

**Ortley Beach Voters and Taxpayers Association
General Membership Meeting
Nov. 16, 2019
The Moose Lodge, Ortley Beach, 9:30 a.m.**

Meeting called to order at 9:32 a.m.

Flag salute and moment of silence.

Roll call: Anthony Colucci, Cathy Crisafulli, Mary Ann Giordano Wallis, Paul Jeffrey, Joan Strathern, Toni Tomarazzo present.

Minutes of the October 2019 General Membership Meeting accepted.

Treasurer's and Membership reports: Anthony Colucci

Treasurer's report highlights:

- Cash balance on Oct. 31, 2019 was \$65,566
- Dues payments have halted.
- Expenditures YTD: \$13,211

Membership report highlights:

- 444 paid members – 19 fewer than this time last year.

Guests:

Mayor Elect Maurice "Mo" Hill

- Showed up unexpectedly; greeted with applause re: his election on Nov. 5.
- Thanked OBVTA members for positive vote tallies from the barrier island.
- Praised members of his team – 3 Republican council members – saying they are young and are the future of the town.
- Highlighted the downtown redevelopment project as a goal of his new administration, promising that development will be on scale with community needs and will be the type of development favored by millennials, who want transportation and nearby shopping, restaurants and entertainment. He said the town council is the redevelopment authority and will oversee the plans as they unfold.
- "I will continue to come to these meetings, I promise," he said to applause.

Toms River Business Administrator Don Guardian

Since last year:

- Dunes and walkovers completed. Walked the beach and will add 12 parking spaces on Ocean Ave; double the number of bicycle racks; add more Mobi ramps at 2 ADA entrances and on roadways; will install 22 benches on the top of the dunes at 11

entrance locations (no badge will be required for access to them). New purchases will be in next year's budget, which town council has to approve.

- Pickle ball courts will be added behind the Wawa at the north beaches – not at Bayside Park.
- Surf Club: Between the state and township, there is \$7 million “on the table” for the Barcellonas (\$6.3 million in Blue Acres, another 5% each from town and state). The town also agreed to clean up the site, ie remove the foundation, etc., so the Barcellonas don't have to incur those costs.
- The town made \$100,000 more in beach fees this year over last.
- Kayak ramp: The storage racks will be relocated and added to; move will add three parking spaces.
- Revaluation: The process will start in 2020 and finish in 2021. The impact is unknown.
- Taxes: The mayor-elect has said he doesn't want to raise taxes. However, CIBA-GEIGY will soon resolve its tax case, which could result in \$15 million to \$20 million less revenue, which could affect things down the road.
- With the election of the first new mayor in 12 years, we are likely to see changes in department heads, etc.
- Downtown redevelopment includes \$100 million investor commitment and \$11 million plus \$5.8 million in grants to fix roads, traffic, etc.
- Downtown building will address the needs of affordable housing, which changes in 2025.

Question from Anthony: What is the town doing to make it easier for Ortley to redevelop its downtown?

Guardian: Retail is dead; the only businesses surviving are for things you can't buy online. Also visitor traffic is the least valuable to small businesses. But he acknowledged the need to help Ortley and said that might include buying a parking lot, etc. There are also \$5,000 grants available to small, new businesses. In response to a question from Toni, he said he did not know anything about who is buying the vacant bank property on 35North.

Question from Theresa Reynolds: She pointed out the success of Seaport shopping areas and asked if TR is considering any such projects.

Guardian: Praised the idea. Said there are two old boathouses in downtown TR on Water St. that are in need of redevelopment and were just purchased privately. They will tie in with parking lot construction planned for the Water Street lot, which will include a walkover to the municipal complex.

Question from John Berish: Expressed support for more bike racks. Urged TR to add a sign that indicates where the beach parking is on 3rd Avenue, as he often sees cars stopping and backing up to get to it.

Guardian: OK

Surf Club questions and comments: Criticism from members re: town's lack of funding for the acquisition. Guardian defended the town, saying the Barcelonas' property appraisal differs by about \$4 million from state and local appraisals. Claimed TR spent \$20 million on Ortley after Sandy – a figure that was disputed by Toni and Anthony. Guardian acknowledged that most of the money was from FEMA, not from Toms River/Ortley tax dollars. Toni pointed out that \$4 million in tax money is going to the downtown redevelopment, with much less allocated to Ortley Beach. George Strathern asked about the dollar difference between the Barcelonas and the town/state and Guardian said it was \$1.3 million.

