

September 3, 2024
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
BOROUGH OF COLLINGSWOOD, NJ

A regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners was held at 7:00 PM Mayor M. James Maley, Jr called the meeting to order, with Commissioner Robert Lewandowski and Commissioner Morgan Robinson present.

Mayor M. James Maley, Jr read the Sunshine Notice stating that the Borough has complied with provisions of the Sunshine Law by adopting before January 10 of this year, a resolution prescribing the dates, times and locations of all regular meetings of the Mayor M. James Maley, Jr led the Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Maley requested a moment of silence in remembrance of Construction Official Chris Mecca and Haddon Twp Court Administrator Laura Cappelli

The Commissioners made a motion to approve the following report Zoning Official.

First Reading of Ordinance 1788 an Amendment to Chapter 141 of the Code of the Borough of Collingswood -900 Haddon

First Reading of Ordinance 1789 Establishing Cannabis Licensing

Public Comment on Resolution Items: No Comment

158. Appointing Emma Tallman as Teen Librarian for the Collingswood Public Library

159. Appointing Michael DePalma as Building Sub-Code Official and Building Inspector

160. Referring Redevelopment Ordinance 1788 to the Planning Board for Review

161. Authorize the Acceptance of the 2025 Safe and Secure Grant

162. Authorizing the Re-Advertising for Bids for Collingswood Pocket Park at Haddon Avenue and Woodlawn Avenue and Rejecting the Bids Received on August 29, 2024

163. Awarding a Consulting Agreement to Gabel Associates, Inc. and Authorizing Issuance of a Request for Proposals for Community Solar Developers

164. Awarding a Consulting Agreement to Gabel Associates, Inc. and Authorizing Issuance of a Request for Proposals for Third-Party Electric Suppliers to Serve a Government Energy Aggregation Program and Related Actions

165. Approving Payment of Bills as Presented by the Treasurer

Commissioner Robinson, wished everyone a happy school year. Commissioner Robinson reminded folks about Clover Market and the upcoming Book Festival

Commissioner Lewandowski, talked about the end of the Roberts Pool Season and thanked the staff and community for keeping it a safe and fun place for its members. Commissioner Lewandowski reminded residents about upcoming events Porch Fest, National Night Out and the State of New Jersey Property Tax Senior Freeze deadline. Commissioner Lewandowski reminded residents all this information and more can be found in the Town Crier.

Mayor Maley, explained the revaluation process is moving along. Letters will be sent out in the fall with an estimate of taxes. Mayor Maley explained the revaluation process, including informal and formal appeal processes. Mayor Maley talked about the new Fire Truck that the Borough purchased and the Fire House tradition of Housing Ceremony. Mayor Maley invited residents to attend. Mayor Maley also commented on the Roberts Pool Season and that we are very fortunate to have such a wonderful amenity for the community. Mayor Maley then thanked Nancy O'Neill who for 28 years she has been running the pool. Mayor Maley also thanked the pool staff and explained it is no small feat to keep a few hundred parents and kids running around all summer long safe.

Mayor Maley opened the meeting to the public.

Meghan Adamoli, 325 W. Franklin Ave., asked if the Board of Commissioners are still committed to investing in the schools no matter the outcome of the All in For Collingswood referendum. Mayor Maley explained we have always been open to talks with the Board of Education no matter the outcome of the election. Ms. Adamoli asked if the Borough would be purchasing

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Garfield School if the referendum passes. Mayor Maley appreciates the question but that conversation needs to happen with the school board to here what plans they have. Mayor Maley added we need to have discussions with the Board of Education and that has not happened. Ms. Adamoli asked if there is a plan by the Commissioners to address economically disadvantaged kids in Collingswood. Mayor Maley said he does not have a plan nor has he been asked to join in a discussion about any future plans.

Rebecca Sieg, 1030 Grant Ave. asked about the role the Borough's Recreation study will play if the All in for Collingswood School Referendum passes and if it does not. Commissioner Lewandowski explained that is always are understanding and wish to work with the school district, including the fields. The idea for the Borough to purchase Good Shepard was because we under the impression if the Bond referendum did not pass it would affect the School Districts Lease with Good Shepard. The School Board believed they were too far along in the process to pivot their plans. We will all have to wait and see. Commissioner Lewandowski talked about his children attending the Collingswood High School and Middle School and their participation in the Marching Band and having no stadium. Our kids deserve better.

