

Meeting Minutes
Hightstown Borough Council
Special Workshop Meeting
April 3, 2012
6:00 pm

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Kirson at 6:13 pm and he read the Open Public Meetings Act statement which stated, "Adequate notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, pursuant to Public Law 1975, Chapter 231. Said notice was sent to the *Trenton Times* and the *Windsor-Hights Herald*, and is posted in the Borough Clerk's office."

The Flag Salute was followed by roll call.

	PRESENT	ABSENT
<i>Councilmember Bibens</i>		✓
<i>Councilmember Bluth</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Doran</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Quattrone</i>		✓
<i>Councilmember Thibault</i>		✓
<i>Councilmember Woods</i>	✓	
<i>Mayor Kirson</i>	✓	

Also in attendance: Debra Sopronyi, Borough Clerk; Michael Theokas, Borough Administrator; James LeTellier, Police Director; and Frederick Raffetto, Borough Attorney.

Resolution 2012-111 Authorizing a Meeting Which Excludes the Public

Councilmember Woods moved resolution 2012-111 with the addition of the topic Public Safety – Police Staffing being added to the resolution, Councilmember Doran seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Council members Bluth, Doran, and Woods voted yes.

Resolution adopted as amended, 3-0

Resolution 2012-111

BOROUGH OF HIGHTSTOWN
COUNTY OF MERCER
STATE OF NEW JERSEY

AUTHORIZING A MEETING WHICH EXCLUDES THE PUBLIC

BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Hightstown that this body will hold a meeting on April 3, 2012 at approximately 6:00 pm in the First Aid Building located on Bank Street, Hightstown that will be limited only to consideration of an item or items with respect to which the public may be excluded pursuant to section 7b of the Open Public Meetings Act.

The general nature of the subject or subjects to be discussed:

Public Safety – Police Staffing

Contract Negotiations – Lucas

Stated as precisely as presently possible the following is the time when and the circumstances under which the discussion conducted at said meeting can be disclosed to the public: July 3, 2012 or when the need for confidentiality no longer exists.

The public is excluded from said meeting, and further notice is dispensed with, all in accordance with sections 8 and 4a of the Open Public Meetings Act.

The public meeting was called to order by Mayor Kirson at 7:04 pm and he again read the Open Public Meetings Act statement.

The Flag Salute was followed by roll call and Council President Quattrone and Councilmember Thibault were now present.

Council President Quattrone moved the agenda for approval, Councilmember Doran seconded.

Mayor Kirson called for a roll call vote on the agenda.

Roll Call Vote: Council members Bluth, Doran, Quattrone, Thibault, and Woods voted yes.

Agenda approved as amended, 5-0.

Hurricane Irene Recovery/Mitigation Discussion

Mayor Kirson opened discussion by reviewing the catastrophic events at Borough Hall and the early measures taken; FEMA and insurance are reviewing proposals for Borough Hall.

Councilmember Doran distributed talking points which contained the options open to the Borough, including moving back to Borough Hall, close off rear portion of the building and re-open front portion, demolish present Borough Hall and re-build, move Borough Hall to another location (Lucas and Broad Street properties).

Mr. Theokas advised that present estimates to clean the building and move back in range from \$550,000 to \$700,000, and that does not include bringing the building up to code, or replacing the contents; FEMA is performing their own analysis, these estimates were acquired by the Borough.

There was discussion regarding the potential for another storm and flood maps. Although new flood maps have been developed in which Borough Hall is not in a flood zone, they have not been adopted so all claims for Borough Hall are being treated as a high flood zone area catastrophe. Mr. Theokas advised that it is being investigated why the new flood maps were not previously adopted.

Mayor Kirson then directed the discussion back to the options proposed. Option #2 is to demolish the rear portion of the building and return the administrative offices and court to the front portion of the building; however what would be done about the offices of Code Enforcement and the Police Department? Another option would be to raise Borough Hall and re-build it higher so it is not threatened if there is another flood; the cost for such an endeavor would be about \$3.7M.

Councilmember Bibens arrived at 7:20pm.

There was discussion regarding the FEMA claim sheets distributed to Council and the refurbishment estimate for Borough Hall in the amount of \$837,821.75; additional discussion took place regarding necessary environmental testing. Continuing discussion brought forward the following points: moving Borough Hall gives the potential to extend the mill property, costs of the options, and the geographic location and history of Borough Hall.

Mayor Kirson called upon each Councilmember for comments prior to opening the public comment period:

Councilmember Woods - commented that it is important to get the Administrative and Court offices up and running at Borough Hall; leave Code Enforcement at the Public Works facility, then we can deal with the Police Department.

Councilmember Doran – noted that she is in favor of preserving Borough Hall because it is the central point of town, but it is logical to leave the Police Department at the Lucas property where it is presently housed.

Council President Quattrone – commented that the Lucas property is up for sale and may not be available for the Police Department in the future. He expressed his concern regarding leaving Borough Hall where it is and suggested building a new Borough Hall behind the Historical Society Building leaving the Borough Hall property available to extend the old mill property. He went on to suggest that the Planner be consulted.

Councilmember Bibens – agreed that rehabilitating the front portion of Borough Hall would be a quick fix, but should we be at that location? The Lucas property is central to the new Route 33 project. She suggested the area behind the old movie house be considered and noted that people will go wherever you put Borough Hall; she does not like the idea of the Broad Street property.

