

**Borough of Highlands
Mayor and Council
Special Meeting
November 23, 2009**

Mayor Little called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m.

Mayor Little asked all to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. Cummins read the following statement: As per requirement of P.L. 1975, Chapter 231. Notice is hereby given that this is a Special Meeting of the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Highlands and all requirements have been met. Notice has been transmitted to the Asbury Park Press and the Two River Times. Notice has been posted on the public bulletin Board.

ROLL CALL:

Present: Ms. Kane, Mr. Caizza, Mr. Urbanski, Mayor Little

Absent: Mr. Francy

**Also Present: Carolyn Cummins, Borough Clerk
Bruce Hilling, Borough Administrator**

Mayor Little stated that Mr. Hilling left the room to contact Mr. Francy.

Agenda:

Downtown Business Assessment Team: DBAT

The Mayor explained that DBAT will be conducting the meeting today. The Council, Administrator and Borough Clerk would leave the dais. There would be a public portion since it is an advertised meeting. She then opened the public portion of the meeting.

Public Portion:

No questions at this time.

Mayor closed public portion.

Members of the DBAT:

**Beth Lippman, Executive Director of Downtown NJ introduced herself and members.
Stuart Koperweis, S3X, Associates.
Mike Redpath, Redpath & Associates**

They all described their professional backgrounds and what they want to see for the Borough of Highland in five years.

DBAT began taking questions from members of the audience.

Mayor Little stated that she sees Highlands in five years with a lot of foot traffic on the Bay Avenue area, does not see much change in residential uses. Improvements: external structures of the buildings improved, elevating structures to comply with FEMA requirements. She would like to see water transportation with other towns during the recreational season on an hourly or bi-hourly schedule. This is her vision.

Ms Kane explained her vision is similar to the Mayors. She also would like to see more foot traffic. Have a cleaner, neater community. Would like to see other types of business besides restaurants, which would serve the community. Have a business community that works with the Borough Council.

Carla Cefalo-Braswell agreed that foot traffic is a consensus of this Board. She spoke of commuter traffic used, has always been a challenge to get them to stop. We need to give them a reason to stop. Would like to see cleanliness, code enforcement is lacking, need to enforce

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ordinances. Crime: mostly public nuisance, skateboarders, cursing, spitting, graffiti, vandalism, enforcement would help tremendously. Need maintenance program. Streetscape needed. Flooding is an issue. Many businesses are affected by flooding. Its hard to attract business here because of it.

Linda Mikail, Commercial Broker and Volunteers with HBP – She has a list of business that are trying to get in to town but they have problems with zoning, flooding, element that walks the street. The mercantile license process and variances are tedious. Need a more business friendly atmosphere.

It is difficult to rent to business here. We have a landlord registration here in town to keep track of tenants and to make landlords responsible. Would like to see this more effective.

Dan Shields – owns two restaurants in town. We need to take the seasonality out of this town. We do a lot of business in summer; do very little the other nine months. We do not have a marketing plan to make Highlands a year round destination. Winter is like a ghost town. The perception of Highlands is that it's only a summer destination. That is the biggest issue that the business owners need to get past. Every year seems like it is getting worse. He does not feel that BID events in town are helpful to his business. He does not benefit from foot traffic. He does not want to set up a tent at the event to sell food or alcohol. He would like to see more events to drive traffic to your location, not away. The events are good for the town not for his business. If he pays into the BID he would like to see events like a trolley stop.

Lori Kutosh – resident. Her vision is to see more occupancy; a lot of businesses are empty. Signage is pitiful, especially with the bridge we need better signage, street clean up needed, pavers, more uniformity. Feels that we should not have to leave town to get what we want.

Paul Murphy – Code Enforcement Officer – Explanation of Landlord Registration.

Its adopted by ordinance to help us track landlords, supply us with tenant information, emergency contact numbers, and mortgage holders and to generate revenue. It does work. This is for rental properties only. There are roughly 500 registered rental units in this town. Landlord registration renewed annually. A certificate of occupancy is filled out each time there is a new tenant. Landlord registration is checked for each c/o. C/O's are issued every time a tenant changes, inspections are done to insure that the building is safe for occupancy.

Bill Weber – resident of Highlands – Feels that the problem with Highlands is that there is too much isolation. Need to get the people involved in cleaning up downtown. We have a Master Housing Development going up on our border. That will attract new businesses here. Need to draw the people here. Would like a better mix of retail stores to attract more traffic. Feels that the new bridge is isolating the town not developing Highlands.

Councilman Chris Francy arrived at 10:23 a.m.

Rebecca Kane feels that one of our biggest stumbling block is that our downtown is not easily accessible. All residential on the highway. Does not show a lot of business or what is down here.

Chief Joseph Blewett – Mercantile Process will change slightly. They have new rules from the State that would speed up the mercantile licensing.

Mrs. Cummins explained that businesses not selling alcohol, would apply thru the clerk's office and fill out an applications packet, and explained the process of all departments involved. Once all departments sign off, the license is then issued.