Mayor Maley explained the Borough started a Recreation Plan a few years ago and the School Board was part of the Steering Committee. A month before the School Referendum was announced the Borough and School met with the consultant. The referendum was not mentioned at that meeting. Mayor Maley explained he was under the understanding that Good Shepard was going to be sold if the district did not move to purchase it. That is why the Borough made the offer to purchase. Commissioner Robinson explained if the Borough did purchase Good Shepard, it would have given the School District and Board of Education more time to work on their plan and to better communicate with the community.

Joe Sperlunto, 194 Lawnside Ave. Asked what was the response from the Board of Education to the Borough's offer to purchase Good Shepard. Mayor Maley explained he attended a meeting with the Board of Education to discuss the Borough's proposal. At that meeting a letter was given to him that said no to the proposal but listed a number of items that the board would like the Borough pay for. Mayor Maley explained it was not the meeting he thought he was attending, there was not a discussion. Mr. Sperlunto, asked about the purchase of Garfield. Mayor Maley explained it was related to him from the Board of Education that after the referendum passes the Borough could then purchase Garfield, pay for student transportation and an additional item related to fields. Mayor Maley added there has been more of a conversation going on this evening then what occurred at that meeting with the BOE. Commissioner Lewandowski explained that the School Board decided to move forward with the referendum and did not want to interject into their decision. Mr. Sperlunto stated but you have. Commissioner Lewandowski explained that he stands corrected, he has but it was done in an attempt to have a dialogue to help with the issues and concerns we were hearing about the referendum.

Lindsay Oster, 1005 Magill Ave. said she was told in January the Borough would be providing transportation for children to get to and from their school. And a possibility of trolleys being the means of transportation. The Commissioners said they have no knowledge of that plan.

Erin Schmidt, 904 Park Avenue stated that Mayor Maley is a no vote for the referendum and asked him why. Mayor Maley explained he is believing the process has been more then awful. Mayor Maley added that he has said to the Board Members, press and anyone who asks him why he is a no, it is because of the process. Mayor Maley said he supports the goal. Mayor Maley further explained this is the biggest referendum the town has seen and the plan is to close two neighborhood schools without community input. Mayor Maley said he first heard about the closing of schools in February. Mayor Maley said he just wanted to see the School Board have the time they needed to work on the process of the proposed plans. Ms. Schmidt asked if the mayor is aware of the achievement gaps and low testing scores. Mayor Maley said he is aware of everything that was put in the School Boards Presentation and that the goal is not the issue. It is the poorly planned process he does not support.

A discussion about public votes on Borough Plans occurred.

Kate Delany, 126 E. Palmer Ave. commented on an identical records request to the Borough and the School District on PILOT payments. Ms. Delaney said the school responded no records responsive and the Borough supplied a report showing \$280,000.00 funding. Ms Delany asked about the PILOT process. Mayor Maley said the Borough pays the amount due from the Parkview PILOT to the schools as it has been doing since 1996. Mayor Maley said he does not know how the OPRA was worded and how the payments from the Borough are received and recorded by the school district. Mayor Maley then explained the school budget process. When the school turns over the amount due to their budget to the tax collector, the school is then paid by the Borough the exact amount they requested. Mayor Maley continued to explain that the School District gives the Borough a bill. The Borough collects property taxes and then pays that bill to the school district. Mayor Maley explained a PILOT does not take any

funds from the school district, a PILOT does charge the property owner a little more. The \$280,000.00 PILOT amount is split among all the property owners. Commissioner Lewandowski talked about the 2% cap and costs going up three and four percent a year. Commissioner Lewandowski talked about has the 2% cap possibly causing a structural deficit over the last 15 years and does that effect academic achievement and the quality of schools. Commissioner Lewandowski questioned whether a 45 million capital project bond referendum will fix the fundamental academic achievements of the district. Commissioner Lewandowski also expressed the Bond Referendum being a 35-year commitment. Kate Delany read information about Louisiana's PILOT regulations. Ms. Delany requested the school board be part of the discussion in any future PILOT agreement. Ms. Delany said she read for the record from the 2023 budget document the difference between the PILOT billing and what the revenue would be is 2 million dollars. Mayor Maley said after he PILOT agreement, we did 5-6 years ago it was decided the funds collected from future PILOT agreements would be marked for the recreation fields. The school was notified and that was the plan. We now have a PILOT agreement with the 900 Haddon Ave Building and we thought that the School Board was in agreement that plan. Mayor Maley stated once the school bond referendum was shared with the Borough in February, the Borough does where the School District is in relation to working with the Borough and the Recreation Field improvements. Mayor Maley we will need to see how the referendum vote goes and discuss any plans moving forward from then.

