

VERNON TOWNSHIP COUNCIL

SPECIAL WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

February 27, 2020

The Special Workshop Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was convened at 3:00 p.m. on February 19, 2020 in the Vernon Municipal Center, 21 Church Street, Vernon, New Jersey with Council President Harry Shortway presiding.

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

Adequate notice of this meeting had been provided to the public and the press on February 20, 2020 and was posted on the bulletin board in the Municipal Building in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-7. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the Township Budget. Official Action may be taken.

Present were Council Members John Auberger, Jean Murphy, Mark Van Tassel, Kelley Weller and Council President Shortway. Also present were Mayor Howard Burrell, Business Administrator Charles Voelker and CFO Donelle Bright.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

Council President Shortway led the assemblage in the salute to the flag.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (*For Current Agenda Items Only, Limited to 3 minutes per person*)

Council President Shortway asked for a motion to open the meeting for Public Comments.

MOTION: John Auberger

SECOND: Mark Van Tassel

All members were in favor.

Seeing no members of the public wishing to speak, Council President Shortway asked for a motion to close the meeting for Public Comments.

MOTION: Kelly Weller

SECOND: Mark Van Tassel

All members were in favor.

Mayor Burrell commented that the Mayor is constitutionally the person who presents the budget, but the budget that is actually adopted is the Governing Body's budget. Mayor Burrell said that there are some things in the budget the Council does not agree with. The only thing Mayor Burrell has heard the Council disagrees with is the compensation equalization adjustments that he has proposed. Mayor Burrell said he is open to and required to acknowledge whatever changes the Council wants to make in the budget. The Mayor would like to continue to provide the services that we have committed to provide to the taxpayers. Mayor Burrell said that the town does not have a lot of employees and he wants to keep the team together. He would like to move forward and get the budget passed so that the employees can forward with the town.

Council Member Murphy commented that as far as pay increases go, she firmly believes that whatever the union contracts are that is what you abide by and that is what has been negotiated. As far as the employee increases, 2% is what should be substantiated in the budget. Council Member Murphy said that there are employees here that are very well compensated. There are employees that were recently hired and those are the terms that were negotiated by them. She said we have taxpayers to answer to and we are not in a position to give raises that are more than 2%. Council Member Murphy explained that the town's budget has gone up and we are in the midst of a reevaluation and taxpayers do not know what they will see. She said that this week the Council received an email with all of the Board of Education salaries. The Board of Education has been in these positions for many years and all of the salaries are astronomical and there is also a school they are trying to close. She is concerned with the tax increases that the Board of Education is proposing as well as the County increases. Council Member Murphy also mentioned the sewer and the increases in sewer rates. She feels that sending employees to school to increase their education for their resumes is not up to the taxpayers to pay for.

Council Member Auberger questioned if we used what was appropriated in the 2019 budgeted for Mayor and Council salaries. He said there is a number here that shows that the full amount was not used. Council Member Auberger said that as a Council Member he has to rely on the numbers he is looking at and he doesn't know if he can because he is being presented this budget and he should have what was spent in the past year. He said he should not have to keep asking for changes or corrections. Council Member Auberger feels that the next budget meeting should be a 7:00 p.m. for the public to get here on time.

Council Member Van Tassel understands the salary raises but does not understand why it all has to be done in one year. He said he is not stuck on 2% increases but feels that bringing the salaries to the average in year is too much. Council Member Van Tassel feels everyone should get a raise but we have to be reasonable.

