

Work Session
Mayor and Council
September 26, 2013

A Work Session of the Mayor and Council was called to order at 7:38 p.m. by Mayor Barra who announced that the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act were met by the required posting and notice to publications.

The following individuals answered roll call: Council members Bernstein, McSwiggan, Strauch, White, Wilczynski and Mayor Barra. Ms. LaMonica was absent. Mrs. McCarthy and Mr. Bole were also present.

Public Comments

Mayor Barra opened the meeting to the public for comments.

Mr. Jeffrey Laughman of 41 Harreton Road said he moved to Allendale six months ago and he and his family have been very happy here.

Mr. Laughman commented that the reason he is attending a Council meeting is because there are no sidewalks in the busy part of town where he lives. When he is walking, he stays within the five streets in his area which are Gloria, Knollton, Kayeton, Harreton and Wilton. He has also found that many of his neighbors have the same concerns. Mr. Laughman presented a petition to the Council with thirty signatures from the area in which he lives.

The petition addresses the fact that sidewalks would alleviate the neighbors' concerns about walking on East Crescent Avenue. Those concerns include children's safety, the safety of runners and joggers, and fire safety due to the frequently overgrown fire hydrant between Wilton and Harreton Avenues.

With regard to raw data, East Crescent Avenue has a thirty five mile per hour speed limit and a high volume of traffic. Other streets with similar issues are West Crescent Avenue and North Franklin Turnpike, East Allendale Avenue and West Allendale Avenue to Myrtle and Hillside Avenue to West Orchard. Just those streets alone have approximately 7 ½ miles of sidewalk space.

What these residents are asking for is to extend the sidewalk from North Franklin Turnpike to Harreton Road along East Crescent Avenue. That is only about ¼ mile of additional sidewalk. That additional sidewalk would benefit approximately 400 people who live on these streets which is about six percent of Allendale's population. Mr. Laughman suggested that adding sidewalk would be a great way to get those people walking to areas such as Crestwood Lake.

He noted that with a thirty five mile per hour speed limit, vehicles frequently drive up to forty. The fatality rate when a pedestrian is hit by a car at that speed is eighty five percent. At twenty five miles per hour the fatality rate is only ten percent.

Mayor Barra said Mr. Laughman is asking for something that the Council already supports. People on the Council already want sidewalks and they are walkers. He suggested that Mr. Laughman serve as chairman of a committee to work on this issue. The Council will assign a member to meet with them as often as necessary to explore the issue and problems which he mentioned previously and that the Council is sympathetic with.

Speed limits on County roads have consistently been an issue in Allendale and Council members are against faster speed limits.

Mr. Barra said sidewalks were installed on Crescent Avenue from Ivers up to Franklin Turnpike after receiving a Federal Grant. Allendale received a \$250,000 grant in 2007 but the sidewalks were just completed this year. Allendale's sidewalk plan is to help enable children to walk to school. The section Mr. Laughman is talking about is the last street in Allendale on the East side of Crescent. Also Crescent from Franklin to Harreton is a difficult place to put in sidewalks due to its slope and it has easement issues.

Mayor Barra stated that a Committee such as he suggested, can start to appreciate these problems and bring ideas to the table.

Mrs. White welcomed Mr. Laughman and said she understands his concerns because she also lives in the area. She agrees with the issues of topography and easements which Mr. Barra referred to earlier.

Mrs. White noted that sidewalks are the residents' responsibility in the Borough Code.

Mr. Strauch said because this group's interest is focused where it is, there may be the possibility of getting the County to lower the speed limit a bit and/or narrowing the traffic lane.

Mr. Barra said Committees have accomplished a great deal in Allendale. He commented that the land on which Orchard Commons is built was purchased through a Committee headed by Mr. Strauch. A Finance Committee made up of residents who are also financial professionals was set up as an advisory committee to the Council.

Mr. Laughman was given information on how to contact members of the Council

Agenda Review

Resolution 13-372, Approval of Sunesys Application

Mr. Harry Pohl of Sunesys was present to discuss the application made by Sunesys.

Mayor Barra said earlier today the members of the Council received the current agreement with Sunesys. He read a portion that states, "Sunesys shall be responsible to repair and/or restore any of its facilities that may be damaged due to fire, explosion or the elements and shall provide to the municipality contact information for this purpose." He asked Councilwoman McSwiggan to comment further on this issue.

