meeting Minutes of March 8, 2022. Mr. Krumpfer seconded, and the motion carried with Mr. Krumpfer, Mr. LeDonne and Mr. Merusi all voting yes, and Mr. Zitone abstaining.

PROPOSALS – Lawn Maintenance – Mr. Zitone explained that the Township had published a request for proposals/quotes for the Lawn Maintenance of the following properties for the 2022 season. Route 206 Ballfield Rt. 206; Neldon Roberts House, 501 Route 206 North; Armstrong House, 320 River Road; Montague Grange #140, 280 River Road (Perimeter of Building & Parking Lot); DPW, 2 Weider Road, Municipal Building and Heliport Area (Whole Field); 277 Clove Road; Montague Firehouse/Community Center and BBQ Pit Area, 275 Clove Road; Zitone Ball Field, 209 Clove Road. The period of services will be from April 4, 2022 through the week of November 13, 2022. The quotes included the services of lawn cutting every 7 to 10 days, once a month weeding of all beds and a spring mulching of the Municipal Building beds. Service also includes raking around trees, bushes and shrubs on all properties. The Township received seven quotes, in listing from lowest to highest the bids were as follows:

- Wally Costa - \$10,000
- Yarosz Landscaping - \$22,400
- Dickson Landscaping - \$22,500
- One Two Lawn Care - \$33,000
- CRM Lawn Care - \$35,000
- BVG Mowing Services - \$37,500
- Precision Lawn and Landscaping - \$70,000

Mr. Krumpfer made a motion to award the contract for the 2022 Lawn Maintenance to Wally Costa for \$10,000. Mr. Merusi seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote. Clerk DeFabiis then issued this approval Resolution 2022-038.

ORDINANCES (First Reading)

None

ORDINANCES (Second Reading)

None

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

All items listed with an asterisk (*) are considered to be routine and non-controversial by the Township Committee and will be approved by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Committee member so requests, in which case the item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the Agenda.

Mr. Merusi made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Mr. LeDonne seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote for all Consent Agenda items.

CONSENT AGENDA

RESOLUTIONS

2022-036* OUTSIDE LIEN REDEMPTION (BL 18, LT 25)

2022-037* OUTSIDE LIEN REDEMPTION (BL 18, LT 105)

CORRESPONDENCE

Sandyston Township – Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area – Deputy Mayor Zitone stated that the Township of Montague was copied on a letter from Mayor George Harper of Sandyston Township. The letter was addressed to Congressman Josh Gottheimer regarding the change in designation of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area to a National Park as speculated by the NJ and PA Chapters of the Sierra Club. Sandyston Township is also requesting that the NJ Sierra Club provide the Township with various documents and information be forwarded to their attention regarding this matter. The Committee agreed that they would like to be made aware of any information or movement, similarly to the request that was made by the Township of Sandyston. The Township will also copy Sandyston Township to this request.

NEW BUSINESS

Zoning Permit – 127 River Road (*Added at Meeting*) - Deputy Mayor Zitone commented that just this past week the house on 127 River Road completely burnt down after a fire had started. The owner of the home (Angela Brenner) has submitted a Zoning Permit to allow a trailer to be placed on her property temporarily while her house is being rebuilt. Ms. Brenner will need to maintain the property by cutting the grass/hay, along with tending to her animals as there is a small barn on the property. Ms. Brenner would like to use this trailer temporarily as housing for a period she estimates to be about eight months. According to the Township Code, trailers are not a permitted use on residential properties. If the Township so decides they can issue Ms. Brenner a waiver. Deputy Mayor Zitone suggested issuing the waiver for a 90-day period and then revisit and renew as seen fit to ensure that progress is being made at the property. Deputy Mayor Zitone further suggested waiving the Zoning Permit Application fee of \$50. Mr. Merusi made a motion to approve this request with Deputy Mayor Zitone’s suggestions. Mr. Krumpfer seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote. Clerk DeFabiis then issued this approval Resolution 2022-039.

OLD BUSINESS

Foreclosures – Deputy Mayor Zitone commented that the Municipal Attorney, Rob Rossmeissl had sent the Committee Members a listing of all foreclosed Township owned properties for consideration for a Land Sale Auction. The Committee then discussed the different parcels that they would like to have included on the final Land Sale Auction listing. The Committee will tighten up the final listings before the next Committee Meeting.

