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**TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY**

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting  
Date of Meeting: February 20, 2015  
Time of Meeting: 6:00 P.M.  
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Mayor Bettina Bieri called the Special Meeting of the West Milford Township Council to order.

**Adequate Notice Statement**

Mayor Bieri read the following statement:

Please note that in accordance with Chapter 231, Public Laws of 1975 of New Jersey, adequate advance notice of this Special meeting was published in the Herald News on February 15, 2015; copies were provided to the Record, Star Ledger, Suburban Trends and posted continuously on the bulletin board in the main corridor of the Town Hall and on file in the Office of the Township Clerk.

Please also make note of all fire and emergency exits – located to the left, right, and rear of this room - for use in case of an emergency. Thank you.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

Mayor Bieri led all in attendance in a salute to the flag.

**Roll Call**

Present: Councilmembers Ada Erik, Michael Hensley (arrived 6:17), Michele Dale, Luciano Signorino (arrived 6:06), Marilyn Lichtenberg, Mayor Bettina Bieri.  
Absent: Council President Vivienne Erk  
Also Present: Township Administrator Kenneth Gabbert, Township Clerk Antoinette Battaglia

Agenda No. II

**Purpose**

Review of the proposed 2015 Municipal Budget.

Agenda No. III

**Review of 2015 Municipal Budget**

**Overview** – Administrator Gabbert said the proposed budget represents a 5.7% tax increase although he expects that will be reduced as the process evolves. It would be necessary to cut \$550,000 to bring the increase below 4%.

**Discussion – Personnel Requests for 2015**

Administrator Gabbert said he previously presented a health department restructuring plan and the health officer is here tonight with a simplified, less complicated version.

Health Department –Health officer Michael Fitzpatrick address the Council directing them to a chart he had prepared. He said he has minimized proposed changes for 2015 and plans to implement more changes in 2016. He is making recommendations in an effort to reduce costs and maintain services. He is looking for savings in the budget. There will be no effect to current employees in his proposal for 2015 with the exception of a request to increase the hours of one administration person at a cost of approximately \$8,000. The \$8,000 increase does not include the benefits for a full time person. He is trying to take individual positions that should have overlapping responsibilities and interconnecting those responsibilities. That cross training will ultimately result in cost savings.

Animal control costs \$125,000 in salaries and benefits and there are costs related to the animal control vehicle. If these services remain full time in West Milford there will be a need for a new vehicle. He is suggesting a shared services contract in 2016 to reduce costs to \$68,000 with no vehicle costs. Staffing, at that time, in animal control would be for administrative services for licensing and would cost between \$5,900 and \$16,000. In 2017 those costs would level out at \$74,000 in totality. The salaries reflected do not include health benefits. Councilwoman Dale said it is important that all costs be reflected to properly analyze the costs. She said if the cost of benefits equals \$100,000 that is one tax point. Mayor Bieri said all costs should be delineated for both existing and future projections.

Nursing – Mr. Fitzpatrick said there have been many changes in recent years with health care. More and more required services will be provided through the national health care act minimizing some aspects of public health nursing services. He has to look at that giant impact to properly analyze the need for these services and he concluded there can be a reduction in hours reducing costs from \$151,000 to \$84,000. He explained the need for additional staff to run programs that are not needed at other times in the department. Councilwoman Erik asked if Mr. Fitzpatrick is proposing to eliminate West Milford staff in