Chief Blewett – Police Department is responsible for fingerprinting. By ordinance, any business owner must be fingerprinted. He then makes his recommendations to the Borough after he gets them back from the State. The time frame notification from the State for fingerprinting is about 6 weeks.

Jim Bollerman, HBP board member and Business Owner – A lot of the items tend to be more an administrative technical thing. Highlands competes with every municipality, business owners are bewildered by the process that they need to go thru just to establish a business and compete. The process in its totality does not compete well with other municipalities. Highlands loses business.

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Things can be done to expedite the process. There is an opportunity to improve, provide the town with what they need. This would help us to compete with the other municipalities. With a five year vision, there has to be a consensus. Discussed Highlands Master Plan and land use plan, would like to see some planning principals carried forward. This would create more stability to the process.

Chris Francy – Was asked, in the Master Plan, there are specific things laid out that need to be accomplished or zones established, has that occurred? That is a slower process. Asked when the Master Plan was done? He stated, in 2004 but adopted in 2006.

Mr. Bollerman continued - We are almost ready for a new Master Plan, it lends an eliminate of instability to the process for Highlands to compete against the competition.

Mrs. Cummins stated that we have lost our quorum and that the recording of the meeting would stop. She shut off recording equipment.

At 3:55 p.m. Mrs. Cummins continued recording meeting.

Roll Call:

Present: Ms. Kane, Mr. Francy, Mr. Caizza, Mayor Little

Absent: Mr. Urbanski

Michael Redpath – explained their roll as to why they are here. Involved to help review what a Business Improvement District is about and how it can work best for the Highlands.

What are the basic principles behind the functioning of a Business Improvement District? It can be looked at as a marketing entity.

- A) It is about partnering towards a shared vision
- B) Working together

Partnering toward a shared vision, get the vision in writing or it can not be shared. Have a vision statement so that you have something to look at, to see where you are going to be. It needs to be a few paragraphs.

The partnering toward the shared vision is crucial to the concept of the Business Improvement District. Part of the role of the BID is seeing the community moving forward and creating an environment that facilitates that happening. There has to be respect between all groups with in the community and how to best work together. Contrary to how they function, to criticize mayor and council publicly is not what the BID is about, not to be in conflict with another organization with in the community.

Managing Agreement – Most organizations get stuck in their disagreements, wasting resources. Commit to working on things that can be agreed on. The BID is run by the business community and being accountable to the entire community thru Mayor and Council. There are two primary ways in which that happens; at budget time when you present what you are going to be doing in order to move towards achieving that shared vision and at audit time that states this is what you did.

Understanding what marketing is: product, price, placement and promotion. Need to fix the product. As a community, you are doing creative, productive things but they are not necessarily the right things for right now. You are not hitting on the fundamentals that need to be addressed first in order for everything else to happen.

Stuart Koperweis – He has 12 pages of notes, never did that before. Really carries off that we all have a vision of what we would like to see happen. We want a better community, business to thrive, influx of businesses and consumers, property values increase to support the residents of the community and provide the services that are necessary. That is the goals of a BID, that is why it is created. Creation of BID is a very difficult process and once you have one created, you don't want to throw it away.

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What is the role of the BID; should it be an advocacy group, a structure that works on managing those agreements?

- 1) Events management – working as partners with municipality
- 2) Mercantile Licenses – BID is to be an advocate for the improvements for business community

Beth Lippman – The role of the BID is to work with the Borough and to work with the people who work in the Borough toward these goals, to be business friendly.

Stuart Koperweis – continued

- 3) Foster Communications with all parties to reach the same place.
- 4) Code/Zoning/Planning Board – issues should be dealt with from a professional perspective of the BID
- 5) Advocate for the Business Community, to help work together with the Governing Body.
- 6) Council and liaison needs to be in communication, bring information back to governing body so they know where the BID is going, what it is trying to accomplish and reasons for it.

Beth Lippman - Without communication, it is not going to work.

Stuart Koperweis – continued – The roles of the BID is to be an advocate, to manage the agreement, to be a public relations person, a professional person working with all of the civic businesses, institutions and governing body.

Beth Lippmann – What can be done to keep this BID running to serve the community? Some things that can be done are not being done. The product, which is the town, it is being ignored. What else besides great restaurants? You are competing with other town. Concentrate on the town, the vacancies, the way the streets look, building appearances. A lot of money is being spent on marketing, but right now money needs to be spent on the businesses. Work to create something new. There are a lot of towns looking to create special improvements districts because they need the funding. The Governing Body will decide on the BID ordinance in two days if it stays or goes. There are issues from the past. They are here to help us to go forward.

Stuart Koperweis – According to town ordinance, you need to have a budget in place by Dec. 1st. Must adopt budget by April 1st but the reality is that if you have a budget that is suppose to be submitted by Dec. 1st – you should be operating on that right now. There are a lot of things in the ordinance that could be tweaked to make it more effective and efficient.

Beth Lippman – You need to step back and have a new look at BID. Don't get rid of the ordinance, because it is a whole process to get it back. But you could suspend it for a period of time. You can do so because there is no budget in place.

