

WESTAMPTON TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

5:30 PM Closed Session

6:00 PM Workshop/Presentation/Rancocas Friends School

7:00 PM Regular Meeting

August 1, 2016

Mayor Daniels began the meeting by giving the residents a background of the Rancocas Friends School property and how it came to be listed for sale. The Township has been a quiet although active partner with the school throughout the years. He also thought this property might lend itself to a community center since the Township really lacks one. Deputy Mayor Abe Lopez had prepared a slide presentation regarding the possible acquisition of the school.

They felt that the school suited numerous community needs and feel it is financially prudent to plan ahead. Acting now is demonstrating leadership and we need to be proactive in planning for the influx of students that are likely to come from recently approved residential projects. If we don't find some additional gym space we may be forced to cut some of our recreation programs. Our schools are at nearly full capacity. Deerwood added 147 students to our schools; it has been stated that the developer told the Township that 20 students would be brought in by Deerwood. Project Freedom estimated they would bring in 5 students, however with 20 units filled we currently may have as high as 15 students enrolled. Ingerman is estimating to add another 50 students and is also a PILOT project. Woodmont is estimating 35 students with a 456 unit apartment complex. Clearly, the numbers have been greatly under-estimated. There is a previously approved development on the site of Sunnyside Farms for approximately 500 more homes; the Township Committee has also just received notice that St. Francis House of Prayer on Springside Road would like to have their 74 acres rezoned to allow for residential development. The Township Committee wants to work with the school board to address the growth of the community, even though this is the Board of Education's job.

The Township LDB Chairman, Dave Barger, a licensed architect, visited the site and prepared a report on improvements that would be necessary. The total estimate is \$1,895,000.00 to bring the property up to speed. The Township can use the property in the interim until it is necessary to move students into the school. We have received several letters of interest from groups and non-profit agencies who want to use the property. There is also the possibility that the Friends School might still be able to continue there. They truly believe it is a win-win opportunity for Westampton Township.

Open to the Public for Comment

George Kotch, 1844 Route 541 – is a member of the Board of Rancocas Friends School; he has filed a pending lawsuit to stop the sale of the school. There was a meeting held that Mayor Daniels attended on March 18, 2016 at the Friends School where he said he would do everything in his power to prevent the school from closing. He also said that the Township was not interested in the purchase of the land.

Nancy Burkley, Olive Street – the Holly Hills development has a low number of children at this time although there will be an influx of young people coming in at some point as the population turns over. Elderly residents will move out and young families will move in. She is a former Board of Education member and president. She has been through 3 school building expansions and each cost between 12 and 15 million dollars and that doesn't include the purchase of land. She is for the purchase of the property. Split sessions and trailers are not the answer. The School Board needs to vote yes on this.

Jennifer Daniels, 46 County Lane – has 2 children; she doesn't want her kids to be in an overcrowded classroom. She thinks the price is great and the Township should purchase the property. It would benefit the whole community for many reasons. It is a blessing in disguise.

Vernita Jones, Amara Lane – on June 20th the Township Committee had a first reading for the bond ordinance to purchase the school. At that time it was explained that the school was splitting the cost; now they are saying the Township is purchasing it outright. She read in the paper that Ms. Grossman stated that they don't have a use for the school.

Joe Myers, Mt. Holly – is the parent of a student at Friends School. He wants to make the Committee aware that there will be legal problems with trying to acquire the property. The school is a benefit to Westampton residents not only because parents are paying their own children's tuition; it is also an alternative option to those who seek a more rigorous educational environment for their children. They want the Township Committee to see their efforts through with trying to save their school.

Lori Hustus, 14 Kanabe Drive – thinks there is no point trying to purchase the property if there is litigation pending.

Nick (last name unintelligible), 6 Roberts Drive – thinks RV offers a rigorous program, just for the record. What would the capacity be if it was used as a school? Mr. Lopez answered that it holds about 400 students. Mr. Kotch stated the capacity is 107, not 400 students.

Sharon Fisher, Irick Road – has lived in the Township for 40 years and has been a real estate agent for 30 years. She has been through all of the school expansions; one year she saw her taxes go up \$900. She spoke about what happened in Willingboro when the Board of Education made a mistake and had to borrow \$10 million dollars. You couldn't give houses away for years in Willingboro. She doesn't want to see a new school go up;

the School Board and the Township Committee better get together on this because November is coming.

Cynthia Zellner, Mount Holly – her kids have gone to the school for years now. She thinks they are misrepresenting the size of the school and are misleading everyone.