Councilmember Quattrone – commented that in order to be realistic, we must move everything (Public Works and Administration) to the Lucas property if we purchased it; then we could add Borough Hall and the Public Works properties to the tax role.

Councilmember Bluth – commented that a decision will be based on the funds that are received, but the cheapest solution is to rehabilitate Borough Hall and she likes the small town feel Borough Hall’s present location gives the town. Moving Borough Hall is the most advantageous for redevelopment potential of the mill property and purchasing the Lucas property takes it off of the tax role. The Police Department must be considered in the decision.

Councilmember Thibault – noted that Borough Hall did not meet our needs previously and would need renovations if we were to move back into it. The Lucas property has faults as well. What about the firehouse; we need to acquire flood insurance for that building. We should look at other places downtown for Borough Hall; he is hesitant to take another large commercial property off of the tax role.

Administrator Theokas – suggested that Council get input from the Planning Board, Planner, GHWHIP and Downtown Hightstown so consideration is given for the best use of downtown to benefit all taxpayers.

There was discussion regarding the GHWIP study for the Master Plan re-examination and that a presentation is forthcoming.

Mayor Kirson opened the Public Comment period and the following individuals spoke:

J. P. Gibbons, 602 S. Main Street – thanked Council for holding this meeting and feels that the insurance should be providing an estimate to the Borough; you can easily tear down part of Borough Hall; is the Lucas Use and Occupancy Agreement being extended?; a move and the cost, as well as the money already spent on the Police Department, should be considered; re-building Borough Hall would show support to the businesses downtown; made suggestions for where to place the various Borough departments and/or offices; the Borough should fight the insurance company; the Lucas property is dated; the Fire Department has no desire to move; Council should bond to re-build Borough Hall and think out of the box.

Frank Rivera, 110 Broad Street – commented that he has a vision of Borough Hall remaining downtown; requested clarification of the code updates needed and flood map acceptance; Lucas property is a good size rateable.

Scott Caster, 12 Clover Lane – inquired as to whether the source of the damage has been evaluated and whether it has been determined that the turnpike construction had an affect; the Engineer should be consulted as to what can be done downtown to reduce the risk of flooding in the future.

Mayor Kirson responded to Mr. Caster, advising that there was a meeting with the Turnpike Authority and they denied having any impact; the Borough presented them with data from the Watershed. Discussion has taken place with the Borough Engineer and Larry Blake; the Mayor reminded the public and Council that there has been previous flooding in the Borough.

Jane Cox, 183 E. Ward Street - commended Council for great discussion and moving ahead but she does not want to see a property taken off the tax base; she feels it is important that the post office remain in the Borough.

Tory Watkins, 68 Meadow Drive – thanked Council for the meeting; noted that this is an opportunity for Hightstown; recommended that Council move slowly and listen to Mr. Theokas, bringing in the various organizations, Boards and Professionals for advice; his vision is to re-locate Borough Hall to Lanning Boulevard in East Windsor; suggested the Borough begin negotiations with East Windsor for consolidation; the Borough should negotiate with FEMA; removing the post office should not even be considered.

Fran Palumbo, 101 Main Street – commented that she had her business up and running in four days; people want a downtown Hightstown; she doesn’t want to see the Borough washed away.

Mayor/Council/Administrative Comments

Councilmember Thibault – thanked the public for attending the meeting and commenting, it was a valuable meeting.

Councilmember Bluth – thanked the public for attending the meeting; she is sorry more public did not attend; there were interesting comments; the time has come to get upper government involved.

Councilmember Bibens – commented that the Borough needs to be more aggressive and fight for every penny due; she is disappointed in the public attendance at this meeting, but appreciates the comments made.

Council President Quattrone – commented that he kept hearing from Council that the people want to know what is going on, but only about a half-dozen residents want to know; he remembers prior floods; he commented regarding getting Democrats to help; he has pictures of the flood and can take them to the turnpike if necessary; it is good government to have discussion in an open forum; he gave the Mayor and Mr. Theokas a lot of credit for all of their hard work with FEMA and insurance.

Councilmember Woods – noted that she waited a long time for this meeting and she appreciates the public comments; she doesn't mind giving up a night for a productive meeting.

Councilmember Doran – noted that most has already been said, but what she is taking away from the public is that Council should make a decision and FEMA should accommodate; we need to develop a plan and are on the right track; we need to get the various organizations, Boards and Professionals to come to a meeting. She reminded the public that there are two public comment periods at all Council meetings and invited the public to attend and speak during those periods.

Mayor Kirson – complimented Council on a good meeting and assured them that he has been in touch with State Officials on the matter and is working closely with FEMA.

Scott Caster of 12 Clover Lane then requested permission to address the Police Director and stated that he admires Council and Mr. Theokas for a great job. He then asked the Police Director if the present location of the Police Department affects response time or if the department being centrally located downtown makes a difference. Police Director LeTellier responded that he does not recommend that the communication and emergency response centers be in a dangerous location or traffic congested area. There is no easy answer an overall assessment of the proposed area would need to be done. His recommendation will be to do what is in the best interest of the public.

J.P. Gibbons, 602 S. Main Street – noted that Council cannot go to upper government until they know what they want to do.

Councilmember Bibens moved to adjourn at 9:20 pm, Councilmember Thibault seconded. All ayes.

Respectfully Submitted,

Debra L. Sopronyi, RMC
Borough Clerk