Stuart Koperweis – Statutorily, you are utilizing the Governing Body to effect rates for programs. If there is no budget in place, there is no right to raise revenue and no programming. The suspension of a budget gives us all the opportunity to look at the purpose of the partnership and move forward from there.

Beth Lippman – We are recommending that the council select a committee of no more than 11 people, business and property owners and council liaison that will take a look at the shared vision plan and write a shared vision plan. Reach out to different parts of the community, develop strategic plan to get there. Hire a professional consultant to work with this group, someone who works with the BID, someone who knows state statutes, someone with fresh eyes.

Stuart Koperweis – He recommends suspension rather than disillusionment of ordinance. It's very difficult to get back in to.

Beth Lippman – Start by taking a look at the ordinance, compare to other ordinances. See how you can better it. Take a look at assessments, how do want to do them, who is being assessed, anyone missing from it? They stress bringing in a consultant to lead this group. Not to get rid of BID ordinance but to suspend for a time. Appoint people for the committee to go forward. Also, look at zoning ordinances and see what will help with the vision. See the big picture. Need

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someone to advise new businesses and landlords with the processes that they have to go thru, to help them be successful.

She spoke of commuter traffic. They are getting in their cars and going home. They are not coming in to the stores. Events bring people into the town, but they do not shop very often, they are window shopping. That needs to be looked at. Maybe they will see something that will bring them back. Need to have the stores, destinations that people want to come to. That is what needs to be focused on here.

Michael Redpath – Mercantile License process. BID could look into it. There is an impediment on how the Mercantile Licensing works. The roll of the BID could be to fix it in a way that assures all borough needs are met. You have to respect each department involved. Work together, to fix the product. Such as, feels Bay Avenue unsafe, broken sidewalks, trash in front of houses, etc. The BID is not to criticize but to be the source of the solution.

Beth Lippman - Their role is to work with everyone to get things accomplished, to make it a reality.

Stuart Koperweis – The BIDS role is to enhance the Governing Body's ability to deliver product and services. It is a partner not a replacement, delivering these roles and services. More NJ businesses are looking to do this type of partnership.

DBAT team all agreed that the BID is an effective tool. It gives a voice to the business and property owners.

Michael Redpath - Look at it as a marriage that is in trouble and commit to counseling. Look at what we have in common, that is a base for good negotiation.

Beth Lippman – Thanked Mayor and Council for bringing them in. You can make this work. Do what is right for the town. You can keep the BID; it is a great tool for everyone.

Mr. Redpath and Mr. Koperweis thanked Mayor and Council for their time. A written report will be sent.

Mayor Little is encouraged to hear that we are doing one thing right and that is promotion. Deficiencies in the product may be a heavy responsibility on the part of the Borough. Feels that the town is good at identifying what is wrong, and which department to go to. Getting the solution accomplished is difficult. Not because people don't want to solve problem, thinks we need education. We need to be shown how to solve that problem. We are complicated by the fact that the council and mayor members are part time, with full time responsibility. She sees a commitment toward looking for additional help from outside of Highlands as guidance as to how to solve the many problems that were mentioned today.

Jim Bollerman – Promotion is good. The issue becomes once we get here, we need to spend money on infrastructure. Will the report provide guidelines or steps we can start to understand what may be involved? What areas need improvement, funding?

Michael Redpath – responded. That would be the role of the Board of Trustees of the BID. Also, you would need to do at least two survey thru out the business community addressing issues and work at getting responses so you have a representative picture of what the thinking is of the community. The BID's role is to be facilitators of an ongoing conversation with in the business community, and the community as a whole. It's an on going process.

Beth Lippman – BID can pay for all kinds consultant to help bring in retail, retail retention. They would speak to retailers about what they need to be doing to improve on their end, like the windows. Some don't know how to do that or want to do it. Sometimes location is everything, sometimes it's the product. A lot of shore towns are doing events, you are competing with them. We are a very visual society. It's about how it looks. There are a lot of choices that we are in competition with.

Stuart Koperweis – The Borough image projected is the best of who we are, this is the best of what we can do. This is what we expect of you. You get back the same thing.

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Michael Redpath – So much of what we get done, we are not spending money on. It's thru the creative partnering, such as Boro Hall, once you identify what needs to be done in order to make it look better,

Mayor Little - We are looking for a new building, different location due to FEMA requirements. It is a priority for next budget.

Michael Red path – Put asphalt over the apron out in front of Boro Hall so that cracks are covered. It's short term appearance. We need a community campaign to restore pride here. There is no pride here. Start with little stuff. We need ongoing, incremental improvements.

Beth Lippmann – If you fix the sidewalks, people will then look at their buildings, how they can improve. If we start improving, they start improving. You've got to start somewhere, little steps.

Carla Cefalo-Braswell – Downtown NJ has annual conferences and workshop, there isn't any financial assistance out there but there are a lot of free resources' available to small towns, such as, façade programs, technical assistance.

The DBAT team thanked the Mayor and Council.

The Meeting adjourned at 5:05 pm

DEBBY DAILEY, DEPUTY BOROUGH CLERK