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favor of bringing in Bloomfield personnel. Mr. Fitzpatrick said that is not what is being proposed. This was developed as a budget piece. He tried to focus on what is needed in the department. Councilwoman Erik said there is a note on the chart saying that West Milford staff will continue to work until 12/31/2015 and then Bloomfield staff begin the next year. Councilwoman Dale said we are not contracted to Bloomfield, services could be provided by in house staff or another shared services agreement. Mr. Fitzpatrick said he proposes to increase registrar services by one day and that person would also provide administrative services thereby reducing administrative costs. It would minimize the impact on the administrator's office and the staff who currently assist with registrar services. Mayor Bieri said it appears the costs still increase overall and Mr. Fitzpatrick concurred. He said the overall savings is \$55,000 in the longterm. Councilwoman Dale noted that Mr. Fitzpatrick is proposing to increase health officer hours to an extent that raises costs to an amount equal to 50% of the proposed increase. Mr. Fitzpatrick said all municipal septic systems are inspected every month which has resulted in savings to the town. They work closer with Building Standards Board which will warrant an increase if we hire a public inspector to research complaints. Councilwoman Dale said the \$55,000 savings will erode over the years and Mr. Fitzpatrick said it will still be a lower number. Mayor Bieri asked if the health officer had looked into having escrows for septic inspections rather than having it funded by taxpayers and also outsourcing that service and maintain our staffing without additional hires or contracts to perform all the other functions. Mr. Fitzpatrick said he spoke with Paul Ferriero about this. There are a very limited number of firms who provide this service. He said if you have a staff of licensed engineers and/or graduate engineers who are not licensed it could result in unlicensed persons reviewing plans. That could be a safety hazard. The cost of engineering review is high and he does not know if this is legally allowed. Mayor Bieri said it may not necessarily be direct escrow but there is a mechanism to pass the costs along to the person needing the service. She said she knows it is being done in other towns and she would like this looked at. Councilwoman Dale asked to have Paul Ferriero speak to Council about this. Mr. Fitzpatrick said the number of septic in West Milford may prove overwhelming. Councilwoman Dale said the point is that the costs are not being assumed by the taxpayers at large; they are being assumed by the user. She said she would like a comprehensive analysis to determine if the pass through costs are fair & reasonable. She asked how many towns Mr. Fitzpatrick represents as health officer. Mr. Fitzpatrick said four but they are much smaller than West Milford. Discussion ensued about passing along costs. Mr. Fitzpatrick said the goal is to prevent environmental contamination. There are very difficult soil & septic conditions in West Milford. Councilwoman Dale said the Council needs to understand the pros & cons and Councilman Hensley agreed saying that the data would allow a comparison of costs.

Administrator Gabbert asked for more clarification on public health nursing. Mr. Fitzpatrick said he is proposing to reduce the contact hours from 53 to 32. Administrator Gabbert asked what services would be sacrificed as a result and Mr. Fitzpatrick said he does not believe there will be any negative impact. He said he has analyzed the requirements and seeing that requirements are changing, some efficiencies of scale, having more people available to do clinics, will allow better services only when needed. More municipalities are going to require more shared services. Attendance at these programs is down. Some towns are not even meeting the minimum requirements so towns are consolidating. You can get flu shots at any pharmacy now. That was not the case in the past. Sharing services allows a municipality to provide services in an efficient manner.

Tax Assessor's Office – Administrator Gabbert recalled that the Council asked him to make specific recommendations regarding staffing in the assessor's office. He said he researched other towns and found the results varied drastically. In West Milford there are three full time persons in this office even though the Township has been downsizing in virtually every area. This department has not been downsized in a long time and he believes that the work can be done more efficiently with less staff. He recommends reducing staff to two full time people on July 1<sup>st</sup> with the ultimate goal of a staffing level of 1.5 persons by January 2016. This would reduce salary costs from \$450,000 to about \$200,000. He reviewed the actual number of hours worked by staff members. 22% of contact time is lost due to time off and he stands by his recommendations. Mayor Bieri said that, based on Administrator Gabbert's numbers, time off equates to about nine weeks per year per person and she asked if that is correct. Administrator Gabbert answered in the affirmative saying he used an average of three years based on actual time taken.

DPW – Administrator Gabbert reviewed the staffing requests saying he is not recommending the requested change in network administration staffing. He said the number two person in DPW is working in a title that does not accurately represent his position. He said he will be proposing to develop the appropriate title. In the meantime, he hopes to address the inequity by funding a stipend for the additional work being performed by this person. Mayor Bieri noted that this person has assumed a tremendous burden on repeated occasions in the absence of a director. Administrator Gabbert said that the garage is simply understaffed. There was a request to hire two new mechanics and he is recommending that one new mechanic be hired. Discussion ensued about space and how it would be cleared to accommodate the additional person. Councilwoman Dale said Council has asked for an analysis of how much is spent on repairs adding that the information is necessary to make an informed decision. If Council funded new equipment it may eliminate the need for an additional mechanic. Discussion ensued about capital investments and the possible impact on maintenance. Councilman