Walking Paths – AARP Grant – Mr. Krumpfer stated that the Township cannot move further on this Grant Application for a Walking Path until the Township Engineer/Planner comes up with a

cost estimate for the Walking Path. Unfortunately, he has a bit of a backlog of items to get to before this matter can be addressed.

Joint Inter-Municipal Court – Deputy Mayor Zitone explained that Prosecutors for the Joint Inter-Municipal Court were set to get a 2.5% raise for 2022, and soon after Prosecutor Michael Hanifan resigned citing that the 2.5% increase would not cover the extensive amount of work that was required of him since the addition of Blairstown to the Municipal Court. Prosecutor Peter Laemers felt that this increase was very low, and he is asking the Court to reconsider their offer. The Township Committee decided to wait on taking any action to see what the other Municipalities are going to offer. Clerk DeFabiis will reach out to Frankford to see if there has been any other decisions or action regarding Mr. Laemer’s increase in salary. Alicia Ferrante will be hired to replace Mr. Hanifan. Ms. Ferrante would like the members of the Joint Court to consider compensation of \$15,000, which was then negotiated down to \$13,500 by the members, but this figure would not cover any extra costs associated with purchasing materials, discovery and postage, etc., those would be separately reimbursed. Mr. LeDonne then made a motion to approve keeping Ms. Ferrante’s compensation for Prosecutor for the Joint Inter-Municipal Court at the annual salary of \$15,000 and not to include separate billing/reimbursement for the purchase of materials, discovery and postage, etc. Mr. Merusi seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

REPORTS

Recreation – Mr. Merusi stated that the Recreation Committee had a meeting last night in which they discussed some items related to Montague Day, but they felt it would be advantageous to have a separate meeting next Monday to discuss these items specifically. Unfortunately, there will not be an Easter Egg Hunt this year. The Recreation Committee is also looking for Donations for the Fireworks Display for Montague Day.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (limited to three minutes per person)

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

Tasha DeGeorge – Sleepy Hollow Road – Ms. DeGeorge commented that also at the Recreation Committee Meeting there was discussion regarding Skyland’s Stadium. A representative from the Stadium has reached out in hopes of organizing a “Montague Night” where the Township Committee is invited. The Mayor would throw out the first pitch and discounted tickets and food vouchers would be available to the Township Residents. The Township could even invite a band to play at the game; Ms. DeGeorge suggested maybe reaching out to Mrs. Taylor to see if the Bell Choir could play a song. The date would not be a weekend or a Fireworks night; it would have to be a regular game that is played Monday through Thursday. The Committee agreed that they would like to schedule a day to do this and thanked Ms. DeGeorge and the Recreation Committee for her efforts. Ms. DeGeorge also asked if the Land Sale Auction parcels would be advertised. Attorney Rossmeissl replied that an advertisement must be placed in the official newspaper (NJ Herald) two times and will be placed on the Township Website, so the process is fair and open. Ms. DeGeorge also voiced her opposition to the designation of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area becoming a National Park. Ms. DeGeorge urged the Committee to pass a Resolution in opposition similar to that, which was passed by Sandyston Township.

Maureen Kaman – New Road – Ms. Kaman stated that she received the information from the Sussex County Farm and Horse Show for the Township Display and stated that this year’s theme is “Welcome to Our Neighborhood”. The focus is on Local Businesses, Recreational Activities, and Schools. Ms. Kaman is asking for some assistance from the Committee Members because this year is going to prove a bit more difficult than past years. Ms. Kaman echoed Ms. DeGeorge’s feelings regarding the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area; she too is in support of the Township Committee passing a Resolution Opposing the Designation as a National Park.

Sandy Hull – Sandyston Township – Ms. Hull provided the Township Committee with a copy of the Proposal from the Sierra Club along with her thoughts and recommendations as well as a copy of the Sandyston Township Resolution which was passed early in the day opposing the proposal from the Sierra Club for the designation of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area to a National Park. Ms. Hull also received a phone call from Senator Menendez’s Office; his staff in Washington are now aware of the situation and will be looking

into this further. Ms. Hull added that the Group “No National Park” is now prominent on Facebook and will have a website up within the next few weeks. Ms. Hull urged the Committee to take action in any way that they can to get this stopped before it gets to Washington.

