

**BLAIRSTOWN TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE  
ANNUAL REORGANIZATION MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2019 – 6:00PM  
MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
M I N U T E S**

**OPENING – Call to Order; Roll Call**

The meeting was called to order by Municipal Clerk Linda Leidner. Those present were Mr. Lance, Mr. Moorhead, Mr. Sikkes, Mrs. Van Valkenburg, and Municipal Attorney Dawn Sullivan. Mrs. Waldron was absent from the meeting.

The **FLAG SALUTE** was conducted.

**INVOCATION**

Rev. David Harvey of the First Presbyterian Church gave the invocation.

**The following SUNSHINE STATEMENT was read by Mrs. Leidner:**

Notice of this meeting has been sent to two newspapers of general circulation in the Township of Blairstown in which notice of the date, time, place and general agenda were set forth in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act. This agenda is subject to change by order of the Blairstown Township Committee before and/or during this scheduled meeting.

**DETERMINATION OF THE WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF CANVASSERS**

Elected Official – Rob Moorhead

Warren County Freeholder James Kearn administered the Oath of Office to Mr. Moorhead

Elected Official – Steven Sikkes

Warren County Freeholder James Kearn administered the Oath of Office to Mr. Sikkes

**NOMINATION FOR MAYOR FOR THE YEAR 2019**

A motion to appoint Stephen Lance as Mayor for 2019 was made by Mrs. Van Valkenburg and seconded by Mr. Moorhead.

Roll call vote: AYE – Moorhead, Sikkes, Van Valkenburg, Lance

Absent - Waldron

All ayes, motion carried.

Warren County Freeholder James Kearn administered the Oath of Office to Mr. Lance.

**NOMINATION FOR DEPUTY MAYOR FOR THE YEAR 2019**

The nomination of Joanne Van Valkenburg as Deputy Mayor was made by Mr. Sikkes and seconded by Mr. Moorhead.

Roll call vote: AYE – Moorhead, Sikkes, Van Valkenburg, Lance

Absent: Waldron

All ayes, motion carried.

Warren County Freeholder James Kearn administered the Oath of Office to Mrs. Van Valkenburg

**OATHS OF OFFICE – POLICE DEPARTMENT**

Scott Johnsen, Chief of Police

Jarret Bisanzio, Corporal

Mayor Lance administered the Oath of Office to both Police Officers

**OATHS OF OFFICE – BLAIRSTOWN HOSE COMPANY NO. 1 OFFICERS**

Calvin Inscho, Chief

Mark Slater, Deputy Chief

Stuart Kise, Captain

Patrick Ceres, Lieutenant

Mayor Lance administered the Oath of Office to each of the Hose Company #1 Officers

**CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS**

- R.2019-001 Various One Year Appointments – Compensated
- R.2019-002 Various Appointments – Non-compensated
- R.2019-003 Cancel Water Utility Balances under \$5.00
- R.2019-004 Appointing Local Emergency Planning Committee Members
- R.2019-005 Fixing the Rate of Interest to be Charged on Delinquent Taxes and Authorize Tax Collector to hold Annual Tax Sale
- R.2019-006 Complying with Open Public Meetings Act
- R.2019-007 Designating Authorized Signatures
- R.2019-008 Authorizing Investment of Idle Funds and Fund Transfers
- R.2019-009 Adopting a Cash Management Plan
- R.2019-010 Contracting for Professional Services with Competitive Bidding in Accordance with the Local Public Contract Law – Municipal Attorney
- R.2019-011 Contracting for Professional Services with Competitive Bidding in Accordance with the Local Public Contract Law – Municipal Auditor
- R.2019-012 Contracting for Professional Services without Competitive Bidding in Accordance with the Local Public Contract Law – Municipal Engineer
- R.2019-013 Designation of Official Newspapers
- R.2019-014 Cancellation of Certain Real Estate Property Tax Balances
- R.2019-015 Authorization for Tax Assessor to File Corrective Appeals and Stipulations and Authorization for Township Attorney to Work with Tax Assessor in Defense of Tax Appeals with the Warren County Board of Taxation
- R.2019-016 Collection of a Fee for Duplicate Tax Sale Certificates
- R.2019-017 Fixing the Rate of Interest to be Charged on Delinquent Water Accounts
- R.2019-018 Contract for Professional Services without Competitive Bidding in Accordance with the Local Public Contracts Law – Municipal Bond Counsel
- R.2019-019 Approving Temporary Appropriations for the 2019 Operating and Water Budget
- R.2019-020 Authorization to Enter into Interlocal Agreement with Knowlton Township for Chief Financial Officer Services
- R.2019-021 Authorization to Enter into Interlocal Agreement with the Town of Belvidere for Chief Financial Officer Services
- R.2019-022 Resolution Authorizing Transfer of Funds

