

BOROUGH OF FAR HILLS
Borough Council Regular Meeting
MINUTES
July 11, 2022
Via Remote Meeting Access Only

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Vallone called the remote meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and read the open public meetings statement in accordance with the law.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Vallone led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Present: Councilman Joseph Carty, Councilwoman Mary Chimenti, Council President David Karner, Councilman Ted McLean, Councilwoman Sheila Tweedie
Councilman Kevin Welsh, Mayor Paul J. Vallone, MD
Also Present: Borough Clerk Dorothy S. Hicks, Attorney Joseph Sordillo, approximately 45 members of the public

Mayor Vallone acknowledged the recent passing of former Borough of Far Hills Mayor Harry Hoffman who presided from 1983-1986. Mayor Vallone added that Mr. Hoffman was a decorated United States Marine and was awarded the Purple Heart. Mayor Vallone asked Ms. Hicks to express condolences to the family on behalf of the Borough of Far Hills.

REPORTS

Councilman Welsh – Fire, Water, Light, Buildings & Grounds

Councilman Welsh advised that due to the annual inspection by the Borough's insurance provider, repairs to the playground equipment at the J. Malcolm Belcher Fairgrounds were required and the area would be closed until further notice.

Councilman Welsh reported he received correspondence from a resident on Railroad Avenue who was concerned about a strong odor emanating from railroad ties which were recently placed on the NJ Transit property. Ms. Hicks had subsequently notified NJ Transit advising them of this concern.

Mayor Vallone read a statement from Janis Vallone indicating that she would be resigning from the position of Chairperson of the Advisory Recreation Committee effective immediately. Mayor Vallone thanked Janis for the reinvigoration of the committee and her efforts in restoring the fairgrounds to its original grandeur.

Councilwoman Tweedie – Health/Sanitation

No report.

Councilman McLean – Roads

No report.

A brief discussion ensued regarding potholes and deteriorating conditions along sections Douglas Road, a municipally shared roadway with Bernards Township. Mr. Sordillo was asked to contact Bernards Township to determine if the maintenance bond issued when the project was completed, was still in effect and could possibly be utilized to make the necessary repairs.

Councilman Carty – Finance/Insurance

No report.

Councilwoman Chimenti – Laws, Ordinances & Elections

Councilwoman Chimenti stated court sessions were continuing to be held remotely and Judge Wong-Taylor had initiated discussions with the State of NJ for a new computer to be installed in the courtroom. The Borough's IT Consultant would be providing the required connections.

Council President Karner – Police

Council President Karner reviewed the June 2022 Police Report.

Council President Karner commended Detective Corporal Kamieniecki for his professionalism and compassion in assisting with the reunion of an elderly gentleman with his family after he had traveled by train to Far Hills and had been reported lost.

Chief DeCarolis

No report.

Mayor Vallone

Mayor Vallone made the following address:

Good evening everyone, dear neighbors, and friends:

As has been customary over the last eleven and a half years, I usually give a report of salient and poignant issues that affect Far Hills and its residents at this time.

But tonight, I have something else to share with you. Last week, I notified our Borough Attorney, Joseph Sordillo and members of the Borough Council that tonight will be the last Borough Council meeting over which I will preside and effective July 15, 2022, I will be resigning my position as Mayor of the Borough of Far Hills. As many of you know, my wife Janis has been dealing with some health issues involving cancer and while we are very optimistic that her long-term future will be bright, it is time that I must devote my time and energies towards that end.

I want to thank Janis for supporting me during the 25 years of my plastic surgery practice where her knowledge, business skills, acumen and vision allowed us to grow a very significant medical practice. During my last eleven and a half years, she has supported me as Mayor and has spent many nights alone as I was either at meetings or advocating on behalf of Far Hills. I am truly grateful for her love and support over these many years.

I started my public service to Far Hills as a member of the Board of Health fifteen years ago, then served on the Planning Board and finally in 2011 was elected Mayor of Far Hills with 92% of all votes cast. When I took over as Mayor of Far Hills my goals were to improve its financial condition, maintain and improve its structural condition, to foster a harmonious and family friendly environment and to continue the bucolic nature of our Borough and to make Far Hills a place where all residents would be proud to live, work and play.

Over these eleven and a half years, I have increased our Borough savings substantially, which now helps to offset our municipal taxes and have paid off all old debt. I have kept our tax rate very low as our municipal tax rate is in the lowest five percent in the State of New Jersey of any municipalities where any public services are provided. I have encouraged our employees in all departments and built a wonderful and effective administrative staff under our Borough Clerk, Dorothy Hicks, and have given our staff the tools, i.e., new computers, servers, and programs that they needed to fully support

our residents and help streamline their daily responsibilities. I have helped rebuild our Police Department under the leadership of Chief Michael DeCarolis into one of the most respected departments anywhere in the State of New Jersey. I am very proud of what Chief DeCarolis has accomplished and how he and his team support our residents. I have supported an infrastructure program to repave and repair one to two roads every year over the last twelve years. I have supported changes and implemented them at the Planning Board level so that the Board now knows who is applying for variances and who owns the businesses located in our Borough, something that did not exist before and is vitally important for safety when fire and electrical issues develop.

