

Borough of Garwood
Meeting of the Mayor and Council

WORKSHOP

January 12, 2016

Start Time: 7:00 p.m.

Adequate notice of this meeting was provided to the Westfield Leader, advertised on December 31, 2015, notification was sent to the Star Ledger and prominently posted on the municipal public bulletin board and filed in the office of the municipal clerk informing the Public of the time and place according to the Provisions of the Open Public Meeting Law (Chapter 231, P.L. 1975).

ROLL CALL:

Mayor Lombardo	P		
Councilwoman Cuccaro	P	Councilman Sarno	P
Councilman Martin	P	Councilwoman Todisco	P
Councilman Mathieu	P	Council President Petruzzelli	P

Also, present: Borough Administrator/Clerk Christina M Ariemma, and Borough Attorney Robert F. Renaud.

Borough Engineer Donald Guarriello was excused.

Borough Attorney Robert Renaud mentioned there are two matters for ex-session tonight, personnel and affordable housing litigation.

Administrator/Clerk Christina M Ariemma – none

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - NONE

NEW BUSINESS

Mayor Lombardo read the following statement:

"It is with regret that I have accepted the resignation of Bob Ehrenbeck as the Mayor's representative to the Union County Transportation Advisory Board. I personally thank Bob for his tenure of service representing Garwood. I wish him well in all his future endeavors. I am appointing tonight former councilman Walter Tucker to be Garwood's representative to the Board.

Council President Petruzzelli, Councilwoman Todisco, former councilwoman Kearney and I attending the 2016 reorganization meeting of the Union County Freeholders. I will point out some of Chairman Bergen's initiatives entitled "One County, one community". The following, in particular, would be helpful to our community. Once again, they will offer an "Infrastructure Grant" to municipalities, and they ask that municipalities prioritize local road paving.

Another initiative is "Union County" at work and play". This includes new jobs, business assistance grants and quality of life improvements, as well as economic development programs. The Union County Economic Development Council was recently awarded a \$1.3 million grant from the Federal Government to make loans from 50K to 250K to small business. The Library Grant Program this year will double the amount of money available for grants.

The Senior Focus, improving and enhancing senior centers will be offered this year and he anticipates funding for smaller items such as kitchens, door, windows, and other interior objects or renovations.

Fire and Mutual Aid projects will go forward in an effort to equip the county's 20 fire departments with compatible radios to promote better communication during emergencies.

Their final initiative addresses the need for a regional animal shelter to help with consistent animal control and promote humane treatment.

This Saturday, January 19th, is Mayor's Saturday, to be held at 11:00 AM in Borough Hall. I have invited Councilman Mike Martin to join me. Please stop by to chat with us."

Comments or matters for discussion from members of Council:

Councilwoman Cuccaro – no report

Councilman Martin – no report

Councilman Mathieu mentioned he attended the Newly Elected Officials Orientation seminar with Council Members Cuccaro and Sarno. He touched on some of the matters talked about at the session. He said that the State of NJ has nine pensions systems of varying degrees. He said the two stable systems are PFRS and PERS. He said Trenton wants to merge the other seven with these two stable systems, which he is firmly against. He asked council to consider a resolution on the matter at some time in the future. He mentioned the Shared Service Agreement with the BOE that will terminate soon. Brief discuss followed on the agreement.

Councilman Sarno commented on the seminar he attended with Council Members Mathieu and Cuccaro. He said he looks forward to exercising things learned at the seminar. He mentioned council stipends and called for council to vote on the matter to reduce the stipends from \$1,500 (Council) and \$1,800 (Mayor) to \$1.

Lastly, Councilman Sarno suggested amending borough ordinances to exclude members of the governing body from being eligible for paid health care benefits. He provided information on other municipalities that have approved this measure. Mayor Lombardo mentioned that he didn't think a vote could take place this evening and deferred to Mr. Renaud who stated that it would need to be done by ordinance for a formal vote. Council Members Mathieu and Cuccaro said that they support the measure and that Councilman Sarno provided detailed information to support the matter. Mayor Lombardo asked Ms. Ariemma to handle the matter. She said that it would have to be an ordinance prepared by the attorney and council should direct the attorney, not her. She commented further that she recalls past research on the subject revealed that passing said legislation would violate regulations in the SHBP; however, she was not certain. Councilwoman Todisco suggested the matter be discussed in committee in which Councilman Mathieu objected. Mayor Lombardo proceeded to direct the matter to Finance Committee however; Councilman Petruzzelli said he is on Finance and should not be involved in the discussion. It was then referred to Laws and License Committee for further review and recommendation. Mr. Renaud said he would review the matter but mentioned that the SHBP may not allow council to exempt this individual.

