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**TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE  
TOWNSHIP OF MENDHAM  
September 24, 2019  
Regular Session Minutes 7:30 PM**

**ROLL CALL:**

Mr. Diegnan	Present
Ms. Duarte	Present
Mr. Monaghan	<i>Absent</i>
Ms. Neibart	Present
Mayor Gisser	Present

Also present:

Deborah Bonanno, Township Administrator  
Matthew Moench, Township Attorney  
Maria Coppinger, Township Clerk

**SALUTE TO THE FLAG**

**STATEMENT OF ADEQUATE NOTICE:**

Adequate Notice of this meeting of the Township Committee of the Township of Mendham was given as required by the Open Public Meetings Act as follows: Notice was given to the Observer Tribune and Daily Record on January 8, 2019. Notice was posted on the bulletin board in the township offices and notice was filed with the Township Clerk.

**RECOGNIZING NEW FIREFIGHTER**

Mr. Sauerman introduced Kevin Berman who applied to be a Junior Member at the Brookside Engine Company #1.

**PRESENTATION**

Proclamation - In Memoriam Rita Lee Schmidt  
Mayor Gisser introduced Rita's family and presented the family with a proclamation.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS/REPORTS**

Mayor Gisser made the following announcements

- Congratulated Mendham Township and Borough Police Departments for successfully arranging the "Cops Kids and Cone Event," after multiple weather delays.
- Congratulated the Dinklage Family on the Emmy win.
- Repairs continue at the library and they hope to have them completed by mid-October.
- October is Fire Prevention Month and the Brookside Fire Department will visit the library and schools for a presentation.
- The Police Presentation is scheduled for October 22<sup>nd</sup> with an 8pm start time - after the regularly scheduled committee meeting.
- The finance committee (administrative staff, Mayor and Deputy Mayor) is scheduled to meet prior to the October 7<sup>th</sup> Township Committee meeting for an initial review of the budget.

Mayor Gisser expressed that the month of August brings an opportunity to take a look at where we stand, financially. He noted that the state of finances is quite strong with revenue collections at 84% versus 80% of last year and on the expense side, we have spent 77% of the projection budget which this time last year we were at 80%.

Mayor Gisser expressed that the professional administrative staff (Ms. Bonanno, Township Administrator and Karen Fornaro, Chief Financial Officer) were both hired in late 2015 which he often uses as a marker when looking

at the financial status of the town. He noted of few things that have taken place from the last full year prior to their arrival (December 2014) to the close of this year:

- Reduction in outstanding debt by \$5,050,056; the township was a shade under \$15 million at the time the administrative staff took their positions; we are below \$9 million in outstanding debt.
- There is \$1.17 million in reserve against our outstanding debt related to insurance claims on Pitney and the sale proceeds of Pitney which gives the township just over \$8 million worth of debt outstanding.
- Approaching a 50% reduction in outstanding debt that needs to be supported by taxpayers over that 5 year period.
- He noted that debt and capital is a big issue but reserves are as well. He expressed that “reserves are what gives the where with all to ride out vitality.” We have increased our reserves collectively in categories of fund balance and other reserves (capital improvements, storm recovery, and unpaid vacation days). Those reserves have increased by \$1.3 million and combined, our reserves are a little bit over \$2.1 million.
- Mayor Gisser expressed that the financial performance of Mendham Township has been extraordinary over the last 5 years which takes a village to do but he focused on the professional staff in Town Hall for their efforts.

Ms. Neibart announced the Memorial Service for Senator Bucco, who passed away last week, which will be held on Sunday, October 6<sup>th</sup> at 2PM at the County College of Morris.

Mr. Diegnan announced that Mendham Football plays under the lights on Friday. Encouraged the public to come out and support the team, cheerleaders and band.