I have supported the VNA and the good work they do and the Far Hills Race Meet Association and have dramatically increased the financial benefits that come to the Borough from these events which directly benefits our residents' taxes. I have built over the years a relationship with the CEOs of these organizations which has been beneficial to all our residents and I am proud to call Dan Powell and the Chairs of the Far Hills Race Meet Association my friends.

As you have previously heard, Janis Vallone who earlier this year resurrected the Recreation Committee, which had been dormant for many years, and has reinvigorated that committee as its Chairwoman and monies have been placed in the budget to enhance the Fairgrounds and those results are already clearly evident.

I, with others have worked tirelessly to comply with the responsibilities of Affordable Housing requirements that have been thrust upon communities by the NJ Supreme Court which alone has taken hundreds of hours and innumerable meetings. During my tenure, I have gone to the homes of multiple residents during Super Storm Sandy to assist them in their time of need and over the years have gone to many of our resident's homes to personally address their concerns and issues.

Over the last many years, I have joined and have been appointed to the Executive Committee of the New Jersey Conference of Mayors and attend their meetings regularly in Princeton. I am also on the Legislative Committee of the oldest multi-political group in the Country, the New Jersey League of Municipalities and attend and chaired meetings and break-out session at their annual conference held in November. Why, because the information that is shared and learned, along with the contacts made, and the input from many professionals around the State of New Jersey benefits our residents here and in Far Hills, and this is what needs to be done going forward.

While the Borough of Far Hills employs many professionals such as our Borough Attorney, our Planner and Engineer to give advice and they work diligently for the Borough, they are not elected officials. They do not live in Far Hills and it is ultimately the responsibility of the Mayor and Council to be fully informed, to be able to have the answers and provide our residents with the information requested and to make the final decisions that affect all of our residents. The Mayor and Council must be on the cutting edge of issues that affect our residents and they must be proactive, not reactive, they must be engaged at the local level and build relationships with our local neighboring municipalities, as well as the county and state level, this is not a part-time job, being the mayor is a full-time job.

To simply say "that is why we have professionals" is short sighted and not the hallmark of a leader, but rather the hallmark of a follower which is not what Far Hills needs.

To those who come after me, remember that Far Hills is special, it is recognized in national publications as one of the most prosperous and affluent communities in the country, actually number 12 out of some 42,000 communities; it is no wonder that while we have 360 or so families, we have over 1200 P.O. Boxes used by businesses and individuals who covet the Far Hills address. Far Hills can never be allowed to become average, that simply is not good enough. The open spaces, the equestrian tradition, the verdant trees, scenic corridors and stately properties and homes in all areas of Far Hills and the Victorian style homes in the town must be maintained. We must not let developers

go unchecked as is happening all around us, remember change for the sake of change alone is not always good.

I remember, many years ago, a very prominent surgeon friend of mine said to me that “when you make something look easy, everyone thinks they can do it, until they try.”

Running Far Hills has required innumerable meetings, time away from family and meeting and establishing long term relationships in Trenton and the County with Governors, members of the Senate and Assembly, lawyers, and other Mayors. For those who think that you can simply pick up the phone and call for help, you are sadly mistaken, relationships must be developed over time as any good friendship is. It has required many, many rubber chicken dinners and most importantly, it requires a vision that Far Hills is special. I sincerely hope that it stays that way in years to come.

To those on the Council and Councils past, to the professionals and to the residents of Far Hills, I thank you for your support over these many years. I have done my very best to keep Far Hills special. I specifically want to thank Councilwoman Sheila Tweedie, Councilman Joseph Carty and Councilwoman Mary Chimenti and many dozens of others for their concern and compassion towards my wife Janis. I will always remember this; I will also not forget those who did not personally reach out to her.

Janis and I will continue to maintain our home here in Far Hills and I look forward to seeing you all in the years to come.

May God bless us all, and may God bless the United States of America and may Far Hills find its way in the future.

Thank you to all.

REGULAR AGENDA

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

6/27/22 – Regular Meeting Minutes

Motion by Councilman McLean, seconded by Councilwoman Chimenti, was unanimously carried that these minutes be approved for content and release.

6/27/22 – Executive Meeting Minutes

Motion by Councilman McLean, seconded by Councilman Carty, was unanimously carried that these minutes be approved for content only.

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution 22-094 – Authorizing SHMAYSC’s 2022 Grant Application

Resolution 22-095 – Authorizing Payment of Bill List

Ms. Hicks provided an overview of the Somerset Hills Municipal Alliance Youth Services of Somerset County (SHMAYSC) grant application.

The resolutions were authorized to be approved via one motion of the Borough Council.

Motion by Council President Karner, seconded by Councilman Carty that Resolutions 22-094 and 22-095 be approved.

Roll Call:

Aye: Carty, Chimenti, Karner, McLean, Tweedie, Welsh

Nay:
Abstain:
Motion Carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT – *The Mayor and Council welcome comments from any member of the public. To help facilitate an orderly meeting and to permit the opportunity for anyone who wishes to be heard, speakers shall limit their comments to 5 minutes.*

Motion by Council President Karner, seconded by Councilman McLean to open the meeting to public comment.

