

BOROUGH OF HIGH BRIDGE
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Date: October 7, 2017 – 10 a.m. – Location: High Bridge Elementary School, 40 Fairview Ave.

Please note: This meeting may contain discussion of items not mentioned on the agenda and, alternatively, any items specifically listed may be omitted.

CALL TO ORDER:

Presiding Officer calls meeting to order and states: “Pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, notice of 2017 special meeting dates were published in the Hunterdon County Democrat and Express Times on August 31, 2017, and posted on the bulletin board at Borough Hall. Action may now be taken.”

FLAG SALUTE: LED BY MAYOR OR PRESIDING OFFICER

ROLL CALL:

Councilman LoIacono, present; Councilwoman Shipps, present; Councilman Strange, absent; Councilwoman Hughes, absent; Councilman Stemple, absent; Council President Zappa, present; Mayor Desire, present. Also present were Administrator Michael Pappas, Acting Clerk Adam Young, and thirty-five public and press.

Motion to amend the agenda to add a presentation by Council members about the water utility:

Motion: LoIacono ; Second: Shipps ;

Roll call vote:

LoIacono, yes; Shipps, yes; Stemple, absent; Strange, absent; Hughes, absent; Zappa, yes; Desire, yes;

Motion passes: 4 yes, 3 absent

A presentation about the water system was given by members of the Council and Mayor. At the end of the presentation the Council opened up the floor for questions from the public to Council from the attached list of participants. Questions include: How many companies were considered? It is a bidding process and three companies reviewed the system and two bids were accepted. How much time were the bids available for? The required amount set by law. Is the contract for the sale of the system available? It is not produced yet. Can other town’s bids be reviewed? Yes, they are available. Will projections made, if not followed, be adjusted to reflect changes to bills? The Board of Public Utilities will decide the rate structure and fees. Can the Borough charge for breaks in the system? Yes, and it will be necessary. Can projected costs to the town be phased in? The assessment of this will need to be done first. A statement was made that a PA system should be used and that Trenton is putting too many requirements on municipal systems which is driving up cost. Where is the base rate to water charges utilized? The water system. If approved, will New Jersey American Water pay for any issues arising out of operation of the system? Tom Schroba of NJAM answered that they will. Why sell the system? To offset the costs to Borough residents and keep the water clean and safe. Council spoke about the rising costs of maintaining the system up to this point which necessitated considering the sale of the water system. The Mayor stated that it is Council’s job to consider all of the options. A statement was made that being incorporated into the NJAM network of systems brings other people’s systems issues into High Bridge. Council stated that the economic benefits of other systems not needing repair also benefits High Bridge. Has there been discussion with other towns not privatizing about how to handle the new regulations being imposed? Council answered that all towns have to deal with the new regulations and that it might be possible to collaborate however no one has stepped forward to do so from other towns. A question was asked about how different rates in neighboring towns of similar size would be charged differently? Council answered that, without knowing their strategy and structure, it is hard to tell. Well sources were discussed. The question of how the money of the sale of the system was asked. Council answered that it will be used to pay down debt of the remainder of the utility system and then other Borough debts. Discussion of rates ensued. Further discussion of the time frame for the accountability act, criteria for operation of the system, how water revenue is calculated, how roads will be handled for repair, when upgrades to the system will begin, what happens if there is bad service with the system, if the water will be exported, statements about the water being the ultimate resource of the people, that the people should retain the infrastructure, and discussion about the Toms River incident ensued.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: 5 MINUTES PER PERSON - NONE

It is the policy of the Borough Council that all public comments on an issue shall be limited to five (5) minutes per person and no person may make more than one (1) comment per subject. Comments may be made on any subject pertaining to Borough issues. Comments pertaining to Public Hearings should be saved for that section of the agenda. No debating between residents. Comments should be addressed to Mayor and Council at the public microphone.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

- A.** Water system information by New Jersey American Water – A presentation and questions were taken by New Jersey American Water after the presentation.

Members of the public spoke about the NJAM info being utilized by the Council, noted that the worth of the system is why there is a sale available, and asked how much money is spent by NJAM for lobbying. NJAM stated that their goal is to educate and other groups are free to do the same thing, stated their position on the use of lobbyists and how everyone uses them, and stated how regulations have effects on rate structures. At this time Councilman Zappa stated that he strongly supports the sale as he believes New Jersey American Water will provide security for the drinking water infrastructure and enforce safety measures in the system such as ensuring fire hydrant operation for an emergency. Discussion ensued about possible, future sales of the system after NJAM acquires the system and what protections are in place for this, what parts of the system would be serviced, the plan to improve overall water quality, the frequency of checking for heavy metals, if there is human involvement with the possible future system, if NJAM will be available for Council meetings, the frequency of water testing done, if improvements will be immediate, how government fees will be charged, state regulations for selling water, hydrant charges and their structure by the BPU, the Haddonfield video, why NJAM desires the system, and at what point NJAM breaks even with charges and infrastructure costs.

At this time Councilwoman Shipps left the meeting and joined by phone.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: 3 MINUTES PER PERSON - NONE

It is the policy of the Borough Council that all public comments on an issue shall be limited to three (3) minutes per person. No debating between residents. Comments should be addressed to Mayor and Council at the public microphone.

ADJOURNMENT: presiding officer asks if there is any further business.

Motion to adjourn: Zappa ; Second: Lolacono ;

Roll call vote: Lolacono, yes ; Shipps (via phone), yes ; Stemple, absent ; Strange, absent ; Hughes, absent ;

Zappa, yes ; Desire, yes;

Motion passes: 4 yes, 3 absent

Next Regular Council Meeting: October 12, 2017 - 7:30 pm – 7 Maryland Ave, High Bridge NJ, 08829