

**TOWNSHIP OF BLAIRSTOWN  
REGULAR COMMITTEE MEETING  
Wednesday, April 13, 2016, 7:30 PM**

**M I N U T E S**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Shoemaker. Those present were Mr. Avery, Mrs. Dalton, Mr. Lance, Mrs. Van Valkenburg and Mayor Shoemaker. Also present were Clerk Pizzaia and Attorney Kevin Benbrook.

The **FLAG SALUTE** was conducted.

**SUNSHINE STATEMENT**

Mayor Shoemaker read the following statement: Notice of this meeting has been sent to two newspapers of general circulation in which notice was given of the date, time, place and general agenda in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** – up to 5 speakers, 3 minutes each

Kendrya Close, Blairstown Foodshed Alliance, asked the Committee for permission to hold the Farmers' Market again this year in the lot next to the Stillwater Fire House. Ms. Close will provide a Certificate of Insurance for the period of time covering the operation of the market. Mr. Avery made a motion to approve this request, which was seconded by Mrs. Van Valkenburg.

Roll call vote:                    AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

Michelle St. Andre, North Warren Garden Club, asked the Committee for \$250.00 in order to finance the plantings of the triangle in front of the Municipal Building and the barrels along Main Street for the entire year. Mr. Lance made a motion to approve this request, which was seconded by Mr. Avery.

Roll call vote:                    AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

Nathan Crisman, Blairstown Elementary School PTG, said that the PTG will be sponsoring a 5K race on June 11<sup>th</sup>. He presented a resolution from the Warren County Freeholders granting permission to hold the event, which will take place on county roads, with the stipulation that Blairstown Township also grants permission for the township roads. Mr. Lance made a motion to approve the road closure in order to hold the 5K race, which was seconded by Mrs. Dalton. Mr. Gara said that police coverage will be provided for the road closure.

Roll call vote:                    AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

**MINUTES**

- March 4, 2016 – Special Meeting Minutes
- March 9, 2016 – Regular Meeting Minutes
- March 18, 2016 – Special Meeting Minutes

Mr. Avery made a motion to approve the March 4<sup>th</sup>, March 9<sup>th</sup> and March 18<sup>th</sup> minutes. Mrs. Dalton seconded the motion.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

**ORDINANCE 2016 – 02** AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND AN ORDINANCE ENTITLED, “AN ORDINANCE FIXING THE SALARIES AND WAGES OF THE OFFICIALS, APPOINTEES AND EMPLOYEES OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BLAIRSTOWN IN THE COUNTY OF WARREN AND STATE OF NEW JERSEY BY SALARY RANGE” Adoption, Second Reading

Mayor Shoemaker explained that this ordinance establishes the minimum and maximum salaries for township employees.

PUBLIC HEARING – Mayor Shoemaker opened the hearing to the public. As there were no comments from the public, the hearing was closed.

Mr. Lance made a motion to adopt Ordinance 2016 – 02 on second reading, which was seconded by Mr. Avery.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

**ADOPTION OF 2016 BUDGET**

R.2016 – 050 Resolution Authorizing Budget to be Read by Title Only

Mr. Lance made a motion to approve R.2016 – 050, which was seconded by Mayor Shoemaker.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

PUBLIC HEARING – Copies of the budget have been made available to the public requesting same and a synopsis has been published in the New Jersey Herald on March 22, 2016.

Mayor Shoemaker opened the budget hearing to the public. Rosalie Murray, Heller Hill Road, asked Mr. Lance why the Township bonded for funds to repair the water tower when this year’s budget was reduced by approximately \$39,000.00. Mr. Lance explained that the funds to repair the water company come from the water utility budget, which is totally separate from the general operating budget. He further explained that the general budget affects all taxpayers, whereas the water operating budget only affects municipal water department users. Mrs. Murray said that she believes that the entire township should be paying for these repairs.

As there were no further comments from the public, Mayor Shoemaker closed the hearing on the budget.