Discussion continued regarding reducing the stipends and the method by which that should be accomplished. It was concluded that it requires an ordinance amendment followed by resolution, however it was suggested that council could vote which would initiate the process.

At this point Mayor Lombardo read the following statement:

"With regard to the stipend issue, over the past 20 plus years I spent as councilman here in Garwood, whenever this issue came up, it was a personal choice made by individual council people, discussed privately with the Borough Administrator. There was no grandstanding, and it was a personal, individual decision that was not legislated. Nor should it be.

On a personal level, my stipend is spent on providing refreshments at the council meetings, various donations to local organizations and gifts for celebrations happening in the borough.

Also, I believe there is worth to being up here on the dais, doing all the homework required to make informed decisions, and spending time sitting on committees and various boards. I would like to think that our time has value and worth, and if anyone chooses to forgo their stipend, it should be a personal decision that should be known only to them and the Boro Administrator.

Let's move on."

Councilwoman Todisco mentioned that the ordinance does not list \$1 for the salary so she believes an ordinance amendment will be required followed by resolution.

Councilwoman Todisco read the following statements:

"As I have done in the past few years, I have prepared a rotating schedule for councilmembers to attend Union County Freeholder meetings in an effort to increase Garwood's visibility with the County. As long as it is okay with the Council, I will hand out a schedule tonight in which each councilmember will get two months out of 2016. It is in alphabetical order and there are two cycles so that a councilmember does not have back-to-back months. I would appreciate everyone's support in this process to ensure we become more knowledgeable of the county level of government and how it interacts with our Borough. As many other municipalities do not attend Freeholder meetings, I believe it is in the Borough's best interest to continue to show Garwood's presence at the County meetings.

Stipend

The bottom-line in that the salaries for council people exist for a reason and stems from the fact that this position is a job. It is there to cover the expenses incurred by serving as an elected official. This is not unique to Garwood. Garwood's salaries, at \$1500 for councilmembers and \$1800 for Mayor, rank quite low among many of our neighboring towns. For example, Cranford's salary for Mayor is about \$2800 and about \$2500 for Committee Member. Roselle Park's salary for Mayor is \$11,000 and \$9,000 for Council Member.

The key is to take this position seriously as a job. It is very time consuming and quite honestly, councilmembers who work hard and put in the time are grossly underpaid. However, I am not advocating, nor have I ever advocated for a raise.

Keeping the salary at \$1500 is not just about me as one councilperson as there were many before me and will be many after me.

Taking it down to \$1 now will impact those that will serve in the future. In fact, individual councilmembers, both Democrats and Republicans, who wanted to forgo the salary in the past, did so privately and with dignity. To call this kind of attention to a minimal salary for a maximum position is strictly a self-serving political move.

To prove this is a political stunt, look at a post from this past Saturday at the League's Seminar on the Garwood Republican Facebook page, which shows a picture of Councilman Joe Sarno leaning against a wall appearing to be mid-sentence. The caption reads, "Councilman Sarno explaining to Councilman Mathieu why he has to give up his Council stipend of \$1500 per year." Fact is that Councilman Mathieu agreed to second Sarno's motion to reduce salaries to \$1 precisely 5 days before this post was made at our Re-Organization meeting. This shows quite clearly that this issue is nothing more than a publicity stunt for the Republicans. After all their Chairman has taken the stipend the past 5 years without question.

I have nothing further on this subject, Mayor. I'd like us to get back to the real business of the people of Garwood."

Council President Petruzzelli commented that the stipend is low and should not be reduced further.

Councilwoman Cuccaro commented that this is public service, not a job.