Question re: sponsoring benches at the tops of dunes.

Guardian: The town will purchase them and then gifts could be made in honor/memorial. Contact the rec dept to arrange.

Question from Paul re: the solar field planned for the CIBA-GEIGY property.

Guardian: The solar fields will go where the factory was, which was cleared of environmental risks. He said some areas that were believed not contaminated were proven through photos to have been toxic dump sites but that, overall, only 100 of the 1500 acres are environmentally unsafe. The solar field will be the largest in NJ. Mayor-elect Hill has a meeting scheduled with the solar company to try to arrange for energy to be sold to TR at a discount.

Anthony Colucci

Pointed out that the board meets all year round and is ready and willing to take any questions or suggestions from members year round. Board members rotate to go to the monthly council meetings, and we can bring up issues there or with the town during regular contacts with Guardian, Hill, Maria Maruca and others.

Toms River PD Sgt. Bachonski

- Will be taking the lieutenant's test in 19 days and is working hard at it. If he passes and gets promoted, it might mean he will no longer be able to come to OBVTA meetings.
- Provided statistics on TR calls in October: 5,783 calls for service -- 190 a day, including for about 15 car crashes, about 50 motor vehicle stops, about 3 mental health calls and 1 OD (34 last month, most resulting in the use of Narcan).
- Re: the car that flew through the air and crashed into the second floor of a TR building: car had a dash cam, which is helping investigators.
- There was also a recent rear end crash by a driver who is drunk and had a suspended license. Ended in a fatality.
- Last month there were 5 DWIs on one Friday. Discussion about driving and when is it most dangerous.
- Announced some personnel changes at top of TRPD.
- Vest-a-Cop drive went well; lots of donations that challenged matching funds.
- Updated on social media accounts, Big and Littles program, Halloween Parade, Tricks or Trunks, recent PO suicide.

- Next Neighborhood Watch meeting is Dec. 12 (1st Thursday of every month).
- Dec. 8 is Jingle Bells Run; TRPD is very involved.
- Applications for Class 1 Seasonal officers is about to go out for next summer; deadline is end of December.
- Suggested that residents request surveillance cameras (doorbells, etc.) for Christmas gifts.
- Holiday crime: Emphasized the need for situational awareness and recommended FBI video on run, hide, fight.

Question re: bicyclists going the wrong way. Need for signs.

Bachonski said he tells his officers to look for offenders. He is skeptical that signs will work. Paul said if the town is considering putting a sign, they should put in near Jerry's. Bachonski said he would forward the suggestion to the Traffic Safety department.

Membership Drive: Toni Tomarazzo

- With membership lagging (down 19 from last year) and need for new members (new homeowners), the board is trying a few recruiting tactics.
- Local realtors are being asked to offer two years free OBVTA membership to new homeowners.
- Board would like to establish a Welcome Wagon next year to reach out to new homeowners.
- New proposal to encourage current members to recruit new ones: Any members in good standing who recruit 2 to 5 new members get a "premium" local branded item at the April meeting. Drive goes from now until day before the April meeting (first general membership meeting of the year). Anyone who recruits 5 new members will receive a \$125 gift card to any restaurant or business in OB. Anyone who wants to participate should put their name on the registration forms they hand out so that we can track them over the winter. Membership approved of the proposal.

Report on Legal Actions: Toni Tomarazzo

- Three meetings ago we hired lawyers to contest Zoning Board approval of a two-family home at 44 Coolidge. The application was not consistent with the master plan. We have learned that the applicant has since withdrawn the application; the next buyer of the property will have to reapply if they want to pursue the plan. We had allocated up to \$16,000 for legal fees but spent less than \$5,000 on this (though we are awaiting a final bill).
 - Paul noted that we were adamant about contesting this because many people in the room had given input on how they wanted Ortlely rebuilt, and that included putting commercial on the first floor of 35North properties. Because of the members' input, we felt that we needed to defend that. That the application was withdrawn "shows that this organization has teeth."

