

**UPPER TOWNSHIP PLANNING BOARD
STRATHMERE DEANNEXZATION REQUEST**

**MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 12, 2008**

A special meeting was held at the Township Hall, 2100 Tuckahoe Road, Petersburg, New Jersey at 7:30 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a Petition filed by the Citizens for Strathmere and Whale Beach to deannex a portion of Upper Township commonly known as Strathmere and Whale Beach from Upper Township and annex same to Sea Isle City, New Jersey.

CALL TO ORDER

SUNSHINE ANNOUNCEMENT

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

ROLL CALL

Present: Daniel Bready, William Brown, James Kelly, Curtis Corson, James Schroder, Donald Kissling, Duane Terwilliger, Susan Ragan, Mayor Palombo, Renee Scrocca.

SWEAR IN BOARD PROFESSIONALS

Stuart B. Wiser, Licensed Professional Planner, of Remington, Vernick and Walberg, was sworn in.

An announcement was made that an additional meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, February 26, 2008 beginning at 6:00 p.m. until 9: p.m.

Mary D'Arcy-Bittner, Council for the Citizens for Strathmere and Whale Beach, submitted the closed session minutes of the Township Committee that were discussed at the previous meeting.

Solicitor Marcolongo marked the 4 sheets consisting of closed session minutes of Upper Township Committee dated September 24, 2007, September 10, 2007, August 27, 2007 and June 25, 2007 as Exhibit S-33.

The meeting was open to the public.

Frederick Jacob, 1900 Commonwealth Avenue, Whale Beach, was sworn in. He was present to give the board facts that have happened since moving in as a permanent resident in April 2007.

Mr. Jacob submitted a photo showing the steps leading to the beach across from his property. The photo was pre-marked by Solicitor Marcolongo as Exhibit S-25. He testified that the photo shows poison ivy growing on the steps and railings. The Township did cut the poison back on July 10, 2007. He stated that this was the only time the entire summer that any of the undergrowth was cut. He has never contacted the township to report the poison ivy on the steps.

He submitted additional photos that were marked by the Solicitor as S-26 through S-32. The first 3 photographs show the steps with vegetation growing on them.

Mr. Jacob discussed the seaweed that was on the beach from July 31 until August 8 of 2007. Exhibit S-29 shows the beach up to the sand dunes covered with seaweed. By the 4th day the seaweed smelled and was a public health nuisance. Exhibit S-30 also shows the seaweed on the beach.

Mayor Palombo agreed that the seaweed was unbelievable this summer. He also stated that Upper Township has entered into an agreement with the State that they will not rake the beaches.

Mr. Jacob discussed Exhibit S-31 consisting of 3 sheets each containing 4 photos. The photos were taken August 23, 2007. In 2003 there was snow fencing that was well maintained and the dunes appeared to be building up. To his knowledge there has not been any work done to the dunes in over 4 years. Most of the snow fencing is gone.

(Mr. Kelly joined the Board at this time)

Mr. Jacob testified that S-32 shows an old wooden ice chest on the beach. He first saw the ice chest in 2003. The chest is still on the beach now.

Mr. Jacob stated that sometime in June 2007 at 2 a.m. he was locked out of his house. He tried to unlock the door and set off the security alarm. The locksmith came to the house an hour and a half later to let them in and re-key the locks. The State Police showed up over 2 hours later. He believes that Sea Isle would have had someone there within minutes. He feels this is a public safety concern. He does not believe Upper Township has the resources to take care of Strathmere and Whale Beach.

Edmund Bamford, 1912 S. Commonwealth Avenue, Whale Beach, was sworn in. He has been coming to Whale Beach since 1950. In 1963 he built a cottage and carried water in jugs from 1950 until the 1980's when the DEP made Sea Isle City cut off the water supply. There was no help from the Township with the water situation. He discussed the vacation of the street behind his house. He had to request a variance to construct an addition to his house. In the 1970's he bought snow fencing and installed as much as 4 blocks.

Mr. Bamford testified that he has been unable to get the help he needs from the Township. It took over 7 months to get the street light in front of his house fixed. He built containers for the trashcans before the Township supplied them. He doesn't believe it should matter if the trash is commingled. His biggest issue is the taxes. His house is assessed as a duplex since there is a separate kitchen. He does not feel it should be a duplex since its only used by his family.

Lawrence Weaver, 214 Roberts Lane, Mt. Laurel, New Jersey, was sworn in. Mr. Weaver's is the owner of 122 Putnam Avenue. He is present to support the Citizen's of Strathmere and Whale Beach in the proposal to join with Sea Isle City. He discussed a situation that happened over 20 years ago when his father suffered a heart attack and died. His mother had to administer CPR while waiting for help to arrive. His Mother said she is not sure how long it took for help to arrive but that it felt like forever. He feels that help would arrive from Sea Isle faster than anywhere else.

Mr. Weaver went on to state that Strathmere was once a part of Sea Isle City. Strathmere is geographically connected to Sea Isle City and not connected to Upper Township. Sea Isle already has a police force and Strathmere must rely on the State Police. The Sea Isle City Police would have a much faster response time to Strathmere than the State Police unless they were already in town. Sea Isle City has a governing body who's primary focus is to manage shore communities. The residents of Strathmere and Whale Beach have spent their own money to be represented here tonight. Since the past fall up to now the beaches have lost a considerable amount of sand. He feels the loss of sand needs to be addressed now.

