

TOWNSHIP OF VERNON

TOWNSHIP COUNCIL SPECIAL EMERGENCY MEETING

DECEMBER 13, 2008, 2:00 PM

A Special Emergency Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was convened at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 13, 2008 in the Vernon Municipal Center, 21 Church Street, Vernon, New Jersey with Mayor Carew presiding.

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The Township Clerk advised that this Special Emergency Meeting is being held pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:9-4 upon affirmative vote of three quarters of the members of the Council. Such meeting is required in order to deal with matters of such urgency and importance that a delay for the purpose of providing adequate notice would be likely to result in substantial harm to the public interest. Notice of this emergency meeting is to be provided as soon as it is possible pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act. The purpose of the emergency meeting is to discuss the Office of Emergency Management actions and clean up operations concerning the winter ice storm event.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Present were Council members Richard Carson, Gary Grey, Glenn McLaughlin and Mayor Austin Carew. Council member Valerie Seufert arrived at 2:30 p.m. Also present were Chief of Police Roy Wherry and representatives of the Highland Lakes, Barry Lake, and Lake Panoramic community associations.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Mayor Austin Carew and all members of the Township Council expressed his heartfelt concern regarding the existing state of emergency in the Highland Lakes, Lake Wanda, Barry Lake, Panoramic Lake communities and other areas in Vernon Township due to the winter ice storm event. He stated these communities have been hit especially hard by the ice storm which began Thursday night causing widespread power outages, fallen trees, closed roadways and extensive property damage. Mayor Carew stated very aggressive actions must be taken by the Township to get the roads open for emergency vehicle access and restore power to these residential communities.

Mayor Carew asked Chief of Police Roy Wherry to brief the Council and public on current conditions in the elevated communities of the Township.

Police Chief Roy Wherry informed everyone that as the Township's Emergency Management Coordinator he has contacted the Sussex County Office of Emergency Management for their involvement. Chief Wherry reported that as of 2:00 p.m., all main roads are open and there is restricted access in or out of the Barry Lake and Highland Lakes communities. Roads in isolated areas are being opened as downed power lines are addressed by Sussex Rural. The Red Cross opened a shelter Friday night at the Senior Center; however, so far only one resident utilized the shelter.

Mayor Carew stated an emergency exists and the Township's priorities are to (i) restore electrical power in all neighborhoods, (ii) aggressively address the needs of the public, especially senior citizens and critical medical individuals, and (iii) provide immediate additional security, police patrols and police presence to ensure public safety and welfare.

Mayor Carew asked for updates from community leaders and representatives present. The following reports were given:

Lake Panorama: All roads are open, Rural Sussex crews are out restoring power and crews are removing fallen trees and brush from the roadways. Police patrols are requested.

Barry Lakes: Several power line poles are down. Barry Mountain Road is passable. Crews are removing fallen trees and brush where they can. Fallen power lines must be addressed by Sussex Rural.

Highland Lakes: Crews are working on opening of roadways. Estimated 80% of roads are open and passable; however, downed power lines are still blocking 5-10 roads. Sussex Rural crews are working on restoring power. Several power line poles are down. DPW crews are out with chainsaws clearing the roads.

Mayor Carew asked Ed Struble from the DPW to give a brief report. Mr. Struble reported DPW crews are working round-the-clock to remove fallen trees and open up the roadways. He informed the Council that in his estimate 97-98% of all roads are open and passable at this time. DPW crews are following the electric utility crews in clean up operations. He further informed the Council that tree limbs and branches continue to drop making it necessary for crews to go back to clean up areas. He stated the road right-of-ways must be cleared of fallen trees and brush before the next snow storm so that snow plowing efforts are not hindered. Mr. Struble stated at least four more chainsaws and chipping equipment is needed.

At 3:05 p.m. Mr. Struble left the meeting to continue with clean up operations. Mayor Carew, all members of the Council, the Township Manager and members of the public thanked Mr. Struble for his efforts and applauded the work of the Township DPW crews.

