

MINUTES**February 7, 1996**

The Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren met in regular session on Wednesday, February 7, 1996, at the Lopatcong Township Municipal Building, 232 Third Street, Morris Park, Phillipsburg, New Jersey.

The meeting was called to order by Director Dickey at 7:05 PM. Upon roll call the following members were present: Freeholder Susan Dickey and Freeholder Kenneth Miller. Mrs. Stone was absent. Later in the evening, she joined the meeting via telephone hookup at approximately 7:25 P.M.

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".

Mrs. Dickey expressed the appreciation of the freeholders for Lopatcong hosting the traveling meeting.

The first item for discussion was the request of the county to support an arrangement between the township and Merrill Creek for a land swap that would allow use of the pistol range formerly owned by Lopatcong. There is a need for a shooting range for the use of all county law enforcement officers to practice and qualify. The property in question had been owned by Ingersoll Rand, and Lopatcong had constructed a range on a part of the land. When the insurance costs got to be too high, Ingersoll asked that it be closed. The property is now owned by the operators of Merrill Creek. A variety of law enforcement people want to reacquire the land for their use.

The range is part of a 73 acre tract that Merrill Creek wants to sell. However, unless the county buys the entire parcel, they are afraid that a range on about 2 acres will destroy the value of the remaining land. This entire parcel is under consideration for county purchase under Green Acres.

The range and parking lot are in place, with a bank that is 300 feet high.

Mr. Musarra, Assistant Prosecutor, stated a need for all officers to have a range. Some have been using a private range in Phillipsburg, but there are a number of injuries due to poor construction and ricochets. He indicated that the Prosecutor's office would be willing to assist with funding to update the range. If this is not doable, it might be possible to reverse the firing direction of the prior county range near the Vo-Tech school, but it would require an increase in the earth mound.

The Police Chief in Greenwich Township said Merrill Creek is not in favor of subdividing the property, as that would destroy the value of the rest of the piece.

A Washington Borough officer said the problem has been around for some time. A local armory built a new indoor range but it was closed due to a lack of air quality capabilities. It might be possible to help upgrade the armory range in return for access.

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Mr. Miller asked Mr. Musarra if the Lopatcong range was adequate for today's standards. The response was affirmative, but it would need some work.

The Pohatcong range officer said the Lopatcong range was used by many departments years ago. An outdoor range is sufficient. An indoor range may be more expensive.

The Hackettstown Police Chief said there is a definite need for a range location in the county.

Mr. Musarra was to explore all available options and submit a report to the freeholders for consideration.

A Lopatcong Councilman said he was concerned about the issue of taxes. While the township expects to keep the tax increase to one cent, the county and school district adds on top of that. Only ten percent of the property tax bill in Lopatcong is for the municipality, the other ninety percent is for the schools and the county. He wanted to know what was being done to try to keep the taxes down. The Governor has been making changes. We have built the Community College and we keep building prisons.

Mrs. Dickey responded that the county supports the Vo-Tech, Special Needs District and Community College. There is a pilot program in Hunterdon County to examine alternatives to the present organization.

The county intends no additional borrowing for this year's budget. The plan is to pay cash for capital projects. The Board has tried to reduce OE or keep it level if at all possible. The S&W portion of the budget will increase due to contract settlements. There has been a reduction in the number of projects, and they are being spread out over a longer period of time.

There was a general discussion of taxes: types and amounts.

Mrs. Dickey indicated that the budget group met last night and tried to track the increases for the past ten years.

Pat Rivoli asked if performance based budgeting was going to be reinstated. Mrs. Dickey responded that it was uncertain. Mr. Dinger offered the opinion that it could be, and in some cases perhaps was, used as a negative tool.

There was a question about the function of the County Environmental Commission. Mrs. Dickey said it was a resource center to help local commissions. It envisions a county inventory of environmental resources.

It was asked how the open space tax money planning was progressing. Mrs. Dickey stated the Board applied for a loan for White Lake. There was the reference to Marble Hill property, but she did not know exactly where that project stood at this time. The Board is looking to apportion the eleven slots on the committee.

In the absence of further comments and questions, upon motion of Mr. Miller, seconded by Mrs. Dickey, the meeting was declared adjourned at approximately 9:30 p.m.
ROLL CALL: Mr. Miller: yes Mrs. Stone: yes Mrs. Dickey: yes

ATTESTED TO:

Naomi J. Stout, Deputy Clerk