

EAST AMWELL TOWNSHIP

Special Meeting - June 21, 2012

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A special meeting of the East Amwell Township Committee came to order at 7:30 P.M. Present at the meeting were Mayor Peter Kneski, Deputy Mayor Patricia Cregar, and Committee members Linda Lenox, Tim Mathews and Dart Sagesar. Township Administrator Timothy Matheny, Deputy Clerk Pam Dymek and Tax Assessor Marianne Busher were in attendance.

In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, a copy of notice of this meeting was filed in the Clerk's Office, posted on the bulletin board, and sent to the Hunterdon County Democrat, Times of Trenton, and Star ledger on June 19, 2012 and printed in the Hunterdon County Democrat issue of June 14, 2012. The purpose of the meeting is to approve a professional services resolution for the Township wide reassessment.

The public is invited to attend and comment at the open portion of the meeting. Action may or may not be taken.

Mayor Kneski explained that this meeting was to discuss a Professional Service Resolution for a Township wide reassessment. He noted that Township Committee has been provided with documents regarding this resolution.

Mr. Mathews inquired if an e-mail received today from a resident was included in the packet. Mr. Kneski replied that Ms. Busher had seen it and will report on it.

Ms. Busher provided an overview of the reassessment process. The field inspection work will include the inspectors completing a field data sheet, which includes the current data of each property, and verifying this information. Ms. Busher will input the data including any changes and notes from the data sheets when they are returned to the Township. This information will be the bases of values changed according to market value as of October 1, 2012.

Ms. Busher explained the process for acquiring quotes for assessor services; she solicited three individual vendors. Mr. Gabrish from Assessor Services was the lowest quote at \$44,460. Mayor Kneski inquired regarding the amount of the other two quotes; one declined to bid and Assessor Services Inc. bid \$54,475.

Mr. Mathews inquired regarding the baseline data provided to the inspector; if this information will be preserved in the event a resident would like to see the "before and after" after any updates or changes are made. Ms. Busher explained that the base data is what was established from the reevaluation in 2005. At the time of that reevaluation calculations sheets were run for each individual property owner. This can be done again but there will be a cost. Once changes are made the original data is no longer available. She added that it is a point well taken and something that maybe should be incorporated and batches could be run. Mr. Mathews asked if a back-up could be done. Ms. Busher explained that she runs two files which allows for a duplicate. Once the files are merged and the 2013 tax book is printed the 2012 information is no longer available unless a hard copy is printed before the merge. Mr. Mathews suggested for the window of time both versions are available the public is made aware that they can come in and review this information. Ms. Busher said the field sheet that the inspectors use in the field will also have the original data on them. Those sheets will be retained in her files after the reassessment therefore the original information will be available. These sheets will not show calculations of how the assessment was arrived but will show all the amenities, a sketch and what the bases of the assessment are. Mr. Mathews asked if it will include handwritten notes; it will. He believed that would be sufficient if there are any inquiries from residents.

Mayor Kneski asked Ms. Busher for a brief overview of what will take place once the inspector brings the data back to her. Ms. Busher explained that she will provide the inspector with the data sheets; he will then conduct the inspections. Completed data sheets will be returned to her on a monthly basis; any changes or adjustments will be entered into the computer by her. Changes can consist of an easement that was unnoted, an addition, any updates, or a change in the appreciation of the property. Mayor Kneski inquired if pictures would be taken during the field analysis; Ms. Busher replied that a

front and rear photo are required as part of the bid. Letters will be sent to residents informing them of the inspectors. Inspectors must make three attempts at each home and will leave a card at each attempt to let the property owner know they were there.

Mr. Kneski inquired if photographs inside the home are allowed or will it only be a visual inspection inside the house. Ms. Busher replied that only exterior pictures will be taken; there will be no interior photos. Photos will also be taken of outbuildings and they will be identified and labeled on the sketch.

Mr. Mathews asked if the inspector would have visible credentials. Ms. Busher replied that they would have photo ID's issued by the County. She will view them along with Mr. Matheny. License plate numbers and makes of cars will be on file. There will most likely be only two inspectors.

Mayor Kneski inquired if there are any sections of the community being focused on at one time or will the whole township be covered all at once. Ms. Busher expressed that the logical way to do it would be to start in one area and then move to another i.e. north to south or east to west. She said it can be worked out if both inspectors will start in the same area or opposite areas; whichever is best for the residents.

Ms. Cregar inquired about the breakdown specifically Class 2 12.35. Ms. Busher explained that Class 2 are residential houses, 3A are farm qualified houses, 4A are commercial, 4C are apartments, and exempt properties are the churches and schools.

