



MINUTES  
SPECIAL MEETING  
BOROUGH OF EMERSON  
MAYOR AND COUNCIL

November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019

7:30 p.m.

Borough Hall-Council Chambers  
Emerson, NJ 07630



---

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor DiPaola welcomed everyone to the November 26th, 2019 Special Meeting and announced that the meeting was being videotaped and could be viewed from a link on the Borough website as well as on Verizon Fios Channel 36 and Cablevision Channel 77. She announced that this Special Meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Law. Notices of this meeting were sent to the Record and the Ridgewood News on November 23rd, 2019. In addition, copies of this notice were posted on the bulletin board in the Municipal Building, on the Borough website and filed in the office of the Municipal Clerk on the aforementioned date.

II. ROLL CALL

**PRESENT:** Mayor DiPaola, Councilman Bayley, Council President Falotico, Councilman Gordon, Councilman Hoffman, Councilman Knoller, Councilwoman McGuire

Councilwoman McGuire said she would be recusing herself and departed the Council Chambers.

Also present were Borough Administrator Robert Hermansen, Borough Attorney John McCann, Borough Architects Kevin and Rita Settembrino and Deputy Borough Clerk Coleen Goddel.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor DiPaola announced that they would be opening up the meeting to Public Comment on any topic and would open again a second time after the presentation.

☞ **Motion** to open the meeting to comments from the public was **moved** by Councilman Hoffman, **seconded** by Council President Falotico and carried unanimously.

Seeing no hands, Mayor DiPaola asked for a motion to close the meeting to comments from the public.

☞ **Motion** to close the meeting to comments from the public was **moved** by Council President Falotico, **seconded** by Councilman Knoller and carried unanimously.

#### IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- Presentation by Borough Architect Kevin Settembrino to:
  - Review and consider plans to renovate Emerson Borough Hall
  - AND/OR**
  - Review and consider plans for the construction of a new Borough Hall

Mayor DiPaola welcomed Kevin and Rita Settembrino to the meeting and noted that this was not a set-in stone plan. It was the original rendition of two schematics the Governing Body had asked to be presented.

Mr. Settembrino began the presentation and explained that one proposal was to renovate the existing Borough Hall with an expansion. The other proposal was to build a new Borough Hall on the same site; once the new structure was complete, the current building would be demolished.

He reviewed the addition and renovation proposal. The addition would consist of a 70' by 70' structure with two floors and a basement which would not exceed the perimeter of the existing building. The addition would not be any taller than the existing building and would be joined by an entrance link that would lead into both buildings. The first floor of the addition would contain emergency services as well as a garage for ambulances and police facilities. The second floor of the new structure would contain a new Court/Council Chambers as well as the remainder of the Court and Police administrative functions. The existing addition to the original Borough Hall (the current Building Department) would be replaced by the new entrance. In addition, the current lift would be removed and replaced with an elevator and stair tower. The basement would also be renovated and include police locker rooms and storage, mechanical spaces and a community room. He noted that this plan was designed so as not to detract from or overshadow the existing building. The existing building would contain offices for the Mayor, Borough Clerk, Administration, Finance and Construction.

Ms. Settembrino reviewed the other proposal of using the current space while a new structure was being built and then demolishing the present Borough Hall. The new building would be 71' deep by 113' feet wide and would be two stories with a full basement. The Borough Clerk's office and Construction office would be on the first floor; the Police Department would be located on the first and second floors. The second floor would also contain the Court/Council Chambers, the Finance/Tax office, and offices for the Mayor and Borough Administrator. She said the design would create a similar aesthetic to what currently existed.

Councilman Knoller asked for the approximate cost of each option. Mr. Settembrino said that the difference between the two proposals was about \$500,000. The less expensive option was the addition/renovation at 27,000 square feet and cost approximately \$12 million. He noted that the further they moved along with the design, the more precise the costs would be. Councilman Hoffman asked about the proposed parking in front of the building that would cut into the front lawn and would destroy the aesthetic look of the front of the building. Mr. Settembrino said that they could address this if there were off site adjacent locations for parking.

Mayor DiPaola asked Mr. Settembrino what he would need from the Borough as well as a timeline for the project. He said they would need the Governing Body to select one of the two proposals. Once they made that decision, they could begin schematic designs and provide a much tighter estimate. They would need four to six months to generate construction documents and get design and approval from the Governing Body. Construction permits would take 30 to 45 days to obtain and actual construction would take approximately 18 months from start to finish.

☞ **Motion** to open the meeting to comments from the public on this topic was **moved** by Councilman Hoffman, **seconded** by Council President Falotico and carried unanimously.

Brian Downing, 15 Lexington Avenue asked if the costs associated with bringing the current Borough Hall up to ADA standards and construction codes were incorporated into the building. He also asked about HVAC costs and any costs associated with mitigating hazardous materials.

Councilman Hoffman said that a number of people were concerned about the murals in the basement and asked if the building was renovated, if they would remain intact. Ms. Settembrino said they would not be touching the walls of those spaces.

Alphonse D'Ambrosio, construction consultant, asked for the total cost of each option and whether there was a budget for this project.

Mr. Settembrino estimated that the cost to renovate the current building with an addition was approximately \$12 million. Mayor DiPaola said she had spoken with Mr. Hermansen, Ms. Roehrer and Borough Auditor Gary Higgins and assured Mr. D'Ambrosio that they would have a plan which would have the least impact on the tax base. Mr. Hermansen noted that debt was coming off from Emerson Woods as well and that the same money would be utilized through rebonding. Mayor DiPaola said this project was being driven by needs of the Police Department and updated needs for the public.