Rebecca Finkel, 916 Park Ave. expressed her concerns about social media comments and printed material that she feels misrepresents and distributes misinformation about the bond referendum, the property tax revaluation and about the trust of the school leaders of color that helped develop the referendum. Ms. Finkle asked the mayor if he supports any of the misinformation. Mayor Maley said no, he said he has not seen the material Ms. Finkle is talking about and that he is trying to stay away from the election social media chatter. Mayor Maley said that is what happens during campaigns. Both sides fell the other is spreading misinformation. People put out all kinds of information and it is the job of the voters decide. Commissioner Lewandowski commented about the revaluation process and if property values double does not necessarily mean the property taxes double.

Meghan DeSmedt, 220 Woodlawn Terrace asked if Mayor Maley met with any members of the groups that are for of opposed to the Bond referendum. Mayor Maley said he has met with anyone who has asked to meet with him. Ms. DeSmedt stated she attended an bond information session where she was able to submit suggestions and comments. Ms. DeSmedt asked if the mayor was able to do anything like that. Mayor Maley said yes, he met with Bruce Smith and the School Board Superintendent Dr. McDowell and he told them he thought the process was flawed and made some recommendations but was told that the plan would not be changed. Mayor Maley said they were the only two people from the Referendum committee that asked to meet with him. Ms. DeSmedt asked if there was additional dialogue at that meeting. Mayor Maley referred the question to Commissioner Robinson who was also at the meeting. Commissioner Robinson stated there was not much time given to us for dialogue. Commissioner Robinson said she did stay after the meeting to attempt to some discussion. Commissioner prefaced her comments by stating she is not opposed to the referendum but strongly disagrees with the method and that the communication was not done well. Commissioner Robinson added that for her personally the goal is important enough that she can look past the poor communication and lack of delivery of information. Commissioner Robinson stated she does not like that the items that are not being addressed in the referendum were given to the Borough to figure out, when there was a plan set with the 900 Haddon Ave PILOT. Commissioner Robinson continued to explain the meeting she thought she was going to was going to be a meeting to discuss plans and that was not the case. The meeting was a presentation with no room or interest in having a discussion. Ms. DeSmedt questioned Mayor Maley's involvement with the vote no campaign. Mayor Maley said non. Ms. DeSmedt continued to question Mayor Maley. Mayor Maley again replied he is not running a vote no campaign.

Mike Muller, 509 Dwight Ave. asked if there is a plan for the Good Shepard School if the Referendum fails. Mayor Maley said after the referendum whether it passes or fails his hope is that we are all talking to figure out what comes next.

Richard Klingerman, 743 Maple Terrace suggested that the Borough buy the Good Shepard Building if the referendum fails and convert it into a youth center.

Erin Schmidt 904 Park Ave. asked if there is a communication issue with the Borough and School Board. Mayor Maley explained that in February we were all on a steering committee held at the Public Safety Building with several school board members, Bruce Smith and Dr. McDowell to discuss and working on a plan. Mayor Maley said a few weeks later Bruce Smith told him that the Board would be going out for a Bond referendum. Mayor Maley continues and said a few weeks later School Board Superintendent Dr McDowell showed him the PowerPoint presentation. Mayor Maley said he told Dr. McDowell his thoughts on why he believed more

community engagement would be necessary to convince the community to close two neighborhood schools. The discussion continued.

Lindsey Oster, 1005 Magill Ave. commented that she was led to believe at a Sharpe PTA meeting in January that the school board and borough were working together. Mayor Maley said the borough did not learn about the bond referendum.

