

Fairness In Taxes

Meeting Minutes 03-01-17

Board Attendance: Bill & Sheila Hartranft, Marie & Dave Hayes, Don Kerns, Michael Hinchman, Vic Staniec & Jim Tweed

Meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:00 P.M. with welcome by Jim Tweed.

January minutes approved with no changes.

Treasurer – Bill Hartranft

- \$4,465.00 in dues have been collected so far for 2017.
- Savings account balance is \$15,955.00 and CD's are at \$12,688.00.
- Letters regarding questions to city council and regarding the candidate search for a new FIT president sent out; 445 via e-mail and 440 via snail mail.
- Recommend that we send some kind of response when notified of a members passing.
- Working on plans for our table at Spring Fest in May.
- There is no OC Flooding update at this time.

President – Jim Tweed

- Questions to city council have been disseminated to all members via newsletter and the web site.
- As had been requested by Keith Hartzell, questions were submitted to council and they responded, though some felt the responses were non-answers and raised more questions. Approximately 10 responses were received from FIT members so far. Recommend a meeting with the committee to categorize, add and re-submit to council.
- Michael Hinchman was asked if it was too soon to talk about the city budget and responded yes. Their budget meeting will be on Thursday, March 9th and he recommended that as many board members as possible attend.

Education – Vic Staniec

- The hearing for Christine Lentz regarding the charges brought against her is scheduled for September 11, 2017.
- School budget not looking good. There were lots of increases; utilities are at 189k+, Air Conditioning for the primary school is \$171k+, and they are acquiring a new phone system. Personnel is up to 32m,913k with a 1.43% increase in salaries.
- State has audited tuitions. Upper Township had fallen behind their payments to OC by 2m+ which has been paid. This year only \$20,000 will be collected from them.
- Fund balance is at 1.6m; \$40,200.00 from 2014-15, \$911,000 from 2015-16 and \$339,000 from 2016-17.
- High school tuition is \$15,489.00 per student.
- They are seriously considering solar panels for the high school, but they will need to replace the roof as well if they go forward. Michael Hinchman asked if they did an analysis on initial cost vs payback. A proposal for solar panels was submitted.
- In the annual rating for school districts OC came in 177th; received B+ for academics and A+ for athletics. Mainland Regional was ranked 89th. Vic noted that on realtor sites such as Zillow rate the districts 0-10 (0 Lowest, 10 highest) broken down by school; Cape May Vocational rated 10, Mainland Regional rated 7, Egg Harbor Township & OC rated 5 and Pleasantville was rated 1. This is a sampling for our area.
- Students must take the PAARC test unless they have taken SATS or ACTS. Dr. Taylor explained they cannot force students to take the test. New Jersey, however, is the only state that requires they take the PAARC test to graduate. A comment from the audience was that this forces teachers to teach to the test and diminishes the ability to be creative.

City Revenue & Expenditures – Michael Hinchman

- The mayor has said that the budget will be up 4-5m this year. The presentation will be at the council meeting on March 9, 2017. Until they have their presentation, it is too soon to do an analysis.
- Michael feels that the city is not doing value spending.
- The number of city employees is now at 258; the low was 234.
- The original estimate to replace the public safety building stood at 9m. It was pushed to 2018 and now is estimated at 17 1/2m to refurbish the building and add an extension. Another \$150,000 is earmarked for landscaping. Why? Is there too much waste?
- Jim Tweed asked how can FIT as an organization help. Michael's response; hold me to task, do research throughout the state for comparable spending comparing costs and methods, do OPRA requests, attend council meetings and ask the city to enforce the existing ordinances. Also recommended we do public education ads.

Guest Speakers Committee – Marie Hayes

- A representative from the American Littoral Society gave a presentation at the February 1st FIT meeting. He provided lots of information and stressed the need to plan. The press was on hand and wrote a full page on the presentation, which was very heartening.
- Dr. Abernathy, Assistant Professor of Political Sciences will be our guest for the April 4th meeting. The focus of the presentation will be good government practices. She has been offered \$100.00 to speak. Sheila Hartranft moved to accept and Bill Hartranft seconded the motion. Unanimously carried.

Web Communication Committee – Dave Hayes

- There is good representation of FIT on all sites.
- Have not been able to have direct contact with Jim Rudolph; if not successful then we should move to Plan B, set up a new web site.

Miscellaneous Items – Jim Tweed

- Recommend we all keep him posted on responses to questions to council. Will require more work, but we it will provide us with a written record of everything.
- An audience member commented that we need to work on getting more people (members) involved.
- There was also a comment about law suits against the city. OC has a reputation for "just settling". It was thought perhaps they should consider not settling in every instance. It was also felt that they should disclose the amount of the settlements to the public.

New Business – Michael Hinchman

- Regarding the plan for EZ Pass on the Ocean Drive bridges, we should consider asking the county to explain why more fully. It was voted on 5-1 in favor.
- Recommend that we put a referendum together to control the height of new construction.

Adjourned 8:55 P.M.

The next meeting (s) is scheduled for Wednesday, April 4, 2017, 7:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by:
Sheila Hartranft, Secretary