

SPECIAL MEETING OF COUNCIL
Monday, August 18, 2003 at 7:00 P.M.

A Special Meeting of Mayor and Council was held, Monday, August 18, 2003, Mayor Ingemi presiding.

ROLL CALL

Members of Council answering roll call were Councilpersons: Bertino, Clark, Morano, Olivo, S. Lewis. Absent: Chiofalo.

PRESENT ALSO

Frank Olivo, Town Solicitor

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

MAYOR'S STATEMENT

This meeting has been properly posted on the bulletin board reserved for such notices on the first floor of the Town Hall and mailed to two newspapers pursuant to law. Please familiarize yourselves with the fire exit drawing to the rear of the Council Chambers. Also, there is to be no smoking in the Town Hall at any time.

REASON FOR MEETING

To discuss and possibly act on placing a public question on the November 4, 2003 General Election Ballot.

Councilperson Bertino Recused

Councilperson Bertino recused himself.

Suspend Rules of Council - Specifically Rule #3 Voting

Motion by Councilperson Olivo, seconded by Councilperson S. Lewis, suspend Rule #3 of the Rules of Council adopted on January 1, 2003.

ROLL CALL - Yeas: Clark, Morano, Olivo, S. Lewis and Mayor Ingemi.
Nays: None.
Recused: Bertino.
Absent: Chiofalo.

Mayor Ingemi declared the motion carried.

PUBLIC HEARD

Mayor Ingemi invited input from Council and the public for this portion of the meeting.

Councilperson S. Lewis

Councilperson S. Lewis stated she feels Mayor and Council have made a decision concerning placement of new town hall site and they should not change that decision now. She questioned polling the public after the decision has been made. She further stated she feels this meeting is an attempt to resurrect the brewery site and any decision to do so will be overruling Mayor and Council's decision to place the new town hall at the Vine Street site.

Councilperson Olivo

Councilperson Olivo agreed with Councilperson S. Lewis. He recalled the public imploring Mayor and Council to "just pick a site." He recalled Mayor and Council meeting on several occasions to discuss purchasing price quotes on each location. He also reminded everyone that the Brewery vs. Vine Street sites were not significant cost differences. He also stated that he heard many of those citizens who signed the petition that requested a public referendum were not fully informed. He finished by stating he feels that the majority of people truly want town hall at the Vine Street site.

Councilperson Morano

Councilperson Morano stated he does not agree with Councilperson Olivo on the price difference between the Brewery and Vine Street sites not being significant. He further stated that when he arrived on Council he only had three sites to choose from. His opinion is that building on town owned property would be significantly lower in cost to the taxpayers.

Chris Baylinson - Attorney for Concerned Citizens of Hammonton

Mr. Baylinson stated he submitted a petition with approximately 20 percent of registered voters to put Brewer vs. Vine Street site on ballot. He is here this evening to make sure that each vote rendered by Mayor and Council is a valid vote. He also stated he felt there were more conflicts of interest here than just Councilperson Bertino.

Frank Olivo, Town Solicitor, responded to Mr. Baylinson, that Councilperson Olivo's property is not located on the current Vine Street site that Mayor and Council voted on.

Mr. Baylinson further stated that there is a significant showing of public interest to place a question on the ballot, per the petition submitted this evening.

Councilperson Morano questioned the Deputy Clerk as to what the petition reads.

The Deputy Clerk read as follows: "PETITION TO ALLOW THE VOTERS TO SELECT THE SITE FOR THE NEW TOWN HALL. We, the undersigned Taxpayers of the Town of Hammonton, ask the Hammonton Town Council to allow the voters of Hammonton to decide whether the new Town Hall will be located at the Brewery site or the Vine Street site." The Deputy Clerk further stated that there are approximately 1298 signatures on this petition. However, she did not have time to properly inspect same as it was just handed to her prior to this meeting.

Frank Olivo, Solicitor, once again reminded everyone that Mayor and Council does not need a petition to place a non-binding referendum question on November's General Election Ballot due to the form of government of the Town of Hammonton. Hammonton's form of government does not allow us to hold binding referendums. Solicitor further stated that Council may consider placing that question or any question on the ballot for this November.

Judy Domenico - French Street - School Board Member

Ms. Domenico stated she does not agree with Mayor and Council concerning the Board of Education sacrificing the Linda Avenue and/or White Horse Pike properties for the new Town Hall. She feels the Town owns property that can be utilized for the purpose of placing the new town hall. She further questioned Mayor and Council that if they do place a public question on ballot, are they prepared to follow the view of the voters? If not, what is the purpose of this meeting?

The Solicitor responded, once again, that a non-binding referendum does not bind Mayor and Council to that decision.

Councilperson Olivo concurred with Ms. Domenico in that there is no reason for placing a question on ballot at this point. He felt once the Vine Street decision was made on July 14th it was over and Mayor and Council were going to move forward.

Jeanne Mazzeo - Broadway

Mrs. Mazzeo stated she respects Ms. Domenico's opinion. She stated that she voted for Mayor and Council, they made a decision on July 14th and the public should respect that decision as the public's voice. She further stated that her own mother signed the petition just because someone asked her to. She finished by stating to Mayor and Council that if this is all because of cost, then Mayor and Council should go to a free location.

