

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Township Council of the Township of East Hanover held on Wednesday, March 30, 2011 at 7:00 P.M. in the Municipal Building, 411 Ridgedale Avenue, East Hanover, New Jersey.

The Mayor called the meeting to order.

Present: Councilmen Peluso, Jocher, Tedesco, and Mayor Pannullo

Absent: Council President Jandoli

Also Present: Joseph Tempesta, Administrator  
Matthew O'Donnell, Township Attorney  
Paula Massaro, Township Clerk

The Mayor led the Pledge of Allegiance and Councilman Jocher gave the Invocation.

The Mayor read the Public Announcement in which he stated that the Special Meeting has been advertised, the press notified, and the notice posted on the bulletin board in the Municipal Building.

The Mayor announced that the meeting was being held in conjunction with the EH Community Partnership Board of Directors and Stakeholders of the Special Improvement District.

**DISCUSSION: Special Improvement District (S.I.D.)**

Mario Accumanno, business owner at 4 Merry Lane and president of the EH Business Association expressed concerns in regard to his as well as other smaller businesses in the Merry Lane complex. Basically, they have lost their voice due to lack of representation on the Board. Mr. Accumanno specifically noted there was pending legislation that would allow businesses to vote for retaining or disbanding a special improvement district. He also submitted a proposed plan to the Council to disband the S.I.D.

Mr. Accumanno was adamant that the S.I.D. should end and phase IV not even be considered. His justification was that phase IV had proposed improvements to schools, municipal building, and Kitchell Church; there were no businesses that would benefit. Mr. Accumanno also voiced concerns on behalf of some fifty businesses that also shared his opinion and felt it was the Council's authority to end it.

Ralph Politi, Jr., president of the EH Community Partnership, read a letter for the record basically providing background data since his appointment to the Board (see attached). Referenced in Mr. Politi's letter was a proposed plan to continue the assessment until the Novartis prepaid agreement was up in 2015, then reduce the assessment by 90% to a maintenance tax, and promote a business website so that all businesses would profit. He felt if it ended now, monies would have to be returned to businesses as well as the prepaid assessment to Novartis.

Obviously, there was much dissension and animosity between former president Mario Accumanno and current president Ralph Politi, Jr., who both disrupted the meeting repeatedly in a disorderly manner.

## **Public Input:**

1. Ron Russo, business owner at 440 DeForest Avenue, basically asked for the Council's direction whether to continue or disband the S.I.D.
2. Carl Vidal, 354 Ridgedale Avenue, commended Ralph Politi for his work on the Board. He said that he would be disappointed if the S.I.D. ended at this point. Mr. Vidal was of the opinion that the businesses on Route 10 were due improvements that were in the original plan.
3. Ken Hadley, 157 River Road, Board of Education member, explained that the schools were not in a position to fund any improvements at the present time.
4. Julius Gaida, business owner at 14 Merry Lane, voiced concerns of the financial difficulties that he has encountered in these tough economic times. He spoke in favor of disbanding the S.I.D. since he believed that businesses on Merry Lane did not benefit from the program.
5. Charles Napoli, Board member and business owner at Merry Lane and Eagle Rock Avenue, was not at first in favor of the S.I.D. However, after completion of improvements and noticing a change of aesthetics on Ridgedale Avenue, he was proud to be involved with the program. Mr. Napoli felt that this has only enhanced the community and has contributed to the value of both residential and commercial property.
6. John Deep, 3 Gregory Lane, member of EH Historical Society, chairman of EH Environmental Commission, and former member of EH Community Partnership, said that he joined the Board because of the ongoing conflict and felt he could offer a residential perspective. Also, his main concern was that taxpayers would not be burdened. Although there have been misunderstandings and controversy, Mr. Deep felt there were significant achievements. He was of the opinion that the S.I.D. should wind down slowly but not move forward with the next phase. Mr. Deep believed that everyone on the Board essentially had the same goal, i.e., to reduce the overall assessment tax of the commercial property owners, yet have enough money to sustain the services for a long time so that the taxpayers do not have to pick up the expenses.
7. Dr. John Graeber, business owner at 470 Ridgedale Avenue, first mentioned that from the onset the Board was marred by antagonism and did not represent the stakeholders of the S.I.D. Also, nothing has been achieved to develop business during one of the greatest recessions in our lifetime. Dr. Graeber opined that the Board was a total failure because of two people that bring political agendas and personal vendettas to the Board and the Township. He said the focus should be on business development, which cannot be accomplished by the present Board. Dr. Graeber suggested that the current Board resign, and the Council appoint individuals that want to work together for the betterment of the community.
8. Property Manager of Berkeley Plaza, 434 Ridgedale Avenue, was disappointed that the S.I.D. did not address a serious parking problem at the shopping complex.
9. Lori Smith, owner of a small family-owned business, commented that her business did not benefit from the S.I.D. and could not continue to afford the assessments.

10. Mario Accumanno spoke about the contention with Mr. Politi at the time when they were both on the Board, as well as a litigation matter.

11. Art Dorey, Board member, was of the opinion that the discord on the Board must end in order for everyone to work together in an attempt to bring about a resolution.

12. Lois Sullivan, 4 Courter Lane, commented on the sidewalks in front of the school and municipal building.

13. Frank Laracca, 19 Wilson Avenue West, addressed concerns in regard to the overall structure of an “unproductive” Board, personality conflicts, and lack of representation of stakeholders at the Board meetings. Mr. Laracca also spoke adversely of Mr. Politi’s leadership on the Board.

In conclusion, Councilman Jocher recommended input from Council President Jandoli, Board liaison, before proceeding in this matter. The Mayor and Council were in agreement.

Motion by Councilman Peluso, seconded by Councilman Jocher to adjourn the special meeting.

Ayes: Councilmen Peluso, Jocher, Tedesco, and Mayor Pannullo

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

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Paula A. Massaro  
Township Clerk

**MINUTES ADOPTED ON** \_\_\_\_\_