

BOROUGH OF PITMAN
WORK SESSION MINUTES
APRIL 12, 2021

Call to Order

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Open Public Meetings Act Statement – Pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, I hereby announce that adequate notice of the time and date of this meeting was published in the South Jersey Times on January 7, 2021, posted on the Borough Hall front door, and advertised on the Borough of Pitman website continuously since January 7, 2021.

Roll Call

Council President Blass: Present
Councilwoman James: Present
Councilwoman Rudley: Present
Mayor Razzo: Present
Borough CFO Considine: Present

Councilman Fitzpatrick: Present
Councilman Mazzola: Present
Councilman Weng: Present
Borough Solicitor Krachun: Present
Clerk O'Donnell: Present

Discussion

Motion to Open Discussion: Mazzola
Time: 6:33 p.m.

Second: James

2021 Municipal Budget Introduction

Councilman Mazzola began the discussion of the 2021 municipal budget by announcing that there will be no tax increase for the Borough's residents. Any increase would be from the Gloucester County or Board of Education budgets. Borough CFO Steve Considine stated that the municipal budget is \$150.00 below the spending cap, and the budget is well within state regulations for Introduction.

Discussion

In response to Councilman Weng, Mr. Considine reviewed the sale of the liquor license process as it relates to the 2022 budget.

Mayor Razzo asked the effect on the Borough by taking \$1.9 million from surplus for the budget. Mr. Considine said that the Borough can raise up to \$400,000.00 in taxes and still follow State regulations. The negative effects on the Borough include a decrease in available cash, which could result in a reduced bond rating. Also, a reduction in surplus limits the amount the Borough can raise taxes in the future. Mayor Razzo recalled a time in the past when the Borough had to apply to the State of New Jersey for extraordinary aid because of past Council's reluctance to raise local taxes. He asked Mr. Considine if this is a valid concern at this time. Mr. Considine replied that approximately sixteen years ago the Borough had no available cash. He said that Council should exercise caution, but the current situation is not near what it was at that time.

Councilman Fitzpatrick stated that the increase to the salary appropriation of the Police Department this year is 17%, and the salary appropriation to Public Works is increased this year by 26%. He asked if this will be the case every year and was told by Mr. Considine that it would be and they are within the cap. Councilman Fitzpatrick asked why there is a six month overlap in employment between the retiring Public Works secretary and the new secretary. He said that his opinion is that a three month overlap would be sufficient

Councilman Weng asked Mr. Considine to express his biggest concern about the Borough's finances at this time. Mr. Considine said that he is not concerned about the Borough running out of money in the short term.

Sale of Municipal Liens

Mr. Considine stated that regarding municipal liens on properties, if the lien is assigned, the Borough receives one hundred percent of what is owed to the Borough. A public auction of the property to be assigned could then be held. Mr. Krachun said that he is in favor of assigning liens. On the other hand, if the lien is sold, the liability is written off. The Borough receives no revenue but owns the property.

Borough Solicitor Krachun stated that the process for the Borough to foreclose on municipal liens is time consuming, but in some instances it can make sense. However, the Borough may not want to take on that responsibility. Also, notice to the property owner of the Borough's intention to foreclose sometimes motivates the owner to pay the outstanding taxes.

Councilwoman Rudley asked if the municipal liens for such things as property maintenance and boarding up, could be foreclosed. Mr. Krachun replied that the foreclosure only includes the lien for taxes. Mr. Considine stated that whichever avenue the Borough takes, the funds paid for services that created the maintenance lien is lost.

Council President Blass asked if the Borough knows if the houses with municipal liens are occupied or vacant. Councilman Weng said that he does not support foreclosing on occupied properties. Mr. Krachun said that is the position taken by most municipalities.

Backyard Chicken Pilot Program

Councilman Fitzpatrick said that he and Combined Planning and Zoning Board Chairman Nick Aspras have worked together to create a summary of points to be included in the proposed Backyard Chicken Pilot Program. Many of the ideas have been taken from programs established in the City of Woodbury and Oaklyn. The Combined Planning and Zoning Board has requested review of the ordinance prior to Council action if one is created.

Points to be considered:

1. Two year program, if not continued, the hens must be rehomed within ninety days.
2. Ten licenses issued (maybe more).
3. Four hens maximum.
4. Twenty-five feet from habitable portion of neighbors house and five feet from property line.
5. Must be in rear yard.
6. Hand sketch of where coop will be in the yard.
7. Chickens may roam outside of coop if backyard is suitably fenced to contain them and a responsible adult is present the entire time.
8. Must take a class approved by the Chicken Advisory Board.
9. Fee of \$20.00 required at the time of application.
10. Application must be approved by the Advisory Board.
11. No selling of eggs.
12. Coop must be predator proof.
13. Must be kept dry and well ventilated with windows to admit sunlight.
14. Must have roof, no tarp.
15. Clean water must be provided and food kept in tightly sealed rodent proof container.
16. No slaughter of chickens.
17. Waste handled to prevent odors and disposed of in environmentally friendly manner.
18. Minimum of three feet per chicken, maximum coop size of 100 square feet.