Ms. Duarte made the following announcements:

- Recreation will host a fall concert at Wysong Park, featuring Daddy Pop, on Sunday, September 29<sup>th</sup> from 5 – 6:30PM
- Thursday, October 3 – the Mendham Stigma Free Community, co-sponsored with the school district, will host a workshop on how parents can support positive mental health in their children
- The Environmental Commission and Raritan Headwater will sponsor a well testing event at a reduced cost on Saturday, October 26. The kits will need to be returned on Monday, October 28.
- Washington Valley Community Association will host a pancake breakfast and activities for families to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Schoolhouse
- Rotary Club is looking for new members

#### **OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

**Ms. Neibart moved. Ms. Duarte seconded the motion to open the meeting to the public.**

**All members present voted to approve.**

Trishna Goswami and Melissa Saharko – Ms. Goswami noted that she and Ms. Saharko are recent residents of Mendham Township and they both acknowledged that it was very difficult to meet new members of the community given the distance of the houses and the general layout of the township. Ms. Goswami and Ms. Saharko organized a meet your neighbor group on “About Mendham” and held a few meetings that were well received. They would like to propose a “welcoming community/meet your neighbor committee” as a more formal part of the township, either as, a volunteer organization that’s endorsed by the township or as a formal sub-committee of the township governance. Ms. Saharko noted that the feedback has been to have monthly community events on the calendar to get people out of their houses to meet their neighbors.

Robert Zimmerman – 3 W. Main Street – thanked the Township Committee, the Fire Department and First Aid Squad for the temporary (60 day) cessation of the siren which he hopes will be a permanent one. Ms. Duarte expressed that the sirens have not gone off because, in reality, there have been no calls.

Diana Orban Brown – Ironia Road – suggested that before the committee seriously considers the property maintenance ordinances, which were discussed during the last meeting, they really need to think long and hard and get the public involved in any discussions. She noted that judging from snippets from the discussion, it sounded to her, that the township is creating a nightmare for the Administrator and Construction Official. She also commented on the ordinance that is being introduced, tonight, (licensing and specific penalties) noting that the ordinance would put someone in jail on a second offense. She expressed that there needs to be some interpretation of the ordinance.

Bob Wock – 12 Cooper Road –responded to the Mayor’s comment about the finances of the town being in much better shape than they were five years ago. He expressed that we need to recognize that it comes with the caveat that our taxes have probably gone up, at twice the rate of inflation during that period, while the home prices have continued to decline during that period. He expressed that it’s very commendable that the debt has gone down and the balances have gone up but fundamentally we still have significant issue that continue to gets worst in the town (taxes increase/home value decline).

**Ms. Neibart moved. Mr. Diegnan seconded the motion to close the meeting to the public.**

**Roll call vote: All members present voted to approve.**

#### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Regular Meeting Minutes of August 27, 2019

**Ms. Duarte moved. Ms. Neibart seconded.**

**Roll call vote: All members present voted to approve.**

Executive Session Meeting Minutes of August 27, 2019

**Ms. Duarte moved. Ms. Neibart seconded.**

**Roll call vote: All members present voted to approve.**

#### **RESOLUTIONS**

**2019-149** Resolution of the Township Committee of the Township of Mendham Appointing Student Representatives to the Environmental Commission, Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee and Historic Preservation Committee

**Ms. Duarte moved. Ms. Neibart seconded.**

**Roll call vote: All members present voted to approve.**

**2019-150** Resolution of the Township Committee of the Township of Mendham Approving Issuance of Social Affair Permit to Ralston Cider Mill

**Mr. Diegnan moved. Ms. Duarte seconded.**

**Roll call vote: All members present voted to approve.**

**2019-151** Resolution of the Township Committee of the Township of Mendham Authorizing the Payment of Bills

**Ms. Duarte moved. Ms. Neibart seconded.**

**Roll call vote: All members present voted to approve.**

**2019-152** Resolution of the Township Committee of the Township Of Mendham Authorizing Discussion without the Presence of the Public – Personnel – Health Department/Contract Negotiations

**Ms. Neibart moved. Mr. Diegnan seconded.**

**Roll call vote: All members present voted to approve.**

**2019-153** Resolution of the Township Committee of the Township of Mendham Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for Professional Engineering Services to Technology Associates to Assist in Potential Litigation**Ms. Neibart moved. Ms. Duarte seconded.**

**Roll call vote: All members present voted to approve.**

#### **ORDINANCE FOR INTRODUCTION**

**13-2019** An Ordinance Amending the Code of the Township of Mendham by Amending Chapter 93, Article 1, Entitled “Licensing and Control of Animals” to Codify Specific Violations and Penalties

Clarification was provided on the proposed amendments and discussion took place on providing language the breaks down a first and second offense. The Township Committee decided to table the ordinance to review the first and second offense option. It was noted that the ordinance also applies to dogs running at large and dogs barking. Statistics from the court will be requested to address the amendments.