Councilman Mathieu commented that he respects everyone's position on the matter however feels strongly that it should be voted on. Mr. Renaud mentioned the process to amend the salary ordinance. After brief discussion, a motion was made by Councilman Sarno, seconded by Councilwoman Cuccaro to direct Mr. Renaud to prepare an amending ordinance to reduce council stipend to \$1, followed by a roll call vote.

Councilwoman Cuccaro

AYE

Councilman Sarno

AYE

Councilman Martin **NAY** **Councilwoman Todisco** **NAY**
Councilman Mathieu **AYE** **Council President Petruzzelli** **NAY**
Mayor Lombardo vote NAY.

The attorney was not directed to prepare an amending ordinance.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Is there anyone in the audience that wishes to address the mayor and council please step to the microphone, sign in, state your full name and address. Please limit your comments to three minutes.

Rich McCormick 101 Fourth Avenue commented that these matters should be discussed behind closed doors. He said council is here to represent the people.

Paul Nieves 263 Fourth Avenue read the following statement:

"Good evening Mayor Lombardo, councilmen and council ladies and members of our community. My name is Paul Nieves of 263 Fourth Avenue. I wish to congratulate newly elected Councilwoman Cuccaro and Councilman Sarno on your recent victories. Your message resonated among many in our community. Although I do not agree with many of the tactics employed, the people of Garwood have spoken and I respect that. As a citizen of Garwood however, I am at a loss why this resolution has been proposed in light of the platform they ran on.

The literature the Republicans distributed during the campaign, and positions they took at the debates, all stated they oppose the DPW shared service agreement. Although the Republicans ran on a platform of accountability to the taxpayer, transparency and disciplined spending, they all voted during the reorganization meeting to hire a DPW employee and a police officer, without ever offering a basis for the vote and without providing an alternate proposal. Despite vowing to be more transparent Councilman Mathieu and Councilman Sarno vote no to reduce the tax collector salary for Garwood from \$50k to \$17k at a saving of \$33k per year without ever explaining why. To Councilwoman Cuccaro's credit, unlike Councilman Sarno, she and the other council members that voted yes put the tax payers of Garwood first, when they voted in favor of reducing the salary of the tax collector, Councilwoman Cuccaro voted yes, despite Councilman Mathieu's non-verbal commands to vote no. This is why I find this proposal at our very first council meeting particularly disheartening.

This resolution is nothing more than a gimmick designed to give the illusion of positive change. We know this is merely a stunt because this proposal directly contradicts the platform the Republicans ran on to overturn the DPW shared service agreement. That reversal will cost our tax payers \$70k every year. Are you seriously proposing this stipend resolution under the guise of saving our tax payers \$11k a year after having run a campaign on a platform that would cost the taxpayers \$70k per year and voted no to saving an additional \$33k per year?

This proposal is also short sighted. The people of Garwood would have to wait over six years to see the equivalent savings of the DPW shared service agreement that the republicans have promised to overturn.

The resolution regarding their annual stipend misses the point of what the public service is all about. It's not about salary. Serving as a council person it's about working for the citizens of Garwood for the greater good. Serving as a council person is about being part of a team to make difficult ideas designed to bring meaningful positive change to our lives. Serving as a council person is about making difficult choices after research and forethought.

I am a firm believer or that charity should be done behind the modesty of a closed door. Whether a council person serves our great town for \$1,200, \$750 a year or one dollar, does not make the service more noble, effective, nor the servant more worthy of office.

Councilperson Sarno correctly stated during his closing at the reorganization meeting that, "serving Garwood is not about me, but about the people I represent." This is why I am against this proposal. This resolution is not about the citizens of our community. It is designed to promote the personal agenda of those who proposed it. It is insulting and it is patronizing. We need resolutions to put the people of Garwood first. We need resolutions designed to promote the long term interests of our town. We need resolutions that are novel and insightful and not political stunts designed for self-promotion.

Foregoing the stipend is a personal choice that should be made in the solace of one's conscience. Over the years, council members have given up their stipends, but it was not grandstanded for public consumption. It was a personal issue known only to the Chief Financial Officer and Municipal Clerk, as it should be. For all of those reasons and many more I will publish in the Westfield Leader, I respectfully request that this resolution be tabled and or allow each council person the personal choice at foregoing this very minimal and insignificant stipend."

