

MOUNT LAUREL TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
WORK SESSION MEETING
FEBRUARY 8, 2010

A Work Session Meeting of the Mount Laurel Township Council was held on Monday, February 8, 2010 in the Municipal Courtroom of the Mount Laurel Municipal Building. The meeting was called to order by Mayor James Keenan.

The Pledge of Allegiance and traditional moment of silence were observed.

ROLL CALL

The Members of Council present were Mayor Keenan, Deputy Mayor McCaffrey, Councilwomen Bobo and Riley, and Councilman Chris Smith. Also present were Patricia Halbe, Township Clerk, Jennifer Blumenthal, Township Manager, and Christopher Norman, Esq., Township Solicitor

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

The Public Announcement, which is required by the "Open Public Meetings Act" of the State of New Jersey and read at every meeting of the Township Council was read by the Municipal Clerk.

Emergency Snow Removal Update

Ms. Blumenthal reported that after the December snowfall Council had asked her to re-address the snow plan route for the non-primary and non-secondary streets to be done at the same time as the primary and secondary streets are done. This came about due to numerous citizen complaints about residents being snowed in for several days. She is working with Emergency Management, including the Chief of Police and Director of Public Works. It will take one year to complete the full plan but they were able to make some immediate changes which had significant positive effects throughout the township. This included the use of additional contractors for Holiday Village, Holiday Village East, Birchfield and Stonegate and we received a lot of positive feedback about that. We also initiated staggered shifts and had them rest in staggered shifts and allowed us to keep the plowing continuing without them reaching exhaustion. We also merged the Public Works and Parks & Recreation Departments putting all personnel, equipment and assets under the direction of the Director of Public Works. We were able to deploy all our assets to benefit the residents. We also upped our communication to the public by having a manned snow desk. We also sent out communications by Nixle and the police sent out a press release advising residents. We were also monitoring the vehicles and where they had plowed. We worked with the fire department this time to use their resources to create emergency teams which freed up some of our public works equipment. We also worked with the Board of Education and the MUA employees and equipment to do some of the plowing. We had the EOC manned by someone from the Public Works Department to keep communications open. This caused a significant increase in service and 80% of the contacts received were positive comments, which is a great difference from the December storm. A lot of the complaints this time were isolated incidents and streets missed at the end of someone's shift so management will do spot-checking after each section is done.

Councilwoman Riley questioned if the employees report where they have left off at when they come in. Ms. Blumenthal stated that they worked in crews so she thinks that there was miscommunication where they thought that the other crewmembers picked up those streets but we were able to pick up on some of it.

Ms. Blumenthal stated that the noise of the plows and the mounds of snow were some of the complaints received. We are looking into purchasing equipment to change the transmission fluid which would help eliminate losing vehicles due to transmission breakdowns, replacing broken GPS units in some of the vehicles and emergency management is looking on a reverse 911 system with possible funding from the State. It looks like we are having another storm later this week so our public works department is moving some of the mounds of snow in anticipation for that storm. We are also going to do some marketing in getting people to move their vehicles so we can plow easier.

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Deputy Mayor McCaffrey stated that he rode around and most roadways were done curb-to-curb and he felt the roads were done the best in years. He received a few calls from Stonegate and Holiday Village that it was an improvement and the residents there were happy. It is a giant leap forward from December as far as snow removal was concerned.

Mayor Keenan thanked Ms. Blumenthal for her hard work and Mr. Pagurek for emergency management. The residents are appreciative. The township has 140 miles of roadway in the township and it is the best he has ever seen in his 20 years here. Anything that was missed was addressed right away.

Ms. Blumenthal stated that we have costs in for possible reimbursement from the State. Mr. Pagurek indicated that the preliminary snow cost amounts for the last storm must be in to the County by 6 pm tomorrow.

Proposal for Ordinance Amendments for Escrow Fees

Ms. Blumenthal stated that this was first brought up in the summer and we were looking at revising the developer's escrow fees as one of the ways to resolve the problem with the developer's escrow funds being depleted while work still needed to be done. An analysis was done of Mount Laurel compared to surrounding communities and it looked like our fees were lower. She had asked the professional service staff and the zoning board secretary to look into the various fees. When she first brought this up, Council was concerned about the fees for the residents and did not want too high fees for them. There was also consideration for flat fees for the residents so they would know how much they would be spending. This is the final draft in ordinance form that we are proposing. The fees have increased but are average to other communities and the increases are minimal. For subdivisions, it has been separated out for residential escrow fees from non-residential.

Mayor Keenan asked for a spreadsheet that shows the changes and Ms. Blumenthal indicated she would send it to Council.

Councilwoman Riley also stated that there has been some recent litigation on the cost per copies and thought that should be looked into and make sure it conforms.

Mayor Keenan asked that any comments back from Council be sent to the Manager by Thursday afternoon so that Ms. Blumenthal will know whether it can be put on the agenda for next Monday.