Mr. Weaver suggests having a town meeting in Strathmere to share a long-term plan that Upper Township has for Strathmere in a much less formal setting than here tonight.

David Townsend, 17 W. Winthrop Avenue, was sworn in. He has owned his property for 25 years. He has visited Strathmere for 55 years. He discussed his family history and ties to the area. He discussed the boat ramp in Beesleys Point and the money that is collected for using the ramp. The Strathmere boat ramp is not maintained and is free. There is no one there to police the ramp and the area. He stated that the ramp is a problem for the residents. He is also concerned that there is no noise ordinance.

Mr. Townsend stated that he installed an irrigation system on his property and the neighbor on the corner wrote him a letter complaining that the sprinkler was creating a pool of water in front of his house. The water drains to Commonwealth Avenue where it stays since there is no place for it to go. In August of 2006 his daughter was going back to college and could not get out of town due to the water.

Paul Krueger, 224 S. Bayview Avenue, was sworn in. He stated that the ordinance doesn't provide or care about the citizens of Strathmere. He feels the Township doesn't spend any money unless it is absolutely necessary. He feels the elected officials have failed to protect their properties from erosion. His security alarm went off while he was

at his permanent residence in Haddonfield. The State Police arrived 1 hour and 10 minutes later. He spoke about sanitation and the fact that the trash sometimes needs to be picked up more than once a week. He feels that the drains should be cleaned since the water prohibits them from putting their trash out for collection. He referred to one time when he placed the trash 17 ft. back where he has some high ground. The Township didn't take the trash. He asked why residents have to call to get things done. If the Township Engineer is responsible for maintaining different things then why doesn't he make rounds to make sure things that need to be fixed are fixed. He feels this is neglect. His guess is that it is a political decision to spend as little as they can on Strathmere. He referred to a report stating "Sea Isle City has spent a great deal of money over the decade attempting to find a non-hard structural solution to the frequency of storm closings to Commonwealth Avenue". A copy of a report by Dr. Stewart Farrell, Director Coastal Research Center, Richard Stockton College, dated March 11, 2004, was marked as exhibit S-33.

Deborah Wittkamp, 9 S. Commonwealth Avenue, was sworn in. She is a lifelong resident of Strathmere. Her family goes as far back as the 1800's when they owned and operated a hotel in Strathmere. She commented that Strathmere has seen many changes but one thing remains the same, Strathmere is a unique barrier island community that has little in common with any other island community.

Her understanding of cultural differences began when she changed schools as a child and went to Upper Township rather than Ocean City. In March 1962 a coastal storm flooded the island. At that time Strathmere had an active United States Coast Guard Station. Strathmere has tried to make the rest of Upper Township understand important issues such as seawalls, clean drinking water and protection. She referred to last week's edition of the Gazette where the cover story references spraying for gypsy moths in Upper Township. The only mention of the meeting held on February 2, 2008 was an announcement that it would be continued on February 12, 2008. Later in the issue is a column written by someone who doesn't have an understanding of what Strathmere is all about. She has never thought that Strathmere should be a part of Upper Township. She urged the Planning Board to recommend deannexation. A copy of the Gazette she referred to was marked as Exhibit S-34.

Charles Wittkamp, 9 S. Commonwealth Avenue, was sworn in. He spoke about police protection. He referred to a night when 2 teens were smashing car windows. It took about 50 minutes for the police to arrive while they were holding one of the teens. He feels that police presence is needed during the summer months. In 2005 there was an accident in front of their property. It took 45 to 50 minutes for the State Police to get there. He believes that Sea Isle City Police would have been there sooner. There are other things that go on in town such as loud music, fireworks, drinking on the beach and open fires. He referred to a 2003 report on local police depts. The report indicates that Dept. of Justice statistics show that the average ratio of officer to resident in small police departments is 2.2 officers per 1,000 residents. Strathmere has 5,000 or fewer residents

in the summer. There should be 11 officers. There is no reference to square miles in the report.

Mr. Wittkamp discussed the lifeguard house. The lifeguard house was going to be constructed on the bulkhead that was built by the residents in 1964. There were temporary structures before and some of the residents were not in favor of the new structure. The township had to stop work and apply for a permit. A meeting was held on June 11, 2004 and Mayor Palombo attended. He reviewed discussion that he remembers from that meeting. He submitted a petition with a cover letter dated June 12, 2004 to require the pilings at the end of Williams Road removed. The petition was marked as Exhibit S-35. He has lived in Strathmere full time for the past 15 years.

Mr. Wittkamp stated that in the 1990's with approval from the Township Committee Strathmere residents raised \$10,000 to purchase a Zodiac to be used by the lifeguards. The boat was intended to assist the lifeguards in rescues. Unfortunately the boat was destroyed after just one summer. If the township saw that the costly equipment was maintained the residents wouldn't have to be concerned about replacing a \$7,500.00 jet ski.

