

**VERNON TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 8, 2024 7:00 PM**

This Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Vernon was convened at 7:00 p.m. on April 8, 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, Jessica DeBenedetto, 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, Township Attorney Ryan Windels

RECOGNITION

Gabrielle Travares – Girls’ Ski Team Overall State Title
Vernon Township Girls’ Ski Team
Vernon Township Varsity Boys’ Basketball Team

PROCLAMATIONS

National Volunteer Month
Child Abuse Prevention Month

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Squatter Ordinance

Mayor Full-Time - The Council decided that Council Members Higgins and DeBenedetto will research this and report back to the Council at the June 10, 2024 meeting.

MAYOR COMMENTS

Thank you, Council President. This month is very important to me. it's not only my birthday, which is on April 15th, but tomorrow is our Business Administrators birthday. But seriously, it is Child Abuse Prevention Month. Child abuse and child neglect continue to threaten the lives and health of millions of our Nation's children. Their physical suffering and emotional anguish challenge us, as parents, neighbors, and citizens, to increase our attention to their protection and intensify our efforts to prevent their maltreatment. Children may be endangered by physical battering, denial of the basic necessities for life and health, sexual abuse and exploitation, or emotional cruelty. Public concern can help prevent maltreatment and help protect children. Action taken after cruelty has occurred is often too late. Prevention of abuse requires that neighborhoods and communities be attentive to the problems of families in their midst and be willing to help when help is needed. It requires the active concern of educational, medical, mental health, law enforcement, and social service professionals, and the efforts of volunteers and private citizens. The health and well-being of our children underlie the future of our country and most importantly in our state. So please, if anyone suspects child abuse, please contact the police, teacher, or counselor someone; for God's sake, call my office. No child should ever be subjected to abuse. I want to thank the Vernon township women's club for decorating the front of our building to spread awareness

Also, April is National Volunteer Month. I want to thank all of our volunteers past, present, and future. This month is dedicated to honoring all those volunteers who are vital to our community. I also want to especially thank those volunteers of our Fire and ambulance departments who put their lives on the line for us each and every day. In Vernon, we welcome all volunteers, and we look forward to working with anyone who wants to dedicate their time and energy to serve our community.

Mayor Rossi appointed Kathy Zayatz to the Senior Advisory Board.

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: DeBenedetto

All members were in favor.

Peter Knipe – commented on the roll and compensation of the Mayor.

Stephanie Blaine – commented on the roll and compensation of the Mayor.

Scott Cassell – commented on the roll and compensation of the Mayor.

Cindy Webber – requested that the Council presents an Autism Awareness proclamation.

Thomas McClachrie – expressed concern with redevelopment and tax abatements.

Sean Clarkin – commented that the Mayor’s salary should be a ballot questions.

Ann Larsen – questioned tax abatement. Ms. Larsen commented on squatting and the properties that should be registered as rentals.

Jessi Paladini – commented on the roll and compensation of the Mayor.

Steve Dunlop – commented on squatters and the potential roll of the police. Mr. Dunlop commented on the Mayor’s salary.

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: Buccieri

All members were in favor.

REVIEW OF BILLS LIST

The Council reviewed the bills list.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

March 20, 2024 - Special Budget Meeting Minutes

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to approve the March 20, 2024 special budget meeting minutes.

MOVED: Buccieri

SECOND: Higgins

A roll call vote was taken:

AYES: Buccieri, Higgins, Sparta, Rizzuto

NAYES:

ABSTAIN: DeBenedetto

ABSENT:

Motion carries to approve the March 20, 2024 special budget meeting minutes.

March 25, 2024 – Regular Meeting

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to approve the March 25, 2024 regular meeting minutes.

MOVED: Higgins
SECOND: Buccieri

A roll call vote was taken:

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

Motion carries to approve the March 25, 2024 regular meeting minutes.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

MOVED: Sparta
SECOND: Higgins
A roll call vote was taken:

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

Motion carries to approve the Consent Agenda.