Liquor Licenses

Ms. Halbe indicated that the township has one consumption license and one distribution license for sale. We have received a number of inquiries in the latter part of 2009 and early 2010 for both licenses and had spoken with the Manager about getting revenue in for the 2010 budget. If we wait until the 2010 census numbers come out in 2011, everyone will have reallocations while now most have sold all their licenses and we are one of the few towns that have licenses left. We will not have a lot of competition if we sell them now. We had two bidders for the distribution license in 2008 and was up for minimum bid of \$450,000 and sold for \$505,000. A consumption license was sold in 2006 for \$800,199 but we had no bidders on one we put up for bid at \$750,000 in 2008. The only question is what the market would be and what the minimum price should be. In the past, when we have put the price up very high, people complained that we did not leave them any room to bid. When we put it up a little lower, they bid it up higher since they felt they had room to compete against others. There is an extensive process that must be followed and I have compiled it using the same procedure we have used before. We would like feedback from Council for the minimum bids for both licenses.

Ms. Blumenthal stated that the timing is very important due to the long process since we could use this revenue in the budget.

Deputy Mayor McCaffrey stated that last time we put up the bids there were several other towns that were also selling licenses and several people that were contemplating coming

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to Mount Laurel went there instead. He thinks the timing is beautiful for us since we are one of the few towns that have licenses left. He believes that we should move forward with it.

Councilwoman Riley asked if we have an analysis of what surrounding towns have sold theirs for recently. Ms. Halbe indicated that it is hard to compare them because some of the licenses sold in surrounding towns are being used for multiple restaurants on one property and that is why they sold so high. We have one circumstance of that in our town.

Ms. Halbe indicated she had received 4 inquiries for consumption license, 3 for distribution and 1 person was interested in any type of license we put out. We require the consumption license to be used in conjunction with the service of food. For a distribution license, it would have to be used where it is zoned for it or get zoning board approval.

Mayor Keenan felt that perhaps the starting bids should be a little higher since there is interest in them. He asked that Ms. Halbe get further information regarding what other licenses have sold for in the area. She will forward the information to Council by Thursday.

Public Comment

Paul Valente – 10 Wagon Wheel Drive. – Is one of the few residents that were not satisfied with the snow removal. He did not get his snow plowed until the second day. He is a development off of Mount Laurel Road and he does not see how it could have been missed. In December, he drove here to complain about it and did not get plowed until the third day since the mailbox was full. Something is wrong with the logistics of where the plows are going. He is hoping that it gets better. He will be at the meetings from now on.

Mayor Keenan said that it was plowed one time early on for this storm and Wagon Wheel had also been discussed after the December snowfall since he thought it needed improvement in service. We will work on getting it better.

Bob Hackney – 206 Nathan Place – Is amazed from the December storm until this storm but it was totally different and he was very pleased. His parents live in Holiday Village and they got done fast also in this storm. He wants to commend everyone.

Mayor Keenan stated that the Township Manager along with the Public Works Department and Emergency Management did an excellent job. We also had manned phones this time instead of an answering machine.

Jeff Shapiro – 433 Kelham Court – Asked for more emergency lighting around Parkers Creek as it is very dark and very dangerous along Hartford Road.

Lisa Conte – 126 Calderwood Lane – Her street is a secondary road and it is hard for public works because everyone parks on the street. Is there something she can do to help inform the residents?

Mayor Keenan suggested that she ask her neighbors sign up for Nixle that way they could get text alerts and e-mail alerts.

Ms Blumenthal stated that one of the items brought up was to ask the neighborhood watch communities through the police department to ask them to help notify the residents.

John Drinkard – 2 East Coach Lane – Has lived in Mount Laurel for 25 years in 4 homes, and all four have been cul-de-sacs. He wanted to thank the township for the effort this storm as the difference was like night and day. He thinks the State can help out by declaring a state of emergency so people don't go out by having a travel ban.

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Paul Valente – Wagon Wheel Drive is the main road and they only had one pass in the middle of the night. Three trucks were there within 15 minutes of calling Ms. Blumenthal. When other roads are done 2-3 times, something is wrong when we are never done.

John Cantwell – Holiday Village – It is nice to hear pleasant responses and is very happy with the job that was done this time. They were there early and they did not block the mailboxes. He is here because he thought something would be said about birth control for geese. In Holiday Village, they started adding eggs but they needed a club to ward off the geese. Please do not try birth control on them.

Mayor Keenan stated that it is not one of the options given to Council, adding is the first option and possible euthanasia only if necessary.

Gary Cogan – Thanked Ms. Blumenthal and whoever else helped get a police presence at the entrance to Laurel Acres Park because it helped the quality of life on Yorktown Drive during the last storm.

Ms. Blumenthal stated that it is part of our snow emergency plan now.

Dennis Riley – 10 Windflower Court – Since he was one of the biggest complainer in December, he had to come back and thank Ms. Blumenthal and the Township for a great job and it was nice to see a snow plow so early this time. He noticed that the snow is piled up at Daylily and Elbo Lane and is causing a blind spot.

Closed Session

The Clerk read resolution 10-R-62, Authorizing Mount Laurel Township Council to go into closed session for discussion of Litigation Matters and Personnel Matters. A motion was made by Councilwoman Bobo and seconded by Deputy Mayor McCaffrey to adopt the resolution. All were in favor and Council went into closed session at 8:32 p.m.

Return to Open Session

A motion was made by Councilman Smith and seconded by Councilwoman Riley to return to open session. All were in favor and Council returned to open session at 9:35 p.m.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Deputy Mayor McCaffrey and seconded by Councilman Smith to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor and Council adjourned the meeting at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Halbe, RMC
Municipal Clerk

Transcribed by
Patricia Halbe