

**VERNON TOWNSHIP COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING**

**March 10, 2008**

The Special Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was convened at 6:10 p.m. in the Vernon Municipal Center, Church Street, Vernon, New Jersey, with Mayor Austin Carew presiding. There were 4 interested persons in attendance.

**STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE**

Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided on March 7, 2008 by delivering to the press and posting at the Municipal Building pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act. The purpose of this meeting is for Goal Setting.

**SALUTE TO THE FLAG**

The Mayor led the assemblage in the salute to the flag.

**ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS**

The roll call of members was called and Richard Carson, Glenn McLaughlin, and Austin Carew answered the call. Also present were Melinda Carlton, Township Manager, and Michael Witt, Township Attorney. Let it be noted that James Oroho arrived at 7:30 p.m. and Glenn McLaughlin left at 8:00 p.m.

**OPEN THE MEETING TO THE PUBLIC**

The Mayor opened the meeting to the public for any comments and/or questions. There being no interested party, the meeting was closed to the public.

**DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**GOAL SETTING** – The Town Council, Manager, and Department Heads met to discuss the conceptual framework and strategic goals for 2008 and to ensure that they are in place. The 2008 goals to be achieved are Main Street, Town Center, Traffic, Township non-issues, Public Image, Financial, and Code of Ethics. It was noted that not all goals will necessarily be met.

The comments and/or suggestions that members made on each of the topics were all inter-related. The plan for redevelopment to the Town Center and having sewers is crucial so that many large businesses can open and draw smaller businesses as well. Businesses in town would utilize a large portion of the sewer capacity. In the event a large chain-type restaurant (like Applebee's) builds in Vernon it would utilize a large portion of the sewer capacity and not allow for smaller establishments to be built, due to lack of infrastructure. Township Engineer Lou Kneip stated that the township previously had a Site Review Committee to streamline the planning and zoning approval process and to promote the community's "business friendly" attitude. The developer appears before the site review committee with a concept plan. The plan is reviewed and discussed by the committee members. As a result, issues or concerns are addressed in the beginning of the process and the developer receives valuable input and advice. The issue of traffic was discussed. It was noted that people are using Main Street as the access road to Routes 515 and 94.

Mayor Carew asked about the public's perception of the municipal departments. Terrance Whalen, Tax Collector, said he receives many complaints that the property taxes are too high. The public is not aware that the Tax Collector is only a collector of the revenue, 80% of which is distributed to the schools and to the county. Pennie Roland suggested that Vernon Day needs to be a more family fun-filled day, not where "businesses hand out pencils." Vernon is a transient town and the residents need more of an old-fashioned country fair. She further stated the residents see the township employees as employed to spend tax dollars, not here to assist them. Pat Seger said that her brother-in-law pays two taxes to the municipality he lives in—one to the municipal government and the other to the school, which happens annually. She suggested that the township try staying open late in the evening to work around the commuters. The staff stated that the township tried it for more than a month and it did not work. Lynne Schweighardt said the township's credibility is improving, but it does not lie with the financial aspect, but rather with the fact that the public sees the township employees as a liability. A majority of the residents are mad with the employees before they enter the municipal building. They view the township employees as putting a "blockade" in front of them

rather than working along with them. Discussion followed to how the township could establish credibility with the Vernon residents. Ms. Schweighardt stated the township used to have a receptionist who took the stress off other departments. She would answer phone calls and provide information to residents who came to the municipal complex. Pat Seger suggested that a senior citizen or volunteer handle the reception area so as not to be an extra financial burden on the township. The council needs to research complaints before responding to the public, and support municipal employees. Melinda Carlton suggested that each department take turns attending council meetings, and give a presentation on what they do and give the council the opportunity to ask questions. Lou Kneip said that none of the money from recent capital projects had been used towards operating expenses (computer networking, training) within each department. He suggested refocusing some of this money to the municipal building. Melinda Carlton said canceling some of the old capital projects this year and next year is fine, but the problem that lies within the complex is the operating expenses. Right now, the capital/bond money has been directed to the capital projects. Councilmember Oroho asked to work with Melinda Carlton, Kerry Scott, and Monica Gosicki on four different budgets.

Will Henderson stated he has served as a volunteer for over 30 years. He suggested that EMS volunteers should be paid. As a volunteer, incentives are important to unpaid assistants. Volunteers receive LOSAP (retirement/pension system for volunteer services), clothing allowance, gas allowance, and property tax breaks for those who meet certain criteria. Mayor Carew said the clothing allowance could be looked into in lieu of what the other states or municipalities offer.

The group discussed and made their recommendations for future goals. The goal categories are Code of Ethics, Municipal Building, Public Image, Township Non-Issues, Faulkner Act, Staffing, Teamwork, Redevelopment, and Financial Issues. Mayor Carew said that the staff should attend the council meeting to address these goals publicly.

## **OPEN THE MEETING TO THE PUBLIC**

Gary Martinsen, Vernon resident. He said credibility needs to be worked on for the public to gain a positive perception of the town council and township employees. A decorative town-entry sign with landscaping could be installed to distract attention away from the basin located on Route 515. Technology issues are important for the staff to be able to communicate effectively with different departments. The township could create a “block party” and invite residents and business associates to discuss what they would like to see come to pass in Vernon. Conflicts are a normal part of doing business because members have different goals, Mr. Martinsen said. However, different goals keep everyone stimulated by their creativity and the opportunity to bring change. With unmanaged conflicts, it can result in defensiveness and different agendas. To correct the situation one needs to build teamwork and focus on win-win situations, Mr. Martinsen stated.

Tom McClachrie, Vernon Taxpayers Association. He asked how much more money will be put into the Town Center before the citizens see the finished product. And when can the citizens expect to get some money back? Mr. McClachrie stated the township should retain the current staff with their current benefits. In the future, new employees will have to look at reduced benefits (i.e. 401k plan not PERS).

Ron Muller, President of Vernon Chamber of Commerce. Earthfest was a venue for the Vernon Chamber, Vernon Recreation, PAL, and the Environmental Commission. This activity would continue and is the only one the town offers. However, the business community should not be fostering Earthfest or otherwise it would become a business proposition. He commented that the Town Hall in the past gave an impression of not being business friendly. However, the Chamber wants to stay neutral, keep its reputation, and not get into political issues.

There being no further questions and/or comments, the Mayor closed the meeting to the public at 8:57 p.m.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further items of business on the agenda, a motion was made by Rich Carson to adjourn the meeting and the motion was seconded by Jim Oroho. All in favor.

The Special Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Andrea Bates  
Acting Township Clerk

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Presiding Officer