

**LAKWOOD TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE
PUBLIC FORUM
MINUTES
MARCH 22, 2007**

The Lakewood Township Committee held a Public Forum on Thursday, March 22, 2007 in the Lakewood Municipal Building, at 7:00 P.M., with the following present:

Mayor.....Raymond Coles

Deputy Mayor.....Meir Lichtenstein

Municipal Clerk.....Bernadette Standowski

Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6, by Resolution of the Township Committee adopted January 1, 2007 and published in the Ocean County Observer on March 13, 2007.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

Mayor Coles started off by thanking everyone for coming out and showing their support and that the coffee was on in the back. He stated that there was no time limit on the speakers but to please be courteous of the others and not to monopolize the conversation and to state your name and address for the record. He also stated that he would allow dialogue back and forth between the speakers.

Before the public portion started, Mayor Coles introduced Jeff Shapiro, Director of Recreation. He spoke about some of the recreation programs that were happening in the township. Winter recreation programs included indoor soccer two nights a week at the Lakewood Middle School, and at the High school five youth programs were held along with one adult program. Track, wrestling and volleyball were also offered. The weight room was open for the adults waiting for their children. All of the programs were free of charge for Township residents. March 31, 2007 will be the annual Easter Egg Hunt at Pine Park. Registration will be held on April 17, 2007 for spring programs. The activities will include T-Ball, Flag Football and Soccer. He asked the audience for any activities they would like to see included in the recreation program. Dave Quinn of Lakewood, suggested that the senior softball teams from Lakewood's senior villages be able to use some of the fields at the various parks. Mr. Quinn said that he would speak with Mr. Shapiro regarding this subject.

Marilyn Fontanetta – Leisure Village East. – She commented on how she enjoys the concerts that come in to the senior villages. Mr. Shapiro assured her that those concerts would continue. He also stated that on April 26, 2007 the Jazz Festival would be held at the Strand Theater with all of the High School kids from the State of New Jersey. The winner would play with the Lakewood Jazz Ensemble.

Mayor Coles then let everyone know about the Uncle Floyd show at the Strand Theater on April 15, 2007. He then asked if anyone else had a question for Mr. Shapiro.

Mayor Coles then opened the floor for discussion.

Marilyn Fontanetta – Leisure Village East. Mrs. Fontanetta commented on the town getting the designation of an urban area. This permits a developer, under the CAFRA Law, to cover 95 percent of the ground. She stated that many people moved to Lakewood because of the natural beautiful features in the area. She wanted to go on record as saying that she feels very strongly that Lakewood should be designated as suburban not urban. Mayor Coles passed this topic on to Deputy Mayor Lichtenstein. Mr. Lichtenstein stated that there is a myth out there that designating a center would create an 80 percent impervious cover throughout the town. That is not the case. It is a complicated procedure. He stated that when you create a center, there are areas that you can build that you can build more than you can build if it were not a center. That is only one little part of the puzzle. He stated that you are working with state agencies and you create open space areas and open space zones. It gives you access to planning organizations and state agencies that will help all of us to create a center for the town. Mr. Lichtenstein stated that there is no denying that the town is going to be built, but that we should do it in a smart way. It will help us make sure that we will have enough roads, open space and parks and not that everyone will be living on Route 9 with one lane of traffic. He is going to ask the Committee to support the continued work with the Office of Smart Growth.

Mrs. Fontanetta felt that the problem with that is that the amount of open space we have is rather limited. She felt that the privately owned land will be developed and it will look like Manhattan with Central Park in the middle

Mayor Coles responded by stating that all of this has to be consistent with the Master Plan and the UDO. He says that just because we have this designation, it gives you access to a lot of different agencies to limit and make sure that the development you do have is done in the smartest way possible. He stated that it is a plan to preserve the town and develop what is left to be developed in an ethical way.

John DeFilipis - 514 5th Street – Mr. DeFilipis asked what it takes for the Township to stop private land owners from selling their property to developers. Mr. Lichtenstein responded by saying that you offer incentives for developers to leave more open spaces. The developers can do better by leaving more open space and only developing maybe 25 acres of the land and leaving the rest of it empty. Mr. DeFilipis asked if the Township can tell a developer not to develop a home if they do not have more than an acre and a half parcel. Mayor Coles responded that you can do that, but only in certain areas. An example of that is the Crystal Lake Preserve which has been zoned for 3 acres. People who owned property there before can go to the zoning board and get a variance to build on less than 3 acres. It is illegal to zone someone's property into un use. Mayor Coles stated that the Courts will overturn it. Mr. DeFilipis asked how can land be zoned. Mayor Coles stated that the Master Plan Committee looked at the entire town and the existing zones and made some recommendations and changes and the Planning Board made some additional changes and a lot of times took what the Master Plan Committee suggested and through it out. Now that the Master Plan has been adopted by the Planning Board, it comes to the Committee for action. The Committee has to look at all of the instances that the Planning Board referred to them and the Committee has to decide to go with the Master Plan recommendation or another recommendation. Mayor Coles stated that you cannot prevent someone from asking for the world. If you have a responsible board, that will not happen.

