

**TOWNSHIP OF KNOWLTON
COUNTY OF WARREN, STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

**TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING
March 9, 2015**

A regular meeting of the Knowlton Township Committee was held at the Knowlton Municipal Building. Present were Mayor Starrs, Deputy Mayor Cuntala and Township Committee Members Mathez, Farber and Shipps. Also present was Ted Rodman, Municipal Engineer and Leslie Parikh, Gebhardt & Kiefer. The minutes were recorded by Lisa Patton, Municipal Clerk.

Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act by publishing notice of all regularly scheduled meetings in the Star Gazette, Star Ledger or Express Times as well as providing said schedule in the Municipal Clerk's office.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm with a salute to the flag and roll call.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A motion was made by Deputy Mayor Cuntala and seconded by Committeewoman Shipps to approve the January 22, 2015 Township Committee meeting minutes. Roll Call: Mathez – abstain, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – abstain.

A motion was made by Committeeman Mathez to approve the February 9, 2015 Township Committee meeting minutes with an addition to reflect that Mr. Lembeck apologized that he did not receive an e-mail from Committeeman Mathez. Committeewoman Starrs added the check presented from Hardwick Township was made out to Knowlton Fire and Rescue. The motion was seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS:

Brian Peck, DPW Supervisor

Mr. Peck presented a draft budget and reviewed the status of equipment. Priorities include: Wishing Well Road overlay - \$90,000 - \$100,000. Station Road from Vail Road to Poppy's Court. – approximately \$45,000 and Walnut Road.

Mayor Starrs inquired about the status of the Polkville Road overlay project. Mr. Peck said Engineer Rodman will advise if the grant was approved. Committeewoman Shipps will refer a resident with road paving complaints to Mr. Peck. Mr. Peck stated he prefers to apply for a NJDOT grant for Polkville road to shorten the width of the road in some areas because the it is costly and time consuming to maintain.

Mr. Peck reviewed the status of vehicles. He requested a new dump truck estimating the cost at \$150,000. He also noted the sickle bar mower has been out of order since 2010 and the chipper is undersized for needs. Mr. Peck requested the same operating budget as 2014 with \$50,000 included in tar and chip.

Committeeman Farber asked if adequate funds are available for patching. Mr. Peck said funds are included in the operating budget. Mayor Starrs asked what will be responsibilities if a part time worker is added. Mr. Peck reported the worker would possess a CDL license to drive the dump truck and would complete lawn mowing two days per week.

Committeewoman Shipps asked for the cost differential between paving and the tar and chip process. Mr. Peck stated blacktop runs approximately \$85,000 per mile. Tar and chip is much cheaper but is not included in capital items. Committeewoman Shipps inquired about the length of life of tar and chip. Mr. Peck said three to four years.

Committeeman Farber asked about the development of other road processes. Mr. Peck stated a fog seal finish was tried on Nightingale and Honey Run Roads. He stated the process worked well. He also considered other processes and determined they would not work well due to road salt usage.

Committeeman Mathez asked if the Frog Pond Road sign was ordered. Mr. Peck said yes. He also stated road signs are being stolen.

Committeewoman Shipps asked if Mr. Peck spoke to Mr. Gates. Mr. Peck reported he did speak to the resident and explained the type of mailbox is problematic because it becomes brittle in winter months and is prone to breaking. Mayor Starrs asked where the situation was left. Mr. Peck said he did not know.

Mr. Peck requested a 3% increase for DPW employees and a \$3.00 per hour increase for the supervisor.

Discussion took place regarding public works certification courses. Mr. Peck explained the courses would require him to be out two days per week for approximately two years. Committeewoman Shipps asked if Mr. Peck was interested in completing the courses. Mr. Peck said only if it is required. He stated he does not think the courses will enhance performance.

Mr. Peck stated an emergency repair bill has not been paid because the vendor doesn't have an NJ business Registration. Committeeman Farber asked the amount of the bill. Mr. Peck stated \$1,400.00 to \$1,700.00. Mayor Starrs will follow up with the CFO.

Mayor Starrs and Mr. Peck will contact the Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission regarding shared services for salt supplies.

Bill Clifford, Koeck Road, asked why the department no longer uses grits. Mr. Peck explained grit clogs drains. Grits have to be mixed with salt; there are no studies to indicate grit increases traction. Mr. Peck stated Warren County uses grits. He explained that grits are most commonly used in remote areas where snow is packed and salt is not utilized.