Richard Rinzler, 11 Hurlingham Road, Far Hills expressed his appreciation to Mayor Vallone for twelve incredible years and for his efforts in making Far Hills a fantastic place to live. He also extended wishes for health and happiness to both him and Janis.

Mayor Vallone thanked him for his kind words and wished him the best in the future as well.

Charles Schwester, 410 Lake Road, Far Hills stated the directional sign on Lake Road, which he mentioned was damaged at the June 27, 2022 Borough Council meeting, was still not repaired.

Ms. Hicks responded the Bedminster DPW would be making the necessary repairs on July 12, 2022.

Mr. Schwester requested a status update regarding his request for an independent financial impact study for the Pulte/Residences at Overleigh development and the utilization of the developer's escrow account to fund the study.

Mr. Sordillo responded that while the financial impact study was discussed at a prior council meeting, he has not yet been authorized by the Borough Council to pursue contracting with a firm to conduct the study. He further explained that the Borough could not require the developer to provide the study nor could it automatically be paid from the developer's Planning Board escrow account.

Mr. Schwester reiterated that a financial impact study should be conducted by an independent firm and offered to pay for it. Lastly, Mr. Schwester expressed his best wishes to Mayor Vallone and Janis and hoped that they would be staying in Far Hills.

Mayor Vallone thanked him for his kind words and indicated that he and Janis planned to continue to reside in Far Hills.

Annette Vallone, sister of Mayor Vallone, on behalf of their father and entire family commended him and Janis for their hard work and 100% dedication to the Borough of Far Hills. Ms. Vallone stated their entire family was extremely proud of them both and were fully supportive of this difficult decision to retire. She also offered her love and well wishes to Janis.

Mayor Vallone expressed his gratitude for her love and support.

Craig and Karen Larson, 160 Sunnybranch Road, Far Hills expressed their appreciation to Mayor Vallone for the time, service, and dedication he had so graciously given to the Borough of Far Hills.

Mayor Vallone thanked them both for their kind thoughts and especially their friendship throughout the years.

George Mellendick, 260 Lake Road, Far Hills thanked Mayor Vallone for encouraging him to become more involved in local government by attending Borough Council and Planning Board meetings. Dr. Mellendick also extended sincere wishes for good health to both Mayor Vallone and Janis.

Mayor Vallone thanked him for his input over the years and for the well wishes.

Wendy Barfuss, 120 Sunnybranch Road, Far Hills stated that she and her husband, Rick moved to Far Hills about the same time as Mayor Vallone and Janis and expressed their appreciation for the level of time and dedication that he and Janis have given making Far Hills the town it is today. She also expressed heartfelt well wishes and prayers to Janis.

Mayor Vallone thanked them both for their thoughtful words and friendship.

Mr. Sordillo stated that in all of the municipalities that he has represented over the years, he has not had such a relationship with a Mayor as he has had with Mayor Vallone, as both a client and a friend. He expressed that he will greatly miss working with him and wished both he and Janis all the best for the future.

Mayor Vallone thanked him for his professionalism over the years and looked forward to their continued friendship.

There were no further comments from the public.

Motion by Council President Karner, seconded by Councilman McLean to close the meeting to public comment.

Mayor Vallone thanked everyone for attending this evening and expressed his best to the Borough Council. He also indicated that he would not be attending the Executive Session.

Ms. Hicks acknowledged all of the well wishes and gratitude expressed this evening to Mayor Vallone for his service to the Borough and stated that he would be greatly missed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Resolution 22-096

- Attorney Client Privilege – Affordable Housing Litigation
- Attorney Client Privilege – NJ Transit and Butler's Pantry Lease

Motion by Council President Karner, seconded by Councilman McLean, was unanimously carried to approve Resolution 22-096.

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION AND ADJOURNMENT

Council President Karner recognized the years of service and dedication Mayor Vallone provided to the Borough while acknowledging that he had full confidence in Borough Council's ability to continue to serve in the best interest of Far Hills.

Council President Karner asked Mr. Sordillo to provide an overview of the municipal vacancy law. Mr. Sordillo reviewed the procedures and indicated effective July 16, 2022 and until the Mayor's vacancy was filled by a vote of the Borough Council, Council President Karner would serve as Acting Mayor. A brief discussion ensued resulting in a consensus to proceed with the vote to fill the Mayor's vacancy at the July 25, 2022 Borough Council meeting.

Councilman McLean requested clarification on the procedure for public comment and if there was any obligation by the Borough Council to respond. Mr. Sordillo advised that there was no legal requirement for the Borough Council to respond to any public comments.

Council President Karner inquired of the Borough Council as to the possible reinstatement of in-person meetings prior to September as originally planned. A brief discussion ensued regarding the recent increase in the number of Covid cases due to the new strain resulting in a general consensus to continue with the remote meetings for the time being. Ms. Hicks was asked to investigate technology for potential hybrid meetings.

Motion by Councilwoman Tweedie, seconded by Councilman Carty was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Dorothy S. Hicks
Borough Clerk

APPROVED - 7/25/2022