Mayor Palombo commented that the Township has purchased numerous types of lifesaving equipment to protect the beaches. There was discussion concerning how much the Jet Ski is used.

The board took a 5-minute break.

Kandace Kruse, 17 E. Sherman Avenue, was sworn in. Her parents built the house that she lives in over 50 years ago. She feels that she pays taxes to a township that barley knows she exists. She received no support from the township when her taxes went up. She feels that given her history on the island a show of concern and support would have been appropriate. She feels the township does not care about the people of Strathmere only the ratables. The township left them stranded for 3 days after a coastal snowstorm. She believes the township should have plowed Strathmere first and not last. She discussed being a member of a community emergency management response team in Sea Isle City where they are there to assist first responders in anyway possible in the event of a coastal storm, flooding or hurricane. Sea Isle has included Strathmere as a part of their plan.

She stated that most residents didn't want anything written on the tower not even Strathmere. The township was happy to comply with the request to leave it blank when the tower first went up but no more. She feels this was a spiteful act by the Mayor.

Ms. Kruse feels that the good outweighs the bad regarding annexation to Sea Isle. They are willing to make some changes. She feels the deannexation is long overdue. She urged the Board to do what is right for the people of Strathmere in allowing them proper emergency management and proper safety and assistance.

Leah Furey, Bach Associates, Professional Planner, was sworn in. The board accepted Ms. Furey as an expert planner.

Ms. Furey testified that she has been retained by the Citizens of Strathmere and Whale Beach to perform an analysis of the Upper Township municipal boundary as it relates to Strathmere and Whale Beach and determine whether Strathmere and Whale Beach would be better served by an alternative alignment of the Municipal boundary. She discussed the material that she reviewed to prepare the Strathmere Deannexation Study.

Ms. Furey testified that it is her opinion that Strathmere should be permitted to deannex and annex to the larger island community of Sea Isle City. It is her professional opinion that the Deannexation would not have any lasting negative impact on the public good or the residents of Upper Township and would have no detrimental impact on the Master Plan of the Township. Strathmere would be better served by joining Sea Isle City. The realignment of the boundary would benefit the public health, safety and security and the general welfare of the residents of Strathmere. It could also benefit the general welfare of the Township overall. It would not have any impact on the day to day activities of the Upper Township residents.

She gave the reasons for her conclusion that joining Strathmere and Sea Isle City makes sense from a geographic, community and environmental and economic standpoint. The Master Plan indicates that Strathmere is a unique area but the plan is not very purposeful or visionary when it comes to Strathmere. She also reviewed Sea Isle's Master Plan and noted that it contains specific sections that could pertain to Strathmere since it recognizes and addresses the special characteristics and needs of the barrier island. Another reason for her conclusion is that the Sea Isle Police Department would be able to provide a more consistent law enforcement. She did not prepare a fiscal impact analysis. It didn't seem relevant to focus on the fiscal impacts since generally the planning board doesn't base decisions on fiscal impact. It was determined by the Citizens of Strathmere and Whale Beach that any fiscal impact of the Deannexation would be only one piece of the larger picture. There are recent efforts at the State level to encourage consolidation of the municipalities. This proposal would promote the purposes of more efficient and effective public services delivery.

Ms Furey stated that the 2006 Master Plan and also the Plan Endorsement Petition discusses the ratable base. Strathmere was not included in the planning scheme.

Solicitor Marcolongo marked the Strathmere Deannexation Study prepared by Bach Associates, PC as Exhibit S-37. The plan was last updated 2/12/08. She reviewed the exhibits in the report.

Ms. Furey summarized that due to the size, location, character and environment, the Strathmere community is particularly suited to merge with Sea Isle City. The Deannexation from Upper Township will not be a detriment to the Township's Master Plan as its currently written. The Master Plan and correspondence with the Office of

Smart Growth does not include Strathmere as part of the overall planning scheme. She feels the proposed change will directly and indirectly advance the purpose of municipal land use law.

Ms. Bittner agreed that they have not submitted any fiscal information or the savings to the township from not having to provide services to the Strathmere. She further agreed that they have not calculated the effect on the municipal budget or the school budget.

Ms. Furey testified that she does not know of any entity in New Jersey that has combined as she has suggested. She agreed that Strathmere was included in the Master Plan as being unique and deserving of special attention. The Sea Isle Master Plan would prefer for the north end of the island to remain at a low density to protect the environment. The consultant hired to do the natural resource inventory also conducted the natural resource inventory for Strathmere. The inventories are very similar. She feels that Strathmere would keep its identity even if it were annexed with Sea Isle. In speaking with the citizens this is a risk they are willing to take. She also indicated that there are different zones in Sea Isle City including a zone that recognizes public beaches.

There was discussion regarding sewers and environmental concerns. There was also discussion concerning how many hours were spent preparing the report.

Solicitor Marcolongo stated that the Planning Board is to report on the impact of the Deannexation upon the Municipality. Ms. Furey stated that she was not hired to do a fiscal impact analysis. Her plan does not address the fiscal impact.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m. and will continue on February 26, 2008 at 6:00 p.m.

Submitted by,

Shelley Lea