

Meeting Minutes
Hightstown Borough Council
Special Meeting
May 30, 2012
7:00 pm

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Kirson at 7:01pm 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 Roll Call was followed by the flag salute.

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; Carmela Roberts, Borough Engineer; Tamara Lee, Borough Planner; and Frederick Raffetto, Borough Attorney.

Council President Quattrone motioned to approve the agenda as presented; Councilmember Woods seconded and the motion was approved unanimously.

Mayor Kirson announced that this is a special meeting regarding Borough Hall and the effects of Hurricane Irene. This is a crossroads for Hightstown, not just regarding the building but there will be ramifications from the decision made for years to come. The future must be considered moving 5, 10, or 20 years going forward. He asked that the discussion regarding the re-establishment of Borough Hall take the future of the Borough into consideration.

The Mayor opened public comment and the following individuals spoke:

Ryan Rosenberg, 177 Lincoln Avenue, Representative from Downtown Hightstown – Read the following letter from Downtown Hightstown, Inc.

"Mayor and Council:

We, the trustees for Downtown Hightstown, Inc., urge you to strongly consider the benefits of moving the Hightstown Borough hall 0.8 miles from its present location to the Lucas Electric site.

Our group's core goal is the development of a thriving downtown district which celebrates our history, provides residents with vibrant community space, and encourages residents, visitors and passerby to explore. Our downtown has kept our Borough relevant from its inception and all the way through the railroad and turnpike eras. This same downtown, if properly and thoughtfully developed, will keep Hightstown relevant into the future, thereby ensuring that our town will never lose its identity.

Phases I – III of the Revitalization Project brought new life to the downtown and inspired numerous public and private initiatives which built upon each other. The next major leap of the downtown's smart growth hinges on the potential expansion of our commercial corridor along Main Street and the development of the rug mill property. Relocating Borough Hall to the Lucas Electric site will make the rug mill property much more attractive to developers, free up the area for more creative and economically beneficial usage, and place the site back on the tax rolls.

We strongly urge you to consider moving the Hightstown Borough Hall to the Lucas Electric site for the long-term benefit of Hightstown Borough and its downtown.

Sincerely,

Gary Grubb , Brent Rivenbaugh, Ryan Rosenberg, Gary Stevens, Yoland Swiney, Esther Velasquez”

Bill Gilmore, 219 Greeley Street, Representative from Greater Hightstown East Windsor Improvement Program (GHEWIP) – referenced the SWOT Analysis performed by GHEWIP and previously distributed to Council, reviewed who attended the meeting in which it was developed and explained that this SWOT analysis presents the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with leaving Borough Hall where it is currently located versus moving Borough Hall to the Lucas Electric or some other property. He then went on to review the SWOT Analysis results:

Strengths

Borough Hall Downtown: pedestrian centered, adequate parking most times, central public space reachable by everyone, sentiment and nostalgia, located near fire/ems/ public works, when police were located in building it offered security, dispatch police from center of town providing shortest response time, contributes to viability of business district, Borough Hall in current location can be rehabilitated, FEMA funding available to pay for some improvements.

Borough Hall moves to Lucas/Other property: pedestrian centered/aligns with Route 33 Corridor study, adequate parking, locates police with Borough offices/provides security, not in a flood zone, access opportunity to high school with Route 33 Corridor study, seven acre site at Lucas property, Lucas/other property would be viable and saleable if consolidation proceeds with East Windsor, move releases a big tract for useful development downtown, move would not be a long distance from downtown, mutual aid with East Windsor happens with police support for added coverage, gateway to downtown, easy ingress and egress from site, new facility would be designed for new service efficiencies, less costly to retrofit than Borough Hall.

Weaknesses

Borough Hall Downtown: parking capacity is limited at times, meeting space for Judge is wrong, Borough cannot be rehabilitated without significant cost and expansion, during serious flood there is no access to Borough Hall, building was not built as a Borough Hall it was a car dealership, impediment to developing the mill, cost to retrofit Borough Hall is more costly than Lucas, drain on capital and will need to redo because state will make us consolidate, presently tax exempt property.

Borough Hall moves to Lucas/Other property: \$60K in taxes lost if Lucas becomes town hall, location of police offices reduce opportunity for using remainder of property for other taxable uses, lease on Lucas property end in May, Lucas built as JCP&L and will need modifications, not centrally located.

Opportunities

Borough Hall Downtown: potential draw for new downtown businesses, staying at borough hall does not remove a taxable property.

Borough Hall moves to Lucas/Other property: allows for green space downtown, provides a potential linkage to rug mill with N. Main Street, site could become potential site for joint East Windsor/Hightstown town hall that is more centrally located and tied to Route 33 corridor redevelopment, moving to Lucas is opportunity to expand downtown to include Bank Street properties, Lucas property improvements would make site more viable for future commercial development, FEMA funds may be available to fund relocation costs of Borough offices.

