

TOWNSHIP OF HAMILTON
6101 THIRTEENTH STREET
MAYS LANDING, NJ
March 11, 2019

The Special Meeting of the Township Committee of the Township of Hamilton, Atlantic County, New Jersey was called to order March 11, 2019 at 6:00 pm with Mayor Art Schenker presiding.

Flag Salute.

Township Clerk Rita Martino certified that this special meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Law. Notices of this meeting were published in the Press of Atlantic City and the Star Ledger on 2/27/19, as well as faxed to the Atlantic County Record and Camden Courier on 2/22/19. In addition, copies of notices were posted on the bulletin board in the Municipal Building and filed in the office of the Municipal Clerk on the aforementioned date. Notices on the bulletin board have remained continuously posted.

The Special Meeting has been called for the purpose of discussion of revisions proposed and a new program proposed for a tax abatement and exemption program for the Township as a means to incentivize economic development within the Township.

Roll Call:

Present: Rodney Guishard, John Kurtz, Judith Link, Art Schenker, Roger Silva

Absent:

Also present: Rita Martino, Township Clerk; Michael Jacobs, Township Administrator;
M. James Maley, Jr., Special Counsel

Discussions

Revisions proposed and a new program proposed for a tax abatement and exemption program for the Township as a means to incentivize economic development within the Township.

Mayor Schenker introduced attorney Jim Maley, who gave a brief presentation outlining the proposed program. This is a five-year, or short term, abatement program. The goal is to achieve a balance between incentives that are valuable to a potential project and fairness to our taxpayers, while being mindful to existing competition from other municipalities. He stated that there are many options, depending on what type of development a town wishes to encourage (new homes, new businesses, etc.). Currently the Township has a few select areas with eligibility for tax abatement. Recently the Township declared the entire Township as an Area in Need of Rehabilitation, which allows the Township to adopt Township-wide abatement programs. Such programs would include exemptions and abatements. Mr. Maley explained that the benefit to providing a short-term incentive to residents or commercial developers is that they will remain in the Township for the long-term. He explained in further detail the benefits for improvement to existing (20+ years old) residential dwellings as well as improvement to or construction of commercial properties and industrial properties.

Mr. Guishard asked and clarified that if someone spends a certain amount of money on improvements, it does not necessarily result in an equal increase in property value.

Mrs. Link asked if placement of a new roof on a commercial structure would qualify. Mr. Maley explained that it would qualify if it increased the assessed value of the property.

Mr. Silva asked and clarified that any questions regarding amounts below \$500,000 may be answered by the Municipal Tax Assessor to simplify the process for smaller endeavors. Some discussion ensued.

Mayor Schenker then opened the floor to the public.

Public Comment

Bruce Strigh of Mays Landing asked and confirmed that the category of “residential single family” could possibly include renovation of an abandoned house to make it habitable again. Some discussion ensued.

Freeholder Amy Gatto of Hickory Street discussed the concept that a property with a use variance would not qualify for this benefit, specifically how this might affect a corner residential property. Some discussion ensued regarding use variances versus bulk variances.

Marge Gosin of Mays Landing asked what the Township’s vision is. She stated that many stores are leaving Hamilton Township, current residents cannot sell their homes, and other municipalities are lowering residential taxes to attract new homeowners. Mayor Schenker stated that the mall is a very

large part of the Township's tax base, and the loss of many Township businesses is difficult. This program is an effort to attract new businesses to make up for that loss. He further stated that loss of the retail area on which the Township survives would result in serious problems. Ms. Gosin stated that the retail is going away on a national basis because everyone buys online; malls are being turned into nursing homes because commerce is dying everywhere. Mr. Maley stated that such nursing homes go into towns that offer incentives; the idea is that a short-term abatement will increase our ratable base in the long-term. There are two ways to reduce a tax bill: you either cut services or you expand your ratable base.

An unidentified woman stated that she has watched each of the elderly people on her street get forced out of their homes. She said that her property is worth over \$500,000.00, and she couldn't sell it if she wanted to. She predicted that all of the people living on the water would leave. She stated that she is 66 and on a fixed income.