Resolution #24-106: A Resolution Appointing a Fund Commissioner and Alternate Fund Commissioner to the North Jersey Municipal Employee Benefits Fund

Resolution #24-107: Approving Active Volunteer Firefighter for Membership in the New Jersey State Fireman's Association (Kurdziel)

Resolution #24-108: Refund Overpayment (Block 273 Lot 103 – McLaughlin Jr.)

Resolution #24-109: Refund Overpayment (Block 273 Lot 105 – McLaughlin Jr.)

Resolution #24-110: Refund Overpayment (Block 345 Lot 2 – McLaughlin)

Resolution #24-111: Participant's Resolution LEAP Implementation Grant FY2024

Resolution #24-112: Refund Overpayment (Block 599 Lot 13 – Corelogic)

Resolution #24-113: Refund Overpayment (Block 335 Lot 17 – Corelogic)

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

RESOLUTION #24-106

A RESOLUTION APPOINTING A FUND COMMISSIONER AND ALTERNATE FUND COMMISSIONER TO THE NORTH JERSEY MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEE BENEFITS FUND

WHEREAS, the Township of Vernon (hereinafter, the Township) is a member of the North Jersey Municipal Employee Benefits Fund (hereinafter, the NJHIF) for medical and prescription benefits, as part of the Employee Benefits Program effective September 1, 2023; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with the by-laws and requirements of membership promulgated by the NJHIF, the Township must appoint a Fund Commissioner and Alternate Fund Commissioner to represent the Township in all pertinent Fund affairs.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the Mayor and Council of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey, that Tina Kraus, Business Administrator is hereby affirmed as Fund Commissioner for Fund Year 2024 and/or until a successor has been qualified and appointed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Donelle Bright, Chief Financial Officer is hereby appointed to serve as the Alternate Fund Commissioner for Fund Year 2024 and/or until a successor has been qualified and appointed, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, a certified copy of this Resolution shall be forwarded to the Fund through the Township’s Health Benefits Consultant.

RESOLUTION #24-107

APPROVING ACTIVE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE NEW JERSEY STATE FIREMEN’S ASSOCIATION (Kurdziel)

WHEREAS, the Township Council recognizes the extraordinary contributions made by volunteer firefighters to our community and seeks to encourage their full participation in professional organizations; and

WHEREAS, Lance G. Kurdziel, an active firefighter and member of the Vernon Volunteer Fire Department, is requesting approval to submit an application for membership to the New Jersey State Firemen’s Association.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Township Council of the Township of Vernon, Sussex County, New Jersey hereby approves Lance G. Kurdziel for membership in the New Jersey State Firemen’s Association.

RESOLUTION #24-108

**REFUND OVERPAYMENT
(Block 273 Lot 103 – McLaughlin Jr.)**

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the Township of Vernon, Vernon, New Jersey, that a warrant be drawn to John McLaughlin Jr. in the amount of \$242.44 representing refund for overpayment of 1st qtr. 2023 property taxes for Block 273 Lot 103.

OWNER	BLOCK	LOT	REFUND AMOUNT
McLaughlin Jr.	273	103	\$242.44
		TOTAL:	\$242.44

RESOLUTION #24-109

**REFUND OVERPAYMENT
(Block 273 Lot 105 – McLaughlin Jr.)**

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the Township of Vernon, Vernon, New Jersey, that a warrant be drawn to John McLaughlin Jr. in the amount of \$1094.43 representing refund for overpayment of 1st qtr. 2023 property taxes for Block 273 Lot 105.

OWNER	BLOCK	LOT	REFUND AMOUNT
McLaughlin Jr.	273	105	\$1094.43
		TOTAL:	\$1094.43

RESOLUTION #24-110

**REFUND OVERPAYMENT
(Block 345 Lot 2 – McLaughlin)**

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the Township of Vernon, Vernon, New Jersey, that a warrant be drawn to Megan McLaughlin in the amount of \$1997.27 representing refund for overpayment of 1st qtr. 2023 property taxes for Block 345 Lot 2.

