

MINUTES**September 6, 1995**

The Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren met in regular session on Wednesday, September 6, 1995 at the Phillipsburg Middle School, 525 Warren Street, Phillipsburg, New Jersey.

The meeting was called to order by Director Dickey at 7:14 PM. Upon roll call the following members were present: Freeholder Susan Dickey, Freeholder Ann Stone and Freeholder Kenneth Miller.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by Director Dickey.

Director Dickey read the following statement: "ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING WAS GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT BY FORWARDING A SCHEDULE OF REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS TO THE WARREN COUNTY CLERK, THE STAR/GAZETTE, BLAIRSTOWN PRESS, THE NEWS, STAR-LEDGER AND THE EXPRESS-TIMES AND BY POSTING A COPY THEREOF ON THE BULLETIN BOARD IN THE OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS. FORMAL ACTION MAY BE TAKEN BY THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS AT THIS MEETING. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IS ENCOURAGED. IN ORDER TO ASSURE FULL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, THOSE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO WISH TO ATTEND THE MEETING SHOULD SUBMIT ANY REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE".

A. OPEN DISCUSSION

Mrs. Dickey thanked Phillipsburg for hosting this latest in the Board's municipal meetings.

1. County Roads

Mayor Decker indicated that one of her intended questions had been addressed, and she asked whether a section on South Main Street was going to be repaved.

County Engineer Hicks responded in the affirmative and that a pre-construction meeting was scheduled for September 7. Additionally, a part of Lincoln Street will be done at the same time. The gas and water companies are also doing necessary repairs in conjunction with the project.

Mrs. Decker requested assistance on Lincoln Street due to the number of accidents. Mr. Hicks asked that accident reports be sent to his office to be incorporated in the annual report to the freeholders. The county needs information over a number of years to see incidents and what benefits result from improvements. County road goes about to the sawmill, and it will be necessary to replace the culvert first. A council member thought that maybe a guardrail would help prevent cars from hitting the buildings.

Council President Rummerfield asked if the county intended to repave Roseberry Street. Mr. Hicks responded that Roseberry is a town road. Mr. Rummerfield then asked if the county would consider taking over the hill that leads down to S. Main. Phillipsburg owns this small section that lies between a county and state road. He suggested that the parties work on a swap.

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Councilman Cassar asked when the county is going to find offices for county units in town. Mrs. Decker said she thought some county offices should be moved to town, such as the welfare office. With about half of the county recipients residing in Phillipsburg, it made sense to have a welfare office here. They indicated they thought Phillipsburg had been by-passed for county office space.

Mrs. Decker said that they had requested an annual meeting with the freeholders on Section 8 housing issues, but this meeting has not been held for several years. She suggested that the county might want the town to oversee the county's program, as she felt the town did a better job on inspections.

Mr. Miller said the number of county funded units in Phillipsburg is down from the 130 to 170 of years ago. We can get the number from Mrs. Lowy or Mr. Delmore. Mr. Rummerfield said they had a meeting years ago to let Phillipsburg know what the county is doing. Unless the feds eliminate funding, we can't get rid of the program. Phillipsburg could charge the county a fee for inspections of buildings. He also mentioned that space for the Health Department used to be provided in town. Then the department moved out. This is a loss of benefits to residents. He thought maybe 1 or 2 days per month in Phillipsburg for health services would be reasonable. Also, the nursing service could use a satellite office in Phillipsburg. Mr. Cassar stated that half the department's calls are in Phillipsburg, so why not locate the department in town?

Mrs. Stone responded that she is liaison to that department, and she will request information from them.

The council also asked about the possibility of a telephone system that would allow town residents to call the county offices in the Belvidere area toll free. Mrs. Decker asked about the transportation committee report. Mrs. Dickey indicated that the freeholders have only received a draft of Phase I, but that this preliminary report did state that big busses were not appropriate for Phillipsburg. It is hoped the report will be done in October.

3. County planning direction

Mr. Cassar said that many people are moving into the area, as they are attracted by open space. This could lead to the open space being destroyed. The county needs to have an open space plan so that developers cannot get around the plan. Mr. Dech, County Planning Director, reported that the county plan identifies high, moderate and low priority sites around the county. High priority areas are concentrated on growth areas, mainly in the southern area. We have the open space tax, and have to decide how to spend these funds. There will be a new plan next year.

A resident stated that we have no parks in the county. Mr. Dech said the plan has open areas. Mrs. Stone stated that 12% of the county land area is in federal and state park land. Mr. Rummerfield stated concern that the open space tax receives much from Phillipsburg tax payers, but there is no land to be used in town. Years ago, Phillipsburg

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got money from the state to make parks on an old dump; then land acquisition along the Delaware. We could use some of the tax money for this land to be acquired.

Ten years ago, Phillipsburg wanted an I-78 interchange, while other municipalities did not. Now, the other townships want an interchange. Phillipsburg wants to be included in discussions on the interchange idea.

Mr. Dech reported there will be a traffic study in the southern section of the county, including Phillipsburg. Mrs. Decker cautioned that we need to be mindful not to put all the I-78 interchange traffic through Phillipsburg. She also said Phillipsburg will pursue the railroad museum, and she wants freeholder support for Phillipsburg in its attempt to get the state to site it here. Mr. Miller indicated he needed to refrain from such a discussion as he is the vice-president of the study committee. Additionally, it is intended to be a transportation museum, not just railroads.