John Donovan – Fox Hollow Road – Mr. Donovan spoke regarding the designation of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area to a National Park and the “No National Park” Group. Mr. Donovan stated that the New Jersey Forest Task Force recently contacted him. He received correspondence stating, “ Dear, New Jersey Forest Stakeholder: As you may know the State Senate Environment Committee Chairman, Bob Smith, has conveyed a Forest Stewardship Task Force to see the consensus and prepare a report on actions needed to better protect and manage New Jersey’s Public Forest Lands. As someone who has expressed interest, Mr. Donovan, in the Task Force or who has taken part in recent discussions about Forests in New Jersey, we are providing you with an update on our activities.” Mr. Donovan said the letter then goes on to say there are some meetings coming up and listed the dates. What Mr. Donovan finds very ironic and coincidental is now the State, not necessarily the Federal Government or the Sierra Club, is conducting a focus study in this area and going on to properties and actually seeing what the status of the New Jersey Public Forests are about so there could be an end around. Mr. Donovan indicated that sometimes we could expose ourselves, like when there are many vacant properties, which he applauds the Committee for trying to get these parcels back on the tax rolls. He added that the focus should be on making sure that they are being good Stewards to the forest and the properties that they own so the Township is not exposing themselves to the Federal Government and/or State to think that the Township is not doing good housekeeping and inviting some sort of wherewithal that the Township could lose property again to the Federal Government. The State Task Force includes a member, Julia Ramos, who is also the Chapter Director of the Sierra Club. Therefore, the Sierra Club is already involved with the State as well, so they are not only focused on the Federal Government, so this could be a double whammy.

Donna Dale – Sandyston Township – Ms. Dale stated that she attended the Sandyston Township Council Meeting earlier today and was very impressed with their willingness to oppose the proposition to change the designation of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area to a National Park. Ms. Dale asked the Montague Township Committee to please join Sandyston in passing a similar Resolution in opposition. We share this area and what happens up here effects all of us, and if this goes through it will be in a very profound way. Deputy Mayor Zitone said that he believes that the members of the Committee agree and are all in favor of not seeing a National Park designation in this area. Clerk DeFabiis is waiting to receive a copy of Sandyston’s Resolution from the Sandyston Township Clerk and she will have a similar Resolution placed on the next available Township Meeting Agenda. Deputy Mayor Zitone then thanked all of those members of the public that came out to enlighten the Township Committee on the situation.

There being no comments from the public, Mr. Merusi made a motion to close to the public. Mr. LeDonne seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Merusi made a motion to enter Executive Session. Mr. LeDonne seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

MONTAGUE TOWNSHIP

RESOLUTION 2022-035

WHEREAS the Township of Montague is authorized, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 to exclude the public from that portion of this meeting for purposes of discussing specific matters as permitted by N.J.S.A. 10:4-12; and

WHEREAS the Township intends to discuss certain matters which are deemed confidential pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 in Executive Session; and

WHEREAS at this time the Township cannot determine the time when the discussions to be held in Executive Session will be made public but will disclose the minutes of the Executive Session when the need for confidentiality no longer exists.

NOW THEREFORE, be it resolved by the Township Committee of the Township of Montague that this meeting shall be adjourned to an executive session (closed session) and the public will be excluded in order that the Committee may, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-13(a), discuss Personnel without taking action, and after reconvening this public meeting action may be taken and the Mayor or her designee will announce, if possible, the time when and the circumstances under which the discussion conducted in Executive Session will be disclosed to the public. This resolution is authorized and allowed by and pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-13.

NOW THEREFORE, be it further resolved by the Township Committee that pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-13(b) the time when and the circumstances under which the discussion conducted in closed session of the public body can be disclosed to the public is when the need for confidentiality no longer exists.

Mr. Merusi made a motion to close Executive Session. Mr. Krumpfer seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Mr. Merusi made a motion to open to Regular Session. Mr. Krumpfer seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

ADJOURN

Mr. LeDonne made a motion to adjourn at 8:18 PM. Mr. Merusi seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully submitted:

**EILEEN DEFABIIS, RMC
MUNICIPAL CLERK**