Threats

Borough Hall Downtown: another flood or more, complaints about mold with old building, continued stagnation of mill project due to Borough Hall obligation, loss of nostalgia for long-term Hightstown residents, loss of potential for updated/improved building on Borough site, unknown cost of moving to new location, unknown cost of updating existing building to meet code standards, public safety hindered during flooding from accessing central area, FEMA funds unavailable a second time for future floods.

Borough Hall moves to Lucas/Other property: not being in center of town, threat of change makes residents uncomfortable, full cost to improve site unknown, removes tax ratable property, loss of access to public accommodations like restrooms, increased response times to other ends of town.

He continued that if the Borough Hall was to move to another location you could possibly generate more tax revenue because you could get the rug mill property back on line and will not have to pay for flood insurance for Borough Hall; overall GHEWIP finds that moving Borough Hall to another location would benefit the Borough and its residents.

Charles (Cappy) Stultz, 408 Main Street (owns Allen 7 Stultz) – noted that his building was 3 feet under water from hurricane Irene but he did not see a police officer for three days because they had to get the police up and running before they could take care of the community. Another concern is the psychological affects moving back to the building will have for the public and employees in regards to mold even if it is cleaned. Hightstown is a car oriented community and he thinks it is better to move Borough Hall.

Jay Zimmer, 56 Mill Run West (Member of GHEWIP and Administrator of Meadow Lakes Community) – commented regarding the taxes paid and the considerable improvements made in the recent past by Meadow Lakes, they have a considerable investment in the community. He noted that the residents of Meadow Lakes are seniors with means but they by-pass shopping in Hightstown to go to Princeton, it would be advantageous to have businesses in town they could patronize. GHEWIP has funded two studies to establish what Hightstown could be and we need to do something to attract Seniors of means to visit and live in Hightstown. Council should seriously consider moving Borough Hall; the time and opportunity is now.

Tory Watkins, 68 Meadow Drive – commented that he has been a resident of Hightstown for 33 years, he raised his children and grandchildren here. We may have suffered through the hurricane, but it dealt Hightstown a favor by giving the opportunity to change things. The residents choose good Governing Body members in elections and you talk about ratables, fiscal and important matters in Hightstown, but you are allowing other matters to interfere and not looking long term. The hurricane and the Route 33 Corridor Study offer an opportunity. He then urged Council to focus on the Lucas, or another, property citing benefits such as re-development of the rug mill property, Borough operations all at one location, and providing the Borough with investment opportunities; taxis could also park on Borough property eliminating that issue as well.

George Serrano, 4 Westerlea Avenue – commented that he is all for moving Borough Hall, but what about the firehouse? He is running for Council and it is a shame Council is not talking about the firehouse. Also, why the Lucas property, what about other properties on North and South Main Streets?

J P Gibbons, 602 N. Main Street – noted that he keeps hearing that Council should think 20 years into the future but you can't see the future. He asked why Borough Hall has not been rehabilitated; we keep waiting for FEMA and the insurance to decide for us. There was water and mold in other businesses downtown, but they have been rehabilitated. There are no monitors in the building and the weather is getting warmer; he believes that there is a deliberate destruction of the building. The firehouse is between Borough Hall and the brook in a flood zone, he has seen the flood maps. He also commented that having all Borough facilities in one locale is not a good idea. What are the numbers? How do we know how much it would cost to rehab Borough Hall? He is outraged that information is not available, is Lucas the only property available? Why take commercial land? He commented that the seat of Government should remain downtown and the Borough should be looking at other property. He commented that the firehouse uses the Borough Hall lot for parking and moving will cause them to be shorted of parking facilities; and he inquired as to what is going on with the court.

Eugene Sarafin, 628 S. Main Street – noted that he has toured the Lucas property and finds it to be a beautiful facility; he recommended all of Council to tour the property. He noted that DC is not in the center of the United States; and recommended that Borough Hall be moved to the Lucas property.

Scott Caster, 12 Clover Lane – suggested that if moving Borough Hall assists in the redevelopment of the mill property, Council should move it and continue into the future; but, why only consider Lucas, why not other properties? The Route 33 Corridor Study is too far into the future to take into consideration and there is merit to having Borough Hall and the Police Department downtown as he feels there is currently less police presence downtown. He urged Council to review properties and keep Borough Hall and the Police Department downtown.

Dimitri Musing, 137 Stockton Street – commented that it appears there is a split opinion whether Borough Hall should remain downtown or move, but it is his opinion that Borough Hall should not be downtown. He urged Council to give thought to the opportunity to make consolidation work. There has been the question of why Lucas; he suggested it is because the police department is there, there is an extra seven acres and there is the opportunity to move public works and sell the present public works property. It is a good idea to invest in the long-term. The RFP was being requested is premature.