Ricky King 412 Hazel Avenue said it's a personal choice to decline the stipend. He asked Councilwoman Cuccaro if she declined her stipend. Mayor Lombardo interjected that it was not voted to remove the stipend.

Bill Nierstedt of 320 Hickory Avenue read the following statement:

"I do not support any proposal to eliminate or reduce Council member salaries. I believe that in asking for such a change, you are selling yourselves short. You are indicating that your jobs are not worth anything; that they are valueless. I disagree. Garwood Council positions are worth something. Good Council members invest a lot of time, and make important decisions for all of us. Council members know that when you calculate the time input vs. salary, it comes out to about a quarter an hour when you are doing your job. When you add in council donations for the EFG, ALJ football, the school play or other advertisements, it is even less. No one runs for council in order to make money. I believe that all council members are worth their pay – whether I agree with their positions or not.

I believe that any such proposal is nothing more than political showboating. Not that Council member Sarno's thought is; I believe that he is sincere. I also believe however, that Republican Party Chairman Mathieu is jumping on his sincerity and advancing his own conviction, while at the same time belittling your offices by advancing an obviously sound bite good policy that in reality is worthless. I say that because the total amount of savings by every council member giving up their salaries is \$10,800/year. Some Council members say they ran because they want to do what the people of Garwood want them to do, that they will not make decisions that serve themselves, but only those that serve the people's needs. Well, the people of Garwood have not asked you

to do eliminate your salary. There has been no referendum or public outcry about \$11,000. You state that Garwood citizens should support this proposal because it will save \$11,000. As you know, members of the public didn't care about saving \$70,000 last year when this council advocated shared services with Fanwood. You can carry this salary savings out to a 3 year term and say it will save \$33,000, but the shared services will save the Boro \$210,000 in that same time period.

I also have concerns about the concept of 'voting for what the people want', and a council member not replacing his/her view for what the public wants. I guess my immediate response to that is, well; don't we have representative democracy in this country for a reason? Our founding fathers did not opt to enable the public to vote directly on every issue. As I have previously stated, the US has a democratic republic, not a democracy. Right now, Congressman Lance, the very same man who swore in Councilman Sarno, has a poll out there that shows most citizens in our district support President Obama's recent gun control proposals. Should Congressman Lance propose a resolution in support of the people's positions on these issues? I know at least one sitting councilman who would not support that position. And what constitutes the public's view? Who are 'the people'? The ones who attend a meeting or the ones who stay home? The ones who voted for you, or the majority of Garwood residents? A majority of those voters who voted in the last election? Should it be a 2/3 majority? Should the Boro invest in door-door poll takers to find out what the public wants? And what does Council do if 'the public' changes its mind? If we rely on 'what the public wants', why have Council members at all? Have residents fill out a survey or electronic poll on every issue and decide Garwood laws that way. Should we just install survey machines and not have any council members at all? This 'Vote as the public wants' is a slippery slope that I do not want this Council to slide onto."

Councilman Mathieu interjected that Council Members Cuccaro and Sarno promised the voters that they would give up the stipend. He commented he did not expect this response but he thinks it's a good idea.

Ricky King 412 Hazel Avenue said it was a promise from Council Members Cuccaro and Sarno and he expects them to live up to the promise.

Bruce Paterson 325 Willow Avenue commented on the stipend matter that he claims has become political. He said it is about trying to reduce taxes, not a party matter. He also commented on the health benefits matter, a job vs. public service, and that BOE and PB members work hard and are not paid. Mayor Lombardo said it was established long ago and it is a personal choice for each individual.

Councilwoman Todisco commented that she is a teacher which is considered a public servant, such as police and commented further on that matter. She commented that she felt the same way about the stipend when she took office however now feels it's a personal choice.

Councilman Sarno commented that he voted no on the Tax Collector position to because the savings should have been greater in his opinion.

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion to adjourn the workshop session was made by Councilwoman Todisco followed by a second from Councilman Petruzzelli.

Respectfully submitted:



CHRISTINA M. ARIEMMA, Municipal Clerk
Borough of Garwood