Mr. Lichtenstein stated that the developer of the Agway project came to the Zoning Board, while he was on it, and asked to have 46 single family houses built on the property. The Zoning Board said no, they want 35 two family houses which would create 70 families. The Zoning Board Attorney came to zoning board members and said you are asking for 70 families. Mr. Lichtenstein said that they were trying to control the basement issue and we should plan right and make sure there is parking and trees. The developer went back to the zoning board and got approval for 44 houses and it got more over crowded than it should have been. Mr. Lichtenstein said that is what smart planning is.

Mr. Billick – 36 Monterey Circle. He asked when the end date for the Central Avenue project should be done. Mayor Coles stated that he would ask one of the engineers to check with the County because it is a county project. Mayor Coles also told Mr. Billick to call the Engineer's office and talk to Kevin to check when the project may be completed.

Claire Winters – Leisure Village East. Ms. Winters commented on the Smart Growth Plan from a book by Senator Byron Dorgan.

Esther Green 20 Holly St. – Ms. Green commented on changes in the environment. She misses the trees in Lakewood and says that birds do not have any trees anymore to go in. She says that birds are losing their habitats. She stated that some of the trees are dead and does not know what is happening.

Betty Krell 144 John St. – She commented on housing. She asked if the Township would consider revitalizing the old houses in town. Mrs. Krell also said she has not seen the Township do anything for low income housing. Mayor Coles responded by saying that Lakewood has more publicly owned buildings available to low income residents than any other neighboring town. Mayor Coles also stated that Lakewood put up fifty homes this year to rehabilitate and that happens every year. It is an agreement with the State called the Regional Contribution Agreement that helps people rehabilitate their homes as long as they fall within certain income guidelines. He also commented that the Township donated 63 acres for affordable housing.

Janet Scherr – 1050 Cross St., - Ms. Scherr commended the Committee regarding the Crystal Lake Preserve. She also commented on the South West Corner of town. She said it includes sizable properties. She stated that everyone is concerned because everyone knows that Toms River has problems with their water supply and does not want that to happen to Lakewood. She said residents of Lakewood do not want to have property that they cannot convey to other people because there is not proper water supply coming to the home. She commented on the A-1 zone flipping to R-40. She also commented on the ROP Zone. She said it is not an appropriate area for multi-family density. She also stated that the area has Farm Land Preservation and endangered species and the Crystal Lake Preserve. These things have to be kept, not only for their natural beauty, but for water resources in the Township. She feels that the divide that exists in Lakewood is between citizens who want to breathe clean air and not have congestion and the developers who want to take that away.

Carol Murray – 51 Drake Rd – She commented on the zoning error and to get it corrected before it is too late. She feels the Crystal Lake Preserve is beautiful and the water is cleared up. She said it is a wonderful place. She said we should keep it that way.

Diane Reeves – Holly St., Lakewood – She feels that the Board of Education is forgetting about the home schoolers and they should have a little more support from the Board of Education. The Mayor commented by saying that he would call the Board of Education and see what legal responsibilities they may have to home schoolers.

Tracey Tipp – 1380 Pasadena St. – He commented on the overcrowding in schools and wanted to know if there are any plans to build any new schools in Lakewood. Mayor Coles stated that is a Board of Education area, but the school population has been steady. The people that have been moving in to town who have school age children send them to private school. Mr. Lichtenstein stated that the Master Plan does include something about schools. Mayor Coles advised Mr. Tipp to attend a Board of Education meeting. Mr. Tipp commented on speeding cars in his neighborhood. Mr. Tipp asked what could be done to put up speed bumps or a “no outlet” sign. Mayor Coles responded by saying that he will have the Chief of Police step up patrol in the area and Public Works to make sure that the speed limit signs are legible. Mayor Coles also suggested to Mr. Tipp to keep him posted on the topic.

Pat DeFilipis – 314 Fifth St. – She Commented on the Lakewood Landlords. Mayor Coles responded by stating that a number of things were accomplished by the settlement. It saved the Township a lot of money on what would have been spent on the lawsuit and it got them to plead guilty to overcrowding which gives the Township the hammer that they need to go after them a second time if necessary. The Mayor stated that the issue is not to shut down buildings and fine the landlords, it is to make sure that the correct number of people are living in the buildings and that they are maintained properly.

Betty Crowell – 144 John St. – Ms. Crowell commented on the number of things Mayor Coles stated he is not aware of regarding the Board of Education. Mayor Coles responded that the Board of Education is their own entity, with their own elections and their own budget. Mrs. Crowell would ask, as a concerned citizen, that Mayor Coles be more knowledgeable about that subject. Mayor Coles responded by stating that he will look into the school board matter more closely.

