

**VERNON TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 26, 2024 7:00 PM**

This Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was convened at 7:00 p.m. on February 26, 2024 via Zoom Webinar and in the Vernon Municipal Center, 21 Church Street, Vernon, New Jersey with Council President Rizzuto presiding.

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided to the public and the press on January 17, 2024 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.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

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

ROLL CALL

Present were Council Members Natalie Buccieri, Jessica DeBenedetto, William Higgins, Badley Sparta and Council President Patrick Rizzuto. Also, present were Mayor Anthony Rossi, Business Administrator Tina Kraus, CFO Donelle Bright, Municipal Clerk Marcy Gianattasio, Township Attorney Peter King

MAYOR COMMENTS

Thank you, Council President. Tonight, my comments will be short. Last week, the Vernon police Department and the ASPCA conducted a search warrant on a home in the PVL section in Vernon. Together they rescued over 90 dogs. I can't go into details at this time because it's an ongoing investigation, but I wanted to specifically thank our Police Chief Dan Young, SGT Koumaras, SGT Fitzgerald, and Officer Lenz and all other officers for all their efforts in making this happen. I met SGT Koumaras at the animal shelter last week and brought me up to speed on all the progress the animal shelter has been making for the past several years and I will say SGT Koumaras loves what he is doing and it shows. If anyone would like to donate, please visit the Vernon township website, click on the services link, and then animal control to see all of the items needed. I believe our council meeting in March the Chief and SGT will be at the meeting to discuss further.

I would like to enter the following names into the record for the following Committees

Economic Development Advisory Committee for a 1-year appointment I have:

Bruce Campbell

Evan Kovach

David Killin

William Jaime Rickey Jr

Debbie Coulson

And for the Board or Recreation which is a 3-year appointment I have:

Ravin Slockbower

PUBLIC COMMENTS (For Current Agenda Items Only, Limited to 3 Minutes Per Person)

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

MOVED: Buccieri

SECOND: DeBenedetto

All members were in favor.

Seeing no members from the public wishing to come forward, President Rizzuto asked for a motion to close the meeting to Public Comments.

MOVED: Sparta

SECOND: Higgins

All members were in favor.

REVIEW OF BILLS LIST

The Council reviewed the bills list.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

January 22, 2024 – Regular Meeting

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to approve the January 22, 2024 meeting minutes.

MOVED: Higgins
SECOND: DeBenedetto

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Buccieri, DeBenedetto, Higgins, Rizzuto
NAYES:
ABSTAIN: Sparta
ABSENT:

Motion carries to approve the January 22, 2024 reorganization minutes.

February 15, 2024 – Executive Session

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to approve the February 15, 2024 executive session minutes.

MOVED: Sparta
SECOND: Higgins

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Buccieri, Higgins, Sparta, Rizzuto
NAYES:
ABSTAIN: DeBenedetto
ABSENT:

Motion carries to approve the February 15, 2024 executive session minutes.

February 15, 2024 – Regular Meeting

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to approve the February 15, 2024 regular meeting minutes.

MOVED: Higgins
SECOND: Sparta

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Buccieri, Higgins, Sparta, Rizzuto
NAYES:
ABSTAIN: DeBenedetto
ABSENT:

Motion carries to approve the February 15, 2024 regular meeting minutes.

CONSENT AGENDA

Resolution #24-65: Township of Vernon Resolution of Support for the JCP&L EnergizeNJ Program BPU Docket No. EO23110793

Resolution #24-66: Refund for Totally Disabled Veteran (Cucuta)

Resolution #24-67: Canceling Taxes for Total Disabled Veteran (Canova)

Resolution #24-68: Refund for Totally Disabled Veteran (Grodewald)

Resolution #24-69: Refund for Totally Disabled Veteran (Grodewald)

Resolution #24-70: Cancelling Taxes for Totally Disabled Veteran (Grodewald)

Resolution #24-71: Approving a Solicitor’s Permit – Trinity Solar, LLC

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

MOVED: Sparta
SECOND: Buccieri

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Buccieri, DeBenedetto, Higgins, Sparta, Rizzuto
NAYES:
ABSTAIN:
ABSENT:

Motion carries to approve the Consent Agenda.

RESOLUTION #24-65

**TOWNSHIP OF VERNON RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT
FOR THE JCP&L *EnergizeNJ* PROGRAM
BPU Docket No. EO23110793**

WHEREAS the Township of Vernon recognizes that reliable electric service plays a crucial role in the daily lives of Township residents; and

WHEREAS the Township of Vernon recognizes that reliable electric service also is critical to the local businesses within our community, and drives commerce in our Township and across the region; and

WHEREAS the Township of Vernon supports efforts to upgrade our energy infrastructure to continue to provide families and businesses the reliable source of energy they need; and

WHEREAS the Township of Vernon supports efforts to enhance the reliability and resiliency of the electric distribution system against severe weather and reduce the number of customers affected by outages and shorten the duration of outages; and

WHEREAS the Township of Vernon has been informed that Jersey Central Power and Light Company’s (JCP&L) *EnergizeNJ* Program includes approximately \$935 million in targeted investments above and beyond its regular annual investments to enhance JCP&L’s service reliability and resiliency; and

WHEREAS the Township of Vernon has been informed that the JCP&L plan is divided into three key investment areas: grid modernization, system resiliency and substation modernization, that will strengthen the backbone of JCP&L’s local electric system, providing the foundation for smart grid capabilities in the future; and

WHEREAS the Township of Vernon has been informed that this investment should provide approximately \$3.08 billion return in reliability benefits to customers by helping to reduce non-storm outages and improving JCP&L’s ability to restore power following a major storm event; and

WHEREAS the Township of Vernon has been informed that JCP&L estimates the initial increase on the monthly bill for an average residential customer would be about 54 cents in 2025 and after full phase-in in 2030 the additional monthly bill for an average residential customer would increase by \$4.16.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Mayor and Council of Township Vernon hereby finds and declares:

That JCP&L's *EnergizeNJ* Program will benefit residents and businesses in the Township of Vernon and throughout Sussex County by making JCP&L's electric distribution system during storm and non-storm events more resistant to storm damage and enabling the system to recover more quickly when outages do occur and increase the distribution system's resiliency, operational flexibility, safety and security.

