

COMMERCIAL TOWNSHIP
EXECUTIVE SESSION
JANUARY 18, 2024

Minutes of Executive Session interrupting the Regular Township Meeting of January 18, 2024, of the Township Committee of the Township of Commercial in the Township Hall, 1768 Main Street, Port Norris, NJ

Those Present:

Ronald Sutton Sr.	Mayor
Joseph Klaudi	Deputy Mayor
Mike Vizzard	Committeeman
Thomas Seeley	Solicitor
Heather Miller	Township Clerk
Dan Chelius	Code Enforcement Officer
Clint Miller	Public Works Supervisor

Mayor Sutton informed the public that the committee was going into an executive session and that when the committee reconvened the regular meeting, they would be called back into the meeting room.

A motion was made by Committeeman Vizzard and seconded by Committeeman Klaudi to go into executive session.

Solicitor Seeley wanted to start out by talking to Dan. He asked Dan if he was familiar with the Whitmarsh properties.

Solicitor Seeley stated that Dan and Clint are out and about and see the most with different properties and that they were going to have to prioritize. We have some horrible, deplorable housing conditions. How many do we have on this list, 11.

Clint Miller asked if they were all structures. She stated that a couple are just land but there are several where someone is living.

Solicitor Seeley asked the Committee and Dan, what do we want to do first.

Dan Chelius stated that he would like to start with the worst ones first.

Solicitor Seeley said or do we do more by boarding up and posting abandoned property.

Dan Chelius asked how do you get rid of squatters.

Clint Miller said that's the problem, boarding them up doesn't do much because they just pull the boards off.

Solicitor Seeley asked what is a rough estimate to how many houses in Commercial Township are abandoned.

Clint Miller said he had no idea, a lot.

Dan Chelius said its not just Laurel Lake there are a lot in Port Norris too.

Solicitor Seeley said that's the problem.

Mayor Sutton said he figures 80-100. Mayor said what they really want to do is because it is near impossible to deal with them all. It would take more than 5 years for that. Let's just look at the Byron Whitmarsh properties that no one is squatting in, that can't be lived in, so we can get that assessment off the books.

Solicitor Seeley said let's talk about cost. Everyone says we can put it as a lien against the property, but we are never going to get that money back.

Committeeman Vizzard said but we are still going to file the lien against the property.

Solicitor Seeley said we can file the lien, but we will never get the money back.

Committeeman Vizzard said the reality is it is relatively cheap to tear down a trailer.

Solicitor Seeley asked what is relatively cheap.

Committeeman Vizzard speculated maybe \$2,000 to include labor.

The conversation continued as to what is involved in the demo process, time and cost calculations.

Committeeman Vizzard said he believed there was \$33,000 set aside for demolitions now.

Clint Miller suggested looking to do 6-8 properties a year.

Solicitor Seely asked if we want to focus on the squatter properties. The consensus was no. It's easier to deal with abandoned properties.

Mayor Sutton said right now, we are concerned with the Bryon Whitmarsh properties. We want to deal with the ones that no one is living in so we can get the assessment of the tax books.

The was a brief review of the properties on the list to identify that ones that could be dealt with now.

The clerk pointed out that we do not own any of these properties, they are all still owned by Bryon Whitmarsh and to demo, a demo hearing would be required.

Solicitor Seeley briefly went over the demo hearing process.

Committeeman Vizzard wanted clarification on who condemns the home. He is under the impression that it is the construction official.

Solicitor Seeley confirmed that it is the construction official that would have to deem the house a safety hazard.

The clerk asked if anything can be done about the people living in these properties.

Dan Chelius said that 208 is really bad. It gets worse ever time he goes by it.

The clerk stated these properties have people living in them, they aren't paying taxes on them, we can't foreclose on them because there are federal liens, they aren't responding to violation notices.

Solicitor Seeley said we can't get squatters out because we don't own it.

The clerk stated there is nothing we can do.

Committeeman Vizzard said Dan still needs to write the tickets and keep a paper trail on them.

Solicitor Seeley said Bill can condemn the house, he can post stickers. Do you think they would leave if you put stickers on it.

The consensus was probably not.

There was a brief discussion on how difficult it is dealing with squatters, getting service and that is on properties that we own.

Solicitor Seeley stated that we can do a condemnation hearing on the vacant houses, if no one responds, we can tear the house down, but we still will not own them until a foreclosure can be done. The lien will remain on the property.

Mayor Sutton suggested that Dan get with Bill White and come up with a list of a half dozen properties that can be deemed hazards and we will have the condemnation hearing to get these places down. The mayor stated that we can also start by getting the ones we own cleaned up.

Clint Miller said he didn't think we had many with homes on them. It may only be 2 or 3.

The clerk stated that a lot of them have been taken down and we haven't acquired anything new because there haven't been any foreclosures in several years.

Solicitor Seeley said that the demolition hearing will require certified mailings and there will be a cost associated with the demo hearings. Mr. Seeley suggested starting with what ones the township owns.

Mayor Sutton asked about the Givens property on Lakeshore that had the boat. He wants to see that one on the demolition hearing list.

Clint Miller said we don't own it, a woman that lives out of the country owns it.

The clerk asked if multiple homes can go through a demo hearing at once.

Solicitor Seeley said yes and that could save some money. He suggests finding out how many structures we own and starting with those.

Committeeman Vizzard said he agreed.

Clint Miller reiterated that it wasn't that many.

There was further discussion on cost. Clint Miller said they can use the derelict housing and it really isn't that much.

Solicitor Seeley said that he was only concerned about cost because most municipalities go out to bid for that work and its usually thousands of dollars.

Clint Miller said the only time there is a real cost is if there is asbestos involved.

Committeeman Vizzard asked Dan how many tickets per court session is the court restricting him to.

Dan Chelius said he really didn't know.

Committeeman Vizzard said he was sure, but he was told 30 a week.

Clint Miller asked Dan to explain how he handles it at the court.

Dan Chelius said that he mostly goes before the prosecutor. There are going to be some cases where he has to go before the judge. If there are three no shows it becomes a warrant, then trial.

Solicitor Seeley explained how the court process typically works.

Mayor asked for a motion to close the executive session.

Committeeman Klaudi made the motion and was seconded by Committeeman Vizzard.
Roll call, all were in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,



Heather Miller, Township Clerk