OWNER	BLOCK	LOT	REFUND AMOUNT
McLaughlin	345	2	\$1997.27
		TOTAL:	\$1997.27

RESOLUTION #24-111

**PARTICIPANT’S RESOLUTION
LEAP IMPLEMENTATION GRANT**

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey has appropriated \$7.5 million for Shared Services and School District Consolidation Study and Implementation Grants to assist local units with the study, development, and implementation of new shared and regional services; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Community Affairs, Division of Local Government Services (DLGS) is tasked with administering these grant funds through the Local Efficiency Achievement Program (LEAP); and

WHEREAS, LEAP Implementation Grants exist to support costs associated with shared service implementation to ensure that meaningful, efficiency generating initiatives are not hindered by short term transitional expenses; and

WHEREAS, the Sussex County Division of Senior Services and Township of Vernon propose to enter into a shared services agreement, but face certain expenses associated with implementation that present a burden to the local units; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of this shared services agreement is to enhance the recreational activities for Vernon Senior Citizens and strengthen our collaboration with Sussex County Division of Senior Services, which will benefit the residents of all participating local units; and

WHEREAS, the Sussex County Division of Senior Services has agreed to be the lead agency in this program and will submit the application to DLGS on behalf of all participating units; and

NOW, THEREFORE, **BE IT RESOLVED** by the Governing Body of the Township of Vernon, that the Township of Vernon does hereby join with Sussex County Division of Senior Services in applying for a LEAP Implementation Grant in the amount of \$400,000.00 to support implementation of this shared service.

RESOLUTION #24-112

**REFUND OVERPAYMENT
(Block 599 Lot 13- CORELOGIC)**

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the Township of Vernon, Vernon, New Jersey, that a warrant be drawn to Corelogic in the amount of \$1,436.28 representing refund for overpayment of 3rd qtr. 2023 property taxes for Block 599 Lot 13.

OWNER	BLOCK	LOT	REFUND AMOUNT
Murphy	599	13	\$1436.28
		TOTAL:	\$1,436.28

RESOLUTION #24-113

**REFUND OVERPAYMENT
(Block 335 Lot 17- CORELOGIC)**

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the Township of Vernon, Vernon, New Jersey, that a warrant be drawn to Corelogic in the amount of \$2482.53 representing refund for overpayment of 1st qtr. 2024 property taxes for Block 335 Lot 17.

OWNER	BLOCK	LOT	REFUND AMOUNT
Lillis	335	17	\$2482.53
		TOTAL:	\$2482.53

MOVED: Sparta
 SECOND: Higgins
 A roll call vote was taken:

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

Motion carries to approve the Consent Agenda.

INTRODUCTION OF THE 2024 MUNICIPAL BUDGET

Resolution #24-114 Introduction of the 2024 Municipal Budget

Council President Rizzuto asked for a motion to introduce the 2024 Municipal Budget.

MOVED: Higgins
 SECOND: Sparta

A roll call vote was taken:

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

Motion carries to introduce the 2024 Municipal Budget.

RESOLUTION #24-114

INTRODUCTION OF 2024 BUDGET

BE IT RESOLVED that the Local Municipal budget of the Township of Vernon, County of Sussex, New Jersey for the fiscal year 2024 be approved by the Governing Body of the Township of Vernon, and the Clerk is hereby instructed to advertise in the New Jersey Herald on April 19, 2024 and that a final public hearing before passage will be held on May 13, 2024 at 7:00 P.M. at the Municipal Building 21 Church Street, Vernon and via Zoom Webinar, that said budget shall authorize total general appropriations of

\$31,400,500.00 and the anticipated revenues of \$12,518,045.53 leaving an amount to be raised by taxes for municipal purposes of \$18,882,454.47.