JCP&L's *EnergizeNJ* Program should be approved by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities.

RESOLUTION #24-66

**REFUND FOR TOTALLY DISABLED VETERAN
([REDACTED] Cucuta)**

WHEREAS, THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS awarded Dionisio Cucuta a 100% permanent and totally disabled veteran: and,

WHEREAS, the law exempts said property from taxation.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the Township of Vernon hereby authorizes the Tax Collector to refund 1st quarter 2024 property tax in the amount of \$2,798.50 to Dionisio Cucuta.

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the Township Tax Collector.

RESOLUTION #24-67

**CANCELLING TAXES FOR TOTAL DISABLED VETERAN
(Canova [REDACTED])**

WHEREAS THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS on awarded Kevin Canova a 100% permanent and total disabled veteran; and

WHEREAS, as of said date the law exempts said property from taxation.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the Township of Vernon authorizes the Tax Collector to cancel the taxes for 2024 in the amount of \$5,896.48.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the Tax Collector.

RESOLUTION #24-68

**REFUND FOR TOTALLY DISABLED VETERAN
(Block 121 Lot 6 [REDACTED])**

WHEREAS, THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS awarded Christopher Grodewald a 100% permanent and totally disabled veteran: and,

WHEREAS, the law exempts said property from taxation.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the Township of Vernon hereby authorizes the Tax Collector to refund 2023 property tax in the amount of \$5,427.02 to Christopher Grodewald.

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the Township Tax Collector.

RESOLUTION #24-69

REFUND FOR TOTALLY DISABLED VETERAN

(Block 121 Lot 6 [REDACTED])

WHEREAS, THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS awarded Christopher Grodewald a 100% permanent and totally disabled veteran: and,

WHEREAS, the law exempts said property from taxation.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the Township of Vernon hereby authorizes the Tax Collector to refund 2024 property tax in the amount of \$1,826.12 to Christopher Grodewald.

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the Township Tax Collector.

RESOLUTION #24-70

**CANCELLING TAXES FOR TOTAL DISABLED VETERAN
([REDACTED] Block 121 Lot 6)**

WHEREAS THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS on awarded Christopher Grodewald a 100% permanent and total disabled veteran; and

WHEREAS, as of said date the law exempts said property from taxation.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the Township of Vernon authorizes the Tax Collector to cancel the taxes for 2024 in the amount of \$1,826.12.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the Tax Collector.

RESOLUTION #24-71

APPROVING A SOLICITOR PERMIT – TRINITY SOLAR, LLC

WHEREAS, Dale Purdy has made an application for a Solicitor Permit for the purposes of providing free information about solar; and

WHEREAS, upon receipt of the application for a Solicitor Permit, by Dale Purdy of Trinity Solar, LLC, the Vernon Township Police Department investigated the applicant's moral character and found it to be satisfactory and in good order for the protection of the public good; and the necessary application has been filed and all documentation is in order;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Township Council of the Township of Vernon that approval be granted for a Solicitor Permit for Dale Purdy of Trinity Solar, LLC

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Township Clerk is hereby authorized to issue a Solicitor's Permit to the aforesaid applicant in accordance with Chapter 428 of the Code of the Township of Vernon.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (Limited to 5 Minutes Per Person)

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to open the meeting for public comment.

MOVED: Sparta
SECOND: Bucciari

All members were in favor.

Jessica Paladini – informed the Council that the Scenic Byway Committee had a great meeting and has new members.

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

MOVED: Higgins
SECOND: Buccieri

All members were in favor.

Bud Jones and Man Lee of Nisivoccia & Company, LLP, the township's auditing firm, explained to the Council the ordinance to exceed the municipal budget appropriation limits and to establish a cap bank (COLA).

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Council Member Higgins questioned who is responsible in the township for applying for grants.

Council Member DeBenedetto had no comments.

Council Member Sparta is not a fan of grants that require the town to match funds. Council Member Sparta congratulated the Vernon Township Boys' Basketball Team and said that all of the sports teams have been doing well.

Council Member Buccieri congratulated the boys' basketball team. Council Member Buccieri is going to follow up with Jessica Caldwell to get information about a potential developer. Council Member Buccieri expressed gratitude for Sgt. Ron Koumaras and Vernon Animal Control for the great job they did rescuing ninety animals.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT COMMENTS

Council President Rizzuto explained that there was a lot more that went into the dog rescue that was printed in the newspapers. Council President Rizzuto would like to celebrate the boys' basketball victory.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:48 pm Council Member Buccieri made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Council Member Higgins.

All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcy Gianattasio, RMC, CMR
Municipal Clerk

Patrick Rizzuto
Council President

Minutes approved: March 11, 2024