



**TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE
TOWN HALL AND REMOTE VIA ZOOM
OCTOBER 8, 2020 6:00 PM
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

ROLL CALL:

Mr. Baio	Present
Ms. Duarte	Present
Mr. Monaghan	Present arrived at 6:59PM
Mr. Orlins	Present
Mayor Neibart	Present

Also, present:

John Mills, Township Attorney
Bob Casey, Township Administrator
Maria Coppinger, Township Clerk

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, Star Ledger and published in the Daily Record on September 24, 2020. Notice was posted on the bulletin board in the township offices and notice was filed with the Township Clerk.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

WORKSHOP

Mendham Township Construction Project in regards to the facilities for Town Hall Administration, Library and Police Department.

Mayor Neibart comments:

The Township Committee will discuss the proposed building project and debrief the town hall meeting held on Thursday, October 1st.

- In August, Cornerstone Architect concluded that the cost it would take to fix the failing infrastructure, roof, update all the systems, and make the town hall building specifically ADA compliant was almost 2 million dollars.
- Hearing these costs, members of the construction subcommittee thought we would build a new building, that would include Administration, Police, and the Library. The architects presented their findings in August that was to the tune of 8 million dollars. After the architects' initial presentation, it became clear what the priorities of the township committee were. The concerns are cost-effectiveness, update the facilities to ADA standards, get the police operations under one roof, give more space to the library, create community space for recreational programs, and heating and cooling centers.
- The most effective solution would be to build a new police station on the pad site, update and expand the town hall to give the library 700 more square feet. As the architect stated last week, the project is between 4.8 and 4.9 million dollars, and that does not include potential state grants, FEMA money, and fund-raising efforts.

Ms. Duarte provided a recap on the comments that she heard during the town hall:

There is a consensus that the police need an adequate facility to do their jobs; no arguments there and no debate in the community. Everyone supports the police; we want them to be comfortable and have a better facility. This building (Town Hall) needs a lot of work.

Some of the concerns were:

- The proposed police station's location; one resident proposed that perhaps the town should purchase a home on Route 24, another resident suggested having the police station relocated to the Ralston side of town.
- Do we need to build a police station right next to the town hall?
- When you look at a 5,000 sq. ft. building, it will be much more extensive and not fit into the Brookside neighborhood.

There are concerns regarding the lack of information.

- Ms. Duarte expressed that the Township Committee has done a pretty good job about trying to get information out there, but it just shows that you can always do better no matter how much you try to inform the public.
- Everyone is concerned about the cost.

 Mr. Orlins comments:

- There is a long history to merge the police, merging the two towns, but there is a reality that we need to move forward on what we control, which is improving the space for the police.
- If we ever did merge with the borough, this space would become obsolete, as would next door, and they could be repurposed.
- The goal is to make the police department as affordable and efficient as possible, noting that the building has been scaled down from 7,500 sq. ft. to 5,000 sq. ft.

 Mr. Baio made the following comments:

- Any public building is its reflection on the community. It's a reflection on the community's values, the citizenship makeup, the vernacular, and it should be something we take with extraordinary pride; pride, that goes beyond the fact that it may cost us \$35 per household in funding.
- "This is a window in time," and it is not just a statement. We have a combination of elements which include significant bonds dropping off in 2024, a low-interest rate borrowing environment, and a dilapidated town hall that needs to be loved more.
- The building ought to reflect the size needed but be done so in a historically important way.
- Read the Lesson Learned Committee (LCC) report that the Township Committeeman Orlins helped write about what went wrong with the firehouse. The firehouse project was poorly managed by this committee at the time, by the administrator who served in the role, not Bob, the construction manager we hired; it was poorly managed by people who chimed in that maybe had vested interest in the outcome.
- The police should not head up the police station (design); the police should make comments and review the plans, but a citizen panel should lead the project. The citizen panel will spend what the Township Committee approves as a budget; the management of that will be done by whoever is sitting in Mr. Casey's seat and will constantly re-examine this every month not to repeat the sins of the firehouse.

 Mayor Neibart addressed the concerns about different locations.

Ralston Fire House

- The septic system is a big challenge.
- Building is next to a flood plain, and it is inadequate to have both the firehouse and the police station in that footprint.
- There is insufficient parking.

Ralston Cider Mill

- Currently, it has no septic.
- There is extensive site work, undeveloped, and massive issues with stormwater management.
- Also adjacent to a category one waterway. The current police facility is between two category one waterways. Also, you couldn't fit a parking lot next to the Cider Mill.

Purchase a new piece of property

- Property listings were all between \$500,000 and \$900,000, which would add to the project.
- Property would come off the tax rolls, which has been a significant error in previous years.

Report from the Chief Finance Officer was read by Mayor Neibart.

Report from Bob Casey regarding the Bond Ordinance and grant money.