PUBLIC HEARING/2ND READING OF ORDINANCE

Ordinance #24-05: An Ordinance of the Township of Vernon, in the County of Sussex, New Jersey Adopting a Redevelopment Plan for the Property Located in the Township Identified as Block 525, Lots 18 and 19 Pursuant to the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1 ET SEQ. (151-161 NJSH Route 94)

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to open the floor for public hearing on ordinance #24-05.

MOVED: Buccieri
SECOND: Higgins

All members were in favor.

Sean Clarkin – feels that zoning should be modified for other development.

Steve Dunlop – expressed concern with the future development.

Peter Knipe – feels that other properties need to be rezoned for future development.

Thomas McClachrie – does not support the redevelopment.

Seeing no one else from the public wishing to come forward, President Rizzuto asked for a motion to close the public hearing on ordinance #24-05.

MOVED: Higgins
SECOND: Sparta

All members were in favor.

President Rizzuto asked for a motion to adopt ordinance #24-05.

MOVED: Buccieri
SECOND: Higgins

A roll call vote was taken:

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

Motion carries to adopt ordinance #24-05.

ORDINANCE #24-05

AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF VERNON, IN THE COUNTY OF SUSSEX, NEW JERSEY ADOPTING A REDEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR PROPERTY LOCATED IN THE TOWNSHIP IDENTIFIED AS BLOCK 525, LOTS 18 AND 19 PURSUANT TO THE LOCAL REDEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING LAW, N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1 ET SEQ. (151-161 NJSH ROUTE 94)

WHEREAS, the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1 et seq., as amended and supplemented (the “Redevelopment Law”), authorizes municipalities to determine whether certain parcels of land in the municipality constitute areas in need of rehabilitation or redevelopment; and

WHEREAS, on July 18, 2005, the Council (the “**Township Council**”) of the Township of Vernon, in the County of Sussex, New Jersey (the “**Township**”), authorized and directed the Land Use Board of the Township of Vernon (the “**Land Use Board**”) to examine whether all or a portion of the McAfee Village area (the “**Initial Study Area**”), meet the criteria set forth in the Redevelopment Law for

redevelopment area designation and to make a recommendation as to whether such Initial Study Area should be designated as an area in need of redevelopment; and

WHEREAS, on May 31, 2006, the Land Use Board, after providing due notice, conducted a public hearing in accordance with the Redevelopment Law, at which hearing it determined that the Initial Study Area qualified as an area in need of redevelopment and recommended that the Township Council designate the Initial Study Area as an area in need of redevelopment pursuant to the criteria and requirements of the Redevelopment Law; and

WHEREAS, on June 12, 2006, in accordance with the provisions of the Redevelopment Law, the Township Council adopted Resolution #06-106 that designated a portion of the Initial Study Area as an area in need of redevelopment (the “**Initial Redevelopment Area**”) which included Block 525, Lot 18 (the “**Parcel**”); and

WHEREAS, on March 13, 2008, the Township Council adopted Ordinance #08-04 adopting a redevelopment plan for the Initial Redevelopment Area (the “**Initial Redevelopment Plan**”); and

WHEREAS, on April 9, 2018, the Township Council adopted Resolution #18-127 ratifying and reaffirming Resolution #06-106 designating the Initial Redevelopment Area; and

WHEREAS, on June 13, 2022, the Township Council adopted Resolution #22-159 authorizing the Land Use Board to undertake a preliminary investigation of property located at 161 NJSH Route 94 and known as Block 525, Lot 19 (the “**Study Area**”) to determine whether that parcel constitutes a non-condemnation area in need of redevelopment in accordance with the Redevelopment Law; and

WHEREAS, on August 24, 2022, the Land Use Board, after providing due notice, conducted a public hearing in accordance with the Redevelopment Law, at which hearing it determined that the Study Area qualified as an area in need of redevelopment and recommended that the Township Council designate the Study Area as an area in need of redevelopment pursuant to the criteria and requirements of the Redevelopment Law; and