Dan Dole, 3 Heath Drive – is a member of the Westampton School Board but is speaking as a tax payer. He spoke about the numbers of projected students with developments coming in. He wants to know how the Committee will purchase the property, retrofit it and not pass on an increase in taxes to the taxpayers.

Mr. Lopez – read aloud the numbers for occupancy for the school; the total number is really 277 students as per the Fire Marshal's recommendations. If we purchase it and hold onto it until the school needs it, there will be no tax increase. The Township will be responsible for this payment solely. The only additional expense will be a new principal, new nurse and administrative support.

John Wisnewski, 441 Pennington Drive – great job with the presentation earlier; he doesn't understand why since schooling isn't the Committee's forte, why are we even talking about this. Shouldn't the Board of Education be doing this? It doesn't seem to be the Committee's decision. Mr. Lopez answered that he feels that he has an obligation to be proactive and he is keeping his promise serving as a Committee person. He is a parent with children in the school system. He had attended a meeting with the superintendent last year where she told him that our schools are bursting at the seams and we would need a new school or a school expansion. This is why he feels this way.

Mayor Daniels thanked all who came up to speak. In March he attended a meeting with Ms. Chang, Mr. Lopez and a member of the Rancocas Friends School; he had stated that whatever he could do to help he would do. He wants to make it abundantly clear that this is no takeover by the Township Committee. They aren't stopping anyone from purchasing this building and continuing it as Rancocas Friends Academy. It came to their knowledge that the building was vacated and for sale and they held an emergency executive session, and the answer was a yes vote, 4 Committee members were present. Some meetings were held in June where there was full disclosure. It was decided that everyone wanted to have a meeting like this one tonight. This is not a takeover; they would love to see the school continue. As a municipal body, they can't move forward to help them although they wish they could. Can we as a community agree or disagree on what to do? That is the question this evening.

The regular meeting was called to order at 7:12 PM by Mayor Daniels. Requirements of the Sunshine Law were read. This meeting was advertised in the Burlington County Times on January 14, 2016. The flag was saluted. There was a moment of silence.

Roll Call:

Committeewoman Chang	Present
Committeeman Lopez	Present
Committeewoman Smith-Hartman	Present
Committeewoman Teleisa	Present
Mayor Daniels	Present

Al Marmero, Solicitor, was present.

Donna Ryan, Clerk/Administrator, Maria Carrington, Administrator and Marion Karp, Deputy Clerk were present.

Approve 8/1/16 Agenda – motion to approve made by Ms. Chang; seconded by Ms. Smith-Hartman. All voted yes.

Closed Session Minutes of 7/5/16 – motion to approve by Mr. Lopez; seconded by Ms. Teleisa. All voted yes.

Regular Meeting Minutes of 7/5/16 – motion to approve by Ms. Chang; seconded by Mr. Lopez. All voted yes.

Special Meeting Minutes of 7/18/16 – motion to approve by Ms. Chang; seconded by Mr. Lopez. All voted yes.

Closed Session Special Meeting Minutes of 7/18/16 – motion to approve by Ms. Chang; seconded by Mr. Lopez. All voted yes.

Scheduled Appointments

6:00 PM Workshop/Presentation – Purchase of Rancocas Friends School.

Public Comments on Agenda Items

Vernita Jones – wanted a correction to the minutes; she had over 2 pages of information that she had submitted which wasn't included in the minutes.

Nancy Burkley – regarding the Bond Ordinance; she wants to make some corrections. The school does pay for nursing, basic skills, special education, and transportation as well as textbooks (Rancocas Friends Academy). She is very offended that people in the Friends school think their teachers care more for the students than in the Westampton schools; we have an excellent school system and our teachers care very much for our children. It is a disservice to sit here and let that comment go by.

Linda Wittman, 413 West Country Club Drive – isn't sure why there is so much controversy here. More children are coming, that is for sure. We have an opportunity to purchase the property for a very good price; she encourages the Committee to work together with the Board of Education. She thinks this acquisition needs to happen.

Susanne Bannister, Bridge Street – the name is Westampton Friends School, not Rancocas Friends School. A lot of people think their school is closing and they are not. It has been causing some confusion.

Sheryl Delgado, Holly Lane – if we don't buy Friends Academy and we expand, where will that be? There is no space for expansion; where will we park? Where are we expanding if we aren't buying this school; she knows more students are coming in.

