

**VERNON TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 15, 2024 7:00 PM**

This Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was convened at 7:00 p.m. on February 15, 2024 via Zoom Webinar and in the Vernon Municipal Center, 21 Church Street, Vernon, New Jersey with Council President Rizzuto presiding.

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided to the public and the press on January 17, 2024 and was posted on the bulletin board in the Municipal Building in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-7.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

Council President Rizzuto led the assemblage in the salute to the flag.

ROLL CALL

Present were Council Members Natalie Buccieri, William Higgins, Badley Sparta and Council President Patrick Rizzuto. Also, present were Mayor Anthony Rossi, Business Administrator Tina Kraus, CFO Donelle Bright, Municipal Clerk Marcy Gianattasio.

Council Member DeBenedetto was not present.

RESOLUTION

Resolution #24-55: Authorizing the Award of Contract for Professional Services – Township Attorney

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to approve resolution #24-55.

MOVED: Higgins

SECOND: Buccieri

All Members Present were in Favor.

Motion carries to approve resolution #24-55.

Township Attorney Mattew Moench took his seat on the dais as the Township Attorney.

PROCLAMATION

Black History Month

PRESENTATIONS

Jersey Central Power & Light – EnergizeNJ

Rich Rebisz of JCP&L gave a presentaion to introduce the EnergizeNJ Program. (attached)

Vernon Emergency Medical Services

Ken Clark, Vernon's Emergency Management Coordinator and Kevin Duffy, Chief Operating Officer explained to the Council that Vernon Emergency Medical Services (VEMS) is the unified organization that has evolved from the merger of two volunteer-run ambulance squads—Vernon Township Ambulance Squad (VTAS) and the Glenwood Pochuck Volunteer Ambulance Corps (GPVAC)—as of 2024. In collaboration with Atlantic Mobile Health, VEMS ensures round-the-clock emergency medical services (EMS) coverage for the residents of Vernon Township, with a significant contribution from dedicated volunteers.

Strategically positioned across the township, VEMS operates three stations to optimize response times and coverage. Station 1 is situated on Breakneck Road, Station 2 is conveniently located off State Route 94 behind the Dairy Queen, and Station 3 is positioned on Drew Mountain Road at the intersection of County Route 565.

MAYOR COMMENTS

I want to thank the Council for taking the time to review my appointment for Township Attorney. I want to thank Mr. Zelinski and his firm for all of his years of serving as the Vernon's township attorney. During my campaign I have said I would work with anyone to help reduce costs and expand our shared service. I have also made comments in regards to working with the BOE, and I have been told a few times to stay away from the BOE, that you can't get involved, and that they are their own entity per se. I have to say truly, for the first time in probably Vernon's history, we are finally working together as a community, and this new BOE administration has taken me up on my offer to work together on ways we can reduce spending through Shared services. We have been working together since I was elected and we continue to discuss and find more ways or reducing costs that's beneficial to the taxpayers. This is only possible because of both new administrations have the willingness to work together. I also want to be clear that our administration is not discussing any educational cost saving initiatives etc... This is not an area I would touch. The Shared services that we are working on getting done not only reduce spending but also provide a better and faster service. For example, the BOE has two catch basins that are collapsing and can be dangerous if not addressed in a timely manner. The BOE has received estimates at a cost of \$17k to \$20k to fix these two catches Basins with no ETA on when they can be repaired. When I raised this concern to the DPW, they immediately visited these 2 locations and told me they can fix it and will start preparing for this after this snow storm. This will only cost us time, not even material because the BOE believes they have the material anyway. Who said Government is slow? Government doesn't have to be slow as long as you have the right people in place who have the willingness to get things done. Well, there is always money that can slow anything down but that's another issue. Other Shared services with the BOE is snow plowing and street sweeping a average cost of \$90 to \$120k

Garbage \$100k plus we will soon be managing our own garbage which is about \$30k. We have the trucks and the permit to manage this type of garbage so why not. We will be purchasing another garbage compactor or two. We will also be taking over the parking lot patching.

The BOE currently pays around \$100k for sewer operator. After discussions with the DPW we have 1 possibly two employees who have their sewer operator license and just needs the water license which we are scheduling this employee to get his license and then we can take over not only the sewer operating costs but also the water testing another \$37k total \$137k

Vehicle maintenance. \$?

The BOE has Licensed electricians and plumbers on payroll. We are looking to do a shared service with them for our township.