- R.2019-023 Appointing Animal Control Officer
- R.2019-024 Appointment of Emergency Management Coordinator
- R.2019-025 Appointment of Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator
- R.2019-026 Appointment of Additional Deputy Emergency Management Coordinators

Mrs. Van Valkenburg made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda, which was seconded by Mr. Moorhead.

Roll call vote: AYE – Moorhead, Sikkes, Van Valkenburg, Lance  
Absent – Mrs. Waldron  
All ayes, motion carried.

#### **FROM THE COMMITTEE**

**Mr. Moorhead** – Mr. Moorhead noted that he is honored to have been elected to the Township Committee. He feels that this is the perfect opportunity to be able to make a difference in a community that he loves.

**Mr. Sikkes** – Mr. Sikkes looks forward to serving on the Township Committee. He noted that he has lived here for a long time and he felt like it was time to step up and do his part to try do what is best for the community.

**Mrs. Waldron** – Absent.

**Mrs. Van Valkenburg** – Mrs. Van Valkenburg began with saying that last year they had a great Committee and she is looking forward to having another great year. Mrs. Van Valkenburg also noted that the Township staff, Police, Fire, Ambulance and all Township volunteers on the different boards and committees do a great job.

**Mayor Lance** – Thanked the Township Committee for electing him Mayor for the year 2019.  
A full copy of Mr. Lance's Mayors Address will be attached to these minutes.

Mayor Lance noted that former Mayor Sal Simonetti is here tonight. Mr. Simonetti spoke to the Township Committee and congratulated the elected officials. He wished everyone a Happy New Year.

Mayor Lance also introduced former Mayor Walter S. Orcutt. Mr. Orcutt remarked that he respects the work and the effort that the Township Committee is putting into the Township.

#### **FROM THE PUBLIC**

None

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

As there were no further comments from the public, Mr. Sikkes made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Mr. Moorhead. All members voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Linda Leidner, RMC  
Municipal Clerk

Reorganization Meeting Minutes January 2, 2019

I would first like to thank my wife and children for allowing me to be away from home on so many days and nights to serve our community for the past 13 years. I've tried to balance home life, elementary school, high school, band, scouts, and all the other activities as best as I could. Most of the time, I've been able to accomplish it all, sometimes not. Only 2 more years to go until this term is completed, but by then two of you will be in college, with one recently graduated from it.

I appreciate Reverend David Harvey for setting the tone of our reorganization meeting. In addition to his pastoral duties, Dave has served our community for many years as a member of the Historic Preservation Committee.

Thank you to our new Freeholder, Jim Kern for taking time out of his busy schedule to administer the oaths of office to the Township Committee. Other dignitaries present here this evening are former Mayor and Sheriff Sal Simonetti, former Mayor Walter Orcutt, and former Deputy Mayor Sal Lascari.

Congratulations and much success to Steve Sikkes and Rob Moorhead on assuming your seats on the Township Committee. You both will find this experience very rewarding in making our community a better place, but the path there is sometimes a difficult one. I have full confidence that you both will help bring Blirstown to the next level of growth and accomplishment.

I am thankful that JoAnne VanValkenburgh has agreed to serve as Deputy Mayor for another year. JoAnne and I have much the same goals for our town – just different ways to get there. Debate is healthy and leads to innovative solutions.

It's really been a pleasure to serve with Committeewoman Debbie Waldron over the past year. Debbie has a deep commitment in helping our community. Her many years of service on the Planning Board/Land Use Board, and also now, her involvement with Public Safety as a Police Commissioner and a liaison to the fire department and ambulance corps is commendable.

