TOWNSHIP OF KNOWLTON COUNTY OF WARREN, STATE OF NEW JERSEY

TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING September 14, 2015

A regular meeting of the Knowlton Township Committee was held at the Knowlton Township 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 Richard Cushing, Municipal Attorney. 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 7:00 pm with a salute to the flag and roll call. There being no executive session, there was an intermission until the public meeting commenced at 7:30 pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A motion was made by Committeeman Mathez to approve the August 10, 2015 Township Committee meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes Starrs – yes.

A motion was made by Mayor Starrs to approve the August 27, 2015 Township Committee meeting minutes with an amendment to remove the words municipal clerk and newsletter. The motion was seconded by Committeeman Mathez. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes. The municipal clerk stated the minutes are not verbatim.

A motion was made by Mayor Starrs and seconded by Committeeman Mathez to approve the August 27, 2015 executive session minutes. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

A motion was made by Mayor Starrs and seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala to approve the July 13, 2015 executive session meeting minutes. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

The Township Committee was in agreement to table the February 26, 2015 Township Committee meeting minutes. The municipal clerk will double check if computer purchases was discussed.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Tom Randis, Vail Road

Mr. Randis presented pictures of 150 Vail Road. He stated the residence is in disrepair and the Warren County Health Department reported the structure is unfit for occupancy. The structure is 11 ½ feet from the Randis property and presents a danger to his home. He stated the home has been unoccupied for many years and he never thought the situation would go on this long.

Committeewoman Shipps informed the Township Committee of rodents on the property. Mr. Randis also stated the residence has birds and bees. He stated he has lived in his home for 13 years and may have opportunity to sell the property in the near future. He is concerned that 150 Vail Road affects his property value.

Mayor Starrs explained the Township cannot find the sole person responsible for the property. Mr. Randis stated there is approximately a \$100,000 tax lien on the property. He asked if the Township can take responsibility. Dick Cushing, Municipal Attorney, explained the tax lien process. He stated the Township could file to foreclose. Mr. Cushing reported the estate has many heirs and the notification process would be arduous if even possible to notify each and every heir.

Mr. Randis asked if the building could be taken down and the bill sent to the owners. Mr. Cushing explained that no one in the estate wants the property.

Ron Cheslock, Vail Road, stated the property has value as a building lot. He asked why the Township has not done anything if taxes haven't been paid in 20 years. Mr. Cheslock said he knew Mrs. Strunk for 40 years.

Mr. Cheslock stated the house could come down for less than \$10,000. The Township could sell the property for \$30-40,000. Committeewoman Shipps stated Mrs. Gouger has a lien on the property. Committeewoman Shipps said Mrs. Strunk is very ill but she saw her out a couple weeks ago.

Mr. Cheslock said nothing has been done; the Township instituted 10 acre zoning to keep the Township beautiful. He stated the new zoning officer is never in. Mr. Cheslock said he has a hearing problem and cannot call.

Committeeman Farber stated if the town takes responsibility for all abandoned properties, it will add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars. He said the taxpayers wouldn't want the Township to take responsibility for all unsafe structures.

Mayor Starrs stated there are two properties that are in need of urgent attention. They are 23 Decatur Street and 150 Vail Road. Although the Township has attempted to contact the owners, the result has been a dead end. The question is does the Township Committee want the zoning officer to keep pursuing this effort.

Committeewoman Shipps stated the zoning officer has gotten a response from the family of 150 Vail Road, they don't want the property.

Jessica Randis stated she is concerned with vandalism at 150 Vail Road affecting her family's home. Currently, there are broken windows.

Mayor Starrs asked what steps need to be taken. Committeeman Farber asked what needs to be done to demolish the structure. Attorney Cushing stated the unfit building ordinance allows demolition if the construction official agrees to the need to demolish. An owner can contest the order to demolish and the structure must be checked for asbestos. Mr. Randis said there is no asbestos on the outside of the residence, it is clapboard.

Attorney Cushing said it is permissible to demolish the building and place a lien on the property. Ownership would remain in the estate and the Township could proceed with foreclosure. The only issue is the number of heirs.

Discussion took place regarding the estate, administrator of the estate, and number of heirs. Mr. Randis recommended sending a bill to all heirs of the estate. Attorney Cushing explained they are not liable.

