

**VERNON TOWNSHIP COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES  
OCTOBER 12, 2023 7:00 PM**

This Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was convened at 7:00 p.m. on October 12, 2023 via Zoom Webinar and in the Vernon Municipal Center, 21 Church Street, Vernon, New Jersey with Council President Buccieri presiding.

**STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE**

Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided to the public and the press on January 6, 2023 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 Buccieri led the assemblage in the salute to the flag.

Council Member Tadrick asked for a moment of silence for the hostilities that are taking place in the Mideast.

**ROLL CALL**

Present were Council Members Peg Distasi, Patrick Rizzuto, Bradley Sparta, Joseph Tadrick and Council President Natalie Buccieri. Also present were Mayor Howard Burrell, Administrator Tina Kraus, CFO Donelle Bright, Municipal Clerk Marcy Gianattasio and Township Attorney Marlin Townes.

**DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**Animal Control Ordinance**

Police Chief Dan Young and Sergeant Ron Koumaras had a lengthy discussion with the Township Council regarding possible changes to the town's animal control ordinance.

**Mayor's Salary**

The Council discussed possibly raising the Mayor's salary and if the Mayor is considered a full-time position.

**November Council Meeting Schedule**

The Council agreed that the November 13, 2023 Township Council meeting will be cancelled due to the New Jersey League of Municipalities Conference.

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

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

MOVED: Sparta  
SECOND: Rizzuto

All members were in favor.

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

MOVED: Sparta  
SECOND: Tadrick

All members were in favor.

**REVIEW OF BILLS LIST**

The Council reviewed the bills list.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

September 11, 2023 – Regular Meeting  
September 25, 2023 – Regular Meeting

President Buccieri asked for a motion to approve the September 11, 2023 and the September 25, 2023 regular meeting minutes.

MOVED: Tadrick  
SECOND: Distasi

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Distasi, Rizzuto, Sparta, Tadrick, Buccieri  
NAYES:  
ABSTAIN:  
ABSENT:

Motion carries to approve the September 11, 2023 and the September 25, 2023 regular meeting minutes.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

**Resolution #23-240:** Authorizing the Award of a Required Discloser Contract for Container Service at the Township’s Public Works and Animal Control Facilities

**Resolution #23-241:** Authorizing the Mayor to Continue the Incentive to Employees Who Enroll in an Alternate Health or Prescription Plan

**Resolution #23-242:** Resolution Authorizing the Option for Employees of the Township of Vernon to Waive Health Insurance Benefits

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

MOVED: Distasi  
SECOND: Rizzuto

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Distasi, Rizzuto, Sparta, Tadrick, Buccieri  
NAYES:  
ABSTAIN:  
ABSENT:

Motion carries to approve the Consent Agenda.

**RESOLUTION #23-240**

**AUTHORIZING THE AWARD OF A REQUIRED DISCLOSURE CONTRACT FOR CONTAINER SERVICE AT THE TOWNSHIP’S PUBLIC WORKS AND ANIMAL CONTROL FACILITIES**

**WHEREAS**, there exists a need to haul and dispose of solid waste (type 10) containers at the Township’s Public Works and Animal Control facilities and;

**WHEREAS**, the quotations were sought in accord with N.J.S.A. 19:44A-20.5 as a required disclosure contract; and

**WHEREAS**, the Township has sought to receive quotations for monthly services and on September 22, 2023, received one (1) quote, to wit:

<b>NAME OF BIDDER</b>	Gaeta Recycling Co. Inc
<b>ADDRESS</b>	278 W Railway Ave
<b>CITY, STATE, ZIP</b>	Paterson, NJ 07503
<b>CONTACT</b>	
<b>TELEPHONE</b>	(201) 206-6114 Cell

<b>EMAIL</b>	<a href="mailto:ralphs@gaetarecycling.com">ralphs@gaetarecycling.com</a>
<b>NAME OF BIDDER</b>	<b>Gaeta Recycling Co. Inc</b>
<b>COST PER MONTH</b>	\$2,721.04

And;

**WHEREAS** Gaeta Recycling Company has provided for the lowest quote based upon price and other factors for these services proposed for the time frame of November 1, 2023 through October 31, 2024; and

**WHEREAS**, the Qualified Purchasing Agent has solicited informal quotes for these services, of which Gaeta Recycling Company was the lowest cost of the quotes sought and determined that the cost will exceed the pay to play threshold of \$17,500.00; and

