THURSDAY, AUGUST 3, 2023, MOUNT EPHRAIM COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES MEETING HELD IN BOROUGH HALL MEETING ROOM

MEETING CALL TO ORDER/OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS STATEMENT

Mayor Tovinsky called the meeting to order at 7:00pm with the "Pledge of Allegiance". He announced that this meeting was posted in accordance with the "Open Public Meetings Act" and proper notice of this meeting was made.

ROLL CALL

The Clerk called the roll with Commissioner Gies, Commissioner Wolk and Mayor Tovinsky present. Also in attendance for the Borough were Clerk Shannon, Solicitor Justin Strausser and Engineer Greg Fusco from KEI Engineers.

APPROVAL OF RESOLUTION

Resolution 23-70, Appointing Christopher Badecki as a Patrolman to the Mt. Ephraim Police Department, was approved on a motion by Commissioner Gies, second by Commissioner Wolk, and with the following poll vote: Gies-yes; Wolk-yes; Tovinsky-yes. Mayor Tovinsky administered the Oath of Office to Officer Badecki.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mayor Tovinsky announced that the May 23, 2023, Caucus and June 1, 2023, Commission meeting minutes were submitted for review and approval. On a motion by Commissioner Gies, second by Commissioner Wolk, the minutes were approved with all present in favor.

APPROVAL OF VOUCHERS

Mayor Tovinsky announced that vouchers in the amount of $1,606,566.04 were submitted for approval. On a motion by Commissioner Gies, second by Commissioner Wolk, the vouchers as submitted were approved with the following poll vote: Gies-yes, Wolk-yes, Tovinsky-yes.

ORDINANCES FOR INTRODUCTION ON FIRST READING

The Clerk read the following ordinances by title:

Ord. 2023-13 Ordinance Amending the Code of the Borough of Mount Ephraim to Include New Chapter 307 Entitled, "Privately-owned Salt Storage"

Ord. 2023-14 Amending the Borough Code to Include New Chapter 404 Entitled, "Tree Removal and Replacement"

She stated these are mandated ordinance that were sent by NJDEP to every municipality in the state and we have to adopt them.

On a motion by Commissioner Gies, second by Commissioner Wolk, Ordinances 2023-13 and 2023-14 were approved on first reading. Mayor Tovinsky announced they would be considered for adoption following proper notice and a public hearing to be held during the September 7, 2023, commission meeting.

RESOLUTIONS FOR APPROVAL BY CONSENT AGENDA

The Clerk read the following Resolutions by title for approval by Consent Agenda:

23-66 Cancelling Taxes and Liens on Borough Owned Property

23-67 Authorizing the Tax Collector to Extend the Grace Period for 3rd Quarter Taxes
23-68 Cancelling Taxes for a Totally Disabled Veteran
23-69 Cancelling Taxes for a Totally Disabled Veteran
23-71 Approving a Handicapped Parking Spot at 42 Valley Road
23-72 Appropriating Items of Revenue and Expense for Grant Received ($600,000 for Bell Road)
23-73 Authorizing Transfer of Vehicle No Longer Needed to Bellmawr

On a motion by Commissioner Gies, second by Commissioner Wolk, the resolution consent agenda was approved with the following poll vote: Gies-yes, Wolk-yes, Tovinsky-yes.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS BY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Gies read a letter he received from Deptford Chief Paul Madina, wherein he thanked the governing body for allowing the Mount Ephraim Police Department to provide coverage for Deptford during the funeral for Officer Shisler. He specifically thanked Chief Conte for his leadership and support during this difficult time for the Deptford Police Department. Commissioner Gies then read highlights from the July report from the police department. He reported they had 608 calls for service and he read the breakdown of calls. They made 50 car stops and issued 64 motor vehicle summonses. They served 27 warrants and had 33 adult arrests. He read highlights of the charges. They had three juvenile arrests for the month. He then read the court report for June reporting they turned $2,639.64 over to the borough. He does not have the fire department report because they are in Florida checking out the new truck. Mayor Tovinsky added the company flew them down to look at the truck at no cost to the borough. They fly back tomorrow.

Commissioner Wolk read the Tax Collector's report for July reporting total collections for July were $1,026,261.13 and there was one lien redemption totaling $3,064.87. He added Cops and Bobbers was very nice and he thanked Chief Conte and the police department for that event.

Engineer Greg Fusco reported that the final overlay for Lake Street is scheduled for next week, weather permitting. Also, the contractor for the intersection of Harding and Linwood will be doing his work in the next few weeks.

Mayor Tovinsky read highlights from the Construction Office report for July reporting they issued 17 permits for July bringing in $2,883 in fees; two vacant property registrations for $2,500; and seven resale CO's for $840. For Public Works, single stream recycling was 59,820 pounds and trash tonnage was 169 tons at a cost of $15,217.98. They picked up 6640 pounds of metal for $531, ran the street sweeper for the July 4 parade, put out all the barricades and broke down after the parade, and helped the schools with the disposal of mulch. Tuesday night (Cops and Bobbers) was awesome—lots of kids with smiles on their faces. Chief Conte does a great job with his force on that event.