You have witnessed this evening the final step of the renaissance of the Blirstown Police Department. The community and the Township Committee have placed our trust and confidence in this professional and efficiently operating department. "Chief" Johnsen was long overdue, but those of you who were at the contentious Township Committee meetings years ago would understand our caution. Chief Johnsen and Corporal Bisanzio have proven themselves as committed police officers. Our Police Department is a credit to our town.

Congratulations to the 2019 officers of the Blirstown Hose Company. Our fire department and ambulance corps are committed in helping our town during its time of need. They spend many sleepless nights out in the cold while still holding down paying jobs during the daylight hours to provide for their families. We are told to, "Be kind and compassionate to one another", these two organizations exemplify this command.

Our fire department and ambulance corps are not the only volunteer organizations in our town. The Land Use Board, Historic Preservation Committee, and Open Space Committee all work diligently to improve our town. They volunteer a huge amount of time to make Blirstown a better community.

You can be assured that Blirstown is an efficient and smooth running operation because of the dedication of our front office and road department. They are always on the look out to improve the delivery of the most cost effective services to our residents.

The Township Committee could not operate in a productive manner at these meetings without the valuable advice of our Clerk, Chief Financial Officer, Attorney, and Engineer.

I thank the Township Committee for placing your confidence in electing me as Mayor for 2019. We have a great working and personal relationship that only benefits our community.

Every year government has its challenges, but 2019 is shaping up to have more than its share in Blirstown:

The opioid and substance abuse problems are the most heart wrenching and saddest challenge that we face. It has been many years in the making and will take many years to overcome. Through education, rehabilitation, and law enforcement we must get a grip on this cancer which is destroying so many lives.

The condition of township roads continue as a big part of our discussions. This year, we completed a phase 1 resurfacing project on Mohican Road. An application to the NJDOT for phase 2 has been submitted, along with a phase 1 project on Heller Hill Road. We recently have been awarded a NJDOT grant of \$145,000 for construction work on Belcher Road. A long range plan of road projects must be developed with a method to pay for them.

The new water well will finally be connected into the village water system this year. This will result in an immediate improvement of water quality while providing a needed backup source of potable water.

The road swap with the County was finally completed after years of negotiation. The Township now owns all streets within the village area in return for County ownership of some outlying roads. A comprehensive plan must be developed to make Main Street more business friendly. The new Main Street Advisory Sub-Committee will work with the input of property and business owners to make this happen.

The most cost effective method of pollution remediation must be found at the Walnut Valley Fire House. At least 2,700 tons of contaminated soil must be removed due to the legacy of two leaking underground storage tanks that have been unused for many, many years.

A huge challenge facing our community was unknown to this Township Committee just one month ago. Our two schools are facing major cuts of state aid dollars as a result of declining student enrollment. For many years, the amount of state aid was frozen, now Trenton is reducing the amount because spending projections in the state budget are economically unsustainable.

The State Government is expected to move into a \$1.1 billion deficit by 2021 increasing to a \$3.2 billion deficit by 2024. But deficit spending by the State is not permitted by law, either taxes will increase dramatically or spending will be drastically cut. Blairstown Township has cut its municipal spending by about a quarter since 2005, I'm sure Trenton can also find areas to reduce spending without cutting state aid to schools.

Trenton has seemed to reject any new large tax increases to solve the problem. They finally have recognized that our state is so overtaxed that it contributes to the decline of overall economic vitality.

The buzzword to address much of this structural deficit in the state budget is consolidation. The area townships have shared many services, programs, and positions throughout the years and we continue to discuss new proposals. It is about time for all of the school districts in our area to work together to develop a plan to minimize the impact that less dollars will have on the quality of education and on our taxpayers.

But the greatest immediate concern to the Township Committee of this pending State financial crisis is the status of the Yards Creek energy tax monies. The amount received by the Township has been unchanged for many years at \$2.9 million. With the energy tax now reclassified by the State of New Jersey as a form of state aid, can a reduction as with state school aid be far off? This \$2.9 million of revenue equals a 39¢ property tax rate.

All municipalities in New Jersey share this energy tax money, all 565 municipalities must be vigilant in protecting this vital source of income. We must fight Trenton from just moving their financial problems to the backs of already overburdened property taxpayers.

We are facing many challenges, but by working together, we will prevail to the benefit of our residents. Thank you all for coming here this evening. Stay informed, come out to the Committee and board meetings, make your opinion and thoughts be heard.

Thank you.