Mrs. McSwiggan said that during Super Storm Sandy there were a significant number of wires that were down throughout the town. When the utility companies were contacted we were told not to worry because the lines were not live and they could be touched. Allendale wasn't convinced that doing so would be safe for workers or residents.

The concern going forward is how to determine ownership of these lines and how to get in touch with the owners of these wires.

Mr. Pohl said all of the Sunesys cables are tagged with a yellow tag.

Mrs. McSwiggan said when companies were called there was often not adequate staffing to take care of the problem and offer a projected timeline to make repairs.

Mr. Pohl said his office is moving to Northern New Jersey and that office will be dedicated to North Jersey service.

Mr. Barra said conference calls were held every day during the storm and its aftermath to keep everyone up to date during times of catastrophes. He asked if Sunesys had a plan to be able to communicate with the municipality in an emergency so that information can be forwarded to the residents.

Mr. Pohl said that type of contact can be provided. He said various numbers will be provided and those individuals will be able to give information on when wires can be removed from the ground.

Mr. Barra said that sort of information is very important to the Borough.

Mr. Pohl said colleges, school districts and hospitals are serviced by Sunesys. Sunesys provides the hardware but no direct services. The consumer doesn't deal directly with them.

Mrs. White asked Mr. Bole if he could provide a list of all of the companies that are on our poles. Mr. Bole said he could provide that.

Mr. Yakimik, Municipal Engineer asked what diameter the cables are. Mr. Pohl said they are less than an inch.

Mr. Yakimik said he is getting increasingly concerned about the weight that is being put on the poles by these carriers. He recommended that in a future discussion with Rockland Electric that this topic be mentioned due to the increasing chance of damage due to high winds and other weather related issues.

Mayor Barra said a meeting had been scheduled yesterday with the President of Orange Rockland but that meeting was cancelled at the last minute. When it is rescheduled he will ask this question.

Resolution 13-375, Tax Liens on Abandoned Properties

Mr. Barra said the Land Use Committee decided to move forward on this issue addressing properties that are or appear to be abandoned. These are continuing issues and in order not to have the whole process take place each time an issue needs to be addressed, the Committee, in consultation with the Borough Attorney and the Construction Code Official, decided to present this resolution to the Council.

In this resolution, long term empty homes are identified, and once approved by the Council, the Construction Code Official will be able to have these property cleaned up on a much more accelerated fashion.

Mayor Barra stated that this is the first time this process has been done.

Mr. Strauch said the purpose of the resolution is to reduce the time to make repairs to long term, vacant properties.

This resolution will enable an accelerated process by the Construction Official so every step won't have to be done each time a property needs cleanup. A long discussion was held at the Land Use Committee and the members of that Committee feel that the owner of the property is receiving due process protections.

Mrs. McSwiggan noted that certain addresses are specified in the resolution. She asked if that limited the properties that could be addressed.

Mr. Barra said it does and stated that the resolution is only applicable to the specific properties named. He added that the process will continue as it has previously for properties that are not abandoned.

Mayor Barra said if challenged, he believes a judge would be sympathetic to this process when we don't know how to locate an owner.

Mayor's Report

Mr. Barra said the New Jersey Supreme Court threw out the third round of COAH today and gave the Governor five months to draft new rules and regulations that must be consistent with round one and round two. It is an eighty page decision with a two page synopsis that Mayor Barra has if anyone would like to read it.

Mr. Barra said he doesn't know how this will impact on Allendale at this time. About five or six years ago Allendale's Governing Body made plans to build Special Needs Housing. Hopefully our obligation will be the same or less. If it is more, we will deal with that at that time. We have helped a great many families with developmentally disabled family members already.

On another issue, the Northwest Bergen Utilities Authority has agreed to refund \$1.6 million to the seven original towns that joined the utility. Allendale will get a credit on our fourth quarter charges which will reduce our obligation from \$415,000 to approximately \$215,000.

There will probably be a resolution toward the end of the year to allow us to use that money as surplus in next year's budget.

Everyone is happy with the decision and this has also opened up a dialog with the Northwest Bergen Utilities Authority which the towns haven't had in the past.

Mrs. McSwiggan complimented the Mayor on all of his work on this issue.

On a motion by Mrs. White, seconded by Mrs. McSwiggan, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn to Regular Session at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gwen McCarthy
Municipal Clerk