**WHEREAS**, Gaeta Recycling has provided for a Business Entity Disclosure and Political Contribution Disclosure form in accord with pay to play law;

**WHEREAS**, the Qualified Purchasing Agent recommends awarding a contract to Gaeta Recycling Company, Inc., 278 Railway Ave., Paterson, New Jersey 07053 who submitted the pricing of \$2,721.04 per month for a total of \$32,652.48 for the extension of contract period of November 1, 2023 through October 31, 2024; and

**WHEREAS**, surcharges for transport and tonnage will be charged in an indeterminate amount on a monthly basis creating a not to exceed amount of \$32,652.48; and

**WHEREAS**, the Chief Financial Officer subject to the approval of the 2024 Municipal Budget certifies \$ 32,652.48 is available in:

2023 Municipal Budget (\$5,442.08): 3-01-26-310-20 Buildings and Grounds O/E  
 2024 Municipal Budget (subject to approval): 4-01-26-310-20 Buildings and Grounds O/E

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, by the Township Council of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex and State of New Jersey, the Mayor, Clerk and CFO are authorized to extend the contract by one (1) year and execute a contract with Gaeta Recycling Company, Inc., 278 Railway Ave., Paterson NJ 07053 not to exceed \$32,652.48; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Business Entity Disclosure and Political Contribution Forms shall be on file and available for public inspection at the office of the Municipal Clerk.

**RESOLUTION #23-241**

**AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO CONTINUE THE INCENTIVE TO EMPLOYEES WHO ENROLL IN AN ALTERNATE HEALTH OR PRESCRIPTION PLAN**

**WHEREAS**, Health and Prescription Costs for employees and retirees are rising year after year and account for approximately 12% of the municipal budget; and

**WHEREAS**, the Township is offering multiple alternative health insurance and prescription plans for its employees; and

**WHEREAS**, the Township and employee will see the largest savings for switching to the optional plan known as Aetna Whole Health; and

**WHEREAS**, beginning in 2017 the Township offered an incentive of 1/3 of the Township's net savings for each employee who elects to switch to the alternate health or prescription plan for the plan year and it is the wish of the Township to continue that program for the plan year January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024

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

1. The Mayor of the Township of Vernon is hereby authorized to continue the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding with the UAW Local 2326 which created the mechanism of which to allow the incentive to be paid.
2. The change to the Personnel Policy and Procedure Manual adding the addendum to offer this incentive to non-union employees is also continued.
3. This Resolution shall take effect immediately upon passage in accordance with law.

**RESOLUTION #23-242**  
**Resolution Authorizing the Option for Employees**  
**of the Township of Vernon to Waive Health Insurance Benefits**

**WHEREAS**, the Township of Vernon (hereinafter “Township”) is continually seeking to reduce expenditures where appropriate; and

**WHEREAS**, the Township provides health benefit coverage to all regular full time employees; and

**WHEREAS**, N.J.S.A. 40A:10-17.1 authorizes municipalities to permit employees to waive health care coverage when such employees are covered for health care under the coverage of a spouse; and

**WHEREAS**, pursuant to statute, the Township may pay to the waiving employee an amount equal to not more than 25% or \$5,000.00, whichever is less, of the amount saved by the Township when coverage is waived; and

**WHEREAS**, the Township desires to implement such a cost efficiency measure for the year 2024; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Council of the Township of Vernon hereby implements the following provisions of N.J.S.A. 40A:10-17.1:

1. Any employee who elects to waive health care coverage pursuant to this Resolution shall be paid a sum equal to 25% or \$5,000.00, whichever is less, of the health care premium savings received by the Township. Payment of sums required under this Resolution shall be made to the Employee on a monthly basis, each payment being one twelfth of the total sum due.
2. An employee shall be eligible for such waiver and payment only upon compliance with, and under the terms of, the provisions of N.J.S.A. 40A:10-17.1.
3. An employee shall be eligible to, or required to, resume coverage pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 40A:10-17.1.
4. This Resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption according to law.

**RESOLUTION**

**Resolution #23-239: Authorizing a Date for Municipal Tax Sale**

President Buccieri asked for a motion to approve resolution #23-239.

MOVED: Sparta  
SECOND: Distasi

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Distasi, Rizzuto, Sparta, Tadrick, Buccieri  
NAYES:

ABSTAIN:  
ABSENT:

Motion carries to approve resolution #23-239.