Random discussion ensued among the audience. One unidentified woman stated that she heard that all of the Section 8 is slowly moving to Hamilton Township, and "there goes" her property values. Mayor Schenker asked about the source of this statement and its credibility. Additional lengthy discussion ensued, including debate as to whether placement of businesses would attract new residents or vice versa.

An unidentified woman asked if the John Brooks recovery center would be subject to this incentive. Mr. Maley explained that they are a nonprofit and already exempt. Mr. Silva stated that centers for opioid addiction wouldn't exist if the need weren't great, and though some residents may resent their existence in the Township, they provide a necessary service.

Mr. Silva also stated that it saddens him to hear that an elderly person may not be able to remain in his or her home, and solutions such as the abatement program must be put into action with the support of the community.

Mayor Schenker stated that both Galloway and Egg Harbor Township have abatement programs in place. We must offer what other towns offer in order to stay competitive.

Caitlyn Capaldi stated that Galloway and Egg Harbor Township also have better school systems, nicer parks, and recreation programs for the children. She stated that she has already pulled her kids out of public schools and has been fighting to get her son a baseball field to play on. She said that if she were looking for a home, she would not necessarily be looking for a place with lots of stores. Mayor Schenker stated that stores are what fund this town; therefore, stores are what put police cars, ambulances, and fire trucks on the street – things residents need to live here. He also explained that much of the land in the Township is owned by the county or the state and is not taxable.

Harry Rogers of 1069 Morningside Drive stated that he is on the Township Planning Board. He commended Committee for the action they are taking, and stated that we must work together to improve the current situation. He asked if there was a mechanism in the new Ordinance to track the abatements and exemptions, so the benefits may be shown at the budget presentation.

Mayor Schenker reminded everyone that Lidl had previously planned to build a grocery store across from Auto Zone. When Lidl abandoned the idea, their real estate agent stated it was mainly because we did not have a tax abatement program; Lidl had invested \$700,000.00 in the deal and walked away.

Mayor Schenker also stated that Special Counsel Jim Maley creates redevelopment plans throughout the area; he is also the Mayor of Collingswood, and has turned it around with this very type of Ordinance. It is a long term plan but it must start now; if we do not incentivize businesses to come here, they aren't coming.

An unidentified woman made suggestions regarding slogans and ways to attract affluent people from Cape May County to shop here. Some discussion ensued.

Timothy Morris of 5045 Somers Point Road stated that he purchased his home 4 years ago and put over \$75,000.00 into it. He opened a store on the first floor and his efforts have been very well received by the neighborhood. Some discussion ensued.

Mr. Silva stated that it is good to hear everyone's opinion; that is how workable solutions are formed.

Bruce Strigh of Mays Landing expressed enthusiasm for the new program, but said that there are many other things that go into a great community, such as code enforcement. He stated that code enforcement has been lacking for decades. A town's appearance is the first impression, and it cannot be ignored. Nobody will invest in a place that doesn't look good.

An unidentified woman stated that she has tried to organize trash cleanups without success. She said she would gladly participate in such a cleanup. Mr. Guishard and Mrs. Link stated that such cleanups do exist. Mr. Silva stated that the Public Works Department does clean up the roads, but people continue to litter. The same woman also spoke briefly about the addiction problem in this country.

Hearing nothing further from the public, on the motion of Mr. Silva, second of Mr. Guishard it was moved to close the public portion.

Recorded Vote: Aye: Guishard, Kurtz, Link, Schenker, Silva
Nay: XXX
Abstain: XXX

Motion Carried 5-0.

Mr. Silva thanked Mr. Maley for his presentation. It was agreed that Mr. Maley would circulate the proposed Ordinance to Committee for review and consideration of possible future action.

At Mrs. Link's request, Mr. Maley briefly spoke of the efforts and effects of a similar program in Collingswood, where he is the Mayor.

Mayor Schenker expressed enthusiasm for the program. He stated that this is a long-term problem and will not be solved overnight. However, now is the time to work toward a viable solution.

Township Tax Assessor Bill Johnson stated that we would be the first municipality outside of Egg Harbor City to include both residential and commercial properties.

On motion of Mr. Silva, seconded by Mr. Guishard and carried the meeting was adjourned at 7:32 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Rita Martino, RMC, CMR
Township Clerk