R.2016 – 051 Final Adoption of 2016 Budget

Mr. Lance made a motion to adopt the 2016 Blairstown Township Budget, which was seconded by Mayor Shoemaker.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

CONSENT AGENDA

- 1 – R.2016 – 052 Authorization to Pay Bills
- 2 – R.2016 – 053 Appointment of Certified Recycling Coordinator
- 3 – R.2016 – 054 Fixing the Salaries and Wages of Officials, Appointees and Employees
- 4 – R.2016 – 055 In Support of Fireworks Display

Mrs. Van Valkenburg requested that R.2016 – 053 and R.2016 – 054 be pulled from the Consent Agenda. Mr. Avery made a motion to approve R.2016 – 052 and R.2016 – 055, which was seconded by Mayor Shoemaker.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

With regard to R.2016 – 053, Mrs. Van Valkenburg asked what a Certified Recycling Coordinator does. Mr. Lance said the position is required by the State to prepare and certify recycling paperwork. Mr. Lance made a motion to approve R.2016 – 053, which was seconded by Mr. Avery.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

Mayor Shoemaker explained that R.2016 – 054 sets the salaries of the employees. Mrs. Van Valkenburg would like the automatic percentage increase revisited going forward, as she feels some employees may deserve more than the amount given to other employees, and some may deserve less. She feels the salaries should be discussed on a case-by-case basis. She also questioned whether the Township Committee members should be receiving salaries.

Mrs. Van Valkenburg made a motion to approve R.2016 – 054, which was seconded by Mayor Shoemaker.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

**DEPARTMENT REPORTS**

- Clerk – March Report
- Finance – March Finance and Fuel Reports
- Fire Department – March Report
- Police Department – March Report
- Tax Collector – March Report
- Animal Control Officer – 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Report, 2015
- Warren County Health Department – March 14, 2016 Report
- Land Use Board – 2016 Annual Report

Mrs. Dalton made a motion to accept the Department Reports, which was seconded by Mr. Avery.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

- 1 – from Leigh Pagano, President, North Warren Little League, regarding the installation of a fence at Sycamore Park

Pat Sagan, Recreation Director, explained that the Little League field only has a temporary fence which has cost the organization a great deal of money to maintain. They wish to install a permanent

fence, which will cost \$3,250.00. The Little League organization will pay for the installation of the warning track and capping on top of the fence. They are requesting that the Township pay for the cost of the permanent fence.

Mrs. Van Valkenburg made a motion to approve the expenditure of \$3,250.00 from Open Space funds for the purchase of a permanent fence in Sycamore Park. Mrs. Dalton seconded the motion.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

**COMMITTEE CORRESPONDENCE** for information and possible action

- 1 – from John Christine, DPW employee, regarding intent to retire effective August 1, 2016
- 2 – from Gary Nemeckay, DPW employee, regarding intent to retire effective August 1, 2016
- 3 – from Phyllis E. Pizzaia, Municipal Clerk, regarding intent to retire effective July 1, 2016

Mrs. Dalton made a motion to accept the above resignations with regret, which was seconded by Mayor Shoemaker.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

- 4 – from Robert Van Wettering, Blairstown Rotary Club, regarding July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks display

Mayor Shoemaker explained that this letter is in support of the fireworks display and for a \$3,000.00 donation towards the cost. Mr. Lance made a motion to approve this request, which was seconded by Mrs. Van Valkenburg.

Roll call vote: AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

**GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE**

There were no questions or comments on the General Correspondence list.

**FROM THE TOWNSHIP ATTORNEY**

With regard to COAH, Mr. Benbrook spoke about the enormous expense that this has caused the township up to this point. Monies are required to be put in escrow for regional masters and local masters, and there are on-going litigation expenses. Mr. Benbrook questioned whether it was cost effective to continue in the COAH litigation or to drop out. Mr. Benbrook does not believe that the township is in great risk of a developer coming in.

After discussion, the Committee decided to assess the township's risk by gathering information from Joel McGreen, Open Space Chair, and the Assessor to determine the amount of large tracts of land that remain and have not been preserved.

Mr. Benbrook suggested that the Committee introduce the Service Electric Cable Company ordinance as soon as possible. If the township does not adopt the ordinance, the cable company will file with the Board of Public Utilities for approval, which will be more costly to the township than adopting the ordinance. Mr. Benbrook is in the process of obtaining a comprehensive layout of cable service from the cable company and will distribute it to the members before the next meeting.

