

COMMISSIONERS REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
RIDGEFIELD PARK
January 23, 2024
7:30 PM

Mayor Anlian announced that this meeting is being held in accordance with the “Open Public Meeting Act, N.J.S.A. 10 4-6 et seq.” notice of which was sent to the Record, and the Star Ledger on December 29, 2023 and was posted on the Municipal Bulletin Board and Village Website.

This agenda is listed as a courtesy and attempt to inform the public of actions being considered by the Village Board of Commissioners. There may be additions and deletions prior to the Board taking final action. Any action may be taken at any meeting, which includes all Caucus and Regular sessions. The Commissioners reserve the right to conduct and/or attend any meetings presently scheduled for the rest of 2024 by a combination of electronic and/or in-person means. Meetings are open to the public.

ROLL CALL

Those present were Commissioners Gerken, MacNeill, Olson, Portorreal and Mayor Anlian in the chair.

Also, present: Bill Betesh, Village Attorney and Tara O’Grady, Village Clerk

FLAG SALUTE

The flag salute was led by Mayor Anlian.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Commissioner Gerken, seconded by Mayor Anlian to approve the minutes of the Commissioners Regular Meetings of December 12, 2023 and December 26, 2023.

On roll call, Commissioners Gerken, MacNeill and Mayor Anlian voted “YEA”.

Abstain: Commissioners Olson, Portorreal

Motion by Commissioner Gerken, seconded by Mayor Anlian to approve the minutes of the Commissioners Regular and Closed Session Meetings of January 9, 2024.

On roll call, Commissioners Gerken, MacNeill, Olson and Mayor Anlian voted “YEA”.

Abstain: Commissioners Portorreal

CORRESPONDENCE

Ridgefield Park Fire Department Truck Co. No. 2 - Resignation

Motion by Mayor Anlian, seconded by Commissioner Gerken, accept the resignation of Richard Flynn from the Ridgefield Park Volunteer Fire Department with regret.

On roll call, Commissioners Gerken, MacNeill, Olson, Portorreal and Mayor Anlian voted “YEA”.

COMMISSIONERS REPORTS

Commissioner Gerken advised the Village is working on obtaining grants for park improvements.

Commissioner Olson stated 24 people attended the public meeting on the proposed mural for the Rte. 46 underpass. A survey will be going out asking “What story should we tell in this space.”

Commissioner Olson met with Wayne King regarding the demolition of the VFW building.

January 23, 2024

Commissioner Portorreal stated the Letter of Intent is underway for the Veterans Park project. There will be a public meeting on the Veterans Park project – date to be determined.

HEARING OF CITIZENS

Ted Tabasco, resident, asked for an update on the decrease in manpower of the Fire Department. He heard that there are approximately 50 firemen on “leaves of absence”. Mayor Anlian responded manpower is adequate and the number is down to 38 leaves of absences.

Mr. Tabasco asked if Engine 4 is still closed. Mayor Anlian stated they are waiting on a member’s certification.

Mr. Tabasco inquired about the \$118,000.00 consultant’s report on the Fire Department. Mayor Anlian stated it was a general review of all emergency services in town and the report suggests some consolidation. No immediate action has been taken yet and won’t be for several years (5-10 years) due to the Village’s financial obligations right now (CSO, Veterans Park). Senior members of the Fire Department approached the Commissioners in 2019 regarding a centralized firehouse. The Board of Commissioners are not forcing the issue right now. The Rescue Squad is active and working with Bogota. The Ambulance Corps. has been inactive, due to the pandemic, but should be back in service in a few months.

Danny Brink, resident, stated he is a member of Engine 4. He attended the meeting in December with the Mayor, 2 of 3 chiefs and the members of Engine 4. It was stated that as long as the Captain showed proof he took the course, the firehouse could be active. Now that isn’t good enough, the Chiefs want the State certificate. Other individuals have been re-instated by showing proof without a certificate – why is this good for some and not all. Mayor Anlian will contact the Chief.

Mr. Brink stated since membership is low at Engine 4, why aren’t new members assigned there?

Mayor Anlian stated he will check with the Chief on how firemen are allocated.