4. Library

Mrs. Dickey acknowledged that at the meeting of July 27, the freeholders offered to put together cost proposals and comparisons. The library director and administrator have been on vacation, and the material is not yet ready.

A Phillipsburg resident supported the expansion and praised the town library's reference collection. If the report was anonymous, it should not be considered. He urged support for expansion, and to maintain the federation.

A Lopatcong resident also urged the expansion. He said the area is a poor community, and it needs industry and tourism. The high school does not have a great library, and the students depend on the town library. It is important to keep the children in mind.

Another resident said that the size of a library is important, and that one large site is better than smaller ones. Yet another resident said he has attended 3 meetings, and haven't heard much at any of them. The research room in the town library is mostly the result of money donated from an estate. A Lopatcong resident said people can't get anywhere without a car, and branches won't offer as much for the kids.

Mrs. Dickey replied that a branch is only one option being explored. An expansion of 7,100 square feet may not be enough for the long term. No decision has been reached yet, and there may be another building as part of the federation.

Mr. Cassar thought that with compact discs and other technology, the physical space will be sufficient. The town library president said they could expand with a second story on the building if needed.

A resident said that when the federation agreement was drafted, it was clear that Phillipsburg was providing the building and collection, and the county would pay for expansion. The longer we delay the more the costs increase.

A White Township resident asked where the town and board were in 1992, 1993 and 1994 with their demands for expansion. This project is not just expansion, half of the

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costs are for remodeling the present building, and that was not part of the agreement.

Mrs. Decker responded that several years ago, the freeholders said they would put the money in the budget, and then they did not follow through.

A former member of the expansion committee said the consultant saw a lot of wasted space in the original ideas for expansion, and redesigned the use of space that already exists. In response to a resident's question, Mrs. Dickey indicated that the cost estimates for the project are \$870,000 for expansion and \$863,000 for renovation, and the rest is for other areas, with a total cost of \$2.9 million. The Blairstown branch was purchased and remodeled and equipped for \$1.6 million.

Mrs. Decker said the Phillipsburg library is a good library. If the county wants to continue the federation and expand the library, then the freeholders and council and library board should sit down and decide where economies can be found. Either do it or end it.

Mrs. Stone said two of three freeholders presently on the board were on the board when the federation was created. We are in favor of the agreement. Phillipsburg is supposed to come up with some info and the county is also working on information to discuss. The county did the federation, Franklin branch, Independence and Blairstown. It may be time to come back to Phillipsburg. We need to know why the cost went from \$1.2 million to \$2.9 million. When both parties have their reports finished, we can meet again. The freeholders have been supportive of the Phillipsburg library.

Mr. Cassar asked when the freeholders are going to put money in the budget.

Mr. Miller responded that how much is to go into the budget is the hangup. The federation agreement means it is not just the town's library, but "our" library.

A Belvidere resident stated he was against spending \$3 million with the present amount of county debt service. We already have high taxes.

A Pohatcong resident thanked the freeholders and council for having the meeting. Many people are moving into the area, and we are looking at increases in taxes. The federation was made before the community college was funded. A librarian said that community college students are using the Phillipsburg library, and we need to move on expansion.

Mrs. Dickey said we need to look at all three options.

Mr. Rummerfield said he thought it important for freeholders to hear from the public and their opinions. When notices go out about having to pay for use of the library on 1/1/96, many people will attend the freeholder meeting to complain. In two runs for freeholder in five years, he always advocated for money in the budget for the expansion.

Mrs. Dickey responded that it was not necessary to get the public upset with threats to charge for service as of 1/1/96, as Phillipsburg cannot pull out without two years notice. She has asked County Counsel to research the law as to whether library tax

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could be used for capital costs, and it cannot be done.

Mr. Rummerfield stated that this is more rhetoric on the same issues. A county library commission member said the county doesn't need Phillipsburg anymore. It is time to fund it, next year.

Mrs. Stone indicated to Mr. Rummerfield that he hadn't been listening. The freeholders like the federation, and need to improve it, but not at a price of \$2.9 million. Mr. Rummerfield replied that until there is money in the freeholder budget, there is no commitment for the federation.

A resident stated that we have lost sight of the purpose of the federation. It was to provide service to people. On 7/27, the talk was of sharing the costs, then the report surfaced and it changed the tone of the discussion. Let's forget all the rhetoric and set up another meeting and try to hammer out an agreement.

Mr. Rummerfield agreed that the philosophy is correct, it was service that drove the federation. As for the council, the benefit in opening the doors is for operations money and for expansion, because it was known that it would be successful. It was suggested that a meeting for the purpose of looking at the architect's report and to look for money in the budget be set. Maybe it is just a haggle over the price. It's time to get politics off the table and solve the problem.

A possible date of 9/26/95 was suggested.

On motion by Mr. Miller, seconded by Mrs. Stone, and there being no further official business to come before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 9:35 p.m.
ROLL CALL: Mr. Miller: yes Mrs. Stone: yes Mrs. Dickey: yes

ATTESTED TO:

Naomi J. Stout, Deputy Clerk