The Township Committee discussed the library and grant funding.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Ms. Duarte moved. Mr. Orlins seconded the motion to open the meeting to the public.

Robert Wowk - 12 Cooper Road – spoke regarding the increase to the tax base and the process on how debt runs off. He commented on the presentation noting that some of the comments made by the architect should have been removed from the presentation since it should be an independent overview.

Craig Shrader - 1 West Main Street – Also agreed the with Mr. Wowk on the editorializing made by the architect. He requested more facts and figures about the project. There needs to be a comprehensive plan about fundraising.

Peter Colford - Old Mill Road – Library President - The Library is the cornerstone of the community, the hub of activity and many would like to see a stand-alone library; one that addresses the needs of the new library in this new digital age. While the plans do not provide for that, the library is supportive of the building plans as they are today because it does provide additional square footage that will allow the library to adjust and adapt the downstairs facilities.

Patricia Zimmerman - 3 West Main Street – expressed her concerns regarding a new building to house the police department and asked what would happen to the new building if the police department merged with another department. Spoke about the benefits of having a stand-alone library.

Peter Dumovic – 3 Shelton Road – Mr. Dumovic’s comments are attached.

Sam Barsa – Conifer Drive – expressed that the cost of the building will exceed the proposed budget. He noted that the state has urged towns the size of Mendham to consolidate. He expressed that the township does not need a physical location, most interaction can be done remotely.

Jack Curtis - 4 Michael Road – expressed that to the committee needs to consider the character of the Brookside neighbor; Brookside is not a commercial district, it’s a residential district. He asked about the upcoming closed finance committee; noting that the meeting should not be held in closed session.

Craig Shrader - 1 West Main Street – asked what the additional cost would be to move the police apartment to the first floor.

Peter Colford - Old Mill Road – Library President – clarified the comments that were made regarding the use of the library; noted that trends are down due to the pandemic but the numbers through the 12 months continue to rise.

William Levitan - 11 Levitan Lane – requested asked that the website be updated with the current plans. He expressed that the plans as they exist are thoroughly appropriate. He commented on the use of the library. Mr. Levitan expressed that there is no reason that he can see that this project should not move forward.

Mr. Orlins moved. Ms. Duarte seconded the motion to close the meeting to the public.

Mr. Monaghan made the following comments:

- This building is really a catastrophe and it has to be fixed. By expanding the towers, it will allow for ADA compliance.
- The police building has been a disaster for 20 years. They are occupying 3,700 sq. feet over four buildings.
- The next question is how do you balance between the Library and the Police Station.
- We need to get into the zone of compromise. The numbers that he has seen show it’s an extra million dollars to put the library next door and the police department down stairs. He does not see the benefit of spending the extra million dollars. The compromise is downsizing the needs right to where they need to be, the bare minimum and we are doing the project as efficiently as we can under the current plan.
- Commented on the location of the police station noting that West Main Street is not the greatest option, but the nature of governing is making compromise.
- There needs to be a resident committee to address the design of the project.

Administrator Casey outlined for the governing body a series of issues that need to be addressed. He recommended that the Township Committee introduce a bond ordinance which establishes 3 things; the amount you are going to spend, the way you are going to spend it, and the scope. It does not get into aesthetics and design, it establishes that you are going to spend 2.6 million dollars to renovate this building, according to the work to maintain the building and 2.4 million dollars to construct a police station up to 5,500 sq. feet.

Mayor Neibart would like to introduce resolution to establish a stakeholder group that would work with the sub-committee on the design and aesthetics of the police building.

Administrator Casey and the Township Committee discussed the time perimeter for the bond ordinance. Mr. Mills recommends that when the formal site plan is settled then its should be sent to the Planning Board.

The Township Committee held a discussion on the current police building and its potential use in the future.

Ms. Duarte would like additional resident feedback, to make the building (current police headquarter) is somehow incorporated into this project.

It was suggested that it would be very difficult to bind future township committee on the future of the building. However, a resolution of intent to document the conversation could be adopted which does not bind future township committee.

Mayor Neibart made a motion to direct the Township Administrator to have Bond Counsel prepare a Bond Ordinance for introduction at the next Township Committee agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Baio. Motion to call the question made by Mr. Monaghan and seconded by Mr. Baio. All members present voted in favor of the motion except for Ms. Duarte who abstained.

Ms. Duarte moved. Mr. Monaghan seconded the motion to open the meeting to the public.

Ms. Duarte read a letter from Mr. James Zemaitis into the record. Letter is attached hereto.

Jack Curtis, 4 Michael Road - Would like to see a mailing to each resident regarding the plans.

Patricia Zimmerman – 3 West Main Street – There was a comment that no matter what the Township Committee did, you will never have 100% support from the residents. She noted that there is 100% support with a stand-alone library at 4 West Main Street and the Police Department on the first floor. Ms. Zimmerman expressed that she supports the police department.