Tom Christiansen, resident, stated when he was a member of the Fire Department, members picked what firehouse they wanted to join.

Mr. Brink inquired as to why Ridgefield Park requires more training than the State of NJ.

Mayor Anlian stated he can’t answer that. Mr. Brink stated the Mayor can change that. Certain classes are not required by the State but are required for Ridgefield Park. He stated the residents deserve to know this. The Village should go by State requirements only.

Noel Cote, resident, stated tomorrow night there is a meeting at the Civic Center with the Environmental Commission and Sustainable RP to discuss native plants. He stated there should be restrictions and guidelines. There are 3 properties in town that maintain a “native” environment very well while there are 2 that don’t. There should be no planting in the curb strip. Plants, trees tend to overgrow and become a hazard for pedestrians on the sidewalk. Mayor Anlian stated they will take his comments into serious consideration. Commissioner Gerken added the meeting is to focus on the types of plants that will grow in our environment.

Mr. Cote inquired as to why the Village is going to waste time and money on a bridge that is deteriorating very badly. Commissioner Olson stated the DOT has been contacted and said that bridge isn’t on the list to fix for several years. Mr. Cote stated the iron and concrete has not been treated and is rusting and crumbling. This is an expense that is wasteful.

Michelle DeLuca, resident, stated there should be some respect – no shouting back and forth at these meetings. Everyone should work together and get along.

January 23, 2024

Joan Carlson, resident, asked how the decision was made to choose that bridge. Commissioner Olson stated it was suggested 5 years ago by Grant School's PTA. Ms. Carlson stated she heard the cost of the mural is \$23,500. Commissioner Olson stated he is anticipating \$6,600.00. Ms. Carlson stated painting a mural is unnecessary and would rather see repaving of roads that are falling apart, beautifying Main Street and safety hazards in the Village taken care of.

Walter Richter, resident, stated earlier today there were 2 fire calls within 10 minutes of each other. Fire trucks didn't go to the 2nd location right away. They waited until they were done with the first call. There is a shortage of manpower.

Goksin Sensoz, resident, stated there are a lot of front yards that are not maintained and inquired as to why the codes are not enforced. Commissioner MacNeill stated there is a Property Maintenance Official who does enforce the code and writes a lot of tickets. He advised Ms. Sensoz to call the Building Department and report any properties.

Ms. Sensoz stated the port-a-potty at Fellowship is in the same spot all the time and asked if it can be moved from time to time.

Askar Mirza, resident, asked where he can obtain a copy the consultant's report. Mayor Anlian stated the report recommends to consolidate the Fire Department and equipment. He is a traditionalist and likes having 6 companies – it shows community commitment. It is hard to get volunteers – there are 100 members in the Fire Department with some senior members that are no longer active. A new fire engine cost is \$1-\$1.5 million dollars and the Village has been replacing them every 25 years instead of 20 years. This is one reason why the consultant suggests consolidation. The State would prefer all emergency services paid.

Mr. Mirza asked what the Village is going to do about the issue with the "leaves of absence" and was told they are doing their best. Commissioner Gerken advised they continue to look for ways to support the Fire Department – grants, state aid. The town only owns the equipment and pays rent to the firehouses.

Janet Malool, resident, stated she can't wait to get the Ambulance Corps. back. She had to call an ambulance and the response time was unacceptable. Not having a local squad is catastrophic. The Village needs to be prepared if there is an increase in population and the need for emergency services grows.

Chris Santana, Volunteer firefighter, stated he is a member of Hose Co. No. 1. The state does require classes that RP requires. There are 40-year members still going to get certified. Engine 4 is not rolling to calls because there is no one in that company in a leadership roll due to the lack of certification.

Loretta Sanchez, resident, stated perhaps there should be a study done on the cost to hire a full-time Fire Department. There is no one more dedicated than emergency service personnel. It would be in the best interest of RP to have these people on a full-time basis. Mayor Anlian stated the cost would be tremendous. There may be some consolidation of some sort at some point. The Village needs to have volunteers and is proud of our Fire Department.