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Hensley said he favors hiring whatever staff is necessary to enter the maintenance information for each vehicle so that the Council can ascertain the maintenance issues and costs. Councilwoman Lichtenberg asked for permission to review the files saying that she would do the data entry to compile the information if the data is legible. Councilwoman Dale said a temporary hire could accomplish this task at a minimal cost. Mayor Bier noted that, while the endeavor may be worthwhile, it may be more efficient to have the mechanic update the Council on each vehicle and begin the data entry process on a going forward basis. Administrator Gabbert said they have begun the process in Excel and will continue working on it.

Administrator Gabbert said we are in a quagmire in DPW. Every available staff person is out engaged in snow removal, sanding or salting. Several times we have exceeded a rational amount of time for people to be working. He proposes resolving that by adding two new entry-level laborers. That will also allow us to reduce the number of contractors and allow manpower to focus on other work all year round. We could also start the brine process. He believes we will see payback. Mayor Bieri asked if we could have part time employees on call just for storm duties. She said she would rather wait to hire when the new director has had a chance to restructure and make recommendations. Councilwoman Dale asked if these hires could be temporary to permanent and Administrator Gabbert said he will look at options. Councilman Hensley said he likes the concept of 3 hires because it might minimize weed growth at the side of roads in Spring. He said he would like to see us purchase a new sweeper. Councilwoman Erik said that would be a capital budget discussion and Mayor Bieri said all those issues should be looked at by new director and recommendations made. Councilwoman Dale said temporary to permanent candidates are generally productive making a full time hiring decision easy to make based on known performance.

Administrator Gabbert said a promotion was made in June 2013 to drafting but it was not correctly reflected in the 2014 budget. He will get more information. The Deputy OEM and OEM coordinator are willing for the stipend to go to the deputy and he will address that. There was a request to make the part time position in payroll a full time position but he does not recommend that.

Police – Administrator Gabbert said the police department is seeking to hire three new patrol officers because of retirements. The captain is planning to retire in April and a lieutenant is planning to retire in July. The chief is also asking for two additional officers. Administrator Gabbert said he does not recommend filling the captains position nor the additional two officers. Councilman Signorino said he would like to know the justification for not filling the captains position and Councilwoman Dale said she would defer to the Chief to make that decision.

Tax Collection – Administrator Gabbert said there has been a request to make the part time position a full time position but he does not recommend that. He said there is a request to hire four seasonal part time people for the annual animal control census and he recommends that.

Parks – Administrator Gabbert said that the Council previously approved a full time position in the parks department which is a division of CS&R. A seasonal person was ultimately hired and he is recommending that that person be made full time.

Administrator Gabbert said he will be reviewing the capital budget at the next meeting which will include technology upgrades. Mayor Bieri said she has been asking successive administrators for years to analyze the potential of having ADP do payroll and automating the time card system for greater efficiency.

Agenda No. IV

**Public Comments**

Mayor Bieri opened the meeting to the public after advising that there is a five-minute limit for each speaker.

Brian Townsend, 1872 Macopin Road, West Milford said he is the Township's Tax Assessor. He said he would like to receive a copy of the Administrator's analysis of tax assessor's offices in other towns as well as the accumulated data pertaining to time used. He said that he understood from the last meeting that the administrator's goal was to restructure without any layoffs. The Council, at that meeting, requested additional information and tonight he was surprised that the administrator is proposing a 1.5 person reduction in the department. He said he would appreciate receiving more information and being provided the ability & opportunity to have input. If the Council is going to consider the administrator's recommendation, he said he would request an opportunity to discuss the potential impact. He has worked in West Milford for 32 years and he asked that he be included in the dialogue and be part of the process. He said that his department did have a reduction in staff from five persons to three people.