PRESENTATION:

Knowlton Fire and Rescue

Bob Peterson, Knowlton Fire President presented a budget report. He stated it costs \$86,700 annually to keep the building open. The company fundraises \$33,000 annually to offset expenses. Mr. Peterson proposed a 5% increase to the Fire and Rescue donation. Discussion took place regarding establishing a threshold dollar amount that the Fire Company pays for vehicle repairs.

Mike Bates, Fire Chief, stated he doesn't feel the Fire Company should bear the sole burden for vehicle repairs. He explained that if the Company disbanded, vehicles would be owned by the Township. Mr. Bates explained a threshold amount would act as insurance to the Fire Company. He also suggested that PILT funds received could be used to establish a vehicle repair fund.

Mr. Bates stated leftover low band radios will be donated to DPW. The radios are worth \$1,500.00 - \$2,000.00. Mr. Bates presented a binder containing refurbished and retrofitted vehicle information. He noted that a loaner truck is provided for the time period of the refurbishment.

Discussion took place regarding a structural fire at 6 Ferry Lane. Mr. Bates reported the fire was contained to the room of origin. Belvidere, Blairstown and Hope fire companies also responded.

Committeewoman Shipps inquired about telephone, direct TV and internet line items of the budget. Mr. Bates explained that the fire company pays commercial price for the services. Committeewoman Shipps also inquired about LODD purchases. Mr. Bates explained the \$1,000.00 line item covers line of duty purchases.

Committeewoman Shipps asked about a \$1,500.00 accountant line item. Mr. Bates explained the accountant prepares and files tax paperwork.

ORDINANCES:

Ordinance 15-02

Ordinance Appointing Personnel Committee Chair As Record Custodian Of Personnel Evaluations (copy attached)

A motion was made by Committeeman Mathez and seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala to open a public hearing for Ordinance 15-02. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

Committeeman Farber stated that the Personnel Committee Chair needs to purchase a fire proof safe to store Township documents. There being no further comment, a motion to close the public hearing was made by Committeeman Mathez and seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

A motion was made by Committeeman Mathez to adopt Ordinance 15-02. The motion was seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution 15-28

Resolution Approving Payment of Vouchers (copy attached)

A motion was made by Committeeman Mathez and seconded by Committeeman Farber to approve Resolution 15-28. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

OLD BUSINESS:

Personnel Manual Revisions

Mayor Starrs reviewed personnel manual revisions. She reviewed changes to vacation, sick and bereavement time policies. She also reviewed cell phone, e-mail, social networking policies and the surrender of Township property form.

Mr. Peck asked for the DPW employee snow day policy to be included in the policy manual. A motion was made to approve the revisions with a change to the pro-rated part time language to clarify part time employees receive two times their weekly scheduled days as vacation benefits.

Attorney Parikh stated that cell phone texts and e-mails are subject to OPRA. Mayor Starrs will draft a letter to employees regarding the revisions. The municipal clerk will distribute revised personnel policy manuals.

Abandoned/Vacant Properties Ordinance

Attorney Parikh explained the ordinance establishes registration requirements for creditors of vacant or abandoned properties. Creditors failing to register would be fined \$500.00.

Committeeman Farber stated if owners don't pay attention to properties now, why would they pay an additional \$100.00 to register with the Township.

Attorney Parikh stated that creditors may also be liable through the Township nuisance ordinance. Mayor Starrs stated she is inclined to table the Abandoned/Vacant Property Ordinance. Committeeman Farber stated the nuisance ordinance may be most important to hold creditors accountable for vacant, abandoned or unsafe properties.

Warren County Municipal And Charitable Trust Fund Conservancy

Committeeman Mathez will follow up with the WCMCTFC to report a Knowlton Township representative is not available to serve on the conservancy at this time.

NJDEP SEP Recreation Wish List

Committeeman Mathez stated he received an e-mail from Larry Si, NJDEP. Mr. Mathez asked Dennis Lembeck, Recreation Director if funding will decrease on the walking trail or interpretive trail. Mr. Lembeck stated the funds should come from the interpretive trail.

George Trongone asked who will be cutting the recreation site grass. Mayor Starrs stated it will be a budget discussion.

Committeeman Farber suggested that the Historic Commission should meet with Fish and Game for discussion of funding and maintenance at Ramsaysburg.