Tree Removal will require a bucket, which we will soon price out. We have the truck for it. This cost will be around 10k for what we spend on tree removal. Now this does not mean we are taking every tree down, just because we have a bucket because this is something a tree specialist should handle, but we will leave that to the DPW to make that decision

Once all of these Shared services are in place The taxpayers of Vernon township will save close to a half million dollars a year.

We will be drafting up these agreements ASAP for council to approve as each BOE contract expire which will be in about one year.

I want to thank the DPW for all that they do for us and for stepping up willing to take on these shared services. These men and women are extremely valuable to Vernon township

Another project in the works is a new communications tower which can be a revenue maker for the BOE The BOE has been in contact with Elizabeth Town Gas to convert the schools to natural gas.

On February 21st, we are having an open public forum with our Tax assessors and the company that has been doing the appraisals, so I encourage the public to attend; we will also be available on Zoom. This information is available on the Vernon Township website.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (For Current Agenda Items Only, Limited to 3 Minutes Per Person)

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to open the meeting to Public Comments.

MOVED: Higgins

SECOND: Buccieri

All members were in favor.

Ann Larson – expressed concern regarding the cannabis ordinance.

Seeing no other members from the public wishing to come forward, President Rizzuto asked for a motion to close the meeting to Public Comments.

MOVED: Sparta

SECOND: Higgins

All members were in favor.

REVIEW OF BILLS LIST

The Council reviewed the bills list.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

January 15, 2024 – Reorganization Meeting

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to approve the January 15, 2024 reorganization minutes.

MOVED: Sparta

SECOND: Buccieri

All members present were in favor.

Motion carries to approve the January 15, 2024 reorganization minutes.

CONSENT AGENDA

Resolution #24-57: Resolution Authorizing Fireworks to be Displayed on February 5, 2024 within the Township of Vernon for Special Olympics

Resolution #24-58: Authorizing the Township of Vernon to Enter into an Agreement with Statewide Insurance Fund

Resolution #24-59: Resolution of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey, Granting Authority for Approval of Certain Purchases in Excess of the Bid Threshold Through New Jersey State Contracts and/or Purchasing Cooperatives for 2024

Resolution #24-60: Authorizing Contract with Microsystems-NJ, LLC, for the Year 2024 in the Amount Not to Exceed \$15,000.00

Resolution #24-61: Resolution of the Township of Vernon Authorizing the Execution of an Agreement for Municipal Services Between the Township of Vernon and Stone Hill Property Owner's Association, Inc.

Resolution #24-62: Resolution of the Township of Vernon Authorizing the Execution of an Agreement for Municipal Services Between the Township of Vernon and Lake Pochung Homeowner's Association

Resolution #24-63: Resolution Authorizing a Grant Application to the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs for the FY 2024 Local Recreation Improvement Grant Program

Resolution #24-64: Resolution of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey, Authorizing the Execution of a Memorandum of Understanding Between the Vernon Township Police Department and Atlantic Health System, Newton Medical Center, to Establish Joint Participation in the Arrive Together Program to Enhance the Support Response to Certain Behavioral Health Crisis Calls

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

MOVED: Buccieri

SECOND: Sparta

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Buccieri, Higgins, Sparta, Rizzuto

NAYES:

ABSTAIN:
ABSENT: DeBenedetto

Motion carries to approve the Consent Agenda.

RESOLUTION #24-57

**RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING FIREWORKS TO BE DISPLAYED
ON FEBRUARY 5, 2024 WITHIN THE TOWNSHIP OF VERNON
FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS**

WHEREAS, N.J.S.A.21:3-1et seq. Explosive and Fireworks, provides that a Municipal Governing Body must authorize the display of fireworks within its boundaries as a pre-condition to such display in accordance with the New Jersey Fire Prevention Code; and

WHEREAS, Mountain Creek Resort, 200 Route 94, Vernon, has submitted an application to Vernon Township to conduct fireworks display on Monday February 5, 2024 for the Special Olympics; and

WHEREAS, Mountain Creek Resort has engaged in a contract with Garden State Fireworks, Inc., to perform the public fireworks and special effects display and has provided the required certificate of liability insurance.