Committeeman Farber stated Zoning Officer Rossi isn't getting anywhere with the estate. Committeeman Farber recommended proceeding with demolition of the structures. Committeewoman Shipps volunteered to obtain quotes for demolition.

Gary Gray stated that as a taxpayer in the township, he will donate demolition of the structures if the township 091415-2

takes responsibility for disposal of the materials. Attorney Cushing asked for an estimate for disposal. Gary Gray estimated \$3,000 to \$3,500. Audience members applauded and thanked Mr. Gray. Committeewoman Shipps stated she will obtain two other disposal quotes.

Committeewoman Shipps asked if she should finish up with the surrogates office regarding a family tree. Attorney Cushing said he will obtain a title search.

Mayor Starrs announced each speaker has 3 minutes on the floor.

Theresa Capriccio Thoene – Columbia Mail Service

Theresa Thoene explained mail service in Columbia is by P.O. box only. She noted the post office closes daily from noon to 1:00 pm which is an inconvenience to some residents who may prefer to have their own mailbox. She explained the Post Master General told her the P.O. boxes were due to an antiquated township ordinance which could now be amended. Mrs. Thoene asked if the Township Committee would look into changing the ordinance. Mayor Starrs will look into the issue.

Mrs. Thoene also stated resident P.O. boxes are free to Columbia residents; businesses are required to pay for the box. She also added Zoning Officer Rossi is very helpful and returns all calls. She keeps in touch with Mr. Rossi regarding 23 Decatur Street. Mayor Starrs reported the mortgage company has a court date in October. Mrs. Thoene thanked the Township Committee.

Bill Clifford – Residents' Petition (copy attached)

Mr. Clifford presented a petition to the Knowlton Township Committee. He read: We the undersigned concerned and responsible residents of the Township of Knowlton, do hereby oppose to the continued expenditures, as indicated herein, for purposes of ousting the long term and dedicated township employee Lisa Patton, Township Clerk. By signing and presenting this official documented petition each signed tax payer / resident of the Township of Knowlton does hereby oppose the Township Mayor and Committee Members continuous actions hiring legal and "special" counsel against the above said dedicated Township Clerk. The following expenditures defined as follows: Lanza - \$19,459.06 plus Gebhardt \$14,801.65, totaling to Date \$34,260.71. Year 2013 total legal expenses Ron Farber, Mayor - \$29,179.00. Year 2014 legal expenses Adele Starrs, Personnel Chair \$36,796.35. Present year 2015 (through August) Adele Starrs Mayor - \$47,607.82.

Mr. Clifford stated no one knew what was going on. He told Mayor Starrs she ran on transparency, this is not transparent. He stated three members of the Township Committee broke the sunshine law. He stated everyone that signed the petition said the Municipal Clerk is knowledgeable, pleasant and helpful to them. He said two residents declined to sign fearing retaliation. He asked the Township Committee to please take heed of the residents' concerns. He also said if the Township Committee does not listen to the residents, the next petition will be for a recall. Mr. Clifford distributed copies of the petition to the Township Attorney, Township Committee Members and Municipal Clerk.

Attorney Cushing advised the Township Committee they are not in a position to comment due to a personnel matter. Mayor Starrs stated people do not have all the information or they wouldn't have signed the petition. Attorney Cushing said the Township cannot defend itself due to the personnel matter.

Attorney Cushing also stated he does not recommend litigation.

Attorney Jeffrey Russo introduced himself as representation for Lisa Patton and stated he is present to protect his client's rights. He stated the Township Committee is violating his client's rights by implication and that in and of itself is a rice violation. Attorney Cushing respectfully disagreed and stated this is not the venue. Mr. Cushing said the Township is not in a position to defend itself due to laws regarding personnel matters. 091415-3

Bill Clifford, Koeck Road, commented that the petition only address finances and the waste of taxpayer money. He stated the municipal clerk is always knowledgeable and helpful. He further stated taxpayer monies are being used for a personal vendetta.

Mayor Starrs stated Mr. Clifford has 5 more minutes to speak. Committeeman Farber stated Mr. Randis was not limited on speaking time; therefore, others should not be.