Mr. Mathews asked Ms. Busher her opinion on Mr. Gill's comments from his e-mail. Ms. Busher replied that she has worked with Assessor Services for over fifteen years and has never had an issue with them. She offered to provide a copy of their resume. They are currently employed by ten other municipalities within Hunterdon and Somerset County. She has never had a situation such as the one in Kingwood. She is 100% confident in his work and spoke favorably about it. He is currently doing reassessments in Raritan and Delaware Townships. Mr. Mathews inquired about the technology references in the e-mail from Mr. Gill. Ms. Busher commented favorably on Mr. Gill's computer skills but she didn't believe it would be a fit for East Amwell as there are security and data support issues as Township records would have to be provided. She would prefer to input and change the data herself.

Mayor Kneski asked Mr. Cushing if he had any comments; he did not.

Mayor Kneski opened the meeting to the public.

Barbara DiPierno, 28 Runyon Mill Rd., expressed that she spoke at last month's meeting. She moved to the Township in October 2005. She was assessed for items she did not have in her house. She expressed that while searching for her current home she viewed many more expensive homes, and homes that were larger with more features, but these homes had lower tax rates. She is concerned about the current information in the software program from 2005 that will be used in this reassessment and the "inequity" following into this assessment. Ms. Busher asked if the data Ms. DiPierno is referring to was from before or after the 2005 assessment; Ms. DiPierno believe it was from both. Ms. Busher said any information in 2005 was from after the reassessment and will be on the data sheets for the current inspection. She explained that the purpose of the inspection is to correct, add, or subtract any incorrect data since then. Ms. DiPierno explained that items were not corrected, and are not correct today, as when she compared properties in the Township for sale the assessment had already taken place. Ms. Busher said the reason for this process and re-inspection of the properties is a way to assure that it is correct. She explained that since 2005 property values have risen and fallen. At currently the ratio is at 100.53%; asking prices are quite a bit lower than assessments. Reassessments will adjust the assessments to true market value as of October 1, 2012. Ms. DiPierno asked what will be used for true market value. Ms. Busher replied current listing prices, asking prices and sales. Ms. DiPierno requested an explanation of the software program. Ms. Busher explained that the program is provided by the State Division of Taxation. The assessment is based on the replacement cost of your home including the type of home and the

amenities in it; that final value is related to the market. Ms. DiPierno inquired if letters would be going out to Township residents naming the company doing the reassessments; Ms. Busher assured they would.

Mr. Kneski inquired if residents would be able to view their current assessments (field sheets) when the field inspectors are at their house or could be provided a copy. Ms. Busher explained that the field sheet lists the current amenities. She offered to provide a copy if desired. Mr. Mathews asked if residents' current sheets could be included in the mailing. Ms. Busher said this could be done. Mr. Kneski noted that if many residents call and request a copy of the field sheet there would be additional postage charges. Mr. Matheny explained that with a specific mailing the form would have to match the address on the envelope and this will require time. Mr. Mathews commented that it would be helpful to know of any errors on the field sheet before the inspection. Mr. Kneski offered a possible solution is to handle providing field sheets on an as call basis. Mr. Mathews said it could clearly state in the letter that the information is available and can be requested by phone. It was noted that this info is available anytime, not just during a reassessment.

Frances Gavigan, 123 Wertsville Road, approached the dais. Ms. Gavigan complimented Ms. Busher on the job she does. She inquired if this is the same firm that was used in 2005; it is not. She commented that there were errors on former assessment and Ms. Busher was diligent in correcting them. She suggested information be added to the website outlining what is being done, informing residents that they can find out their past assessment information, and directing them to where they can find further information. Ms. Gavigan had a recent appraisal done on her property for a refinance and inquired if it would be of use to Ms. Busher. Ms. Busher replied that she is always willing to look at an appraisal but since it is a refinance appraisal she will look hard at the comparables.

Ms. Gavigan addressed two properties in town that are residential with a farm. She asked if the same rules and qualifications are being applied to this process as a bank assessor would follow. Ms. Gavigan noticed there weren't many comparables in East Amwell for her non-conforming farm property; she asked Ms. Busher how she will handle specialty properties in terms of reference comps. Ms. Busher replied that specialty properties have to be looked at on more of an individual basis; she will look far and wide to find support for an appropriate value.

Ms. Gavigan asked if the areas to be covered in the Township (i.e. north to south, east to west) could be identified and publicized in the VIP summer issue.