Mr. Lance said that a request was made to have cable provided at the Masonic Lodge and the fire department has requested cable at the Stillwater Road firehouse also. Mr. Benbrook said that he would incorporate these requests into his communication with the cable company.

**FROM THE TOWNSHIP CLERK**

The town-wide cleanup has been scheduled for September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. The voucher system will be used again this year.

**FROM THE TOWNSHIP ENGINEER**

With regard to the Paulina Dam, Mr. Rodman reported that French and Parrello will be inspecting the dam as required by the State.

The NJDOT will be resuming work on Route 94 from Mohican Road to Kerr's Corner Road on April 18<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Rodman said that the previous notice indicated that this work would be done at night, but the new notification does not. Mr. Rodman will call the DOT to ascertain the work timetable.

Mrs. Van Valkenburg asked about the schedule for the tower repairs. Mr. Rodman said that there is no date yet but he is working on this. Christine Rolef, CFO, said that this was part of the bond ordinance and it should be started within the month.

**FROM THE TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE**

**COMMITTEE MEMBER AVERY**

Mr. Avery said that the Seniors' group will be going to the Brownstone on April 20<sup>th</sup>.

With regard to the sewer project, a grant qualification application was submitted by Van Cleef and it will take a couple of months before we receive any news on this.

The feral cat situation in the village area has improved and the efforts will continue through the spring and summer.

Mr. Avery reported that the Givens Belet building continues to be refurbished. He hopes to get the building ready in order to bring the Seniors Nutrition program back to Blirstown.

The next meeting of the Blirstown Enhancement Committee will be held on April 26<sup>th</sup>. They are currently exploring involvement with the Appalachian Trail Program in order to promote tourism.

Mr. Avery asked David Keller to come forward to speak about the signage project the BEC is working on. Mr. Keller said that one of the main goals of the BEC is to promote tourism. He said that there are no *Welcome to Blirstown* signs, except for NJDOT and Warren County signs. The BEC is proposing the installation of seven (7) signs that will welcome visitors to Blirstown. The BEC plans to pay for the signs through fundraising. Mr. Keller distributed photographs indicating where the signs will be placed. The BEC will return to the Township Committee when the details are finalized.

Mr. Avery reported that all of the lighting on Main Street has been repaired and the unused fixtures in other parts of the township have been removed.

Mr. Avery said that the sound system has been worked on since the last meeting. There are now speakers in the ceiling and each Committee Member has a microphone.

#### COMMITTEE MEMBER DALTON

Mrs. Dalton attended a meeting in Belvidere on March 23<sup>th</sup> regarding the Appalachian Trail. The Appalachian Trail Commission wishes to join with municipalities through which the trail passes in order to attract tourism to the area. Part of the advertising would include a map of Blainstown indicating local businesses. She will keep the Committee informed on progress with this project.

Mrs. Dalton met with the Blainstown Elementary School and North Warren Regional High School superintendents in order to establish a one-hour shutdown time for gypsy moth spraying. Spraying will begin on or after May 16<sup>th</sup> through June 15<sup>th</sup>, from 5:30 am to 2pm, with a moratorium from 7am to 8am. Information about the gypsy moth spraying can be found on the township website.

The North Warren Regional High School budget meeting is scheduled for April 27<sup>th</sup> at 7pm.

Mrs. Dalton said that the Township is interested in providing family health coverage to employees. At this time, single coverage is being provided. Mrs. Dalton said that the lack of family coverage is causing good employees to leave Blainstown for employers that do provide this coverage. Christine Rolef, CFO, came forward to answer any questions on this proposal. She said that in discussing this with Mr. Kevin Benbrook, the PBA contract will not be an issue because the benefit is being increased. As long as this benefit is placed in the personnel policy and extended to all employees, the amended benefit could be added to the new police contract when it is renegotiated.

Mrs. Rolef said that the new plan being offered is a high deductible/tier policy. All new employees would have to take this plan. Current employees are covered under NJ Direct 15. Mrs. Rolef said that it would be cost prohibitive to cover new employees with family coverage under this policy.

After discussion, it was decided that the Committee is in favor of making this change to employee insurance coverage. Mrs. Rolef will work with Mr. Benbrook to write a draft amendment to the personnel policy for the Committee to approve at the May meeting.