John Grande, Meadow Ridge Road

John Grande asked why his property taxes increased this year. Mayor Starrs said the increase was due to school taxes. Mr. Grande stated it is very discouraging to come to Township Committee meetings year after year to request improved services. He said the final finish was never put on Meadow Ridge Road.

Discussion took place regarding weed wacking or spraying of Meadow Ridge Road. Discussion also ensued regarding certification of the DPW Supervisor. Mr. Grande said he can never find the DPW workers. Mayor Starrs said she is in contact with the supervisor. Committeeman Farber stated there is also an assistant supervisor. Mr. Grande suggested the Township Committee should keep better supervision over the department.

ORDINANCES:

Ordinance 15-09

An Ordinance Amending Chapter XI Of The Revised General Ordinances Of The Township Of Knowlton Known As The "Land Development Ordinance Of The Township Of Knowlton" With Specific Revisions To Section 11-297.A(3)

(copy attached)

Mayor Starrs read the ordinance by title and explained the Planning Board is recommending changes to bring the Knowlton Township ordinance in line with New Jersey municipal land use law.

A motion was made by Mayor Starrs to introduce Ordinance 15-09. The motion was seconded by Committeeman Mathez. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

Ordinance 15-10 An Ordinance To Establish The Position Of Office Manager

(copy attached)

Committeeman Farber asked if this position needs to be created by ordinance or would a professional services resolution suffice. Attorney Cushing said an employee would be paid through salary while a consultant would be paid by professional services contract. Attorney Cushing explained the ordinance establishes duties and responsibilities.

Mayor Starrs said she envisions the position will be temporary. The salary will be taken from the current municipal clerk/personnel administrator position.

A motion was made by Committeeman Mathez to introduce Ordinance 15-10. The motion was seconded by Committeewoman Shipps. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – no, Shipps – yes, Starrs - yes.

RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution 15-82
Resolution Approving Payment of Vouchers
(copy attached)

Discussion took place regarding Alert All and T&R Alarm invoices. Mayor Starrs explained she approved the Dorrence Hillyerd Plumbing voucher previously held for investigation.

A motion was made by Committeeman Farber and seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala to approve Resolution 15-82. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

Resolution 15-83

Resolution Approving Application For Transfer Of NJABC Liquor License – Hunters' Lodge (copy attached)

A motion was made by Committeeman Mathez to approve Resolution 15-83. The motion was seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

Resolution 15-84 Resolution Declaring A Secure Location For The Housing Of Government Records (copy attached)

Committeeman Farber stated he does not want to tie up the house next door with records storage. He stated there is currently no alarm system in the building. Bill Clifford, Koeck Road, said the building is a wood frame structure. Discussion took place regarding a deputy clerk and office manager position. Committeeman Farber asked who would oversee the deputy clerk. He also suggested that the office manager should be in charge. If the office manager is only one or two days per week, how could they manage day to day operations?

Committeeman Farber asked if the Municipal Attorney could house records for the township. Attorney Cushing stated he should not be involved. Attorney Cushing suggested a secure location in the municipal building for records storage. Mayor Starrs will revise the resolution for the next meeting.

A motion to approve Resolution 15-84 was made by Mayor Starrs and seconded by Committeeman Mathez. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

Resolution 15-85 Resolution Authorizing the Termination of Personnel Administrator (copy attached)

Jeffrey Russo, Attorney, stated obviously this is a rice notice violation since his client was not informed. Committeeman Farber stated only the registrar position is a separate salary from the municipal clerk salary. Committeeman Farber said if the Committee plans to change the salary, the employee needs to be rice noticed. He stated matters are being handled haphazardly. Attorney Cushing said this can be handled at the next meeting with a rice notice. Township Committee members present were in agreement to table Resolution 15-85.

Resolution 15-86 Resolution Authorizing The Hiring Of An Office Manager – Professional Services Resolution (copy attached)

Committeeman Farber said he only received this resolution in his mailbox Saturday morning. He stated this is rushed together and should have opportunity for more input from the Committee. Township Committee members were in agreement to table Resolution 15-86.

Resolution 15-02d
Resolution Amending Compensated Appointments
(copy attached)

Township Committee members were in agreement to table Resolution 15-02d.

