

Approved: October 24, 2023

MONTAGUE TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES

OCTOBER 10, 2023

7:00 PM

OPENING STATEMENT

Mayor Zitone 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. Innella, Mr. Krumpfer, Mr. LeDonne, Mr. Merusi, and Mayor Zitone
Also present were Municipal Clerk Dana Klinger and Municipal Attorney Robert Rossmeissl

Absent: None

PRESENTATION

Certificate of Recognition – Benjamin Smith, Eagle Scout – Troop 150
Mayor Zitone and the Montague Township Committee recognized Mr. Benjamin Smith for his outstanding achievement of obtaining his Eagle Scout Award. Mayor Zitone went into detail on the numerous accomplishments and accolades Ben has received. Mayor Zitone then presented Mr. Smith with a certificate of recognition commending Benjamin for his immense accomplishment and honoring his commendable dedication.

MINUTES

Mr. Merusi made a motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of September 26, 2023, and the Executive Session Meeting Minutes of September 26, 2023. Mr. Krumpfer seconded, and the motion was carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

VOUCHERS

Mr. Merusi made a motion to approve the vouchers. Mr. Krumpfer seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

ORDINANCES (First Reading)

None

ORDINANCES (Second Reading)

None

RESOLUTIONS

None

CORRESPONDENCE

Sandyston Township – Mayor Zitone stated that Sandyston Township has copied Montague on a letter that they have sent to Mr. John Donahue regarding the Redesignation of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area to a National Park. Mayor Zitone added that Montague has sent similar correspondence in the past to the NJ Sierra Club and has received no response. Municipal Clerk Klinger further added that the New Jersey 24th District Legislators have also just recently sent a letter to the NJ Sierra Club in objection to the redesignation.

County of Sussex – Mayor Zitone stated each year the Township of Montague receives funds in Lieu of Taxes for Federally owned lands. This year the Township will be receiving \$3,661.

Cablevision of Warwick, LLC (Altice USA) – Mayor Zitone explained that the Township has received notice of Intention of Franchise Renewal from Cablevision of Warwick. Attorney Rossmeissl further added that the Township will have an opportunity to negotiate a limited amount of terms with Cablevision when the time comes, this notice is just a formality of what they are legally required to submit to the Township during this time and negotiations should begin within the next two or three years.

State of New Jersey Department of the Treasury, Division of Taxation – The Township Mayor and Committee acknowledged receipt of Certification of the Table of Equalized Valuations for Tax Year 2023. Mayor Zitone further added that the average ratio assessed to the true value in Montague Township is 77.48%. Mr. Innella added that in Sussex County alone there are about 14 municipalities that are lower than Montague. Mr. Innella further added that he spoke with the Tax Assessor on this, and the County has Montague near the top of the list for Municipalities to be put on notice for a reevaluation. Attorney Rossmeissl also added that after his conversation with the Tax Assessor feels that the Township will be ordered to do a reevaluation in the next two to three years, and for some reason or another, Sussex seems to be aggressive with this.

Sussex County Board of County Commissioners – Resolution in Support of Assembly Bill No. 5548 prohibiting the State from imposing a Mileage-Based User Fee. Mayor Zitone stated that the State is proposing eliminating the Gas Tax and replacing this with a mile-based user fee regardless of the type of vehicle they use, where each driver contributes based on the miles they drive instead of paying a tax on the fuel they buy. This would be an alternative approach to funding transportation projects. Mayor Zitone and the Committee members were in favor of supporting the County Commissioners in their support of Assembly Bill No. 5548 to prohibit the State from imposing and implementing a milage-based user fee. A resolution will be placed on the next Agenda for approval.

NEW BUSINESS

Family Promise – Mr. Innella stated that a few months ago the Township was contacted by Family Promise, which is a non-profit organization that supports people facing homelessness and housing insecurity through several programs. Services include homelessness prevention and shelter diversion, utility assistance, housing navigation, and support for people exiting the shelter system; support is also available for people who are currently homeless, including case management, education, employment counseling, and access to laundry and showers. Mr. Innella is hoping to get the word out to the Community, he is going to share this information with the School, the Township has the information linked to its website, the seniors are going to have a speaker at one of their meetings, and the Municipal Clerk will also forward this information to HPCC for their distribution.

Tax Lien Sale – Mayor Zitone stated that the Township will be holding an Electronic Tax Lien Sale for unpaid 2022 and/or prior year's taxes on Thursday, October 26th at 8:30 a.m. Municipal Clerk Klinger further added that in order to participate you would have to preregister by October 19th with a deposit. The link is posted on the Township website home page as well as on the Tax Collector's Department webpage or anyone interested can stop in and get or call the Tax Collectors for more information.