### **RESOLUTION #23-239**

#### **AUTHORIZING A DATE FOR MUNICIPAL TAX SALE**

**WHEREAS**, the governing body of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey, desires to collect all taxes, assessments and other municipal charges that are now delinquent; and

**WHEREAS**, The Tax Collector is directed to sell all municipal delinquencies through December 31, 2022 in a manner prescribed by N.J.S.A. 54:5-19, and as amended by Chapter 99, Public Laws of 1997.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, by the Council of the Township of Vernon, that the Tax Collector is hereby authorized and directed to sell all municipal liens in accordance with New Jersey law, both as stated above, on Wednesday, December 6, 2023 via Electronic Tax Sale.

#### **INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCE**

**Ordinance #23-20**: An Ordinance Amending the Vernon Township Administrative Code Chapter 250, Article II Fees and Escrows Enumerated in Section 250-15 Relating to Animal Control

President Buccieri asked for a motion to introduce ordinance #23-20.

MOVED: Distasi  
SECOND: Sparta

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Distasi, Rizzuto, Sparta, Tadrick, Buccieri  
NAYES:  
ABSTAIN:  
ABSENT:

Motion carries to introduce ordinance #23-20.

**Ordinance #23-21**: An Ordinance of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey, Adding Chapter 13, "Cannabis Establishment Licensing and Regulation," to the Township Code, Establishing Local Annual Cannabis Licenses for all Cannabis Establishments to Operate in the Township, Pursuant to the New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory, Enforcement Assistance, and Marketplace Modernization Act

President Buccieri asked for a motion to introduce ordinance #23-21.

MOVED: Tadrick  
SECOND: Distasi

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Distasi, Rizzuto, Sparta, Tadrick, Buccieri  
NAYES:  
ABSTAIN:  
ABSENT:

Motion carries to introduce ordinance #23-21.

**Ordinance #23-22:** An Ordinance Amending, Revising, and Supplementing Chapter 330 Entitled “Land Development” to Clarify Regulations Relative to Permitted Locations for Legal Cannabis Uses Within the Township of Vernon

President Buccieri asked for a motion to introduce ordinance #23-22.

MOVED: Distasi  
SECOND: Tadrick

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Distasi, Rizzuto, Sparta, Tadrick, Buccieri  
NAYES:  
ABSTAIN:  
ABSENT:

Motion carries to introduce ordinance #23-22.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS (Limited to 5 Minutes Per Person)**

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

MOVED: Sparta  
SECOND: Tadrick

All members were in favor.

Jessica Paladini – expressed concern that a bill from the Sussex County Municipal Utilities Authority has not been paid as of now.

Seeing no other members of the public wishing to speak, President Buccieri asked for a motion to close the meeting for Public Comments.

MOVED: Tadrick  
SECOND: Distasi

All members were in favor.

**MAYOR COMMENTS**

Council Meeting Following the February 3, 2023, hazardous materials train derailment in East Palestine, OH, at the February 27 Council Meeting, I reported to the Council and the public that my staff and I had conducted a detailed inquiry with the objective of determining: 1. The potential for a similar hazardous materials train derailment in Vernon Township; and ... 2. If Vernon had a safety plan in place to deal with such a derailment, should such a derailment occur in our town. The results of that detailed inquiry revealed that Vernon Township does in fact have in place effective emergency services response plans for a variety of incident types, including railroad related emergencies. The municipality’s emergency services response plans consist of specific coordinated efforts involving the municipality’s four Fire Departments, the two Vernon Township Emergency Medical Services Organizations, the Vernon Township Police Department, the Vernon Township Office of Emergency Management, the Sussex County HAZMAT Team, plus Mutual Aid Agreements with emergency services organizations in surrounding towns and throughout Sussex County. In addition, through official sources, we have confirmed that the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railway Corporation, the organization which operates the train that travels through Vernon, does not carry any crude oil, any toxic inhalation hazard, any poisonous inhalation hazard, or any other products or materials that could explode or cause widespread injury or harm, such as was the case in East Palestine, OH. As a follow up to our earlier due diligence on this important matter, on tonight, I am pleased to report to the Council and the public that we in Vernon Township are not simply relying on a written emergency services response plan, we are also playing a specific, central role in the actual training efforts related to that plan. One of those training efforts will take place this Saturday in the parking lot at Veterans Memorial Park, next to the train tracks that cross County Route 644, which is better known by many residents as Vernon Crossing Road or The Flats. As part of this training effort, the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railway Corporation will station one of their rail cars on the tracks next to the

