

MOUNT LAUREL TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
WORK SESSION MEETING
MARCH 8, 2010

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

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.

Google Fiber Network

Ms. Blumenthal stated that Google has indicated that they will be doing testing of ultra high speed networks which will be 100x faster than what people are experiencing now. Many municipalities are putting in to be part of this trial testing. The minimum population is 50,000 but they will allow municipalities to join together to qualify. She would like to do shared services with Moorestown to do the testing as one of their trial locations. The Moorestown solicitor had drafted a resolution that Mr. Norman is now reviewing.

Mayor Keenan questioned if there is any amount of money that the municipality would have to put up. Ms. Blumenthal stated the paperwork only says that they going to decide based on level of community support, local resources, weather conditions, approved construction methods and local regulatory issues. They only say that if they place it in a town, they will have a competitive price for the users.

Councilwoman Riley questioned if we are committed to do it if we are in a shared service with Moorestown if a price is attached to it. Mr. Norman stated that we could have an opt-out option for either town if they think it is cost prohibitive. Mount Laurel does not have FIOS so it could be an enticement for Google to consider it.

Council was in agreement to participate.

Online Payments

Ms. Blumenthal stated that the township has been dedicated to starting a customer service campaign and began some initiatives in DCD. We began also looking at online tax payments and other payments but would like to start with payments for the tax office. After research by Police Lieutenant Randall, we determined that we could accept either ACH debit payments or credit card payments. If we accepted credit cards, we would have to charge a 3% service fee, which sees a bit high. We opted for a company called Cit-e-net, which allows for ACH debits. It would cost the township \$2000 per year and \$1500 set up fee. Ms. Blumenthal is proposing that we charge a fee of \$1.00 per transaction initially, which could be removed in future years. Lieutenant Randall did comparisons of different communities and they all gave very good reviews of the company. One of the issues was when someone paid at the end of the day and had insufficient funds but we already experience that in the tax office. Cit-e-net's reports would identify that and the tax collector could then work that out before the end of the day. She is asking to move ahead and start this service.

Mayor Keenan questioned how long it would take to start the service and Ms. Blumenthal indicated that it would take at least several weeks. Mayor Keenan questioned if people would be able to view their tax bill online and Ms. Blumenthal indicated that the township would provide any service that is within the \$2000 price.

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Councilwoman Bobo stated that she noticed that some of the towns also use it for their water and sewer payments and asked if it could be used as a shared service with the MUA. Ms. Blumenthal indicated that she believed that the MUA could sign up for this service but she did not think it would save us any money.

Councilwoman Riley questioned why Lieutenant Randall was the person who did the research on this particular topic. Ms. Blumenthal responded that it was because Lieutenant Randall has been doing a lot of research on our IT since Chief Lehmann retired and is also the one who did the research on upgrading our server. She relies on him for anything of an IT nature.

Councilwoman Riley asked if the Tax Collector was involved in the decision-making. Ms. Blumenthal stated that she knew that Lieutenant Randall had spoken to her. She has faith in Lieutenant Randall's analysis based on his speaking with the other municipalities. Councilwoman Riley felt that as a Lieutenant in the Police Department, his time and efforts are being spent on research that could be done by someone else.

Mayor Keenan stated that they were concerned before about having a police officer handle the IT for the township and asked if Ms. Blumenthal is committed to moving away from that. Ms. Blumenthal replied that she agrees because the salaries of the police are too high to be having them do IT work. At the current time, she has to use the best resources that she has and Lieutenant Randall is the one that knows the IT service.

Mayor Keenan stated that he liked the idea but felt that the Manager should check into it a little more that it meets our needs as a township and the requirements of the tax collector and that the filing deadlines and reports are generated.

Councilman Smith asked that Ms. Blumenthal check into the accessibility of getting the tax bill information to them so the taxpayer can view it online but he does like the fact that it will improve the collection and our float time. Ms. Blumenthal indicated that 50% of our residents pay the tax collector directly instead of through mortgage companies.

Councilwoman Riley felt that the \$1.00 fee would be good initially since it will offset the setup costs. It can be re-visited later.