Township Manager, Melinda Carlton, advised that her office is responsible for the coordination of all removal efforts between the Township DPW and residential communities. Ms. Carlton reminded members of the Township Council that a policy decision needs to be made regarding the scope and extend of clean up services to be provided to property owners.

Township officials agreed Phase I emergency operations must include the immediate clearing of roads for public safety and restoration of power. Tree limbs and brush can be removed from the roads and right-of-ways with 72 hours. Phase II operations will focus on the removal of tree limbs and brush. Mayor Carew asked the members of the Council for direction in defining exactly what the scope of work should be at this time.

The Council unanimously agreed that it is imperative and necessary to remove fallen trees, limbs and brush from the roadways and clear the immediate right-of-ways for anticipated snow plowing operations.

The Township Council asked the Township Manager to provide cost estimates for storm clean up efforts and to solicit costs for the retention of outside services as well. Ms. Carlton stated she will update the Township Website with emergency information for the public's use. The Police Department's Communication Center will continue to answer calls from the public and the County will be contacted for delivery of services to the senior citizens in need.

At 3:25 p.m., Mr. Tom Stone, Sussex Rural Electric Utility Company representative arrived. Mayor Carew asked Mr. Stone to update the Council and public on the status of restoring electric service to the residences.

Mr. Stone reported at the height of the storm, approximately 5,000 customers were without service. As of 1:00 p.m. today, approximately 1,800 customers are without service. Sussex Rural is contacting customers on its critical medical consumer list. Sussex Rural has dispatched 40 linemen working rotating shifts on the main feeder lines. Downed utility poles are being reset. Tree crews are trimming 10 feet along the right-of-way to safely remove downed wires and prevent further damage from broken tree limbs. Mr. Stone informed the Council that Sussex Rural is not responsible for removal or chipping of fallen trees and limbs and doubted the electric company can provide any further assistance in the clean up efforts. Mr. Stone agreed to provide the Township Manager with the contact information for Asplundh Tree Service, the company currently contracted by Sussex Rural for tree trimming services.

Mr. Stone stated Sussex Rural expects the tree crews to be done by Sunday night, allowing the line crews to finish restoring power lines and service to the homes. Sussex Rural will notify customers if they will need to retain a licensed electrician to install a meter pan or entrance cable to restore electric

service to their homes. It is anticipated that it will take two weeks to correct any low-hanging power lines.

At 4:00 p.m., Mr. Skip Danielson, Sussex County Office of Emergency Management, arrived. Mr. Danielson informed members of the Council that OEM operations begin on the local level then advance to county, state, and federal levels if warranted. The Township will have to fund all costs. He reported the county does not have funding available and suggested the Township contact the state Senate and Assembly representatives for state assistance. Further, Mr. Danielson suggested the Township contact the BPU to request the power company to assist in tree removal efforts. He informed Township officials that they must capture all costs associated with manpower hours and equipment costs to substantiate FEMA assistance. Property owners are responsible for their respective property damage and should contact their insurance agents for property damage claims.

Mayor Carew asked Skip Danielson if the county can provide additional chainsaws and wood chippers for the Township's use. Mr. Danielson stated he will contact the county's Road Supervisor, Mr. Steve Lousey, to assist in the Township's efforts and provide whatever resources the county may have to help the clean up efforts. Mr. Danielson stated he will also contact the state Fire Service for additional chainsaws, chipper equipment and manpower. Lastly, Mr. Danielson further pledged he will personally contact Byram Township officials for chipper crews.

State Senator Steve Oroho will contact Congressman Scott Garrett for federal assistance.

In closing, Mayor Carew summed up the meeting that the Township will do whatever is necessary to safeguard the well-being and safety of its residents.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, a motion for Adjournment was made by Council member Glenn McLaughlin, seconded by Richard Carson, with all members voting in favor.

The Special Emergency Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was adjourned at 4:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin R. Kline

Robin R. Kline, MAS, RMC
Municipal Clerk

Minutes approved: 01/08/2009