Clerk Shannon added that outside of the consent agenda, we have one more resolution. We received the resignation of the fire sub-code official and need to appoint an acting sub-code official for a term of 60 days. That resolution will be 23-74, Appointing Keith Knight as the Acting Sub-Code Official. On a motion by Commissioner Gies, second by Commissioner Wolk, that resolution was approved with the following poll vote: Gies-yes; Wolk-yes; Tovinsky-yes. This will be a 60-day appointment until a permanent appointment can be made.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mayor Tovinsky opened the meeting to the public and asked that residents state their name for the record.

Present was Sue Carney from Valley Road who thanked Chief Conte for the handicapped parking spot for her husband who is a 100% disabled veteran. They really appreciate it.

Also present was Teresa Malek from Bell Road who said she has two 10x10 sheds that have been there for 20 years and she wants to replace them with one 10x20 shed. She needs to know why it needs to be 20 feet away from her house. Mayor Tovinsky said that needs to go before the Land Use Board. Malek also asked why she needs a demolition permit and the Mayor again stated she needs to go before the Land Use Board on the 14th to ask those questions. Malek said "nothing gets accomplished here" and Mayor Tovinsky responded we do not know all of the laws. That is why you have to go to the Land Use Board.

Theresa Armbruster thanked the governing body for the speed sign on her street—it is making a difference but there are still speeders. She asked for more police presence during the day and to start giving out speeding tickets. Chief Conte said we can detail someone to do radar on 4th Avenue. She added that the July 4 parade was excellent.

Kerry Kelly from Davis Avenue said the strip behind her townhouse is out of control. The potholes she can barely make it through, and also the overgrown grass. We have parking problems and there is no reason parking is only on one side of the street. There are people living in the ten townhomes and the street is wide so there is no reason there isn't parking on both sides. She can't have relatives to her home because there is nowhere to park. She has spoken to everybody including the state and the county and no one has an answer. Someone has to own it and take care of it. Mayor Tovinsky said it is not our property. Kelly raised her voice and said someone has to take care of it! Solicitor Strausser asked her to calm down and she responded with don't tell her to calm down. She said it is up to the township to take care of the property. If the police and fire had to respond to an emergency, they would not be able to get through. She is paying over $6,000 in taxes and has no property compared to what she had in Deptford. The back of her house is a disgrace. The potholes are at least four feet deep. Mayor Tovinsky responded that legally we cannot go back there because it is Conrail's property. Kelly asked that the lawyer contact Conrail to ask them to take care of it. Kelly continued to yell at the governing body the same complaints. Solicitor Strausser responded that his office will send a strongly worded letter to Conrail. Kelly yelled that you are just trying to placate me. You have all lied to me in the past. Solicitor Strausser told her her five minutes are up. Kelly responded she has another issue. When she bought the house, a CO was done on her property and there have been a lot of problems since she moved in. She wants to know how to file a complaint about the CO process. She bought a house that had thousands of dollars worth of work that needed to be done. Mayor Tovinsky told her to file a complaint with Tara.

Also present was Chris Oliver from 5th Avenue. He said his jaw hit the floor when he opened his tax bill. He has been here since 2008 and his taxes have nearly doubled. He said he reviewed the municipal budget and the commission has cited increased operating costs, increase trash costs and he understands all of that. Costs have increased for all of us. But his question is what has been done to curtail some of the budgetary problems. For instance, our Public Works department has a director, a superintendent and an assistant superintendent. We have a business administrator in our schools making over $100,000, a school superintendent making $150,000. Commissioner Gies interrupted telling him he has to go to the school board about that. Oliver continued saying our police department is a huge part of our budget. We have a police chief, a police captain, a police secretary, two sergeants (but I think it is actually three), eight full-time officers and two part-time officers. I respect the police and the work they do. My interactions with the department have shown them to be professional, capable and courteous. Why in a one square mile town, with eight full-time officers and two part-time officers, are we so top heavy in supervision and administration? The sergeants, the captain and the chief are almost $600,000 per year. It seems that there are certain things in the budget that are within your control. He said that when last year you ran out of your fuel budget, what did you do to curtail those costs? Mayor Tovinsky said we stopped unnecessary use of vehicles unless it was an emergency. Oliver said maybe it

was not the best time to be spending $750,000 on a fire truck. Mayor Tovinsky responded we have a five-year capital budget that we go by, and it was time to do that. Oliver asked that there be cutbacks and consolidation in administration to share some of that burden. Any pro-active measures by the governing body will go a long way with the residents. Mayor Tovinsky explained that in Public Works, we have a superintendent who makes $82,000, a part-time superintendent from Bellmawr, who has licenses that our guy does not have, who only makes $6,958 and me as the director who makes $4,750 for being mayor and public works director. The total is $94,000. We have five full-time employees who have a contract and get benefits. We are down by two and haven't hired anybody to hold costs down. We are using five part-time guys to cover who get no benefits and only $16 per hour. That is how we are keeping costs down for Public Works. Oliver said maybe if we didn't have a police chief and a police captain, we could have an extra officer on the street. Maybe cutbacks need to be considered to ease the tax burden on the taxpayers. In a one-square mile town, I really question why with eight full-time officers, we need a chief, a captain and a secretary. It is great that we have a detective who is not burdened with patrol duties but why does he need to be a sergeant? We are very top heavy with supervision in these departments. He does not want an adversarial relationship—he is just looking for solutions. He sees a new police was hired tonight and he wishes him a safe, healthy and prosperous career.