Ms. DiPierno asked why the appraisals are being done when they were done in 2005. Ms. Busher replied that it is because property values have fallen. There have been an increased number of tax reviews including successful tax appeals. This puts exposure on the municipality as money collected will be refunded. If a resident is successful with their tax appeal their value will stay low while others will stay true market. Ms. DiPierno inquired if some residents will "get hit hard" because they didn't appeal; this process will still not benefit them. She noted that they could be "hurt". Ms. Busher said those residents may receive a reduction in taxes for next year but residents who appealed may not have a change. Ms. DiPierno asked about four years from now; Ms. Busher replied that she is not looking at anything; she would be able to change values for the next four years if the market demonstrated that it was needed. Ms. DiPierno inquired if there is a successful appeal then will the resident get all their tax money back for the year; Ms. Busher replied they would get back the amount that was reduced from their assessment.

Ms. Gavigan inquired how many of the twenty-six municipalities are reevaluating that she is aware of. Ms. Busher replied that West Amwell and Flemington are doing reassessments. Readington is doing a compliance plan for this year. Delaware will be doing a reassessment next year.

Ms. Gavigan noted that the bulk of our tax bills go to the school. She inquired if the lower tax values may result in the burden to be equalized across the County. Ms. Busher explained that it's very complicated; the amount is equalized.

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Ms. Gavigan asked why there are 103 exempt properties. Ms. Busher replied that these include the school, rescue squad, etc. and they add up. It was added that preserved properties are exempt. Ms. DiPierno inquired what the preserved properties are exempt from. Ms. Busher explained that preserved properties are exempt from taxation if they are state owned. Ms. Gavigan asked about living in a private residence that has a preservation easement. Ms. Busher explained that a preservation easement is not exempt; it is deed restricted. Not for profits (such as D&R) are exempt. Ms. Gavigan inquired if anything is being done regarding assessing farmland. Ms. Busher replied that farmland assessments are determined by the State Agricultural Department.

Ms. Cregar made a motion to close to the public. Mr. Mathews seconded the motion. All were in favor; the motion passed.

Mr. Kneski thanked the audience for their comments.

Mr. Mathews inquired about anomalies: what would happen if an inspector goes out to a property and discovers a shed that wasn't on the initial sheet and there is no record of it. He asked if this information will be shared with the zoning office and possibly trigger a fine. Ms. Busher replied that typically she does not pursue that in her normal job, as an example if someone doubles their size of the house that could result in an investigation. She can follow it up on it as a procedural matter if desired but she is the tax assessor and not part of zoning.

Mr. Kneski asked if Mr. Sagesar had any questions. He inquired if the e-mail was discussed. Mr. Kneski replied that Ms. Busher contacted the resident and the concerns were discussed earlier at the meeting and briefly reviewed again at this time.

Mr. Kneski inquired if Ms. Cushing's office has reviewed the professional services agreement; Ms. Busher said he has.

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East Amwell Township  
Resolution 76-12

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Township Committee of the Township of East Amwell, in the County of Hunterdon, New Jersey, that this Township Committee hereby approves a professional service contract for the following service: For work associated with the Township wide reassessment by Robert Gabrish, GP, Assessor Services, LLC of 414 Runyon Court, Flemington, NJ 08822. This Agreement shall be effective from the 21<sup>st</sup> day of June, 2012, and continue through the 31<sup>st</sup> day of December, 2012. The Township shall pay the Consultant, fees for the services rendered by the Consultant in the amount not to exceed forty four thousand four hundred and sixty dollars.

Class 2 Property Inspection	\$24.00/each
Class 3A Property Inspection	\$35.00/each
Class 4A Property Inspection	\$40.00/each
Class 4C Property Inspection	\$40.00/each
Exempt Class Property Inspection	\$35.00/each

By Order of the Township Committee,

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Peter Kneski, Mayor

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Ms. Cregar made a motion to approve the Professional Services Agreement with Robert Gabrish, GP, Assessor Services, LLC. Mr. Mathews seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

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Peter Kneski: yes  
Pat Cregar: yes  
Linda Lenox: yes  
Tim Mathews: yes  
Dart Sagesar: abstained (due to arriving late at the meeting)

There were four yes votes with one abstention; the motion passed.

Mr. Kneski asked if there were any additional comments.

Mr. Mathews commented on enhanced communications, security and presentation of badges in regard to the recent burglaries in the area.

Ms. Lenox made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Cregar seconded it. All were in favor; the motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 8:11pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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Christine A. Rosikiewicz

(note: These minutes were composed from a recording of the meeting.)