WHEREAS, on October 13, 2022, in accordance with the provisions of the Redevelopment Law, the Township Council of the Township adopted Resolution #22-241 which designated the Study Area as an area in need of redevelopment (together with the Parcel, the “**Redevelopment Area**”) and authorized Jessica Caldwell, PP, AICP of J. Caldwell & Associates, LLC (the “**Planning Consultant**”) to draft a redevelopment plan for the Redevelopment Area; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Consultant prepared a redevelopment plan entitled, “151-161 NJSH Route 94 Redevelopment Plan” for Block 525, Lots 18 and 19 (the “**Redevelopment Plan**”); and

WHEREAS, the Township Council desires to have the Land Use Board review and make recommendations concerning the Redevelopment Plan in accordance with Section 7(e) of the Redevelopment Law; and

WHEREAS, subject to receipt of the Land Use Board’s recommendations concerning the Redevelopment Plan, the Township Council believes that the adoption of the Redevelopment Plan is in the best interests of the Township and the redevelopment of the Redevelopment Area.

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

Section 1. The aforementioned recitals hereof are incorporated herein as though fully set forth at length.

Section 2. The Redevelopment Plan, on file with the Township Clerk, is incorporated herein by reference and, contingent upon the receipt of the Planning Board’s recommendations, is hereby approved and adopted pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-7.

Section 3. The zoning ordinances and maps of the Township are hereby amended to be consistent with the Redevelopment Plan and the provisions therein.

Section 4. This Redevelopment Plan supersedes the Initial Redevelopment Plan in its entirety with regard to the Redevelopment Area.

Section 5. The Township Council shall serve as “redevelopment entity” for purposes of implementing the Redevelopment Plan and exercising the powers granted to a redevelopment entity under the Redevelopment Law.

Section 6. In case any one or more of the provisions of this ordinance or the Redevelopment Plan shall, for any reason, be held to be illegal or invalid, such illegality or invalidity shall not affect any other provision of this ordinance or the Redevelopment Plan and this ordinance shall be construed and enforced as if such illegal or invalid provision had not been contained herein.

Section 7. This ordinance shall take effect as provided by law.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (Limited to 5 Minutes Per Person)

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

MOVED: Sparta
SECOND: Buccieri

All members were in favor.

Peter Knipe – thanked the Mayor and Council for the work on the budget. Mr. Knipe commented on squatting.

Scott Cassell – questioned the budget process.

Steve Dunlop – questioned the budget process.

Sean Clarkin – expressed concern about the 2025 budget process. Mr. Clarkin questioned when the MUA and Council were going to meet together.

Thomas McClachrie – commented on the budget. Mr. McClachrie expressed concern with the redevelopment ordinance.

Jessi Paladini – thanked the Mayor and Council for the work on the budget. Ms. Paladini gave an update on the Scenic Byway.

Peg Distasi – questioned the budget.

George Nikanorov – commented on the budget. Mr. Nikanorov expressed concern with comments made by another member of the public.

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

MOVED: Sparta
SECOND: Buccieri

All members were in favor.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Council Member Higgins had no comments

Council Member Sparta acknowledged Elaine Colianni who recently passed away. Ms. Colianni was a member of the Board of Education. Council Member Sparta would like to review the ordinance for Council meetings. He is concerned about the virtual part of the meetings and also the public portion because of the threat of artificial intelligence.

Council Member DeBenedetto thanked the Mayor and the CFO for their work on the budget.

Council Buccieri had no comments

COUNCIL PRESIDENT COMMENTS

Council President Rizzuto had no comments.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:35 pm Council Member Higgins made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Council Member Buccieri.

All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcy Gianattasio, RMC, CMR
Municipal Clerk

Patrick Rizzuto
Council President

Minutes approved: April 22, 2024