- Surf Club: Purchase of the property is our paramount issue. The board has put in a lot of time, yet we are no further along this month than last. There is a gap between the bid and the offer, and there is a stalemate, with no negotiations going on. To get both sides talking and the issue moving forward, and to develop ways to bridge the gap from the \$7 million offered by state and local governments (which the Barcellonas have rejected) and the \$10.2 million appraisal of the Barcellonas, the board has a proposal to fund and support nonbinding mediation between the parties. A mediator will get both sides together and get the talks moving.
 - Estimated that we will need to spend \$2,000 to \$3,000 for the mediator, but are asking the membership for authority to spend up to \$5,000.
 - Board sees this as a constructive way to move this forward; it sends a signal to both parties that we are committed to this.
 - Some disagreement among board re: whether there are downsides to this or not. But Paul said there are reasons to think this might work, based on prior conversations with Mo Hill and outgoing Council President George Wittmann. A lack of info being shared among council members, etc., might be part of the problem, even as we are picking up signals that both sides might be willing to bend. Paul said the Barcellonas have expressed a willingness to come to the table via mediation. The township has not been informed yet.

Sue, a member, said she sees the mediation offer as a “brilliant idea” that offers an opportunity for face saving.

Joan pointed out that if the town doesn’t go along, we will have to step up our media.

Cathy C. said her experience in real estate is that the longer deals go on, the less chance they have of being made. This is an opportunity to step up, try to get the parties together and try to get a good result.

Anthony said this is our best chance to get the parties in the same room to communicate with each other, as we are finding that they deal in half truths and don’t communicate.

Jim Stanton, 4th Ave., member and a former elected official in north Jersey, pointed out that there are restrictions on what municipalities can pay for property, and that they may not have additional room to move. He suggested we first see if the town has an updated appraisal of its own. He also pointed out that it seems the town is being creative by offering building removal, etc., and said he is sure no one in town is waking up and thinking about how they could screw over Ortley.

Paul noted that he had recently met with the head of Blue Acres/Green Acres, who indicated that she wants to see this happen. So state money is not going away. Just have to get people to the table.

Mary Ann said she was one of the people who had been reluctant to go along with this for many of the reasons that Jim had stated, as we don't fully know the parameters, limitations, or even political consequences of the OBVTA taking such action. However, we can still explore those issues without necessarily taking action. The matter has to be put to a vote today because this is the last meeting of the year and we cannot pursue this if the money is not allocated by the membership. So while she has doubts, she is willing to support it to at least pursue the option.

Pat, member, said we needed more Ortlely residents to come to the town council meetings and push our case. She was told that OBVTA board members attend virtually every meeting and that many members had showed up at a recent meeting to speak out in favor of the Surf Club property purchase, but there was a "Sanctuary State" resolution on the agenda that drew a lot of speakers and the meeting went on too late and many Ortlely residents left before they could speak. Pat says anyone who comes to the meetings must speak out and she noted that, starting in December, the meetings begin at 5 p.m (instead of 6 p.m.).

Toni said she rejects the question of whether the town has the legal right to pay over appraised value, as there are numerous examples of where this has been possible and at the least it is an open issue. Meanwhile, if we can get people together at the table we might be able to address any limits.

George Strathern said he thought it was a great idea but wondered if \$5,000 was enough. Proposal was amended for the membership to authorize spending up to, but no more than, \$10,000 to pursue nonbinding mediation.

Spending proposal was voted on via a show of hands: No nays. Proposal approved.

Holiday Luncheon: Anthony

- Instead of having a dinner/dance party this year, we will be holding a Holiday Luncheon on Sunday, Dec. 8, from 1 to 5 p.m., at the Crab's Claw Inn in Lavallette. The cost is \$25 per head, which includes full buffet, coffee, dessert and one drink each. Flyers are available. You can pay on the website via credit card or Pay Pal or mail checks to Mary Ann Wallis, 1 Second Ave., Unit 1, Ortlely 08751. Form is available on the website. No tickets will be issued; guests will check in upon arrival and will receive drink tickets then.

Motion to adjourn by Paul, seconded by Anthony. Adjourned at 11:01 a.m.