Mayor Keenan asked that it be set up that the \$1.00 fee is separated out to a different account than the tax payments for accounting purposes. He would also Ms. Blumenthal to check into which bank the ACH vouchering will be sent to and how long they hold the money before they post it.

Councilwoman Bobo stated that she uses a similar system for school lunches. She is surprised how much she pays in convenience fees but she still does it.

Council was all in agreement to move forward with online payments when Ms. Blumenthal checks into those few items.

Fire Department Reimbursement Ordinance Request

Ms. Blumenthal indicated that she had received a request from the Fire District for a proposed ordinance and a resolution that the Fire District passed in January to start establishing billing fees. It is very much like our EMS billing except our EMS billing goes through health insurance and Medicare regulations and this appears to be more car insurance based. They do have that they will not be charging Mount Laurel residents in excess what the health insurance pays. She knows that the reason we can waive anything beyond what the health insurance pays is because Medicare indicates in their handbook that we do not have to because we are local government. She is not sure about car insurance and if there are regulations that cover that.

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Councilwoman Riley is concerned with the potential for car insurance increases. Also, it indicates that if you don't have car insurance that you do not have to pay and it seems like we would be consenting to people driving without car insurance.

Mayor Keenan stated that he reads Fire district resolution 2010-08 as a formal request from the fire district asking us to look into this. He has numerous questions, such as who will be billed, is there any duplication of services and he recommends that the Manager talk to the Fire Chief and Fire Commission to find out exactly what they are looking for.

Deputy Mayor McCaffrey was concerned that someone could get a surcharge on their car insurance based on some of the fees he is seeing in the proposal. He is not sure he wants to see the residents of Mount Laurel charged those types of numbers and he would be very cautious about what we are do.

Councilwoman Riley suggested that any questions that council members may have should be e-mailed to the other council members and to the manager. Council was in agreement.

Deputy Mayor McCaffrey felt that we should check to see if other municipalities are charging for this service and how the auto companies will handle this.

Mayor Keenan stated that we need to make sure of what the fire district wants to charge for and whether it is all within their realm to do so. He would like to find out how other neighboring towns are doing this and all auto companies are billing for it and whether it is a separate rider on their car insurance, and if it is legal to waive it for residents.

Deputy Mayor McCaffrey felt there are a lot of legal issues and not sure of their charter and how it reads.

Ms. Blumenthal stated that she would meet with the Chief initially and report back to Council.

Mayor Keenan indicated that if it is what the fire department feels it needs then he is willing to look into it.

Professional Contracts

Mayor Keenan stated that there was discussion last week about a not-to-exceed amount in a contract and Councilwoman Riley questioned why it is not in all our contracts. He had asked the Manager to look into that further. He would like a clause in our contracts that when it reaches 80%, Council and the Manager are informed. It will allow us to keep track of our expenses so that we do not go over 100% of our appropriations.

Councilwoman Riley indicated that under 40A:11-51a1, a contract must state the nature, duration and amount of the contract. We have been having our professional service contracts open-ended and they must state the amount. She feels that when our professionals submit their monthly bill, they should have a cover letter showing the total amount of their prior bill, the current bill and the amount that is due under their existing contract.

Mr. Norman questioned what if a bill is in dispute and a portion has not been paid and the issue does not get resolved. Councilwoman Riley responded that a line for unpaid fees could be added. She wants to make sure that our contracts are not challenged and if they are open-ended, they are not in compliance.

Mayor Keenan stated that we want to close any loophole and asked that the Manager look into it.

Ms. Blumenthal stated that if something is in dispute, the township is still liable for it.

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Deputy Mayor McCaffrey asked that we speak with Mr. Marrone about any accounting procedure that can be set up. Ms. Blumenthal stated that we would need to do a purchase order for one encumbrance and pay off that.

Ms. Blumenthal indicated that she only has signed the contract for Bowman but they have a set amount in their contract. She is just starting to get in the contracts for 2010.

Councilwoman Riley questioned how the professionals are being paid if we have no contracts. Mr. Norman stated that you could re-ratify if work is done with clear knowledge of the governing body and there is case law on it.