Lev Golinkin, 5 Kiel Court, East Windsor (member of Downtown Hightstown) – noted that he has spoken to people who were here 15 years ago, before downtown was revitalized, and they are saying to move Borough Hall. This Council should listen as those people got things done and the Lucas property is only .8 miles from the present Borough Hall.

Ann Willis, 158 North Academy Street – commented that the charm of Hightstown is that it is a small town, if you move Borough hall and the police department, it will lose the small town feel. The Borough facilities should not be spread out, we need to retain the small town feel of Hightstown.

John Archer, 131 Bennett Place – thanked GHEWIP for the SWOT Analysis. He has been a Realtor in Hightstown since 1978 and knows that the Lucas property is contaminated so a phase I study should be performed. Public entities should follow protocol and need to know who they are, can we accept the GHEWIP studies? Are they legal without having gone to bid? The

Mayor Kirson responded that GHEWIP is an independent organization, not a part of Borough Government, and they chose to have the studies performed and offered it to the Borough for information and consideration; the Borough has the right to accept and review the information offered. Mr. Archer continued that the Lucas property was constructed in 1958 with electric heat and the Broad Street property is still available. He also inquired as to whether the cell phone lease on the Lucas property comes with the property if purchased by the Borough. If it makes financial sense to move, then Borough Hall should be moved, but we need to know the costs to make a good decision.

Fran Palumbo, 101 Main Street – commented that consolidation was the platform on which some of Council ran to get elected and if we move closer to East Windsor we get closer to consolidation. Borough Hall belongs downtown.

Denny Hansen, 211 Grant Avenue – noted that the Borough cannot afford to make a financial mistake with this decision; you can't just leave things the way they are. She has reviewed the budget and can't find any way to cut expenses and she is concerned about the viability of the Borough. The community is inspiring and she likes living in a small town, but it costs a fortune to live here. It's all about money and looking forward; we need to trust the people making the decisions and they need to be fiscally responsible.

Steve Misiura, 352 S. Main Street (Planning Board Chairperson) –reminded Council that he spoke at the last meeting regarding the redevelopment plan and noted that if a long term plan had been done 25 years ago things could be different today; the Planning Board has spoken with the Planner regarding a recommendation. He also noted another small town that had outgrown its location and needed to move. He encouraged Council to be practical in their decision.

Mike Vanderbeck, 344 Stockton Street – commented that he owns three commercial and five residential units downtown and has invested a lot into them. He thinks Hightstown is thriving and viable, he has been there for 25 years and there was considerably more commercial stores downtown in the past. It is possible that Hightstown Borough may become a part of the Main Street Program and moving Borough Hall will allow more commercial businesses downtown, which will assist the current businesses; Borough Hall has no historical significance and does not economically boost businesses downtown. He encouraged Council to look at the future so they do not regret their actions later. He also noted that the fire department should also be addressed and could possibly be moved to the Lucas property, but that would be the fire department's decision.

Kathleen Gravely, 40 Westerlea Avenue – commented that the existing Borough Hall is immaterial, and Borough Hall should stay downtown. The Route 33 Corridor is the prime place for commercial property and the Broad Street property is in a residential area and should not be commercial. We do not need seven acres for Borough Hall and there is a retail and tax opportunity for the Lucas property.

Dan Buriak, 194 Stockton Street (Historic Preservation Commission Chairperson) – noted that he has lived here for sixteen years and that police presence and response on Stockton Street is exceptional. He then addressed Council as the Chairperson to the Historic Preservation Commission and noted that they find that there is no intrinsic value to Borough Hall and that it is not the nucleus of the town, it detracts from the historic image of downtown. We are no longer a Borough Hall centered society, we are a commercially driven society and we need to have a vision for downtown and build a commercial corridor. With electronic bill paying and advances in technology, resident visits to Borough Hall have diminished and will continue to decline. The HPC does not find the current Borough worthy of preservation and recognizes the risk of repeat flooding. With the recent development of the Hightstown/East Windsor route 33 Corridor plan, it is recognized that the commercial center of Hightstown is being steered away from downtown and that moving Borough Hall and permitting the use of that property for commercial development will assist to balance commercial development within the community.

There being no further comments, the Mayor closed the public comment period.

The Mayor then called on the Professionals for their opinions and recommendations.

Tamara Lee, Borough Planner – noted that she will not tell the Council what is the best choice, but will assist and guide them through their decision. She continued that discussion regarding Borough Hall began many years before the hurricane, the building was previously inadequate and the hurricane did not create the problem. The Borough needs to assess its needs, options, existing building and the vision of where the Council wants the Borough to go and whether Borough Hall is the center of this community. She then referred to a memo that she had previously sent the Council and noted that once quantified it will be easier to see which direction is logical for the Borough.