NEW BUSINESS:

Intersection of Roy Ace, Clinton Streets and Route 46

Discussion took place regarding NJDOT proposals to change the blinking light at the Route 46 intersection near the firehouse. Mayor Starrs explained 5 options were presented by the NJDOT. Committeeman Farber asked if the light could remain the same. Mayor Starrs reported that the light cannot remain as is, but it is possible to remove the light altogether.

Committeeman Farber suggested that the Township Committee consult with the Fire Company. Committeewoman Shipps will follow up.

Station Road Viaduct

Mayor Starrs reported that the New Jersey State Police are not writing many tickets due to their opposition to Governor Christie's budget cuts. She said the troopers are still writing tickets for cars parked without permits on Station Road. The judge ordered the offenders to remove graffiti from the viaduct. She also reported the no parking signs have been installed. She inquired if the Township Committee would like to repaint graffiti on the viaduct in the fall or once per year. Discussion took place regarding having community service workers repaint the viaduct.

Committeeman Farber suggested that the Township Committee meet with the NJDOT because the viaduct is the jurisdiction of NJDOT. He stated that if the State does not want to maintain the structure, it should be imploded. The Township cannot paint over all the graffiti because it is too high.

NEW BUSINESS:

Legislator's Town Hall Meeting

Committeeman Mathez reported there will be a 24th District Legislators Meeting at the Knowlton Township Municipal Building on October 30th at 10:30 am.

Municipal Building Furnace

Committeeman Mathez stated he was contacted by SuperHeat to inquire if the Township wanted to have the boiler cleaned. The cost is \$580. A motion was made to approve the expenditure by Committeeman Farber and seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala. Roll Call: Mathez – yes, Cuntala – yes, Farber – yes, Shipps – yes, Starrs – yes.

Municipal E-Mail Accounts

The municipal clerk stated Municipal Software, Inc. has recommended that all Township e-mails should be through municipal e-mail accounts. She supplied the phone number for MSI so that officials can set up passwords for their accounts.

Municipal Building

The municipal clerk reported the NJDCA Construction Department has asked for the ramps to be repaired so they do not become safety hazards. They are crumbling at places and have holes which could become trip hazards.

Bill Clifford, Koeck Road, stated he repaired the ramps last year. He said the problem is the ground is deteriorating under the ramps.

Deputy Mayor Cuntala will obtain quotes from masons. Committeeman Farber also suggested a quote should be obtained for the area outside the double doors in the basement.

Discussion took place regarding mold remediation needed in the basement. The Township is waiting for communication from the insurance adjuster. Committeeman Farber stated a sump pump will be necessary to avoid further problems.

Engineer Rodman reported he is working on obtaining quotes for installation of a ductless air conditioning unit in the meeting room. He also stated the NJDOT State Aid Grant Application is due in October. He will apply for Polkville Road in 2015. Committeeman Farber reviewed his instructions for all grant applications to be forwarded to Senator Oroho's office.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Bob McNinch, Vail Road, asked if all ordinances and resolutions introduced at this meeting with significant content were discussed with other Township Committee members. Mayor Starrs said she talked to all Township Committee members individually.

Paul Ritter, Brook Hollow Winery, reported that he purchased land across from Stark Road. He intends to plant vines and build another structure mirroring the current building. He will be putting together a site plan. Mayor Starrs inquired about parking on the premises. Mr. Ritter said he plans to have paved parking.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no other business, a motion was made by Committeeman Mathez and seconded by Deputy Mayor Cuntala to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 pm. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa K. Patton Municipal Clerk

We the undersigned concerned and responsible residence of the Township of Knowlton, do hereby appose to the continued expenditures, as indicated herein, for proposes of ousting the long term and dedicated township employee: Lisa Patten, Township Clerk.

By signing and presenting this official documented petition each signed tax payer/resident of the Township of Knowlton, do hereby oppose the Township Mayor's and Committee Members continuous actions of hiring legal and "special" counsel against the above said dedicated Township Clerk.

The following expenditures defined as follows:

C. Lanza \$19,459.06 plus Gebhardt \$14,801.65, Totaling to date <u>\$34,260.71</u>

Year 2013 total legal expenses Ron Farber, Mayor \$29,179.00

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