Mrs. Dalton said that there will be two (2) vacant positions in the DPW. With regard to the mechanic/laborer position, there is presently a part-time employee who is being considered for the full-time position. Mrs. Dalton suggested hiring two (2) part-time employees to replace the current driver/laborer, which would realize a cost savings since medical benefits would not be provided. After discussion, the Committee was in agreement to advertise for two (2) part-time driver/laborers.

#### COMMITTEE MEMBER LANCE

Mr. Lance said that there are new cracks developing in the Water Department building. There appears to be water infiltration into the building on the north side. There are also sink holes developing around the building. Carl Stoddart, DPW Foreman, is working on the problem.

Mr. Lance summarized the Police Department Report for the month of March. Mr. Lance said that he suggested to the Police Director that the Police Department set up a safety point to make internet

sales exchanges. The Police will install a sign at the rear of the building that will allow citizens to make these exchanges safely. The exchange will be videotaped. This service will be advertised on Nixle.

With regard to the Historic Preservation Committee, the members are in the process of making an inventory of their collections. They are setting up a display on John I. Blair in the cabinet located in the outer lobby.

The Historic Preservation Committee sponsored a meet and greet with Fred Heilich, Railroad Historian, at Blair Academy. The lecture by John Trommald at Blair Academy on April 5<sup>th</sup> was well attended.

Mr. Lance recommended Karin White and Donna Chenard to be appointed as members of the Historic Preservation Committee. Mr. Lance made a motion to make these appointments, which was seconded by Mayor Shoemaker.

Roll call vote:                    AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

#### COMMITTEE MEMBER VAN VALKENBURG

Mrs. Van Valkenburg reported that the Land Use Board will be entertaining a bulk use variance for an accessory building on Walnut Valley Road, a use variance on Stillwater Road, and a use variance on Artist View Lane for an existing business.

With regard to the Open Space Committee, Joel McGreen came forward to discuss High Acres Farm. Two appraisals have been received and a price of \$4,800.00 per acre has been agreed upon by the family. Mr. McGreen is requesting a resolution stating that the Committee is willing to move forward with this project and to authorize the Mayor to sign a contract, and also allow him to have the property surveyed. Mr. McGreen would like to authorize Laura Brill to complete the survey. After discussion, it was agreed to provide Mr. McGreen with this resolution and to approve the signing of the contract contingent upon attorney review. Mr. McGreen will also seek another quote for the survey. Mr. Lance made a motion to approve this request, with a \$15,000.00 limit on the cost of the survey. Mr. Avery seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:                    AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

Mr. McGreen said that the Croucher property is moving along, and he is still working with the owner of the Kostenbader property, who is searching for a new attorney.

With regard to the sewer feasibility study, Mrs. Van Valkenburg said that she attended a meeting where she heard an update and was able to ask questions. She prefers that the Committee meet as a whole when these important topics are discussed in order that everyone hears the same information. Mayor Shoemaker said that a special meeting will take place when more information is available. Mr. Lance said that he would like the sewer rates that have been distributed among the Committee Members to be made public. He said that the rates are too high and unaffordable by the residents. Mrs. Van Valkenburg agreed and added that the figures presented do not take into account all of the costs involved in the construction of the sewers. After discussion, Mayor Shoemaker said

that these numbers need to go to an expert and at that point the Committee can meet and discuss the matter with a more informed picture.

Mr. Lance said that he is afraid that sewers could affect the township's COAH requirements. He said that sewers may encourage land development.

Mayor Shoemaker asked the Committee for permission to meet with the USDA and NJEIT to review the information on the sewers and to evaluate the numbers in order to present the most solid numbers available. There is no charge to have this evaluation completed. Mr. Lance objected to proceeding any further with the project. Mayor Shoemaker made a motion to have the USDA and NJEIT to review the rates the township has been given at no charge to the township. Mr. Avery seconded the motion. All members voted in the affirmative, with the exception of Mr. Lance.

Mrs. Van Valkenburg said that the DCA has been using space in the Municipal Building for several years free of charge and she would like the Committee to look into charging the State for the space. She would also like the Committee to consider bringing our court back to Blairstown. She said that we have a police department and it would be a good source of revenue, as it had been years ago when we had our own court. Both Mr. Benbrook and Mrs. Rolef said that the cost of paying court personnel and making the court room compliant would far exceed the revenues brought in.