Lynn Berry, 45 Cliff Road, Pinecliff Lake, West Milford said she has been a resident for over 40 years and a local business owner. She and her husband own an engineering and land-surveying firm. Through the years, they have seen many changes and they have worked with each of the departments critiqued here tonight. West Milford is one of the most professional public entities they work with. The staff is always

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working and busy and that is not the case in other towns. There is not a lot of fat in the departments. She greatly appreciates the staff in West Milford town hall. West Milford is a unique community with unique conditions and needs. There are many sanitary systems, soils, lots, existing cemeteries, and wells abutting wells. Personally, it has been her pleasure to work with West Milford employees who are an asset.

Millie Blazovic lives in Jefferson but is the Activities Director for Bald Eagle Commons, 21 Richmond Road, West Milford said the changes in the health department will affect her seniors. Changes to health programs nationally are forthcoming but community nursing is not just about clinics. It's also a sense of community & nursing. She commended Bobbie Del Sol, the public health nurse, depicting her as the face of community nursing. She spoke about Ms. Del Sol's personal touch saying she knows the patients and checks on their overall lives each time she sees them. In this society that is rare in the medical community. She counsels on nutrition, checks vitals and does everything a community nurse should be doing. She urged the Council to save that for this entire community.

Elizabeth Martin, 32 Forge Road, West Milford said she works at Milford Manor which is the only nursing home in town. When there is an emergency they always call Bobbie Del Sol first. Not just because she is the town nurse but because of her experience & knowledge. She understands budget constraints but she would never cut the most experienced persons. Ms. Del Sol is always the first person to respond to emergencies & health issues and she gave examples.

Kathy Mazzouccolo, staff attorney for West Milford Unions, Local 3301 and Local 2275, lives in Bayonne, said the health officer mentioned that the affordable health care act is changing everything. If that is so how can you make a definite recommendation about what the needs will be in the future? There are currently court challenges to the Act and she would hesitate making predications as to the outcome. This town is very unique. It is environmentally sensitive and critical to the water supply of New Jersey. The health department is critical to that effort. Apparently West Milford has an incredible public health program with valuable services to seniors & youth. Think seriously before making radical changes. There was a time when there were over 40 DPW employees in West Milford; there are now 16. There are miles of roads with varying conditions with limited lighting. These guys do a tremendous job. They go without rest to clear roads and in inclement weather West Milford roads are better than many more populated and better staffed areas. Township officials should be proud of your staff. She hopes Council bears in mind the years of dedicated service.

Paula Edelstein, part-time Public Health Nurse and resident for 34 years, outlined her credentials and experience. As a resident her main concern is communicable disease. Her passion is to protect every person in her town. She handles reports & investigations. She explained what that involves. She works with the REHS staff in town as a team to find source of these communicable diseases. She is also passionate about disease prevention. There have been no outbreaks in West Milford in the last 30 years because she & Ms. Del Sol are constantly educating families & parents to get vaccines their children and they need. Adults can get free vaccinations. They have been taking care of children for many years. ACA help families get care but many in shelters do not have access to health care. They cannot get into school without immunizations. The health department gives them the vaccinations for free. She works behind the scenes. She relayed how the West Milford health department ensures that they get vaccinations directly from the State rather than wait for Passaic County to take action. This was especially true during the H1N1 outbreak. She ensured that West Milford became a provider that that the Township got an allotment directly from the state rather than wait for the county. As a result there was no H1N1 outbreak in West Milford. She talked about the recent measles outbreak in California and the work the West Milford health department does to prevent such outbreaks in our town. The health department is a team that works together. They have resources to care of our town. They work with various organizations to address community needs. They have a volunteer base that is comprised of local nurses to assist if there is ever an outbreak.

Bobbie Del Sol, Vernon said she has been the Township Nurse for 26 years. She teaches at Ramapo. Many clinics throughout the state are based on how West Milford conducts clinics. She explained how staff from the health department, with volunteers, make these clinics a success. She audits preschools to ensure all preschoolers have their shots and she is a liaison for school nurses. The nurses take care of the police department and emergency responders. She works with students from William Paterson on a community assessment program and she continuously strives to develop new programs. West Milford is her home. She explained the personal relationships she has with residents. The idea is the health department staff does not want to be replaced by Bloomfield. She & Ms. Edelstein have worked too hard & too long and will not stand by. They love this town.