Craig Schraeder – 1 West Main Street – commented that the Historic Preservation has not been adequately discussed in the decision-making process. The impact to the historic district is something that is very important. He looks forward to talking about the project but it's important to look at it from a comprehensive planning perspective.

Mr. Monaghan moved. Ms. Duarte seconded the motion to close the meeting to the public.

Mr. Casey advised the Township Committee that the Fire Department will host a Coin Toss (Donation) on Saturday, October 10th at the corner of Route 24 and Cold Hill Road.

ADJOURNED AT 8:31PM

Motion made by Mr. Baio and second by Mr. Monaghan.

All members present voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Distributed: 04/15/2021

Approved: 04/26/2021

Maria F. Coppinger
Township Clerk

Peter Dumovic's Remarks – October 8, 2021

I am a 24-year resident of the Township.

First, I have very much appreciated the discussion at tonight's meeting and especially hearing the individual perspectives of our elected officials. This meeting is truly a Workshop, and I hope we see further meetings that utilize this format in the future.

Now to my comments to this specific Construction Project...

A year ago, in October 2019 our former mayor gave a public presentation to the Township on the police headquarters. At that time, he stated we have been talking about the problems at the police headquarters for at least 15 years. And last year, the mayor presented a possible solution of building a new police facility on a piece of property the Township already owns adjacent to Town Hall. I expressed my support of that solution at that time.

Over the course of this year, our new mayor and the Township Committee has looked in to this matter in far greater detail, and engaged the services and expertise of the Cornerstone Architectural Group to fully evaluate the current state of the police facility as well as Town Hall, so as to also assess whether we could incorporate the police headquarters on the first floor of Town Hall.

The Township Committee held a number of open-to-the-public meetings over the last few months, where the Cornerstone Architectural Group presented various potential concepts or options that involved different approaches, ranging from repairs, to reconstruction, to new construction. And residents provided their feedback on the various potential concepts or options, especially regarding the projected cost estimates and the location of a potential new building.

It seems the Township Committee has now arrived at a place where we are talking about the construction of a new police facility adjacent to Town Hall, and upgrading and expanding the Township municipal offices and also our library. The total cost is projected to be about \$4.9 Million, and I understand that would translate in to an additional \$35 per year to a homeowner's tax bill on a \$900,000 home.

Personally, I am supportive of us spending these monies. I believe these improvements will serve our community very well for a long, long time. If we move forward, we must learn the lessons from the Township's last significant capital project, the Emergency Services Building. And with respect to the construct of a new building on Main Street, there clearly needs to be a stakeholder group that must be integral to the construction design team.

One last point, given the significance of this project for our town, and especially from a financial pocketbook perspective, the Township Committee may wish to consider going out to our entire community to seek a final okay before we move forward on this project. The Township Committee has certainly sought feedback on the proposed project but so far we have only heard from dozens of residents, yet the cost of this project will clearly impact every single household in our town for many years.

Peter Dumovic
3 Shelton Road

"My name is James Zemaitis, I live at 58 Corey Lane, and I am speaking tonight on behalf of the Historical Preservation Committee, of which I am a member. After our Committee meeting last night and as the result of conversations amongst the committee members, we would like to read into the record the following statement: "We, the Historical Preservation Committee, agree that the existing police station needs to be replaced. We applaud the Mayor's statements in last week's public meeting recognizing the historical and cultural significance of the Municipal Building, which includes the library, on the corner of Cherry Lane and Main Street. It is the most noteworthy 20th Century building in the Brookside Historical District.

Should a new police building be constructed within **any** of the Township's historical districts, The Historical Preservation Committee would like to be appointed by the Township Committee a clear advisory role throughout the entire process of determining the new site for the police building...with a specific focus on the building's architecture, overall size, and relationship with the rest of the structures and landscape in the historical district. The Township Committee will have to apply to the State under the NJ Register of Historic Places Act an application for project authorization, prior to the construction of a new building within any Historic District, and it is imperative that the Township Committee, the project architects, and the Historical Preservation Committee find consensus prior to filing the application.

Furthermore, should the new police station be constructed on the site known as "the pad," replacing the existing modern residence, this will be a dramatic change to the centuries-old townscape which is the Brookside Historical District. We encourage everyone to approach such a project with the big picture in mind. Constructing a police station on the pad would mean that there would be three major changes to the center of Brookside: A - the demolition or partial demolition of the existing police buildings, and the future plans for that small lot, which includes Patriot's Path and a stream, something which has yet to be discussed in detail; B- The renovation and restoration of the Municipal Building; C-The architecture of the new police building. We encourage all residents to think holistically about this important section of the Brookside Historical District, and the implications that these decisions will have on the community's architecture for years to come. It is our duty as the Historical Preservation Committee to provide advice, and... we hope for such an important project as this...consent in the final master plan encompassing these three projects."