Ms. Hernandez, 604 David Street, – her ears heard the key phrase; no increase in taxes. How will they accomplish this? They will have to renovate the building, how will this be paid for? There will be a tax increase eventually. She doesn't understand why the Committee and the Board of Education aren't working together.

Chris Hamilton, 16 St. Andrews Court – people seem to be confused; if they vote tonight, is the School Board on the hook for anything? Mayor Daniels answered no. He wanted to know what the plan would be if the schools decide not to use it later on. Mr. Lopez stated that it could be a community center; we are also looking at leasing it out and have many letters of interest. He thinks the building has potential to generate revenue for the Township in many areas. They can always sell it at the assessed value of \$5.6 million dollars. He is confused by the animosity of some of the parents of children who attended the school. He thinks as an addition to the Township for all those reasons that it is a great idea to purchase it; he hopes we proceed with it.

Mayor Daniels – we still lack a Township center/community center; this is about economics.

Mr. Milanes, 604 Fort Drive – wants a place for veterans. He thinks the Committee is trying to do a good job.

Eileen Greve, Rolling Hills – doesn't understand how we will fund the purchase. We would do a BAN; essentially like taking out a mortgage.

Maureen Hogan – has lived here her entire life; she understands the need for an identity. Her field is education; it sounds like the Committee is trying to sell it as a community center now. Be honest and put that out there; the reality is that regulations change and it doesn't pay to retrofit as a school.

New Business

Appoint Municipal Clerk effective 9/1/16 for a 3 year appointment – Ms. Chang questioned whether the appointment should be made for a 1 year period. Donna Ryan explained that it is a state statute for a 3 year appointment. Mr. Lopez made a motion to appoint Marion Karp; the motion was seconded by Ms. Smith-Hartman. All voted yes.

Dale Road Storm Drain Construction Project – information regarding the road closure and detour.

Police Report – no additional comments from the Chief.

Resolutions

68-16 Payment of Vouchers – motion to approve made by Ms. Smith-Hartman; seconded by Mr. Lopez. Ms. Teleisa had a question about a solicitor's bill for New Century; it is regarding their bankruptcy; they are trying to recover about \$42,000 in taxes. All voted yes.

69-16 Refund/Cancel Tax Sale Certificate – motion to approve made by Mr. Lopez; seconded by Ms. Smith-Hartman. All voted yes. Ms. Teleisa asked for an explanation.

70-16 Approve Retirement for a Police Officer – motion to approve made by Mr. Lopez; seconded by Ms. Smith-Hartman. All voted yes.

71-16 Emergency Appropriation for Down Payment for a Bond Ordinance – motion to approve made by Mr. Lopez; seconded by Ms. Smith-Hartman. Ms. Teleisa commented that she had recently found out there was not full disclosure nor transparency regarding the school. There is a pending lawsuit involving the Friends Academy; Westampton was mentioned in the lawsuit; the venue has been changed to Ocean County. The plaintiff is seeking relief suspending the sale of the property. In her job to do her due diligence; in her Committee seat it is her job to protect our schools, our residents. We can't afford a legal action against us and can't afford an added debt. Mr. Lopez asked if the property was still for sale; it is. At this time there is no impediment to purchasing the property. Ms. Chang has a copy of the complaint and the court order transferring it to Ocean County. A lawsuit could cost us a lot of money. Ms. Chang and Ms. Teleisa voted no; Mr. Lopez, Ms. Smith-Hartman and Mayor Daniels voted yes. The resolution does not pass, since it needs a 2/3 vote.

Mr. Lopez encourages every Committee member to put their Committee member jobs on the line to assure the residents that they will not receive a large tax increase for a new school or addition in a number of years.

Ms. Chang asked Mr. Lopez to stop speculating and to be honest with the residents; scare tactics are working on a national level; she hates them being used in Westampton.

He stated that he is the only one offering to resign if he is wrong; if the past is any measure of what can occur in the future. He and Ms. Smith-Hartman did not vote for any of these developments nor for any of these PILOT agreements.

72-16 Mr. Lopez called for a motion for a resolution to place the matter regarding the purchase of the school as a nonbinding referendum on the ballot; let's take it to the polls this November and let the residents decide. Motion made by Mr. Lopez; second by Ms. Smith Hartman. Ms. Chang and Ms. Teleisa voted no; Mr. Lopez, Ms. Smith-Hartman and Mayor Daniels voted yes.

Ordinances

17-2016 Bond Ordinance for purchase of Friends Academy, Block 201, Lot 6 (315 Bridge Street) – (second reading). Ms. Chang commented that the ordinance is dead, there is no sense voting on it. Mr. Lopez made a motion to table the Ordinance; the motion was seconded by Ms. Smith-Hartman. All voted yes to table the Ordinance.