Rebecca Finkle 916 Park Ave. stated that she does believes the Vision Plan 2026 had a process.

Denise, Camden County resident asked if the mayor is a no vote because of the lack of discussion with him or with the community. Mayor Maley listed several concerns; including the average tax increase of \$600.00 a year on the average taxed home and the closing of two neighborhood schools. Mayor Maley talked about the collaboration on the bond referendum of the expansion of the Middle and High School between the Borough and School District. He explained it was developed together, there were more community meetings. Mayor Maley said this is a big vote and if there was more collaboration and community involvement that it would have eased some of the back and forth our community is witnessing. Denise had questions about how PILOT programs work and the effect on the school budget. Mayor Maley explained the school is not affected by the PILOTs, the school presents the budget to the Borough and the Borough collects the taxes and pays 100 percent of what the school district asked for. The residents pay a little more in their tax bill but the schools are not getting less then what is budgeted. Mayor Maley said he 2% Cap effects the schools budget more. A discussion on the difference between definition redevelopment and rehabilitation occurred.

Joe Sperlunto 194 Lawnside Ave. asked is the amount of the PILOT for 900 Haddon comparable to the level of investment from the Bond referendum. Commissioner Lewandowski responded no. Mr. Sperlunto asked what are the plans for the PILOT funds. Mayor Maley explained the plan is to have a discussion with school board about recreation fields. Commissioner Lewandowski talked about the Knight Park fields, travel teams and the Recreation Study. Mayor Maley said whatever happens with the referendum we will continue to want too talk to the schools and work on a plan.

MaryEllen Reis 401 Virgina Ave. stated she has lived in town since 1983 and is a former employee of the Borough. Ms. Ries talked about the positive changes to Collingswood over the years. Ms. Ries talked about the improvements to Sutton Towers and Eldridge Gardens which are now Parkview Towers and Pewter Village and the difference to the community it has had.

Meghan DeSmedt, 220 Woodlawn Terrace gave some background on her previous residence and her belief to always vote yes on school questions. Ms. DeSmedt questioned Mayor Maley's support of school investments. Mayor Maley said he objects to the statement that he does not support school investment. Mayor Maley explained the school board does not need him. But he does believe more community engagement is necessary and he believes so much more could have been done. Mayor Maley stated more community conversation would have lead to less division. Ms. DeSmedt continued accused the Mayor Maley of not supporting the schools and asked what is his plan after the referendum vote. Mayor Maley said it will be that same as it has always been, if he is invited to meet with any school board members he will be there. He would have met with them a year ago, six months ago, anytime. Mayor Maley continued to explained he thought they were all working together on a plan until he was informed that the School Board had decided to hold a Special Election for the Bond Referendum. Mayor Maley said the Board of Commissioners is not holding up any plans. Commissioner Lewandowski added that it is difficult to have an entire community to agree on the same thing. This is how democracy works. Commissioner Lewandowski talked about how the community has been looking to place blame, blame Jim Maley and the Commissioners or blame the school board members. Commissioner Lewandowski said many of the school board members are my friends and neighbors, they all work very hard and thankless job. Commissioner Lewandoski said what is important now deciding what is best for your family; some families that will face a \$400-\$700.00 tax increase, while others need to decide how will this affect my children and what is best for them. Commissioner Lewandowski added the final piece is we need to find a solution to the abhorrent issue of segregated schools, a proposal has been presented and is this recommendation we need to decide on.

Dina, Camden County resident stated she is in awe of the amazing communication happening between the public and the Commissioners. She added not being a resident and knowing the history of the panel, Mayor Maley explained our form of Government is Non-Partisan, we do not run on a D or R ticket. She commented how appreciative she is of the open dialogue of the meeting.

Erica Schmidt asked about the funding formula of PILOTS and the Commissioners meeting with the Board of Education. Mayor Maley said he is happy to meet with anyone who asks to meet with him.

Joe Sperlunto, asked where the 2% sales tax that will be collected from cannabis sales will be applied. He asked if it will be directed to the fields and recreation? Mayor Maley said we need to collect the fees first and then decide.

With no additional comments, Mayor Maley moved the meeting be adjourned at 8:20 PM, which was seconded.

Adopted: 11/14/2024