19. Tenant must have consent of landlord of HOA if there is one.
20. Creation of a Chicken Advisory Board of five members. The Board will handle complaints, classes, and new coop applications. The Board is appointed by the Mayor, for a one year term. The Board elects Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary. They shall meet on a regular schedule and keep Minutes of their meetings.
21. New coop applications go to the Advisory Board then to the Planning and Zoning Board for final approval, like the process used for Historic Commission Applications.
22. Any local or county Health Inspector or Advisory Board member may inspect property after a twenty-four hour notice to license holder.
23. Failure to comply with rules will result in revocation of license.
24. Complaints go to the Advisory Board, and each complaint is investigated by two members of the Board. If a violation is found, it is issued by the Code Enforcement Officer of the Borough.

Council President Blass expressed two concerns, the first being that he would like to see the coop set back ten feet from the property line, not the proposed five feet. Also, he would like to see the Advisory Board members appointed by the Mayor, but with Council approval. Council President Blass mentioned that the Historic Commission members submitted their thoughts pertaining to coops in the Historic District. They expressed that there should be no plastic materials used in the construction, and no chain link fencing. Rather, the coop could be constructed of wood pickets with chicken wire attached on the inside of the pickets, and that the coop should be painted. There should be no raw wood showing.

Councilwoman Rudley asked if the application fee would be deposited to the General Fund or a designated fund to be used in the event a situation requires a remedy. Councilwoman James asked if it is known how long it would take to implement the program.

Councilman Fitzpatrick replied that at this time the funds from the application fee would be deposited into the General Fund, and that it would take four to five months to get the program running.

Councilwoman Rudley said that the setback for pools and sheds is ten feet from the property line. She agreed with Council President Blass that to be consistent with Borough Code, the setback for chicken coops should also be ten feet.

Councilman Mazzola said that he feels the proposed plan is well thought out, and Mayor Razzo urged Councilman Fitzpatrick to craft an ordinance to take to the Planning and Zoning Board for review.

Miscellaneous

Mayor Razzo asked Council's opinion on returning to open meetings for Council as well as other Borough Commissions and Committees. He asked if anyone was opposed to beginning on April 26, 2021. Council President Blass suggested the first meeting in May, and Councilman Weng agreed based on the COVID vaccination schedule which will open vaccines to all as of April 19, 2021.

Councilwoman Rudley mentioned that a Borough owned lot on First Avenue has been being taken care of by neighboring residents when a meditation garden was established in honor of a resident upon her death several years ago. The residents are now asking for the Borough to resume upkeep of the lot. Councilwoman James mentioned that a large tree has grown in the lot and if the lot were to be used for additional parking, the tree would have to be removed. Councilman Mazzola stated that the size of the lot was too small to build on, and Councilwoman Rudley said that the maintenance of the lot going forward will be the responsibility of Public Works.

Motion to close discussion: Weng
Time: 7:22 p.m.

Second: Mazzola

Public Portion

Motion to open to the public: Weng
Time: 7:22 p.m.

Second: Mazzola

Kevin Austin, 562 Florence Avenue – Mr. Austin asked how much debt the Borough has in bonds at this time. Borough CFO Considine said that he will get the answer and share it with Mr. Austin. Mr. Austin then asked the amount of the overall increase to the 2021 budget over last year, and if capital projects will affect the budget. Mr. Considine said that the 2021 budget shows an overall increase of approximately \$300,000.00, roughly three percent, over the 2020 budget, and that the effects of spending for capital projects will be seen in 2022 and 2023.

Steve Roth, 15 Mansfield Avenue – Mr. Roth asked if there has been any interest in finding a buyer for the former Wawa on Woodbury Road. Borough Clerk O’Donnell said there has been interest in the property, but no activity on getting it occupied.

Barry Owen, 508 Pitman Avenue – Mr. Owen stated that the Economic Development Committee has a contact at Wawa and agrees that even with that they are very hard to get in touch with. Mr. Owen asked about the timeline for adopting the 2021 Municipal Budget. Mr. Considine stated that it will be introduced at the Formal Meeting this evening and the Second Reading and Public Comment will take place at the Formal Meeting on May 10, 2021 at 8:00 p.m.

Motion to close public portion: Weng
Time: 7:30 p.m.

Second: Mazzola

Adjournment

Motion: Blass
Time: 7:31 p.m.

Second: James

Respectfully Submitted,

Judith O’Donnell
Borough Clerk/Administrator