Maryanne Terracino, 7110 Richmond Road, Bald Eagle Commons, West Milford said Ms. Del Sol comes to her building once per month to take resident's blood pressure. She asks questions about all lifestyle issues. She cares for people. When her son passed away, Ms. Del Sol was there to help her with depression. She never met Ms. Edelstein but knows she is an asset. She said seniors appreciate them both because they genuinely care. She thanked the commons for letting her come adding that Ms. Del

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Sol often gives up her lunch to come at the designated time. She said the West Milford DPW keeps our roads better than any town in Bergen County. She thanked police, fire & first aid because they respond to Bald Eagle swiftly. Appreciates every time they come with kindness, consideration & caring. Seniors don't like raised taxes but sometimes you have to give to get.

Joan Dundorf, 45 Lake Park Terrace, Hewitt said her opinions are representative of many residents'. She met Ms. Del Sol in the 1980s after major surgery. She explained the circumstances. Last year she had a major illness. While she was in the hospital her husband was bitten by a tick and she told him to call Ms. Del Sol who has become a friend. West Milford residents will never get that from someone from Bloomfield.

Robert Sargent 29 Vreeland Road, West Milford said paying \$10,000 per hour for contractors to remove snow might be a good deal by comparison to costs of purchasing new trucks and related manpower.

Gale Barth, 11 Mountain Circle North, West Milford said she is the deputy tax assessor and she agrees with all nice things said about the health department. Mr. Townsend covered a lot about the work done in her department. They also help residents with personal issues. They do more than just determine property values. She has worked with the assessor's office for 30 years and works with residents. Many residents come in very upset and the staff allays many fears. The assessor's office is more than just tax appeals. They work with people, explaining the processes. They take time with people. Many people may not understand what they do. They listen to residents. The staff has been there a long time and they have a lot of knowledge. They are at the top of their pay grade due to tenure. You cannot replace the level of knowledge. They are proud of their work product and they love West Milford.

Shirley Perlman, Richmond Road, Bald Eagle Commons, West Milford said she agrees with all the comments made about staff at town hall. She said the tax assessor's office help people fill out forms and they explain the process.

Timothy Storbeck, Butternut Road, Vernon said he is the West Milford Chief of Police. He recognizes that the Council has tough decisions to make. They know how he feels about the police department and all first responders. All other departments, including health & tax assessors help them in their work. He knows there are fiscal concerns but there is a value to people who have been here for a long time, who know their jobs and the residents too. There is personality & professionalism.

Timothy Ligus, 599 Moorestown Road, West Milford is the Construction Official in town. He works with all departments and everyone works together. He recognizes that the administrator and Governing Body have a hard job to keep taxes down. Mayor Bieri has been a proponent of consolidation. Nonetheless, it gets to a point where you cannot cut any more. Everyone has had to take on more with less and this is a testament to municipal staff. The health department has had new codes and they work with the construction department. He would frown on outsourcing those services. Outsourcing would negatively impact the building department. The process has been working well in recent years. He would like to see the Township hire an experienced health officer. Everyone tries to work together. As a taxpayer in town he would like to see services remain in house.

Anthony Parillo, Ridge Road, West Milford said he is the PBA delegate. The staff in the police department is the first responders to any emergency regardless of the type of emergency. Public safety, officer safety & liability issues should be considered when considering staffing. The PBA supports the chief's recommendations.

Bob Nicholson, 20 Hyde Road, Stockholm said municipal taxes are 20% of a tax bill. 60% goes to the school and 20% to the county. He does not agree with cutting staff in the police department or in the health department. Things cost money. We need police officers. We need to protect our freedoms. Unions and council should put together a good package to make this affordable. We should not sacrifice our safety.

Elaine Celano, 1419 Macopin Road, West Milford said that on September 23, 2011 her son was hit by a school bus. The police department, first aid and health department came together and that helped her survive. There was overwhelming support and she is proud to live in this town. She is the part time person in payroll. She would never want to be anywhere than working with the people in this town and she came from corporate America.