Mrs. Van Valkenburg asked if the Fire Company has forwarded the Tax Form 990 to the Township. Mrs. Rolef said that they have not. Mrs. Van Valkenburg would like this record since the Township buys the majority of their equipment. Mrs. Rolef and Mayor Shoemaker both indicated that they will ask for this form from the Fire Company.

#### MAYOR SHOEMAKER

Mayor Shoemaker said that the County forwarded an agreement for shared services, which would allow the municipality to obtain equipment with an operator at reduced charges. Mayor Shoemaker made a motion to sign this agreement with the County, which was seconded by Mr. Lance.

Roll call vote:                    AYE – Avery, Dalton, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

Mayor Shoemaker said that there have been several meetings with the County over the Main Street issue, whereby the County wants Blairstown to take over ownership and maintenance. The County has forwarded to Blairstown a copy of a resolution the Freeholders intend to approve to officially "discontinue" ownership of Main Street.

There was a discussion on whether the County could legally vacate this road. Mr. Benbrook said that if the street were to be vacated by the County, it could be legally challenged. Mayor Shoemaker would rather attempt to come to an understanding with the County before entertaining legal action. He will be meeting with Freeholder Sarnoski tomorrow and will have more information on this issue. In addition, Mayor Shoemaker and Mr. Benbrook will draft a letter to the Warren County Freeholders outlining the Township's position on this matter.

Mayor Shoemaker explained that Lt. Losey, who has recently retired, has communicated with the Township through the PBA attorney, asking the Township to pay for his insurance premiums until his

retirement is approved by the State. It is estimated that the State could take up to eight (8) months to grant approval. Mrs. Rolef said that the Township cannot legally pay the premiums for him. Mrs. Rolef is concerned about receiving the reimbursement from Mr. Losey by the end of the year, because if it is unpaid, it would affect Blairstown's fund balance.

After discussion, the Committee was in agreement that there was no way to assure that the money would be paid back by the end of the year, and that it would not be prudent to potentially affect the Township's fund balance.

Mrs. Rolef said that an alternate plan would be to ask Mr. Losey for a formal letter of retirement, which he has been reluctant to do. Under advisement of Mr. Benbrook, all accrued monies due to Mr. Losey for accumulated sick and vacation time has been withheld until such letter is received. If Mr. Losey submits this letter, his final payout check could be issued and Mr. Losey would be able to pay the insurance premiums without financial hardship. After discussion, the Committee agreed that this was a reasonable solution to Mr. Losey's problem. Mr. Benbrook will draft a letter directly to Mr. Losey requesting his letter of retirement, after which the Township will pay all monies due to him.

#### **FROM THE PUBLIC**

Richard Myron, Cobblewood Road, spoke about a letter he received from the Township stating that the condition of Heller Hill Road would be addressed. He is concerned about the area of the stone wall where the rocks are falling into the roadway. Mayor Shoemaker said that the situation has been addressed. There is a possibility of moving the hedgerow across the street to widen the road. Mr. Myron thanked the Committee for installing the guiderails on Heller Hill Road.

With regard to the plan to install the sign and camera at the rear of the building for safe internet purchases, Mr. Myron feels that it is an invasion of privacy.

Rosalie Murray, Heller Hill Road, said that she does not believe the sound system is better than it was before.

Mrs. Murray said that she would like to see an ordinance on design standards in Blairstown, citing the unattractive building being built next to the Municipal Building.

Mrs. Murry feels that the cost of the sewer system should be borne by the entire township, not only the sewer users.

Mayor Shoemaker referenced a resolution discussed last month regarding the support of a scenic byway. The byway would be a way to attract visitors to the area which would benefit the local businesses. Mayor Shoemaker made a motion to approve this resolution, which was seconded by Mrs. Dalton.

Roll call vote:                    AYE – Avery, Dalton, Lance, Van Valkenburg, Shoemaker

**ADJOURNMENT**

As there were no further comments by the public, Mr. Lance made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Mr. Avery. The meeting was adjourned at 10:46 pm.

Submitted by:

Phyllis E. Pizzaia, RMC  
Municipal Clerk