Mr. Lembeck stated additional funding will be needed for new playground equipment. Discussion took place regarding priority items on the SEP Wish List. Mayor Starrs stated the priority list was voted on at the last meeting. Committeeman Farber agreed that the priorities were discussed and stated the trail is a lower priority than the playground due to insurance liability of a playground.

Committeeman Mathez stated the Ramsaysburg project is a viable project and is 4% of the entire funds allocated. Committeeman Farber said he disagrees; the Township was not supposed to spend tax payer money on the project. He also stated maintenance of the property should be handled by the State since they own the land. He stated more maintenance funds from the State are currently planned to be available in the future.

2015 Budget Meeting

A separate budget meeting will be held on March 16, 2015 at 7:00 pm.

150 Vail Road

The municipal clerk will request the status of oil tank removal at 150 Vail Road from Jim Miller, Construction Official.

NEW BUSINESS:

Recording of Meetings

Committeewoman Shippis suggested recording of all Township Committee meetings. A motion was made to approve tape recording meetings by Mayor Starrs and seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shippis – yes, Starrs – yes.

Shared Services

Committeewoman Shippis reviewed S-533, the Common Sense Shared Services Pilot Program. She expressed concern that the Township has not looked into opportunities for shared services. Committeeman Farber stated he took offense to the implication that shared services have not been explored. He stated many shared services exist within the Township and not all shared services are feasible for all Townships. Committeewoman Shippis will look into municipalities willing to share services.

Township Clean Up

Township Committee members unanimously approved Township Clean Up Dates from May 4 – 9, 2015. The Township will utilize the Warren County Landfill voucher system.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Bob McNinch, Vail Road, noted that during the previous meeting he had requested the basis for salary increases in the draft 2015 budget. At that meeting, Committeeman Mathez responded that the basis for salary increases was generally the previous year inflation rate. Mr. McNinch noted that per BLS, the inflation rate was 1.6%

overall for 2014, 1.5% overall for 2013 and so far in 2015 (one month only) negative .1%. Mr. McNinch noted his concern with increasing taxes due to ever higher government costs when average family income is less today than six years ago.

Mr. McNinch stated based on his observations on attending Township meetings over the last two years, the Township Committee was “very secretive” as far as sharing information with the public. He noted he could provide many examples. Mayor Starrs asked for some examples. Mr. McNinch provided two:

- a) For new ordinances the Township Committee does not make readily available to the general public either the wording of the new ordinance or even a description of content prior to holding the “public hearing” session. Ordinance 15-02 of today’s meeting being an example of same.
- b) For executive sessions the Township Committee does not provide the public any information at all as regards to the general content of same and date that the executive session meeting notes will be issued.

It was agreed that the municipal clerk will post pending ordinances on the Township website and municipal building bulletin board. Mr. Trongone, Polkville Road, said there are some problems with Township ordinances. He stated a 37 page sign ordinance is ridiculous. He also said outdoor lighting should not shine beyond the property owner’s property line.

Bill Clifford, Koeck Road, asked for justification of increased legal fees. He stated 2013 legal fees were \$24,721.90. In 2014 legal fees increased to \$40,847.13 with \$14,755.00 charged for personnel matters. He asked how can this increase be justified. Mr. Clifford also stated special counsel retained at \$175 per hour with extra charges shows there is something wrong with this picture. He stated people need to see what is going on.

Mayor Starrs stated she attended an insurance seminar and was advised to follow attorney advice. The municipal clerk will forward legal fee information requested by Mr. Clifford to the attorney. There was no OPRA request. There was no redaction of information.

Mr. McNinch asked when was the last time quotes were received for attorney fees. Committeeman Mathez stated it has been approximately 20 years since solicitation of attorney fees has been considered.

Committeeman Farber stated the fees became off the track last year and he suggested that the Township consider a flat legal retainer fee. He suggested this matter be reinvestigated in 2015.

Mayor Starrs asked Attorney Parikh to check the proposal for a retainer fee vs. an hourly rate.

George Trongone asked if the attorney is present at every meeting. Mayor Starrs said usually the attorney attends one meeting per month. Mr. Trongone stated other towns have moved toward having their attorney present on an as needed basis. Committeeman Mathez stated the Township could be more careful since there may be times an attorney is not needed at meetings.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mayor Starrs and seconded by Committeeman Mathez to adjourn the meeting at 10:15 pm. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa K. Patton
Municipal Clerk
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