WHEREAS, the Fire Marshal and Applicant has acknowledged the late submission of the application and respectfully requests Township Council authorize approval of the Fireworks resolution after the event.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Council of the Township of Vernon, in the County of Sussex, hereby authorizes the fireworks display with special effects, performed by Garden State Fireworks, Inc. and sponsored by Mountain Creek Resort on February 5, 2024 for the Special Olympics upon satisfaction of all statutory and departmental requirements.

RESOLUTION #24-58

**AUTHORIZING THE TOWNSHIP OF VERNON TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT WITH
STATEWIDE INSURANCE FUND**

WHEREAS, a number of local units have joined together to form the Statewide Insurance Fund (“FUND”), a joint insurance fund, as permitted by N.J.S.A. 40A:10-36, et seq.; and

WHEREAS, the Township of Vernon (“LOCAL UNIT”) has complied with relevant law with regard to the acquisition of insurance; and

WHEREAS, the statutes and regulations governing the creation and operation of joint insurance funds contain elaborate restrictions and safeguards concerning the safe and efficient administration of such funds; and

WHEREAS, the Township of Vernon has determined that membership in the FUND is in the best interest of the Township; and

WHEREAS, the LOCAL UNIT agrees to be a member of the FUND for a period of three (3) years, effective January 1, 2024 terminating on January 1, 2027 at 12:01 a.m. standard time; and

WHEREAS, the LOCAL UNIT has never defaulted on claims, if self-insured, and has not been canceled for non-payment of insurance premiums for two (2) years prior to the date of this Resolution.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the LOCAL UNIT does hereby agree to join the Statewide Insurance Fund; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that to the extent required by law, the Local Unit shall provide notice of the Indemnity and Trust Agreement to the Office of the State Comptroller; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the LOCAL UNIT will be afforded the following coverage(s):

- Workers' Compensation & Employer's Liability
- Comprehensive General Liability
- Automobile Liability and Physical Damage
- Public Officials and Employment Practices Liability
- Property
- Inland Marine Boiler and Machinery
- Crime-Faithful Performance and Fidelity
- Pollution Liability
- Cyber Liability
- Non Owned Aircraft

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the LOCAL UNIT's Fund Commissioner is authorized and directed to execute the Indemnity and Trust Agreement and such other Documents signifying the membership in the FUND as required by the FUND's Bylaws and to deliver same to the Administrator of the FUND with the express reservation that said documents shall become effective only upon the LOCAL UNIT's admissions to the FUND following approval of the FUND by the New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance.

RESOLUTION#24-59

RESOLUTION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF VERNON, COUNTY OF SUSSEX, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, GRANTING AUTHORITY FOR APPROVAL OF CERTAIN PURCHASES IN EXCESS OF THE BID THRESHOLD THROUGH NEW JERSEY STATE CONTRACTS AND/OR PURCHASING COOPERATIVES FOR 2024

WHEREAS, a need exists for the acquisition of various goods and services contained within cooperative contracts and over the bid threshold as aggregation of commodities, for the daily operations of the Township of Vernon; and

WHEREAS, the Township of Vernon may, without advertising for bids, purchase such materials through the New Jersey State Purchase and Property State Contracts and other approved Regional Cooperative Purchasing Systems of which the Township of Vernon is a member, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40A:11-11, N.J.S.A. 40A:11-12, and N.J.A.C. 5:34-7.29 et. Seq., and

WHEREAS, under the state cooperative contract, or designated regional cooperative contract award, the following vendors hold valid cooperative contracts in accord with the New Jersey Local Publics Contract Law.

Vendor	Contract #	T- Number	Title	Term Expiration
Morton Salt	Sussex County	21-009	ROAD SALT/ GRITS	5/31/2024
NORTH CHURCH GRAVEL	Sussex County	21-009	ROAD SALT/ GRITS	8/10/2024
DENVILLE LINE PAINTING	MCCPC #36		LINE STRIPING	12/31/2024
TILCON	MCCPC #5		PAVING MATERIAL	12/31/2024
AAA Equipment Co Inc	17-FLEET-00805		FIREFIGHTER GEAR	6/14/2024
IN LINE AIR CONDITIONING COMPANY	19/20-23		HVAC	3/17/2024
Riggins/ Conoco	MCCPC#12: #2 ULTRA LOW SULFUR DIESEL FUEL		Diesel	12/31/2024
Griffith-Allied Trucking, LLC (dba Allied Oil)/ Riggins	MCCPC CONTRACT #1: MOTOR GASOLINE		Gasoline	12/31/2024

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Council of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey, as follows:

1. The Qualified Purchasing Agent (QPA) upon receipt of an identified need and direction from the Township is hereby authorized to approve purchases in the aggregate over the bid threshold from the list of approved cooperative contract, through New Jersey State Contracts and/or Purchasing Cooperatives to which the Township of Vernon is a member without further action from Council, provided that funds are available to cover the expenditure.

