

Committee Meeting – March 1, 2010

MAYOR’S REPORT

MAYOR’S LEGISLATIVE DAY:

Last Wednesday, the Administrator and I attended the League of Municipalities Mayor’s Legislative Day at the State House in Trenton. We listened to the heads of the DCA, DEP, members of the Senate and Assembly and League officials speak about statewide issues that impact our towns and our taxpayers. Hot topics were alternative school funding, binding arbitration, COAH, shared services and pension reform. Governor Christie then spoke for about 15 minutes about what we can expect out of Trenton this coming fiscal year. All I can say is that it wasn’t pretty. The Governor basically said to prepare for substantial cuts in state aid to both municipalities and schools. At the same time he said that he would give us the tools to make the necessary cuts which I translated into legislative initiatives that would provide assistance and guidance to local governments in an attempt to try to keep budgets and tax rates as stable as possible. In about two weeks, the Governor will give his budget address and at that time we will know the rest of the story and where we will need to go from there. In an attempt to balance the State’s budget, Governor Christie is doing what he said he would do if he was elected. Now it is up to the rest of us at the County and local levels to the same when it comes to our budgets.

BARNEGAT’S 2010 BUDGETS:

So now begins the process of our budgets, both the School Boards and the Municipality’s. First of all, both entities will continue to discuss how and where we can assist each other through shared services. While we have been doing this by meeting monthly, we need to step up the process and implement immediate cost cutting measures wherever possible in light of the state budget situation. Realizing that this year will be extremely challenging due to the imminent, massive cuts from Trenton, what do we do to maintain our tax rate but yet at the same time, retain an acceptable level of service to our residents? As I am sure you have read, other towns have announced major layoffs, curtailed capital projects and instituted furloughs in order to maintain their budgets and cut operating expenses. Do we do the same here in Barnegat? These are some of the questions that this Committee will be discussing, the School Board will be discussing and we will be discussing together. Tonight I have added a resolution calling for a “joint executive session meeting” of the School Board and the Township in an effort to determine how we should handle the situation and to avoid a “knee jerk” reaction. The focus of the

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meeting will be on personnel items and how they impact the budget and shared services.

In addition, the Township will once again be conducting budget meetings through out the Township during the April and May time frame in order to discuss budget priorities for 2010. I have received a few letters and suggestions from our taxpayers on their thoughts on where we can cut costs. It would be helpful to hear from even more Barnegat residents as to just what they think is a “necessary service” and what they think is not. The Township Committee, the School Board and our Administrations pride ourselves in providing the utmost in services to our community at a reasonable cost but this will be increasingly difficult with this major loss of aid from Trenton this coming year. We are going to need to tighten our belts and make some painful policy decisions in order to maintain our budgets for 2010. All I can add is that the five of us up here and our School Board will do the best we can for the people that have elected us in this, (again as I said) extremely challenging year in Barnegat Township.

COUNTY ROADS WISH LIST:

The Administrator and I met with County Engineer, Frank Scarantino and Road Department Supervisor, Steve Childers last week to go over our “wish list” for County roads within our borders. Issues concerning safety along the bathing beach area, the traffic signal at Route 9 & Barnegat Blvd and the schedule of paving projects for this year were among the items discussed. Generally speaking, the County agreed with most of our requests, however, some requests will require outside agency approvals, like the New Jersey Department of Transportation.

PROPERTY ASSESSMENTS

This morning, the Township Administrator and I had a very productive meeting with the Ocean County Tax Administrator Ozzie Vituscka regarding property assessments in Barnegat Township. As a result of this meeting, the Township will be working very closely with the County Board of Taxation in order to perform something called a hybrid reassessment in Barnegat this coming year. The Township Administrator will provide additional details in his report. In addition, the Township will be conducting once again “Tax Appeal” workshops in order to educate our residents on the tax appeal

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process along with advising them on other programs available to reduce their property tax burden.

THE YEAR OF THE SOUP:

It appears that 2010 will be the year of the “Soup Contests” in Barnegat. School Superintendant Jason Bing announced that the Relay for Life Soup Cook-Off will be held on Friday, April 6th from 6:30 – 8:00 PM at the Barnegat High School dining hall to benefit the American Cancer Society. At the same time, Township Clerk, Kay West announced that will be having an employee’s Soup Kitchen Contest at noon on March 17th at Town Hall to benefit our scholarship fund. Information on attending the school’s event is available on their web site, www.barnegatschools.com.

Jeffrey M. Melchiondo
Mayor, Barnegat Township