18-2016 An Ordinance Rescinding Ordinance 3-2016, Building Fees (second reading) – motion to approve by Mr. Lopez; seconded by Ms. Chang. This was opened to the public for comment; no comment was made. All voted yes.

Correspondence

None

Dates to Remember

Westampton Township Farmers Market – every Thursday at the Burlington County Library from 4 to 7 PM.

August 2nd, 6 PM, Safety Training Center – National Night Out at the Public Safety Center. Rain date is August 3rd.

Monday, August 8, 11 AM, Westampton Municipal Building – Rep. Thomas McArthur would be present to hold a Town Hall meeting for AARP and senior citizens. Lunch will be provided.

Kelsi Worrell – is swimming on Saturday night, RV is having it televised at the PAC Center. It is at 9 PM; could this be put on the Township website. There will be a reserved section for the Tarnsfield Swim Club. She is in the semifinals Saturday night. This is one more point of pride for our community.

Monday, August 8 – Board of Education meeting

Open to Public Comment

Anthony Dennis, 3 Fenwick Court – spoke regarding 18 Sherwood Lane, the property is deplorable, and it is falling apart. It definitely needs some attention. We do have a property maintenance person now; Donna Ryan will make sure she moves it up on her list.

Chuck Emig, 23 North Hill Drive – he came in here tonight dead set against the school acquisition; however now he thinks it is a good idea. We are only 1 vote away and the entire council didn't know about the pending litigation. Is there any way the Township can be in a position to be first in line once the litigation is resolved. At this point it could be sold to anyone.

Mr. Lee, 3 Mayfaire Circle – wants to commend the Deputy Mayor for a good presentation; although he is troubled about the pending litigation. He is glad that they are talking about a referendum and that the entire Township will be aware of what's going on and will be able to vote on it.

Mr. Berberian, 138 Winstead Drive – is there any kind of credit given from trash that is put out. He frequently sees scrappers coming by and taking metal items; didn't want the Township to be missing out on some revenue.

Sharon Fisher, Irick Road – wants to say thank you. We have some excellent Township employees; she recently suffered two brain aneurisms; she is lucky to be here today due to the quick action of our EMTS and Police. They were just phenomenal. We are fortunate to have such wonderful Township employees.

John Mumbower, Lancaster Drive – unfortunately the previous council agreed to these PILOT programs. Now the schools won't receive any funds for this increase in students. He would like to see the Committee dedicate funds to the school board now.

Comments from Department Heads and Professionals

Fire Chief Craig Farnsworth – congratulations to Marion Karp on her appointment as Clerk; tonight is Donna's last meeting.

Mayor Daniels – Donna is retiring at the end of this month, this is her last meeting.

Mike Meenan – thanked Donna for everything; congratulations to Marion.

Al Marmero – wished Donna the best on her retirement; congratulations to Marion.

Police Chief Joe Otto – wished Donna the best on her retirement. He would really miss her; congratulations to Marion. Regarding National Night out, the fireworks best viewing area will be from BCIT.

Donna Ryan – wanted to thank the Committee and the residents for the privilege for working here for 38 years; the schools are great, she raised her children here, she loves the residents; she will desperately miss working here.

Maria Carrington, new Administrator – thanks to everyone for welcoming her.

Ms. Smith-Hartman – has known Donna for 38 years; she always had the answer or would find out the answer. She thinks it will be a wonderful transition

Ms. Teleisa – congratulated Marion, she knows she will do a great job. Thanked Donna for her blood, sweat and tears, she would be missed.

Ms. Chang – thanked everyone who came out tonight, whether they were for or against it, they were part of the process. Congrats to Marion on her apt and congrats to Donna on her retirement.

Mr. Lopez – thanked everyone for coming out; this is democracy at work and is what the founders intended. There is an election this November; get out and vote. He takes pride in being on the first governing body in over 7 years not to raise your taxes.

Mayor Daniels – congratulations to firefighter Jeff D'Angelis. We have a resident in town who is disabled and the hoist base for the pool had broken and he was unable to enjoy the pool. He went over on his own and fixed the base so that he could use the pool again. He commended EMT Vincent Knott for his act of kindness this weekend at the sports fields. They partnered with Verizon this past week to give out free backpacks to children in the community. He thanked each person for coming out to the meeting this evening.

There were no further comments and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Marion Karp, Deputy Municipal Clerk