Carmela Roberts, Borough Engineer – advised that she has performed flood elevation surveys for municipal facilities and that the 100 year flood is at approximately 82 feet and the door to the police department at the Borough Hall is about 8” above that, but Hurricane Irene was three feet higher than that. Even though the flood maps change, flood elevations do not. The determination in the new flood map is that the building is in a 500 year flood zone, however we have already fallen victim to the 100 year flood.

James LeTellier, Police Director – appreciates the public comments and police are present throughout the community; he gave representative statistics and noted that officers are only in headquarters to do their paper work and the data presented is proof. He

then stated that the police department should not be in a flood location as they serve as the emergency communication center. Location of the police department in the Borough will not affect response and he is committed to public safety and cost effectiveness.

The Mayor thanked them for their comments and opened the floor to the Borough Council for comments and discussion.

Council President Quattrone – commented that he has heard a lot of opinion and some facts. He suggested that before a decision is made Council arrange to tour the Lucas property, and also possibly the Shangle and Hunt property before any commitment. The Borough could be absorbing a \$1M deductible and that definitely is slowing the process.

Councilmember Thibault – commented that he is committed to not authorizing anything until a financial analysis is performed. He noted that the Lucas property is \$1.7M without any renovation or moving costs; the Borough receives \$64,890.00 in taxes (of which \$18,000.00 is municipal funds) from Lucas. The Shangle and Hunt property is \$750,000.00 and only pays \$6,200.00 in taxes; and is 6,200 square feet. Council has asked for an analysis, but has not received it. What about modular office space? What about renting? There are other options available and they will not act until Council receives the information. The Lucas property is contingent on too many things. Regarding the rug mill and Route 33 corridor development, we are in bad economic times. Government does not have a good track record for redeveloping property. He will not act without the financial analysis.

Councilmember Bluth – thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and noted that her patience is running thin; information has been requested and not received. She noted that she has performed FEMA research and requested grant information. She demanded that the information requested be submitted to Council; all options must be explored and there is a need for the financial analysis.

Councilmember Doran – thanked everyone for attending and noted that Council needs to see the numbers. Are we waiting for Borough Hall to deteriorate beyond repair and the Shangle and Hunt property to be sold? If developers are waiting for the Borough Hall property, then bring them forward. Why are we being driven to go to Lucas? She would like Borough Hall to remain downtown; .8 miles of a 1.2 square mile town is far away. Moving Borough Hall to an outside area is not what she wants to see. A decision cannot be made without the numbers.

Councilmember Woods – as Liaison to Borough-owned property she is attending the meetings with the insurance and we have been told to come up with a like kind replacement amount and then they will negotiate. This could have been done six months ago and if the mold is left unchecked we could be left with the costs. The Shangel and Hunt property is not being investigated and she is afraid we will be locked into not having a choice. She noted that she has been proactive in research and has questions with no answers.

There was discussion regarding the hiring of professionals to get the financial analysis.

Borough Administrator Theokas – noted that progress has been made over time on the claim; it is a big project and the numbers for the damages are not yet ready. He noted that Council has not yet been asked to make a decision because the information is not yet available.

Council President Quattrone – advised that no decision to go to Lucas has been made; the police department is there because it was available and they were willing to take them in after the hurricane. He comes to Borough Hall every day and there are no numbers yet, it is a slow process. He is glad that Councilmember Woods is attending the meetings. Councilmember Thibault asked for a special meeting and what did we learn, other than that the information is not yet ready. We cannot just jump to a decision; we need to weigh in all the factors. There were a lot of opinions tonight, but we cannot move too quickly.

Mayor Kirson – commented that nobody is deliberately destroying Borough Hall, boilers were installed at a cost of \$40,000.00 to prevent freezing in the winter. The figures received are still not clarified, and we are still working on it. The Engineer anticipated that the RFP cost for an Architect is \$50,000.00 to \$100,000.00 just to do an RFP for the repairs to the building. As Council was previously advised, the Architect's estimate to get back into Borough Hall is \$700,000.00 to \$750,000 as it was before the flood (like kind) but we need to bring it up to current code and this is costly. The courtroom upstairs does not meet code requirements, and the administrative offices downstairs do not meet PEOSHA requirements, and the police department would be a total and complete renovation to meet current requirements. The flood elevation of the building is also an issue and could require a knock down and total rebuild at a cost of approximately \$3.7M. We need to know what the insurance is going to give us before moving forward. We are working hard and want to do the right thing. We are watching the taxpayer's dollars.

Councilmember Thibault – noted that the memo from the Planner explains the process and we should start now.

Councilmember Doran – requested that the discussion continue at the meeting of the June 4th meeting.

Councilmember Thibault – advised that the lack of information being given to Council is a big problem.

Councilmember Thibault moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 PM and Council President Quattrone seconded; the motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Debra L. Sopronyi
Borough Clerk