Bob Salvo - N. Second Street

Mr. Salvo stated he does not care who owns property or where, he strongly feels the town hall belongs here in town. He stated town hall is the anchor of the community as well as the town.

Frank Mazza - Business Owner

Mr. Mazza stated he agrees with Mayor and Council as he realizes 50 percent of their decisions will be viewed as wrong. However, he stated that Mayor and Council made a decision and they should stay with that decision.

Nelson Johnson, Esq.

Mr. Johnson stated he too is a traditionalist. He sees the people walk or drive to town hall, the post office, the shops in town, the school across the street. He stated that this is the heart of our community and moving town hall will have a negative impact on the surrounding properties.

He urged Mayor and Council to stay with their decision to locate the new town hall at Vine Street.

Robert Weatherbee - Liberty Street

Mr. Weatherbee stated that if Mayor and Council change their decision now, he will lose faith in them.

Anthony Mortellite - Broadway

Mr. Mortellite stated specifically to Mrs. Mazzeo that he explained the petition in detail to her mother. He strongly stated he did not misinform her.

Mrs. Mazzeo responded to Mr. Mortellite that she did not say her mother was misinformed, she said her mother just signed the petition for no reason.

Mr. Mortellite then requested Mayor and Council to go to a cheaper site, wherever that may be.

Councilperson Olivo

Councilperson Olivo questioned Mr. Baylinson who he represents?

Mr. Baylinson responded, the Concerned Citizens of Hammonton.

David Rizzotte

Mr. Rizzotte advised the public that when the school board was approached by Council concerning the Linda Avenue and White Horse Pike properties, the school needed to put properties in a 5 year facility plan. He stated he is not against a public question, however, he requested Mayor and Council that should they place a question on the ballot they should not limit the selection to only Brewery vs. Vine Street.

Glen Davis - 429 Bellevue Avenue

Mr. Davis brought to everyone's attention an article he read concerning certain properties of linen business owners being contaminated. He further stated the Brewery site is EPA approved.

Councilperson Morano

Councilperson Morano stated his total outlook on this issue is economics. He advised Mayor and Council that he had the opportunity to be on the outside looking in as a taxpayer as he was only appointed to Council recently. He does not want to place additional expense on taxpayers as the school is still financially unstable. Again, he stated if we can save 2-3 million it is worth placing on ballot. If the people vote for Vine Street then that would end it.

John Rodio - Golf Drive

Mr. Rodio stated that Mayor and Council should look into changing the Town's Charter so that the Town of Hammonton can have binding referendums that allow the people to actually be heard and have their votes count.

Angela Donio - Tilton Street

Mrs. Donio stated we elect Mayor and Council and expect them to make decisions for us. Her family is definitely concerned with the downtown area and she has received a Mayor's award for her work downtown. She stated she did not see all this interest from the start while others, like herself, have been involved from the onset. She further stated she wants to publicly clear up rumors that she owned properties at the Vine Street location. She also wanted to advise everyone that she heard from a good source that this petition was being circulated through the bingo hall and it just said "no to higher taxes."

Anthony Mortellite - Broadway

Mr. Mortellite stated that is untrue.

Trina Scipione - Maple Street

Ms. Scipione stated that she owns a deli in town and feels the town hall and police department should not be moved. She feels the town hall location brings business to shop owners and feels safe with the police nearby.

Sal Mazza - Moss Mill Road

Mr. Mazza questioned, is it true that the town has to relocate the properties that the town hall will be placed on?

Solicitor responded there is a State law that mandates tenants receive assistance in moving to new locations. There are differences for residential and commercial. The Town would pick up actual expense of moving business. Potentially, you have those issues everywhere. Therefore, before you define site location, you cannot come up with prices.

Chris Baylinson

Mr. Baylinson stated there is a fixed cost for Brewery site and it appears to be a more ascertainable site.

Councilperson Olivo

Councilperson Olivo responded that the Brewery is assessed at \$595,000 and is asking \$850,000. Argumentatively costs are estimates at best.

Nelson Johnson

Mr. Johnson questioned how will Mayor and Council place a public question on ballot if they cannot give the people a true cost?

Sal Mazza - Moss Mill Road

Mr. Mazza requested Mayor and Council to place town owned properties on ballot if they vote to hold a referendum.

Councilperson Olivo

Councilperson Olivo reminded everyone that one criteria Mayor and Council looked at was the town hall location. He stated that he too was trying to split up town hall offices. Upon investigating same, he found that other municipalities were very sorry they split their municipal building in such a way. Further, other municipalities don't have the feel of a warm town as we do here in Hammonton.

Sam Maimone

Mr. Maimone stated to Mayor and Council if they choose to place a question on ballot, they can't just give the public 2 sites to choose from.

Motion to Place a Public Question on November 4, 2003 General Election Ballot

Motion by Councilperson Clark, seconded by Councilperson Morano, to place a public question on November 4, 2003 General Election Ballot concerning the placement of a town hall site.

ROLL CALL - Yeas: Clark, Morano, and Mayor Ingemi.
Nays: Chiofalo (Proxy vote), Olivo and S. Lewis.
Recused: Bertino.

Mayor Ingemi declared the motion defeated.

ADJOURN

Motion by Councilperson Olivo, seconded by Councilperson S. Lewis, the meeting be adjourned. Motion carried.

April Boyer Maimone, Deputy Clerk