RESOLUTION #24-60

**Authorizing Contract with Microsystems-NJ, LLC,
for the Year 2024 in the Amount Not to Exceed \$15,000.00**

WHEREAS, there exists a need for Computer services for the Township of Vernon for the Tax Assessment Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal System (CAMA) and printing of assessment cards; and

WHEREAS, the Municipal Assessor has determined that Microsystems-NJ, LLC, the Township’s current contractor providing Computer services for Tax Assessment/CAMA and printing of assessment cards is qualified and authorized by the State of New Jersey to continue providing the Township with such services; and

WHEREAS, Vernon desires to appoint Microsystems-NJ, LLC, pursuant to a contract under the provisions of N.J.S.A. 40A:11-5(1) (dd), which states computer software services are an exception to public bidding; and

WHEREAS, the Chief Financial Officer has certified that funds are available for this purpose in the 2024 municipal budget and the value of the contract will not exceed \$15,000.00.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the Township Council of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex and State of New Jersey as follows:

1. The Township of Vernon is authorized to engage Microsystems-NJ, LLC, for the purpose of Computer Services and Printing for Tax Assessment.

RESOLUTION #24-61

RESOLUTION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF VERNON AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF AN AGREEMENT FOR MUNICIPAL SERVICES BETWEEN THE TOWNSHIP OF VERNON AND STONE HILL PROPERTY OWNER’S ASSOCIATION, INC.

WHEREAS, the Municipal Services Act (“Act”), N.J.S.A. 40:67-23.1 et seq., provides that qualified private communities are entitled to receive certain municipal services; and

WHEREAS, Stone Hill Property Owners Association, Inc. is a qualified private community as defined under the Act, and the Township of Vernon is a municipality governed by the Act; and

WHEREAS, the Township of Vernon and Stone Hill Property Owners Association, Inc. desire to enter into an Agreement for Municipal service to provide that the Township shall reimburse Stone Hill Property Owners Association, Inc. for certain municipal services as specified in the Agreement.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Township Council of the Township of Vernon that the Mayor and Clerk are authorized to execute an Agreement for Municipal Services with Stone Hill Property Owners Association, Inc.

RESOLUTION #24-62

RESOLUTION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF VERNON AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF AN AGREEMENT FOR MUNICIPAL SERVICES BETWEEN THE TOWNSHIP OF VERNON AND LAKE POCHUNG HOMEOWNER’S ASSOCIATION

WHEREAS, the Municipal Services Act (“Act”), N.J.S.A. 40:67-23.1 et seq., provides that qualified private communities are entitled to receive certain municipal services; and

WHEREAS, Valley View Homeowner’s Association is a qualified private community as defined under the Act, and the Township of Vernon is a municipality governed by the Act; and

WHEREAS, the Township of Vernon and Lake Pochung Homeowner’s Association desire to enter into an Agreement for Municipal service to provide that the Township shall reimburse Lake Pochung Homeowner’s Association for certain municipal services as specified in the Agreement.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Township Council of the Township of Vernon that the Mayor and Clerk are authorized to execute an Agreement for Municipal Services with Lake Pochung Homeowner’s Association.

RESOLUTION #24-63

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A GRANT APPLICATION TO THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS FOR THE FY 2024 LOCAL RECREATION IMPROVEMENT GRANT PROGRAM

WHEREAS, the outdated and antiquated sports lighting at Veterans’ Memorial Park falls short in meeting modern safety standards. Dimly lit areas pose safety risks, limit playing hours, and discourage community members from utilizing these spaces. Upgrading the lighting infrastructure is essential to address these issues; and

WHEREAS, proper lighting at our local recreation facilities will increase the illumination levels to meet sports safety standards and improve the overall playing experience for all community sports leagues. It will also encourage and enable expanded use of the ADA accessible walking path and playground area, fostering community involvement and promoting healthy lifestyles through enhanced passive recreation opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the installation and upgrade of lighting systems to more useful, energy-efficient and eco-friendly solutions will enhance the quality, safety, and accessibility of these spaces; ensuring a positive impact on the entire community, and as part of revitalization efforts of this original community park, proper lighting will provide opportunity for full capacity usage for youth sports and allow for family friendly gathering opportunities that will extend through generations; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey has recognized these needs; and