PUBLIC HEARING

NJ Green Acres Program – Fellowship Park Improvements

The following hearing is being conducted in accordance with regulations promulgated by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program, and in accordance with Jake's Law.

January 23, 2024

Notice, including a display ad, was published in the Village's official newspaper and on the Ridgefield Park website.

Motion by Commissioner Portorreal, seconded by Mayor Anlian to open the public hearing on the NJ Green Acres Program Application for Fellowship Park Improvements. The Public Hearing opened at 8:36 p.m.

On roll call, Commissioners Gerken, MacNeill, Olson, Portorreal and Mayor Anlian voted "YEA".

Noel Cote, resident, stated he went and looked at Fellowship Park and asked for more details about the plan.

Commissioner Portorreal stated that the playground would be renovated with an inclusionary sensory playground, a quiet area and ADA compliancy.

Commissioner Gerken advised funding is available through Jake's Law.

Mr. Cote is in favor of the park improvements.

Janet Malool, resident, stated Fellowship Park is a heavily used park. She would love to see children-size picnic tables added as well as more interactive equipment. She is in favor of the project but asked if there would be any impact to the Community Garden.

Attorney Betesh stated that an environmental impact analysis was prepared, which showed that there would be no adverse effect. The footprint for the playground will be in the same place.

Daina Scheideler, resident, stated this is a great project. The special needs population is increasing in Ridgefield Park. Toms River has a new all-inclusive playground and suggested the Commissioners to go see it.

Goksin Sensoz, resident, stated she is in favor of the project and suggested additional sitting areas be placed in the park and the lights left on longer.

Leslie Olson, resident, stated she appreciates the Commissioners going after a funding opportunity.

Motion by Commissioner Portorreal, seconded by Mayor Anlian to close the public hearing on the NJ Green Acres Program Application for Fellowship Park Improvements. The Public Hearing opened at 9:02 p.m.

On roll call, Commissioners Gerken, MacNeill, Olson, Portorreal and Mayor Anlian voted "YEA".

RESOLUTION:

2024-16 Authorize Application to NJ Department of Environmental Protection, Green Acres Program – Fellowship Park

Motion by Commissioner Portorreal, seconded by Commissioner Gerken, to approve Resolution 2024-16.

On roll call, Commissioners Gerken, MacNeill, Olson, Portorreal and Mayor Anlian voted "YEA".

January 23, 2024

NEW BUSINESS

Mayor Anlian announces that the following business is considered to be routine in nature and will be enacted in one motion. Any item may be removed for separate consideration.

RESOLUTIONS:

- 2024-17 Authorize Expenditure of Fire Prevention Dedicated Funds
- 2024-18 Appoint Emergency Management Council
- 2024-19 Appoint Environmental Commission Members
- 2024-20 Authorize 2024 Temporary Capital Budget
- 2024-21 Authorize Mayor Anlian to sign Mid-Bergen Regional Health Commission Agreement for Health Services

Motion by Commissioner Olson, seconded by Commissioner Portorreal, that the consent agenda be approved.

On roll call, Commissioners Gerken, MacNeill, Olson, Portorreal and Mayor Anlian voted “YEA”.

PROCLAMATION

- 2023 Artist Laureate
- 2024 Artist Laureate

Commissioner Olson read the proclamation honoring Guillermo Lopez-Acosta as the Village’s 2023 Artist Laureate.

Commissioner Olson read the proclamation honoring Theresa Heidel as the Village’s 2024 Artist Laureate.

The Board of Commissioners congratulated Mr. Lopez-Acosta and Ms. Heidel.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Commissioner Gerken, seconded by Commissioner Olson to adjourn.

On roll call, Commissioners Gerken, MacNeill, Olson, Portorreal and Mayor Anlian voted “YEA”.

Mayor Anlian adjourned the meeting at 9:12 p.m.

/s/William G. Gerken
Commissioner

/s/Adam A. MacNeill
Commissioner

/s/Mark C. Olson
Commissioner

/s/ Wanda C. Portorreal
Commissioner

/s/Tara O’Grady

Village Clerk

Approved on February 13, 2024

/s/ John H. Anlian

Mayor