

Meeting Minutes
Hightstown Borough Council
Special Meeting
August 8, 2012

6:00 pm

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Kirson at 6:01 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; and Rick Perez, Architect.

Resolution 2012-209 Authorizing a Meeting Which Excludes the Public

Council President Quattrone moved resolution 2012-209, Councilmember Bibens seconded.

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

Resolution adopted, 5-0.

Resolution 2012-209

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 6, 2012 at approximately 6:00 pm in the First Aid Building located at 168 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:

Potential Contract Negotiations – Municipal Building Needs Assessment

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 8, 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 7:14 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.

Presentation by Council members Woods and Bibens

Councilmember Woods introduced the presentation “Vision with Economy Opportunity for Growth and Viability” and identified the problems as recovery effort and incorporating the revitalization vision for downtown and cost; the suggested options are the Lucas Electric property, current Borough Hall location, or to buy the Rug Mill property. The purpose of the presentation is to review the option of the Rug Mill property and she noted that she has toured the facility and is very excited about this plan and noted that it is an overall vision. Councilmember Woods then presented statistics for the Rug Mill Property.

She continued with an explanation of phase I which would consist of purchasing the rug mill, restoring the old Borough Hall administrative offices for temporary use, demolish the rear portion of the Borough Hall facility, and relocate the police department and court downtown in modular facilities temporarily (possibly behind Ely House). Councilmember Woods gave examples and cost estimates for modular facilities.

Phase II of the project would be to create a non-governmental based development team, apply for historic designation and look for possible grants, and follow-up with the progress of an environmental clean-up of the Rug Mill property. Creating a space for Borough offices on the second or third floor of the main building would also be a part of phase II. Once the Borough offices are moved to this location, the current building would be available for rent or sale. She then reviewed a portion of a memo from the Borough Planner.

Phase III would be to create a destination mall in part of the brick portion of the rug mill, such as artist studios and a reception hall for weddings and etc., leaving plenty of room for additional office space or a conference center.

Phase IV would be for the exploration of possibilities for the blue and white warehouse section of the property which could be upscale condos or an anchor store. At this time Councilmember Woods was advised that this portion of the Rug Mill property was sold some time ago. The Bank Street Park could also be developed into a more attractive recreation area with an ice skating rink and picnic area.

Councilmember Bibens then explained the benefits of the project which included the creation of green/open space downtown, opportunity for commercial rent or sale of current facility, creation of a future ongoing revenue stream, and that the plan invests in the future of Hightstown as a sustainable town and/or makes Hightstown more attractive for possible future consolidation. She went on with a summary of how this project could be accomplished, starting with a decision by Council that this is what they would like to do. She then reviewed the challenges.

Councilmember Bibens commented that the Borough needs revenue for sustainability and this concept is a viable option; sometimes you have to spend money to make money and this is a vision for the future with endless possibilities. This project would be taking action toward solving three major problems in Hightstown: Borough Hall complex, Rug Mill, and the lack of a revenue stream.

Mayor Kirson thanked Council members Woods and Bibens for the nice presentation, which contained a lot of ideas and food for thought. He commented that he supports the idea of a re-development agency and that the state has particular requirements for same.

Council Discussion

Mayor Kirson opened discussion noting that to get a developer to participate in such a project would require that they collect the revenue, not the Borough. We need a package to present to a developer.

Council President Quattrone commented that he would like to review the memo from the Planner that was referenced, and that the re-development agency must be independent of Council. He is concerned with the price given in the presentation for the Rug Mill Property and what about issues with mold in the Rug Mill building? He went on to note that the Rug Mill has already been ruled out as a historic

site, so it cannot be designated as such. Council President Quattrone expressed concern as to whether the Borough should act as a landlord.

Council President Quattrone commented that he thinks the old Borough Hall should come down and we need to find money to move forward.

There was discussion regarding the numbers that were presented and a possible joint meeting with the Planning Board.

Councilmember Doran commented that she felt the presentation was a Rug Mill re-development presentation, not a Borough Hall solution presentation. She noted that the Planning Board has heard a lot of this and discussed it along with the possibility of an independent re-development committee, but there is a cost associated with the re-development committee. She is concerned with coupling the Rug Mill re-development with the Borough Hall location; we need to re-focus on Borough Hall.

Councilmember Woods advised that her presentation has already been sent to the Planning Board members.