Sue Muhaw, REHS Health Department said the health department is always beat upon. They have at times worked with a health officer and at times without. There have been 4 good solid years in this department. The staff pulled together. The nature of the job is that you can't make everyone happy. They know what they need and where to cut corners. Speak to them. They try to expedite inspections when

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closings are looming. Things are better now than they were years ago. They work with people to help them.

There being no more comments from the public, Councilman Hensley moved to close the public portion of the meeting.

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Moved: Hensley Seconded: Lichtenberg  
Voted Aye: Unanimous voice vote.  
Voted Nay: None.  
Motion carried.

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Mayor Bieri said Mr. Townsend was not asked to speak tonight but that is because he did such a thorough job at the last meeting. There may be more questions in the future. She said that the Governing Body is of the belief that department heads get recommendations from staff before coming before the Council. The Governing Body thought they were hearing input from staff. Department heads may or may not agree with what is being proposed but their opinion should be sought nonetheless. Staffing is significantly lower in DPW than it has been in the past. Timing and restructuring are the issues. We also contract out more now than before. The goal is to attain the right balance and analyses are necessary to achieve that. Her philosophy is to encourage & advocate for cross training, attrition, economies that would not affect current staff. None of this conversation is about quality of work or personalities. Everyone agrees that we have top-notch staff. Some things might or might not happen; this is an evaluation process. The Governing Body has a job to do, Council determines the budget level and she, with the administrator, works within that budget. Council needs information to make informed decision. This is about budget not performance.

Councilwoman Lichtenberg concurred with the Mayor's comments.

Councilwoman Erik said she will fight to retain our dedicated and experienced people. The staff is cross-trained and has been bare bones for some time. She will not approve of what was presented tonight for the health department.

Councilman Signorino said this is the first time we have had crowd at a budget meeting. He is delighted to see how everyone comes out to defend his or her colleagues. The Governing Body has to know how decisions affect this familial community. It is good to see positive energy and those here tonight set a good example.

Councilman Hensley said this discussion had no bearing on job performance of any individual. He is impressed about learning about how the departments work together and the experience we have. He has not met most employees before tonight. Thank you for showing the human side. Thank you for your service to the community. We owe public employees a debt.

Councilwoman Dale said it is a fine line. She asked everyone to understand there must be a balance. She welcomes the balance and it is great that we work together. It is also important to consider residents who are struggling to pay bills. The municipality does have budget challenges. We must start to right the ship. She would not propose changes for existing employees but we must make changes going forward. She asks for people to work with the Governing Body, give suggestions and let voices be heard. She appreciates all that the employees do.

Councilman Signorino said the knowledge from years of service is invaluable. That contributes greatly to the work product. Government takes a long time. That is also a factor. He appreciates that.

Councilwoman Erik said even if we hold line at zero there will have to be cuts because insurance costs continue to increase. That is the hard part. Councilwoman Dale said it is a difficult balance. Mayor Bieri said even if nothing changes our costs rise every year due to benefits, insurance and pension. That makes it difficult. Councilwoman Dale said the public should be educated about what portion of the taxes go to municipal costs. They should also know how much of the budget the Council has control over. Mayor Bieri echoed those sentiments saying that the Council has control of less than half of the municipal budget. Administrator Gabbert said the Council has control of about 35% of the municipal budget, the rest is mandated expenses such as insurance, pension, grants, etc. Mayor Bieri said many residents think all taxes go to municipal government.

Councilman Hensley urged people to sign watershed petition saying we must band together on that legislation to get the revenue we deserve and be compensated for being stewards of the land. Everyone in West Milford should know and support this petition. He lamented that people who retire have to leave town. Mayor Bieri said there are around 3,000 signatures which is disappointing in a municipality with a population of over 26,000. It can make a difference. We need more signatures. Councilwoman Dale

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asked suggested sending it out with tax bills and opening up the petition again with the tax bill. We should consider opening the online petition again.

Agenda No. V

**Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Council, the Township Council adjourned the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

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Moved: Erik Seconded: Signorino  
Voted Aye: Unanimous voice vote.  
Voted Nay: None.  
Motion carried.

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Approved: May 20, 2015

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MAYOR BETTINA BIERI  
PRESIDING OFFICER

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ANTOINETTE BATTAGLIA  
TOWNSHIP CLERK