parking lot at Veterans Memorial Park, so that it can be used as tool in this training. Participating in this unique regional training session will be all four Vernon Fire Departments, the two Vernon Township Emergency Medical Services Organizations, the Vernon Township Police Department, and the Vernon Township Office of Emergency Management. Also participating will be the corresponding organizations from surrounding municipalities through which the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railway Corporation trains travel. Other organizations participating include the Sussex County HAZMAT Team, the Sussex County Fire Marshal's Office, the Sussex County Sheriff's Office, the Sussex County Office of Emergency Management, and the New Jersey State Police. I have been told by Vernon Fire Commissioner Dan Gros that McAfee Fire Department Chief, Jeff Andersen, has played a key role in the planning, organizing, and coordinating of this important training session. And therefore, on behalf of the residents of Vernon, I offer a special word of thanks and appreciation to Chief Andersen. I also, again, want the residents of Vernon know, that their Mayor and Council are committed to making sure that Vernon is not only a good town in which to live and raise a family, but also a safe town in which to live and raise a family.

In our collective efforts to maximize Vernon's potential to find and cultivate sources through which we can reduce the tax burden on our municipality's homeowners by obtaining state and federal aid and grants, the Council and Mayor have worked long and hard to develop and strengthen positive relationships with our state and federal representatives. The developing and strengthening of these positive relationships between the town's governing body and our state and federal representatives have proven to be very beneficial to Vernon's taxpayers. For example: ∞ It was through a strong positive relationship with our State Senator, Steve Oroho, that Vernon was able to obtain a 100K\$ grant from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs for the purpose of hiring an Environmental Consultant to conduct samplings of the soil in the illegal Wallace landfill; and ... ∞ It was through a strong positive relationship with our U.S. Congressman, Josh Gottheimer, that Vernon was able to obtain 3.5M\$ for the specific purpose of making additional sewer system connections within our town's current Sewer Service Area. These strong and positive relationships have not only yielded valuable funds that we have been able to allocate to pay for needed municipal improvements, without increasing the tax burden on our municipality's homeowners - - these strong and positive relationships have also enabled us to improve and enhance the state and federal constituent services that are available to Vernon residents. This is especially true as it relates to the federal constituent service that's available to Vernon residents through our Congressman Josh Gottheimer. For example, in 2017, then Mayor Shortway used this strong and positive relationship to persuade Congressman Gottheimer to make a staff member available to Vernon residents, each Tuesday from 9am to 1pm in the Vernon Municipal Center, for the purpose of helping our residents to overcome the sometimes frustrating bureaucratic rules and procedures that make it very difficult for some of our residents, and especially some of our senior citizens and veterans, to overcome problems related to Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, Passports, Veterans' Health and other Veteran's issues, as well as other federal matters. A host of Vernon residents have told me that this on-the-scene, personal constituent service has been extremely helpful and beneficial to them. However, a meaningful number of Vernon residents have told me that they need help with federal related matters, but due to their work schedules and/or other personal matters, have not been able to take advantage of the federal constituent service that's offered by Congressman Gottheimer during the normal Tuesday, from 9am to 1pm, time periods. Therefore, on tonight I am pleased to announce that I have again used this strong and positive relationship to collaborate with Congressman Gottheimer to enhance his federal level constituent service to Vernon residents by occasionally making a staff member available, in the Vernon Municipal Center, at an after 4pm time period. The first of these after 4pm constituent service meetings will be held on November 27 at 6pm in the Municipal Center. In addition to the personal outreach that I will make to those Vernon residents who have specifically asked me to arrange for them an after 4pm constituent service meeting, the municipality will publicize this and future after 4pm constituent service meeting dates on the municipality's website, the municipality's electronic message board, and other mediums available to us. We will continue in our efforts to find creative ways to serve the needs of Vernon's residents!

## **COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Council Member Distasi thanked the police for realizing that the fees needed to be raised for the cat adoptions. Her prayers go out to the people of Israel.

Council Member Sparta had no comments.

Council Member Tadrick commented that if you see something, say something and be careful and aware of your surroundings.

**COUNCIL PRESIDENT COMMENTS**

Council President Buccieri thanked everyone for a productive meeting. She feels that it is a dangerous time and she appreciates the people in our military and first responders that keep us safe.

Council Member Rizzuto echoed Council President Buccieri’s comments in regards to the military and first responders.

**ADJOURNMENT**

At 8:11 pm Council Member Tadrick made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Council Member Sparta.

All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

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Marcy Gianattasio, RMC, CMR  
Municipal Clerk

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Natalie Buccieri  
Council President

Minutes approved: October 23, 2023