Councilmember Thibault commented that this was worth looking at, but not as a Borough Hall solution; cost is a factor and he does not want to see a tax increase for the taxpayers. The estimated cost for the Lucas property is at \$3.6M and a knock-down and re-build of Borough Hall is \$3.7M; either option adds three or four cents to the tax rate. He believes modular buildings would cost \$1M to \$2M, and we need to look at the least expensive way to provide offices for staff, and move quickly. The cost for modular buildings must be seriously evaluated and considered and they can be placed behind the Ely House for Borough offices and the Police Department.

There was discussion regarding the options which included the Lucas property, demolish and re-build Borough Hall, modular buildings behind Ely House, and/or re-habilitate the old Borough Hall.

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

Fran Palumbo, 101 Main Street – commented that it has been 345 days since Hurricane Irene and all the stores on Main Street have re-opened, but Borough Hall has not. Council needs to evaluate how much has already been spent on the Lucas property and make a decision now.

Eugene Sarafin, 628 S. Main Street – commented that it took eleven months to get this far because things take time if you are going to do them correctly; lease the Lucas property if you do not want to buy it, then you can consider moving Borough Hall back downtown in the future.

John Archer, 131 Bennett Place – commended Council members Woods and Bibens for their presentation and considers it a viable option; he is the realtor for the rug mill property and the price was \$750,000 for short sale, the property is in foreclosure. The bank will probably not break out the parking lot behind Ely House; just buy the property and generate revenue.

J P Gibbons, 602 N. Main Street – noted that there was prior concern that the current Borough Hall is in a flood zone and he reviewed previous discussion; he inquired as to who let the blue and white warehouse portion of the rug mill property to be sold. He went on to note that the Lucas property will not cost \$3.6M, but we need to move forward with the option of fixing or buying new. Put \$3.6M in the Rug Mill property; he then reviewed the presentation. He stated that we need to do something now and purchase the Rug Mill as investment property for a future public/private partnership.

Steve Misiura, 352 S. Main Street (Planning Board Chair) – Inquired whether Perez performed an analysis to evaluate the square footage need. Modular buildings should be based on that need and the cost is per square foot; Lucas is the simplest and quickest solution. Hightstown should not be getting into the development and land ownership business, it is very complicated. Council needs the square footage need before a decision is made.

Skye Gilmartin, 41 Powell Court – commented that it was a great presentation and she would like one on the Lucas property option. There has been an opportunity created and we need to look at Lucas through an analysis.

Frank Rivera, 110 Broad Street – gave kudos to Council members Woods and Bibens, it is a great concept. He spoke regarding ownership versus developing of the Rug Mill and noted that 148 Monmouth Street has a waiting list for studios. Keep focused on a Borough Hall solution.

Kathy Gravely, 40 Westerlea Avenue – felt that the presentation was broken apart, only phase I covered Borough Hall; it would be necessary to tear down the back section of the Rug Mill no matter what. She would buy a loft at the Rug Mill.

Lee Stultz, 117 Taylor Avenue – commented that the Rug Mill needs a lot of work and the Borough being a landlord/owner is a concern, but something needs to be done with the property. He suggested moving employees back into the old building for now and look at the Rug Mill as a possibility in the future. The Rug Mill must be connected to down town, Borough Hall is a separate issue; keep the discussions going.

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

Councilmember Thibault commented that the Rug Mill only pays \$20,000 in municipal taxes and per the Architect's evaluation, we need 15,000 – 18,000 square feet. There is an example of a re-development agency from West Orange with the town taking responsibility, but we should not gamble with taxpayers money; we need to look at something else for Borough Hall. This is the first time residents have mentioned going back into Borough Hall, we would have to bring it up to code as well as clean it. He will look at realistic figures for modular buildings for the next meeting.

There was discussion regarding where modular buildings would be placed.

Councilmember Doran commented that it appears to be the consensus of Council that we are going back to our old property whether with modular buildings or refurbishing. We should use the property we already have.

Councilmember Woods commented that there is a need to address a vision for Hightstown and we should find a developer for the Rug Mill before purchasing the property.

There was discussion regarding a time frame for re-development of the Rug Mill property.

Councilmember Bluth noted that she is concerned with the big risk the Rug Mill project would be.

Mayor Kirson noted that as much as people want things to move quickly, we need to be sure we do the right thing. Today's economic climate is not conducive to condos and development.

There was further discussion and it was decided that a special meeting to discuss Borough Hall will be held on August 23rd. The Borough Clerk was directed to set up as location and notice the meeting accordingly.

Councilmember Bluth moved to adjourn at 9:35pm, Councilmember Woods seconded. All ayes.

Respectfully Submitted,

Debra L. Sopronyi, RMC
Borough Clerk