

TOWNSHIP OF VERNON

TOWNSHIP COUNCIL SPECIAL GOAL SETTING MEETING

April 13, 2009

The Special Goal Setting Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was convened at 4:30 p.m. on Monday, April 13, 2009 in the Vernon Municipal Center, 21 Church Street, Vernon, New Jersey with Mayor Austin Carew presiding.

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

Pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, adequate notice of this meeting had been provided to the public and the press on April 3, 2008 and notice of this meeting was posted at the Municipal Building.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Present were Council Members Richard Carson, Gary Grey, Valerie Seufert, and Mayor Austin Carew. Council Member Glenn McLaughlin was absent. Also present was Township Manager Melinda Carlton.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mayor Carew opened the meeting for Public Comment.

Seeing no one from the public wishing to speak, Mayor Austin Carew closed the public portion of the meeting.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

2009 Goal Setting

Mayor Austin Carew extended an invitation to all staff in attendance to sit at the tables with the Township Council to allow for an open exchange of ideas and interaction with the Township Council and Manager.

Mayor Carew commented that the goal setting meetings in 2008 were very beneficial to both the Council and staff and applauded Township Manager Melinda Carlton for introducing this practice to the Township.

Township Manager Melinda Carlton briefly discussed the goal setting meeting held in January with the municipal department heads and discussed topics and issues the staff believed were of importance to Vernon Township. The various topics were itemized and the top four goals were ultimately selected by the municipal management staff. The 2009 goals selected were: Goal #1, Strengthen the Foundation; Goal #2, Municipal Building Renovation; Goal #3, Economic Development; and Goal #4, Financial Accountability. The Goal Setting Report from the January 12, 2008 Management Staff meeting was distributed to the Council for review.

Ms. Carlton commented that Goal #1, Strengthen the Foundation, was proffered by Police Chief Roy Wherry and was adopted unanimously by the department heads. The staff agreed that the development of written policies would foster greater employee accountability and consistency in overall performance outcomes. Updating the Township's Administrative Code, Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual, and Fiscal Policies were discussed as three areas that should be reexamined and updated. Department heads acknowledged that with layoffs and personnel attrition, a much greater burden has been placed on the remaining staff and therefore, time will be the biggest factor to overcome in being able to develop written policies at this time.

The Township Council agreed that written protocols are important and suggested policies be reviewed and updated every several months to keep in tune with changes in the work environment, government regulations, and risk management requirements.

The Township Manager informed the Council that the staff believes the Township has been very proactive in taking the necessary steps towards achieving fiscal accountability and therefore did not place financial accountability as the top goal to be accomplished in 2009. Nonetheless, everyone agreed that financial accountability continues to be an important goal for 2009 and ranked it as Goal #4.

Mayor Austin Carew informed the municipal staff that the Council will be creating a Finance Advisory Committee, which will be tasked with reviewing Township finances from an outside perspective and will continue to foster financial transparency in local government.

The Township Manager presented Goal #3, Economic Development. Ms. Carlton informed the Council that the management staff recommended that the Township Council should take an active role in promoting the Township and recruiting new business to Vernon. The management staff discussed the need to “brand” Vernon Township’s image as a means to market the Township to new business interests. Also discussed was reintroducing “Vernon Day” to help showcase our community as a great place to live, work and play.

The use of Township planning documents, such as the Township’s Master Plan and Natural Resource Inventory, was discussed. It was strongly suggested that these planning documents be distributed and referenced by all sitting members appointed to the Township’s boards and commissions in order to develop a uniform, consistent and balanced approach to community planning. It was reported that the Township’s Master Plan will be updated in the coming year.

The continued development of the Town Center was discussed at length. The management staff recommended that the Township must commit its resources to developing the water and sewer infrastructure for the future build-out of the Town Center. The Township Council discussed challenges presented to the Township by the Highlands Regional Master Plan and Council on Affordable Housing mandates.

The Township Council discussed current initiatives being developed by the Beautification Committee to create attractive signage and streetscaping along the various “gateways” into Vernon Township. The management staff commented that property maintenance and code enforcement matters have become more reactive and less proactive over the years. To help address zoning issues, the Township Council proffered that the Land Use Board may be able to schedule work sessions during the year to review and update property maintenance and zoning ordinances. The Council will bring this matter to the Land Use Board’s attention.

The Township Council informed the staff that an Economic Development Advisory Committee was formed as a result of the 2008 goal setting meetings and discussed the activities and progress the Economic Development Advisory Committee has accomplished this year.

The Township Manager informed everyone that a community-wide survey will be developed to determine “how we’re doing” from the citizens’ perspective and to analyze the way services are delivered, as well as, what services may be desired.

Both the Township Council and staff commented that the Faulkner Act Council-Manager form of government has left many questions unanswered as to what extent the Township Council can interact with the municipal offices and employees. The Township Council will address this concern with the Township Attorney for further clarification.

The Township Council thanked the staff for their ideas and comments and welcomed the continuation of informal meetings with the staff as a means to open up dialogue and idea sharing for the benefit of the Vernon Township community.

ADJOURNMENT

Due to time constraints, the Township Council agreed to reconvene the Special Goal Setting Meeting on April 23, 2009 at 4:30 p.m. A motion for Adjournment was made by Council Member Valerie Seufert. Motion seconded by Council Member Richard Carson with all members voting in favor.

The Special Goal Setting Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was adjourned at 5:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin R. Kline

Robin R. Kline, MAS, RMC
Municipal Clerk

Minutes approved: May 14, 2009