Don Sheridan, 5 Lexington Avenue asked about the life expectancy of the changes they were proposing. He asked if the Governing Body had considered renting office space in the Borough as an alternative to construction.

Mayor DiPaola said it was an interesting concept and it had been considered previously on a temporary basis, but not on a permanent basis. Councilman Hoffman said that many administrative and police functions had to be centralized; the idea could be entertained but would be limited. Mayor DiPaola said that it was important, as long as it was financially feasible, to keep all the Borough departments as close to being under one roof as possible for the ease of residents.

Mr. Marrone asked if anyone had estimated what this would cost the average taxpayer in town in terms of a tax increase. He opined on the impact to taxpayers and asked if the public would have the opportunity to weigh in or vote on this.

Mayor DiPaola said the Governing Body first needed to determine the direction they were going to take and then proceed to cost estimations. At that point, they would sit with the CFO and Auditor to determine projections. Councilman Knoller said that \$400,00 to \$500,000 in debt was coming off the books, and that current debt would be replaced by this debt so it would not have a big impact for taxpayers like they were experiencing for the school renovations. Mayor DiPaola noted that these were very early numbers and the Borough also had the opportunity from the redeveloper working in the center of town to be the general contractor for the project. This could represent considerable savings. Mayor DiPaola said they were not rushing this project and that this was a first look at designs; they were trying to be as transparent as possible so they were discussing a broad first look overview of what they were contemplating before they went into committee meetings.

Brian Todd, 207 Palisade Avenue asked if anyone had discussed getting an extension on the \$500,000 offered by the developer. He said he had hoped that when the debt for Emerson Woods ended, he would have loved to see a reduction in taxes. He opined that it was being rushed at the end of the year and asked if they had considered just constructing a new emergency services building and keeping everything else intact.

Mr. McCann said he was in contact with the redeveloper's attorney and that this was an ongoing matter with potential litigation on various issues outside of this topic. Mayor DiPaola said that building a new emergency services building did not satisfy the needs of the whole Borough.

John Snyder representing the Pascack Press asked if there was a plan for presenting the murals or making them available to the public.

Mayor DiPaola said they had not addressed that yet, but if the building was not knocked down, they would offer opportunities for the public could come in and enjoy the murals through guided tours and other events.

Maureen Howlin, 35 Furman Drive, a member of the Volunteer Ambulance Corps, asked if the new plans would include a garage for the ambulances and asked about the facilities planned for the Corps. She also commented on the current facilities of the Corps and said they were not really satisfactory.

Mayor DiPaola said there would be spaces for the rigs, as well as training, office and meeting spaces. She also noted that she had spoken to Ambulance Corps Captain Dave Mason the day after Ms. Howlin had reported unsatisfactory conditions. She said that Captain Mason had indicated that in his opinion, the depiction given to the Governing Body was not as poor as it was in her opinion. Captain Mason had been given the option of using the vacant house on Locust Avenue but he said that he did not want to use it. He had chosen to keep the rig at the DPW and get wi-fi.

Mayor DiPaola requested that Ms. Howlin and the whole crew go through the chain of command and speak to Captain Mason and decide what their needs were and then have the Captain speak to Mr. Hermansen. She added that the Borough did want to meet their needs and did appreciate them; they did not want the Corps to work under the conditions that Ms. Howlin had previously described. She asked that Ms. Howlin make an appointment with Mr. Hermansen so that he could address all her concerns.

Councilman Knoller announced that Councilman Gordon arrived at 8:42 p.m.

Jonathan (inaudible), 36 Granger Road asked for a timeline for the project and whether it would take place in 2020 or 2021.

Ed Bueti, 91 Chestnut Avenue asked about disruptions to the Police Department and whether there would be adequate police parking while construction was taking place. He asked if the Governing Body would consider renovating the current Borough Hall and building something across the street.

Mayor DiPaola said that now that commuter parking was available at the vacant lot on Locust Avenue, it would be a test of what the residential area could bear. She added that residents on Locust Avenue and Jefferson Avenue were not interested in seeing a commercial building in their backyards. She noted that they were looking at all their options and would look for the best utilization of the property from the Borough Architects.

Kate Stutzel, 186 Eagle Drive asked what materials would still be left if the current building was renovated and the long-term issues they would need to worry about in terms of maintenance.

Mr. Settembrino said there were maintenance issues in old and new buildings and that they would design the exterior building so that it required minimal maintenance. A new building would have a brick veneer. He added that construction materials were better today than they were years ago. He added that the aesthetics of the existing building would not change if it was renovated. Mrs. Settembrino said that not all walls would be removed but some changes would be made to make the flow better.

Paul Coombes, 74 Pascack Avenue asked if costs were clearer for renovating or for building a new building considering unforeseen issues with renovation such as asbestos, lead or soil contamination. He also asked what the architect's opinion was as to whether to demolish and construct a new building or renovate the existing structure.

Mr. Settembrino said that an existing condition study would be done as well as a mitigation plan but they did not presently know that cost. In his opinion, he would choose the addition/renovation option because it offered the best of both worlds. It would maintain the integrity of the existing building and its historic character while renovating it, providing new police facilities and be less costly.

Councilman Hoffman said the historic value of the building went far beyond the murals. Borough Hall was a WPA building; the murals were important but if they were not there, he would still say it was important to preserve it.

Don Pierro, 70 Eagle Drive asked if the renovation option was larger so as to accommodate the existing building and minimize reconfiguration. He also asked about the needs of the department heads and whether the building would be the appropriate size for the next 50 or 80 years.

