

EAST AMWELL PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
7:30 PM East Amwell Municipal Building
February 11, 2015 - Meeting

Call to Order, Attendance and Pledge of Allegiance

This meeting of the East Amwell Planning Board was opened on February 11, 2015 at 7:30 PM. The following notice was read, "In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, this is a regularly scheduled meeting pursuant to the annual meeting notice as published in the January 22, 2015 issue of the Hunterdon County Democrat, a copy of the agenda for this meeting was forwarded to the Hunterdon County Democrat, filed in the Township Clerk's Office and posted on the bulletin board on February 4, 2015."

Present: Roger DeLay
Gail Glashoff
Linda Lenox
Don Reilly, Chairman
Dart Sageser
David Wang-Iverson
John Buckwalter – Alt. #1
Dante DiPirro – Alt. #2
Planner Banisch

Excused: Fred Gardner
Rob Gilbert

Citizens' Privilege to Speak on Items not on the Agenda

A motion by Gail Glashoff, seconded by Linda Lenox to open the floor to public comment was unanimously approved. Seeing no members of the public come forward, a motion by Roger DeLay, seconded by Linda Lenox to close to the public was unanimously approved.

Approval of Minutes

A motion by Roger DeLay, seconded by Linda Lenox to approve the Board's 1/14/15 minutes with no revisions noted was unanimously approved.

New Business – Other

Discussion: Implementation of the Village Study

Chairman Reilly explained that he would like to go through the recommendations listed in the study and provide an update on what has been done over the past month to address each suggestion. He noted that while there have not been any subcommittee meetings there have been a number of initiatives that have been carried forward.

The following recommendations were discussed:

Consider Incentivizing Residents with Tax Abatements on Improved Values for Qualified Residents

– Chairman Reilly noted that nothing specific has been initiated but that some conversations have taken place with Ken Bogan from the County Planning Department.

Consider Providing Low Interest Loans to Improve Residential Homes for Qualified Residents –

Chairman Reilly noted that nothing has been initiated as of yet. He asked Planner Banisch for his thoughts on how the Township may pursue this item as well as the tax abatements. Chairman Reilly remarked that Flemington Borough has an abatement program that has been reviewed as a potential model. Planner Banisch commented that the tax abatements are for improvements made to buildings within the historic district of Flemington Borough. He explained how the program works saying the Stangl Factory building was bought for “x” number of dollars and “y” was spent, and for a period of years the Tax Assessor is allowing the property owners to pay the taxes on the original value and over time the new tax rate will be implemented. He remarked it incentivizes property owners to make improvements.

It was noted for the record that Planner Banisch will provide the Board with information on tax abatement programs and low interest loan programs.

Adopt an “Unfit Building” Ordinance that is Based on the International Building Code in the First Quarter of 2015 –

Mr. Wang-Iverson explained he is hoping the Unfit Building Ordinance will be introduced at tomorrow night’s Township Committee meeting. He remarked that the ordinance is primarily focused on structures that are considered, under the uniform construction code, to be unfit for habitation or otherwise unsafe for people to use the building or even for neighbors to be around the building. He noted it is driven exclusively by the Uniform Construction Code under the authority of the Construction Official. It was noted that the Construction Official can issue a violation and that property owners can appeal. If they lose the appeal, the property owner will then be obligated to remediate the situation and if they fail to do so, the Township would have the ability to do the remediation under the powers of the ordinance and then impose a tax lien on the property. Mr. Wang-Iverson clarified that the main motivation of the ordinance is to provide a mechanism whereby the Township can impose a tax lien on a property if they do any type of remediation work regarding safety issues. He remarked that from his perspective, the Township is not looking to take on doing “repairs” but rather keep buildings and structures safe. Chairman Reilly remarked that it seems to him that buildings in villages and residential areas would be of the most concern because that is where the public is most involved.

Local residents Form a Not for Profit 501c3 Whose Mission is to Help and Assist Residents with Maintenance Issues and to Acquire Grants for Building Restoration in the Village – Chairman Reilly noted this issue is currently being explored but nothing definitive has been done yet.

Local Residents Form Community Volunteer Groups to Assist Residents on Maintenance Issues –

Mr. Wang-Iverson commented that the following people have been added to the Village Study Subcommittee: Joanne Cole and possibly Joanie Stevens. It was noted that Will Harrison has indicated he wishes to remain active with the subcommittee.

Traffic Calming Recommendations – Chairman Reilly noted that recommendations include engaging appropriate County and State Officials to discuss strategies for traffic calming, determine if NJDOT Complete Streets can assist and to seek grants from the State and other agencies to fund traffic calming efforts. Chairman Reilly stated that he and Mr. Sageser met with Ken Bogan from the County Planning Board who suggested a meeting take place with Tara Shepherd the Director of HART and Jim Martin the County Engineer to discuss appropriate traffic calming remedies. He remarked that the strategy is to work with the County first and then bring the State in. Mr. Wang-Iverson updated the Board that the Township has purchased 2 solar powered speed signs for the Village in an effort to get traffic to slow down. Chairman Reilly commented that they will schedule a meeting with the County and Ms. Shepherd to discuss what can be done further to address the speed of traffic in the Village area.

Zoning Recommendations – Planner Banisch indicated these recommendations were on hold for the time being. Chairman Reilly asked about the status of COAH. Planner Banisch confirmed that COAH is still moving through the Supreme Court and stated that it is safe for the Township to assume responsibility for the second round calculations but noted nothing after that has been confirmed.

County Self-help Recommendations – Chairman Reilly stated that recommendations include engaging the County in discussions to return the South County Branch back to Ringoes. Mr. Sageser commented the Township is reaching out to the appropriate people to try and determine what their funding availability is and what programs they desire. It was noted that the library has about 3 years left on the lease at their current location, but now is the time for East Amwell to get moving on a plan for getting them to return.

Open to the Public

Chairman Reilly opened the floor to public comment. Frances Gavigan of 123 Wertsville Road came forward and commented on the number of deteriorating structures within the Village District and remarked that salvaging them would be outrageous and commented that many property owners don't have the means to maintain their properties. She suggested there may be financial incentives that the Township can create for residents to be able to do the work needed on their properties. She suggested perhaps waiving construction fees and seeking help from organizations such as Habitat for Humanity. Ms. Gavigan referred to the earlier discussion on tax liens and commented that in some cases property repairs could cost \$30,000 to \$50,000 and questioned whether or not the Township could cover such costs. Seeing no other members of the public come forward a motion by Gail Glashoff, seconded by Roger DeLay to close to the public was unanimously approved.

Oral Reports

FOSPC – No report was given.
Agricultural Advisory Committee – No report was given.
Environmental Commission – No report was given.
PB Secretary – No report was given.
Chairman – No report was given.

Presentation of Vouchers

A motion by Roger DeLay, seconded by Linda Lenox to pay the vouchers as listed on the agenda was unanimously approved.

Adjournment

Chairman Reilly adjourned the meeting at 8:45 PM.

Maria Andrews, Administrative Officer