OLD BUSINESS

River Road – Junkyard – Mayor Zitone stated that there will be no comment on this agenda item.

Community Center Update – Mayor Zitone stated that he has spoken with Charlie Schaffer, the Township Architect, regarding the bid specs/packet for the Sprinkler System for the Community Center and he stated that he is very close to completion. Attorney Rossmeissl stated that after speaking with the Architect they stated that they are still waiting on one more drawing from the mechanical engineer and then the Township can advertise the request for bids. Mr. Merusi then made a motion to approve advertising a request for bid once the drawings and complete bid packet is completed by Charles Schaffer Associates, LLC. Mr. Krumpfer seconded, and the motion was carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

REPORTS

Construction Department – September 2023 - There were 22 permits issued for the month of September 2023 for a total collected of \$7,385.00 and one penalty issued with a fee of \$4,000 collected in penalties.

Tax Collector – September 2023 – Current taxes collected for the month of September 2023 totaled \$98,675.50, the prior year's taxes collected \$10,217.62. Township Liens collected totaled \$1,224.78, and cost of sale totaled \$22.41 Interest collected for the month of September totaled \$3,175.34, and Prepaid 2024 taxes totaled \$6,110.16, for a total collected for the month of September of \$119,624.81

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (limited to three minutes per person)

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

Ralph Cashell – Minisink Drive – Mr. Cashell asked if anything could be done to possibly get the Sheriff's Office up to the area on a Sunday. There are cars and motorcycles that race down River Road almost every weekend. The noise is unbearable not to mention the safety issue. Municipal Clerk Klinger will reach out to the Sergeant to see if this could be a possibility.

Steve Marris – Mr. Marris explained that he lives in the Community and helps a friend who owns J and J Pizza in Montague. Mr. Marris noted that a few of the Committee members have voted in favor of allowing Short Term Rentals within the High Point Country Club. Mr. Marris then went on to speak about the possibility of "pop-up parties" that have been seen in the news where people post these things online and in a matter of hours hundreds of thousands of people have shown up to a location. Montague does not have a local police force and cannot control something like this. Mr. Marris went on to say that he is a Veteran and is now being forced to move out of the County because his landlord said that they would like to convert the apartment to a Short-Term Rental. They are losing housing for the community with very minimal benefit to the town. Mayor Zitone stated that when the Committee voted to approve STRs in the HPCC the intent was never to hurt veterans.

Edison Avecillas – River Road – Mr. Avecillas stated that he owns and operates several STRs within Montague, not within the HPCC. Mr. Avecillas added that he can understand Mr. Marris' concerns regarding veteran housing, but that is not an issue because of investors or anyone making or converting their home to an STR that is an issue with high-interest rates, builders, issues that have stemmed from Covid-19, not enough housing being built, this is more to blame from the federal government not providing incentives and providing better assistance for our veterans. Mr. Avecillas has never had any issues with his renter's hosting parties and they are explicitly forbidden. Mr. Avecillas then went on to ask about the Lead-Based Paint Inspections in Rental Dwelling Units and where the Township stands with this. Mayor Zitone stated that the Township Committee is not in favor of this mandate, this requirement was not very well thought out. Mr. Avecillas stated that he as a landlord has personally taken it upon himself to pay and get all his properties certified as Lead-free and feels that this should be the landlord's responsibility. Attorney Rossmessl added that for landlords that do not opt to get this inspection done themselves, the Township cannot force them to do it themselves, so at some point, the Township will have to get into the business of conducting lead inspections for landlords who won't do it on their own and that is the problem that the Township is facing.

Dory Downes – Tomahawk Terrace – Mr. Downes stated that last year in June the Township Committee conducted a sale/auction of township-owned properties. Mr. Downes asked if they had any idea of when they might conduct another one. Mayor Zitone stated that they will be doing so next year, more than likely in the spring of 2024. Mr. Downes asked if there was any way for him to request that the Township include certain properties in this sale. Mayor Zitone stated once they start the land sale discussions on the agendas, then he can present those to the Committee. Municipal Clerk Klinger added that if Mr. Downes would like to send an email about the properties, he is interested in she will make a note as she is currently compiling a list of a few items that other residents have mentioned and suggested.

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

ADJOURN

Mr. Innella made a motion to adjourn at 7:48 p.m. Mr. LeDonne seconded, and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully submitted:

**DANA KLINGER, RMC
MUNICIPAL CLERK**