David Drukaroff – 1433 Laurelwood Ave. - Mr. Drukaroff commented on the home schooling situation. He stated that New Jersey has virtual schools which may be an option for home schoolers. Mr. Drukaroff also asked when the inspection department would get automated. Mr. Drukaroff also commented on drug addicts. Mayor Coles responded by saying that home schoolers should gather together and advocate for themselves. He stated that if they get an organization together, that they might get their word across better to the School Board or the County Board of Education.

Esther Green – Holly St. - Ms. Green commented on a Civil Rights Commission and when the Township would have one. Mayor Coles stated that there is a Civil Rights Commission in place, however, they have not had enough people show up to the meetings to have a quorum. Ms. Green responded by saying that she has plenty of time, and would agree to volunteer her time to be on the commission. David Quinn also commented by saying Ms. Green should contact Warren Sherrard for more information.

Tony DiStefano – 172 White Road – He Commented on Whitesville Road being a dumping ground. He says it is constantly going on. There is sheet rock, doors and shrubs. He called the Police Department and they stated that it was not their department. Mayor Coles responded by asking

Mr. DiStefano to leave his phone number with the Clerk and he would contact the Chief to see what he could do. Mr. DiStefano also stated that in 2000 he bought a house on White Road. It is a two acre plot. He has stated that now zoning has been changed in that area to one acre lots. Mayor Coles stated that he is waiting for the Master Plan to come back from the Planning Board. When the plan is delivered to the Committee, they will have to react to all of the items that the Planning Board did not take a stand on. Mr. DiStefano asked who changed the zoning from two acre to one acre. The Mayor stated that the Township Committee will have the opportunity to review that item and vote to make any necessary changes. Mr. DiStefano also stated that permits were supposed to be frozen, but houses were built on one acre lots. Mayor Coles stated that he did not have the answer for him at that time on why the zone was changed. Mr. DiStefano asked if a freeze could be put on the building permits until the mistake was changed. Mayor Coles responded that it is not legal to tell people they cannot build on their property. Janet Scherr commented that the residents of Lakewood have been double taxed on their property because their land, which was A-1 for a building lot has now been designated to conform to one acre for a building lot as opposed to two acres. Ms. Scherr read a statement that she made in front of the Master Plan Committee regarding the error that was made in the zone change. Mr. Lichtenstein responded by giving his reasons on why he voted against the change. He stated that you can change the zone in a neighborhood during the Master Plan without doing notice. You cannot change the zone if there is no notice. Doing notice to everyone would have been a great task and he was worried that there would be legal challenge. Ms. Carol Murray commented that it was all about greed. Every other town tries to conserve land. Lakewood seems to be going in the opposite direction. She asked the Committee to do what's right and to try and preserve land. Mr. DeFilipis commented again on the subject of the zoning change.

Shirley Allen – Lakewood – Ms. Allen commented on the homeless situation in Lakewood. Mayor Coles responded by stating that the Committee he put together regarding the homeless situation met for their second meeting. They are trying to come up with two approaches to the situation. The first would be a short term approach to give immediate assistance to these individuals. The second approach would be to see what could be done to eliminate the problem to help these people on a long term basis. That would include getting the medical attention they need, homes and jobs so they can join society once again.

Claire Winter – Leisure Village East – commented on the different places where these meeting would be held. Mayor Coles responded by stating he would like to ask many different places to host these meetings. He would like to ask Georgian Court University and BMG to host these meetings. It exposes the Committee to different places they have never been before. The meeting will be advertised in the newspapers and on the Township website as soon as the dates have been set.

Alice Kelsey – Lakewood – She commented on if the Lakewood library is going to be expanded. The Mayor stated that he has not heard anything, but he would be willing to go to the County to find out.

Esther Greene – She commented on the Master Plan Meetings and asked if they were open to the public and asked if the Master Plan was a final document. The Mayor responded by stating that the Master Plan Meetings were open to the public and also explained closed session meetings and why the public was excluded from those meetings. The Mayor went on to explain that the Master Plan is not a final document and the next steps to finish the process.

Tracy Tipp – 1380 Pasadena St. – He asked what steps were in place to make sure that mistakes do not happen again in the Master Plan. Mayor Coles responded by stating that a lot of those mistakes will not be made by paying a lot more attention to detail in the preparation of the Master Plan.

Pat DiFilipis – Ms. DeFilipis commented on the reassessment . Mayor Coles responded by saying she should go to the Tax Assessor to fill out a form to make adjustments to her taxes.

Dave Quinn – Lakewood - Mr. Quinn explained the Master Plan Process. He explained how sub committees are formed to discuss different parts of the Master Plan and this process takes several months. He said the Master Plan is not flawless, but the only way it works, is if the public comes out to voice their concerns.

Esther Green – She felt that more notice should have been given for this meeting. The Mayor responded by stating that he is going to try and give 30 days notice.

Mayor Coles thanked everyone for coming and meeting adjourned at 8:57 p.m.