**Ms. Duarte moved to table the ordinance. Ms. Neibart seconded.**

**Roll call vote: All members present voted to table the ordinance.**

#### **OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

**Motion to open public comment was moved by Ms. Neibart and seconded by Ms. Duarte.**

**All members present voted to approve.**

Bob Wock – 12 Cooper Road – suggested having separate fines for not licensing a dog/cat, excessive barking, etc. on the proposed ordinance (13-2019).

Terry Gordon – Roxiticus Road – She recently read on NJ.com that a township resident paid \$19 in taxes on a farmland assessment. She stated that she has not been able to sell her house for four years and has dropped the price by \$400,000. She pays \$28,000 in taxes. She wants to know what the town can do so that farmland assessed properties pay more because it isn't fair.

Diana Orban-Brown – Ironia Road – (responded to Ms. Gordon's comments on the resident that pays \$19 in taxes for a farmland assessed property) Ms. Brown expressed that there are two sides to a story and noted that the man in question paid \$20,000 in property taxes for his property. He received a break on the five acres that he uses for farmland purposes. She noted that it's perfectly legitimate and that he pays his fair share of taxes.

**Motion to closed public comment was moved by Ms. Neibart and seconded by Ms. Duarte.**

**All members present voted to approve**

**DISCUSSION**

Mayor Gisser noted that he spent some time with the tax assessor because he had a sense that farmland assessment would come up this evening. Mayor Gisser explained that the rules that govern the creation of farmland properties/assessment are state statutes that were established in 1964. Mayor Gisser clarified that this is not a local ordinance. He noted that it's certainly a bigger issue in Mendham Township for the obvious reasons; more of a rural community, larger parcel of land. Mayor Gisser explained that within the state statute that establishes the farmland assessment there are two branches of the statute which include farmland and forestry/woodland and there is a different assessment for each. Mayor Gisser detailed the requirements to apply for these types of assessments as well as the annual requirements. He is also relieved to know the process that the municipality goes through to verify that people are living up to their obligations under the state statutes. Mayor Gisser provided statistics for Mendham Township noting that there are approximately 142 properties representing 90 farms and 50% are under forestry guidelines with the other 50% are traditional farmlands. It was reiterated that this is a state issue and should be addressed at the state level.

Mayor Gisser noted that there was letter from H2M Associates which referenced that they preparing for a Master Plan Review and requested comments from the Township Committee.

Mayor Gisser spoke on the concern about property values and taxes. He provided data pertaining to Mendham Township that was composed by the NJ Realtors Association.

Ms. Duarte and Brain Jendryka, Board of Education President, are working on the new resident survey to find out what brings residents to Mendham. The new Ralston Fire Engine is in production and should be at the final inspection in late November for delivery by the end of 2019. Ms. Duarte requested a proclamation on behalf of Vanessa Brown, who is the Chair of the Historic Preservation Committee and also the Chair of the Morris County NAACP, to be included in the NAACP Gala's ad journal.

Ms. Neibart noted that the towns have passed their resolutions to join the shared court and reminded the committee that a liaison would need to be appointed.

Motion to adjourn into Executive Session made by Ms. Duarte and seconded by Mr. Diegnan.  
All members voted to adjourn into Executive Session.

**ADJOURN**

**Motion by Ms. Duarte and seconded by Ms. Neibart.**

**All members voted to adjourn at 9:30 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Distributed: 10/10/2019  
Approved: 11/11/2019

Maria F. Coppinger  
Township Clerk