Kerry Kelly again asked about the parking on Davis Avenue. It is plenty wide enough for parking on both sides. Mayor Tovinsky said we will look into that. Kelly also said that the stretch from Kings Highway at the stop sign is yellow the whole way. It is about 40-50 feet of no parking. Chief Conte said that is supposed to be fifty feet because of the stop sign.

Rachel Bendorf from 4th Avenue said she was also shocked when she opened her tax bill. She moved in 2015 and has made a lot of improvements to her home. There is another house on her block that is similar to hers and is paying over $3,000 less than she is. I am one of the highest on the block. Mayor Tovinsky said she can talk to our assessor about filing an appeal. Clerk Shannon added that although she will have to wait until next year to file the appeal, she can at least talk to the assessor to find our why her taxes are so different from the other property. She will take her contact information and have the assessor contact her.

Mayor Tovinsky announced that some of our vacant buildings will be filled soon. The printer place on Valley Road will be a dispensary. Across the street will be a sandwich shop. Next to McDonald's will be a bar going in. The Sacred Heart project is getting new appraisals so they can finalize with the homeowners so hopefully that will be started before the end of the year. We have a commercial building next to the convenience store at Kings Highway and Grant Avenue, that we changed to residential and they remodeled it and it is now rented. The movie theater on Kings Highway, he is still working on that. It was the old Sozzi building. As for the corner property next to the Spread across the street, he is asking for $500,000 and no one wants to buy it because it was a cleaners and the soil will have to be tested.

Sue Carney said she heard that they found buried oil tanks at the Sacred Heart property and asked if there is any truth to that. Mayor Tovinsky responded no—that was all tested and there is no contamination at all. Clerk Shannon added there was previously an underground tank but it was removed by the church.

Stan Witkowski asked about the signs on Kings Highway about construction. Is that about the re-paving of Kings Highway? Chief Conte responded it is a two-year project starting with replacement of the water main. The water main is being replaced first and then they will come in and re-line the sewer main. After that the paving will happen. It will be a two-year project. Mayor Tovinsky added this will not cost us anything because NJAW owns the water and sewer mains. Witkowski then asked what our tax collection rate is and Commissioner Wolk responded it is about 99%. Witkowski said 99% is an excellent rate. He then asked about when the Sacred Heart properties will be transferred to the developer. Mayor Tovinsky said he spoke to the lawyer and they are

working on the closing documents and hope to have it done soon. Mayor Tovinsky added we have six new houses going up on Rudderow and three houses went in on Center Avenue. That is nine more houses to bring in tax money and five vacant buildings that will bring in tax money. Someone compared us to Barrington but look at the commercial rateables they have compared to us. Witkowski said we don't have new revenue sources we can rely on so we ask that when you are working on the budget, you consider that you may have to make changes in how we operate so we don't have these increases. A lot of people are on fixed incomes and we can't rely on additional funding sources. Mayor Tovinsky said we are making cuts—we pushed back air conditioning in the trash trucks to next year's budget because it is very expensive and did not want to add it to this year's budget. We were also supposed to get a new trash truck but that got pushed as well. Our trucks are getting old and are breaking down. We also collect Runnemede's recycling and trash which brings in about $60,000 a year. We are trying through shared services as much as we can.

Teresa Malek asked why we have to pay for the people who don't pay their taxes. Commissioner Wolk explained that we collect for the town, the schools and the county. We have to include a line item for uncollected taxes. If you look at your tax bill, 49% of that goes to pay for the schools. My own tax bill is $9400 and $4500 of that goes to the schools. The borough gets $3024 of his tax bill which is 32%. The rest goes to the county. If you want to complain about your tax bill, you need to go the school board. When the bill comes in for the schools, we have to pay them. We have to have a reserve for uncollected taxes which is required by law. If I want to complain about local taxes, you want to go to a school board meeting. They have administrators, attorneys, engineers and they have a budget. Mayor Tovinsky added we have gotten grants for the past six years to re-do our streets. Go to the school board meetings. Their meeting schedule is on their website.

Seeing no further public comment, on a motion by Commissioner Gies, second by Commissioner Wolk, the public hearing was closed.

On a motion by Commissioner Gies, second by Commissioner Wolk, the meeting was adjourned to closed session at 8:02pm.

Approved: *Terry Shannon*
Terry Shannon, Borough Clerk