

Meeting Minutes
Hightstown Borough Council
Special Meeting
August 23, 2012
6:00 pm

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Kirson at 6:05 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 followed 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; Frederick Raffetto, Borough Attorney; and Eric Bernstein, Labor Counsel. Councilmember Thibault was absent due to the nature of the discussion during executive session.

Resolution 2012-216 Authorizing a Meeting Which Excludes the Public

Councilmember Bluth moved resolution 2012-216, Councilmember Doran seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Council members Bibens, Bluth, Doran, and Woods voted yes; Councilmember Thibault was absent.

Resolution adopted, 5-0.

Resolution 2012-216

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 August 23, 2012 at approximately 6:00 pm in the Historical Society Building located at 164 N. Main 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

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: November 23, 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.

Council re-convened into public session at 7:04 pm.

Roll call was followed by the flag salute. Roll call had remained the same with the exception that Councilmember Thibault had arrived during executive session and was now present. Carmela Roberts, Borough Engineer and Tamara Lee, Borough Planner also joined the meeting at this time.

Councilmember Bluth moved the agenda for approval, Councilmember Bibens seconded.

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

Agenda approved 6-0.

Council Discussion

Councilmember Thibault distributed a comparison of the options available for Borough Hall; with figures for going back to Borough Hall, the Lucas property and the Bank Street property, based on the numbers from the spatial needs assessment. There was discussion regarding using modular buildings for the Administration staff and Police and it was noted that the option of moving back to Borough Hall, and demolishing the rear portion of the facility, does not include the Police Department.

Mayor Kirson introduced discussion as to where Borough Hall should be located and Councilmember Thibault commented that to build on the current site seems the most feasible choice.

There was discussion regarding the options available and flood zones. The Borough Engineer noted that we will always be at risk for flooding at this location and that Council should also consider the cost for ADA compliance and site work.

Councilmember Doran commented that she was in favor of utilizing property already owned by the Borough and the Borough Engineer recommended that Council consider putting the Police Department next to Borough Hall and have parking for both facilities in the rear of the property.

Tamara Lee, the Borough Planner noted that Council should talk about other factors, such as whether Borough Hall will stay downtown or go elsewhere; is this plan for a temporary or permanent space; and the cost associated with the project. Councilmember Woods inquired as to the importance of the frontage on Main Street, in relation to getting the Rug Mill property developed.

The Planner advised that the plans for the Rug Mill have always depended somewhat heavily on the frontage on Main Street and for a long time there has been concern that the tax base here is not really balanced, with too much burden on residential; and the way to relieve that burden is to have more commercial. One suggestion that has been in the Master Plan has been to incorporate this property into development and extend the downtown business district up this way, up Main Street; and that would be valuable commercial property that would help to balance the tax burden because you would have more valuable retail space along Main Street. It's easier to have retail space there, you would have office space in the rear and retail on Main Street; this would be the most economical way to develop that property and see the most revenue out of it. If you expand downtown, you're going to have less of a burden on residential. That has always been seen as somewhat important because if you can get the kind of revenues you would get for retail then a developer is going to be more attracted to renovating the rest of the site. When you take Main Street off, that's when we start talking more about residential, because residential for the rest of the rug mill becomes the more reasonable option; but if you put more residential it counters what we originally said we were trying to do, which is to balance the tax base; unless you go with Senior Housing which isn't quite as much of a residential burden. But it is certainly not the benefit that retail is.

Councilmember Woods inquired as to whether keeping Borough Hall in its present location would prevent retail development at the rug mill. Tamara Lee responded no, but retail in upper levels or set back from Main Street is never going to be as successful as retail right on Main Street and continuing the downtown experience. People want that immediate draw, they don't want to walk and they certainly don't like walking up stairs; just ask anybody who is trying to rent retail space; it is much harder to rent than first floor retail space. So if the objective is still to balance the tax base, then using the piece of property for some sort of retail is going to be more beneficial, and using the Main Street portion of that property is also going to help the re-development of the rug mill. It is going to make it easier, or you are going to have to change your plans for the rug mill.

Councilmember Doran stated that we could keep that plan and go ahead with what we're talking about now, and when we get to a point where we have a viable developer then the location of Borough Hall can be on the table and we could transition to a plan where the Borough Hall functions move into the back part of the rug mill.

The Borough Planner noted that is why she asked if these plans were permanent or transition space. Councilmember Doran responded that they are permanent as to where Borough Hall was prior to the hurricane and in that case it was on the table as part of the re-development plan. When that started to go down the toilet with Wolfington, we were going to stay with Borough Hall but that was always on the table as a part of the re-development plan. Meanwhile I think that's what we're talking about, resuming the same sort of position. It was never my intention to negate that part of the re-development plan and say that it was never going to be available to the rug mill. The Planner noted that then you are not talking about a permanent situation.

The Borough Planner then advised that if the plans are to be temporary, Council should take into consideration how much has been invested into the facilities already in temporary use; and a consensus of the ultimate goal is needed so Council can work backward from there. Mayor Kirson noted that if the development of the Rug Mill is the ultimate goal, consideration should be given to renting space for the Administrative offices and leaving the Inspection Department at the Public Works facility. There was further discussion.