Council Member Weller is concerned about the salary wages. She said the ranges are pretty high but 2% is low. Council Member Weller said maybe there can be a happy medium in the ranges. Council Member Weller feels that the range is very broad and asked what will be done in the future moving forward, do we just keep increasing the range. She is all for giving the people who deserve a raise an increase but with the town in the position it is in currently, we have to be responsible with the range that is chosen and the percentage of the increases. Council Member Weller would like to see some guidelines in place as far as education. She said education is important but employees should be made to stay after a certain amount of time or pay back the town for the education costs.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

- a. Court Budget
- b. Recreation/Senior Center Budget Presentation
- c. Land Use Budget
- d. Municipal Clerk
- e. Administration Budget
- f. Legal Services and Engineering Budget
- g. Mayor - Council
- h. Commission/Committees Budget
- i. Insurance Budget
- j. Debt Service & Capital Budget
- k. Shared Services and Grants
- l. Utilities and SCMUA
- m. Statutory Obligations and Municipal Services

The above named departments individually presented their 2020 municipal budgets. The Township Council and the individual departments discussed the budgets. Questions were asked and answered.

A motion was made by Council Member Auberger to take a 10-minute recess, seconded by Council Member Van Tassel. All Were in Favor.

A motion was made by Council Member Auberger to close the recess, seconded by Council Member Van Tassel. All were in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (*On any topic, limited to 3 minutes per person*)

Council President Shortway asked for a motion to open the meeting for Public Comments.

MOTION: John Auberger

SECOND: Kelly Weller

All members were in favor.

Andrew Pitzker – [REDACTED] commented that he is involved in the MUA and it is great to hear the numbers that is being spent but he hasn't heard too much about what is being stopped. He commented on the committees having recording secretaries. He said that common practice in big business is to assign someone to take notes. He feels that having \$1000.00 set aside for a recording secretary is a waste of time and money. We could be utilizing that money elsewhere such as a flyer or to give to a school for an environmental program. Mr. Pitzker suggested utilizing technology to eliminate the CD's used to record meetings.

Thomas McClachrie, questioned when was the last resolution to roll over the BANS. He also asked what the interest rate was on the BANS. Mr. McClachrie commented on the salary line items in the budget saying that you cannot move money out of that line item.

Seeing no other members of the public wishing to speak, Council President Shortway asked for a motion to close the public portion of the meeting.

MOTION: John Auberger

SECOND: Mark Van Tassel

All members were in favor.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Council Member Murphy asked what the increases are for the DPW and the police is. She said that they are getting paid according to the union contract. Council Member Murphy questioned the \$3000.00 for the part-time administrative assistant in the Clerk's office. It was explained by the CFO that this is not a raise. The \$3000.00 is in the budget in case the part-time administrative assistant needs to work extra hours in the Clerk's office. Council Member Murphy feels that if this money is in the budget it can be transferred and spent.

Council Member Auberger had to leave the meeting for personal reasons.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT COMMENTS

Council President Shortway commented that he proposes when the short term rental ordinance is passed, we can take a certain portion of that money and put it towards recreation, that percentage can be debated. Council President Shortway strongly believes in training employees. He feels that training is important and also to have a second in command. Council President Shortway agrees with Council Member Weller that a contract should be put in place in case a class is failed that the employee reimburses the town and that they have to stay employed at the town for a certain amount of time. Council President Shortway said that no one objected to the police training. The town pays a percentage for the police to go to college and after the police are done with the classes, they are paid more money.

Council President Shortway recommends that the Mayor put \$600,000 in fund balance again like has been done in past years. Council President Shortway spoke about collecting the money that Legends owes the town.

Council President Shortway feels that whatever pay increases that the Mayor suggest is not going to pass, therefore he recommends that the supervisors of the positions work an extra half hour a day and receive a 4% increase across the board. He said that this is a compromise and we need to get the budget passed as soon as possible.

MAYOR COMMENTS

Mayor Burrell said that what Council President Shortway just presented is what he is looking for as far as having a sense as to what the Council will agree to. Mayor Burrell would like the Council to individually give their feedback to the Mayor and it will be discussed on March 9th at the Council meeting.

Council Member Murphy commented that there are employees that have not been employed for even a year and this will have to be taken into consideration.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items of business to be conducted on the agenda, a motion for Adjournment was made by Council Member Van Tassel, seconded by Council Member Weller with all members voting in favor.

The Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcy Gianattasio, RMC, CMR
Municipal Clerk

Harry Shortway,
Council President

Minutes approved: March 9, 2020