WHEREAS, in the FY2024 budget, Governor Murphy has allocated \$25 million for the FY 2024 Local Recreation Improvement Grant to support improvement and repairs to public recreation facilities; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Community Affairs has issued a Request for Proposals to solicit applicants for the FY 2024 Local Recreation Improvement Grant; and

WHEREAS, a determination has been made that it would be in the best interests of the Township of Vernon to apply for grant funding.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Council of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey, that the Mayor and the Clerk are hereby authorized to execute and submit a grant

application to the Department of Community Affairs for the FY 2024 Local Recreation Improvement Grant Program.

RESOLUTION #24-64

RESOLUTION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF VERNON, COUNTY OF SUSSEX, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE VERNON TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT AND ATLANTIC HEALTH SYSTEM, NEWTON MEDICAL CENTER, TO ESTABLISH JOINT PARTICIPATION IN THE ARRIVE TOGETHER PROGRAM TO ENHANCE AND SUPPORT RESPONSE TO CERTAIN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS CALLS

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Township Council of the Township of Vernon have received from the Vernon Township Chief of Police a Memorandum of Understanding to establish joint participation in the ARRIVE Together Program to enhance and support responses to certain behavioral health crisis calls; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor, Township Council and the Vernon Township Chief of Police have reviewed the terms of the MOU; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Township Council, together with the Chief of Police find it to be in the best interest of Vernon Township and its residents to execute the MOU.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by Mayor and Township Council of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, that the Vernon Township Police Chief be authorized to execute the Memorandum of Understanding between the Township and Atlantic Health System, Newton Medical Center (Participating Mental Health Service Provider) to establish a joint participation in the ARRIVE Together Program to enhance and support response to certain behavioral health crisis calls.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution shall take effective immediately.

Resolution #24-56: Resolution of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon Amending Resolution #22-77 in Support of an Adult-Use Cannabis Retailer License for Castle of Green

Council Member Sparta made a motion to table resolution #24-56. Seconded by Council Member Buccieri.

All members present were in favor.

Motion carries to table resolution #24-56.

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCE

Ordinance #24-02: Ordinance of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey, Amending Chapter 13, “Cannabis Establishment Licensing and Regulation” of the Code of the Township of Vernon to Remove the Requirement for the Vernon Township Police to Perform Background Checks and/or Investigations

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to introduce ordinance #24-02.

MOVED: Sparta
SECOND: Higgins

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Buccieri, Higgins, Sparta, Rizzuto
NAYES:
ABSTAIN:
ABSENT: DeBenedetto

Motion carries to introduce ordinance #24-02.

Ordinance #24-03: Ordinance of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey, Amending Chapter 52 Section 9-D of the Township Code Entitled “Duties of Fire Commissioner/Deputy Commissioner

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to introduce ordinance #24-03.

MOVED: Sparta
SECOND: Buccieri

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Buccieri, Higgins, Sparta, Rizzuto
NAYES:
ABSTAIN:
ABSENT: DeBenedetto

Motion carries to introduce ordinance #24-03.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (Limited to 5 Minutes Per Person)

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to open the meeting for public comment.

MOVED: Sparta
SECOND: Higgins

All members were in favor.

Scott Castle – is happy with the new Council and the Township Attorney. Mr. Castle is in favor of shared services.

Seeing no other members of the public wishing to speak, President Buccieri asked for a motion to

close the meeting for Public Comments.

MOVED: Higgins
SECOND: Buccieri

All members were in favor.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Council Member Higgins thanked Mr. Castle for his comments.

Council Member Sparta thanked Mayor Rossi for the invitation to the Special Olympics. It was a great event.

Council Member Buccieri also thanked the Mayor and said the Special Olympics was a great event.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT COMMENTS

Council President Rizzuto thanked all of our DPW workers and emergency responders for the great job they did with the snow storm. Council Member Rizzuto also thanked the Mayor for the invitation to the Special Olympics saying it was a great affair.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:30 pm Council Member Sparta made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Council Member Higgins.

All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcy Gianattasio, RMC, CMR
Municipal Clerk

Patrick Rizzuto
Council President

Minutes approved: February 26, 2024