Council President Quattrone commented that Council is putting the horse before the cart with these discussions because information on how much money is available from the insurance is necessary before a final decision on location can be made. He noted that Council must take into account the re-development plan; a re-development commission, containing people from outside the Council, should be established to report to Council. He went on to state that the quickest solution would be to move to the Lucas property; and consideration should be given to also moving Public Works to that facility. Then, the re-development commission could work on getting the old Borough Hall, Public Works and Rug Mill properties developed. Council President Quattrone added that he would rather spend \$50,000.00 to expand the Public Works building than spend funds on the old Borough Hall at this time. Councilmember Woods commented that she feels the most inexpensive and practical solution is to move back into the old Borough Hall.

There was discussion regarding whether FEMA or the insurance can dictate where Borough Hall is located and flood insurance availability. Discussion continued on updating workspace in the old building for borough employees, location of the Police Department and Administration, ADA compliance, the value of the Borough Hall property, and required Planning Board input and approvals.

The Borough Attorney and Engineer advised Council regarding the process. The Borough Attorney noted that the next step would be for Council to adopt a resolution, with contingencies, that would be sent to the Planning Board for their comments and recommendations. The Planning Board will also advise as to whether the proposed plan is in compliance with the Master Plan.

The Mayor opened the Public Comment Period and the following individuals spoke:

Eugene Sarafin, 628 S. Main Street – commented that police accessibility is an issue at the old location and functionality should be considered; lease the Lucas property as a temporary fix and consider moving the Court elsewhere.

Skye Gilmartin, 41 Powell Court – inquired as to the status of security at the Lucas property.

Bill Gilmore, GHEWIP – commented that Borough Hall does not need to be downtown and a majority would like it elsewhere; Council needs a vision for the future before making a decision and the Lucas property offers great opportunity.

J P Gibbons, 602 N. Main Street – commented that he believes Council is split on this decision because they want to merge with East Windsor; ADA compliance would not be an issue with modular buildings; Buying the Lucas property is not a viable option; a private/public partnership is needed to develop the Rug Mill property.

Kathy Gravely, 40 Westerlea Avenue – commented that all businesses in Princeton are downtown and the boutiques in multi-level structures are very popular; we need to build Hightstown into something, the taxes keep going up.

Keith LePrevost, 213 Greeley Street – noted that part of the problem is the lack of a disaster plan; trailers should be brought in temporarily; Council should rely on the advice of their professionals; a Re-development Authority is a great idea; a vision should be developed before a decision is made.

Scott Caster, 12 Clover Lane – commented that an independent planning process should be used in making a decision; nobody represents the businesses downtown; Council has dropped the ball on revitalizing Hightstown; why not build on top of the Public Works facility?

Skye Gilmartin, 41 Powell Court – commented that this discussion brought out some good ideas; Council should rely on the advice of their professionals; Hightstown needs an emergency plan; another couple meetings with numbers and discussion like this are needed.

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

Borough Planner, Tamara Lee, reminded Council that once the resolution is sent to the Planning Board it will be the first time they will discuss this matter and how it affects the Mater Plan. They will need time for discussion.

Councilmember Woods noted that she attended the Downtown Hightstown meeting regarding revitalization and the professionals stated that Borough Hall should be downtown; Council has done an exceptional job with research and a lot of consideration has gone into the decision to keep Borough Hall downtown.

Councilmember Bibens – noted that she is tired of hearing that Hightstown is not sustainable; Council needs to know how much money they will be receiving for the project; the staff is in need of a useful work environment; more discussion is needed to establish what should be done.

Councilmember Bluth – commented that a decision needs to be made.

Councilmember Thibault – it will cost an estimated \$2M to renovate the Lucas property; he read the GHEWIP Action Plan for downtown and it convinced him that Borough Hall should remain downtown; money is an issue in this matter since Hightstown has the highest taxes in Mercer County; we need to get something done quickly and inexpensively; we need to plan now and make a decision at the next meeting.

Councilmember Doran – commented that Council has received a lot of advice from the public and it is being considered; we need to make a decision and we move forward.

Council President Quattrone – noted that the Council must look at the Rug Mill as it is key to the vision, per the public; the cost to move to the Lucas property is not \$4M and moving Public Works is also an opportunity; the Water Plant is looking great; more retail space is always better; if we want to move quickly, then we just need to move to Lucas; the bottom line is we must do this properly.

Mayor Kirson – commented that this meeting was productive and after a few more discussions Council should be ready to make a decision.

Fred Raffetto, Borough Attorney – reminded Council that they must adopt a resolution.

Mayor Kirson suggested that this item be placed on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting so a resolution can be prepared regarding the desired location of Borough Hall.

There was discussion regarding procedures for Planning Board approvals. The Planner and Attorney were directed to prepare a guidance checklist for Council to use through the process.

Councilmember Thibault moved to adjourn at 9:25pm, Councilmember Bibens seconded. All ayes.

Respectfully Submitted,

Debra L. Sopronyi, RMC
Borough Clerk