Councilwoman Bobo questioned who draws up the contracts. Ms. Blumenthal indicated that the professionals draw up the contracts themselves and we review them. Mayor Keenan stated that we needed to get these contracts done early as part of the RFP process. Ms. Halbe stated that the contracts are coming in very late this year.

Councilwoman Riley felt that we should also be cognizant of the fact that the contract can only be for one year and not until a successor is appointed. The statute is very specific. Mayor Keenan questioned how the township would address needing the services of their attorney on January 2nd when the reorganization meeting is not until later in the week. Mr. Norman stated that, if due to an unforeseen circumstance there is a gap between contract periods it is a technical violation but there is equitable dealing with the issue.

Mayor Keenan asked that the RFP process for next year include that contracts must be submitted within 30 days of the award of the contract.

Councilwoman Riley questioned if the Manager is the only person who reviews the contract because she believes that an attorney should also review them.

Public Comments

Sue Conte – 207 Ramblewood Parkway – Wants Council to be aware that there is a problem at Pennybridge. There is a tree that has fallen over and is blocking the creek and she is not sure if it is the responsibility of Mr. Goodwin or the Township.

Mayor Keenan will have the Manager check into it.

Gary Cogan – 112 Yorktown Drive – He feels the fire department ordinance would result in the wholesale non-writing of insurance policies in Mount Laurel unless it becomes the norm that the other towns all do it. I am not sure we can be the leading edge and for sure there will be surcharges. He suspects that other towns are not doing it in any great numbers.

Mount Laurel Fire Chief Gallos – Thanked Council for looking into the matter. The Fire District solicitor said that they did not need an ordinance due to the fire district being its own entity but an ordinance makes it stronger to proceed if any insurance companies balk at payment. The main reason that they are asking for this is because they cover a huge portion of I295 and the Turnpike. On December 23rd they were out there for 4 hours and tied up that they could not serve the residents. The trucking companies have this type of coverage in their policies. The fire district cannot bill the homeowners for fire protection since their policies state that if they are already paying for fire protection, they cannot bill them. He looks forward to working with Ms. Blumenthal on this. Many other departments are already doing this such as Wildwood, Medford, Vincentown to name a few. They have about 500+ calls on the Turnpike annually.

Deputy Mayor McCaffrey questioned whether the fire district already has a contract with the Turnpike Authority. Chief Gallos responded that they only get \$75 per vehicles and the Turnpike is getting a bargain.

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Mayor Keenan questioned as to whether a Mount Laurel resident would be billed if they were on the Turnpike. Chief Gallos responded that they would bill the auto insurance.

Councilwoman Riley questioned if there is any difference in billing between volunteer and paid departments. Chief Galls responded that Evesham and Cherry Hill are both paid departments and are also billing.

Mayor Keenan asked that Chief Gallos work with the Manager and she will report back to Council.

Public Comments

Fred Braun – 104 Haines Court – Questioned how the ACH would work for mortgage companies. Ms. Blumenthal stated that it would be more for individual residents, the mortgage company may have a thousand of our properties and they send in payment for all together.

Mr. Braun asked who is responsible for patrolling state highways, as he thinks that we should dump it back on the state. Mayor Keenan indicated that the State does patrol those highways now.

Mr. Braun said he has not seen any police going past his house in two years. Deputy Mayor McCaffrey said that he sees them all the time. Mayor Keenan stated that he sees them also.

Closed Session

The Clerk read resolution 10-R-82, authorizing Mount Laurel Township to go into closed session for discussion of Litigation Matters and Personnel Matters. A motion was made Councilwoman Riley and seconded by Deputy Mayor McCaffrey. All were in favor and Council went into closed session at 8:33 p.m.

Return to Open Session

A motion was made by Deputy Mayor McCaffrey and seconded by Councilwoman Bobo to return to Open Session. All were in favor and Council returned to open session at 10:10 p.m.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Councilwoman Bobo and seconded by Deputy Mayor McCaffrey. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Halbe, RMC
Municipal Clerk

Transcribed by
Patricia Halbe

The minutes of this meeting are summary minutes. A copy of the recording will be available in the office of the Municipal Clerk for four years.