



## BOROUGH OF LEONIA

COUNCIL- Work Session Meeting  
~ Minutes ~

Trina Lindsey, Borough Clerk

312 Broad Avenue  
Leonias, NJ 07605  
<http://www.leonianj.gov/>

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**October 16, 2023**

**7:30 pm**

**Leonias Senior Center**

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A Regular Meeting of the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Leonias was held in person at the Leonias Senior Center at 305 Beechwood Place, Leonias, NJ, and virtually via GoToMeeting on October 16, 2023. The Work Session meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by Mayor Zeigler.

Those present were led in the Flag Salute by Council President Grandelis.

A moment of silence was observed for the victims of the atrocities inflicted upon the people of Israel by Hamas. Mayor Zeigler spoke of the wish that the people of Israel and Palestine remain safe as these events unfold.

Mayor Zeigler read the following statement: "In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, the notice requirements have been satisfied. Notice of this meeting by the January 8, 2023 Sunshine Notice containing the time, date, and access information was published in the Record, Star Ledger and has been posted at Borough Hall and on the Borough website."

**PRESENT:** Mayor Judah Zeigler, Council President Grandelis, Councilwoman Maureen Davis, Councilman Pasquale Fusco, Councilman Christoph Hesterbrink, and Councilman William Ziegler

**ABSENT:** Councilwoman Joanne Terrell

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mary Anne Groh for Borough Attorney Brian Chewcaskie  
Acting Borough Administrator Scott Tamagny  
Borough Engineer Drew Di Sessa  
Chief Financial Officer Issa Abbasi  
Borough Auditor Gary Higgins  
Borough Clerk Trina Lindsey  
Deputy Borough Clerk Jonathan Mandel

**Presentation****2022 Audit Report – Gary Higgins**

Borough Auditor Higgins began the presentation by stating that the Borough was timely in its audit submission.

Borough Auditor Higgins explained that in New Jersey generally accepted accounting principles are not accepted, instead the regulatory basis promulgated by the Division of Local Government Services is used. The Borough of Leonia is in full conformance. Whilst there were some material weaknesses, it did not impact the presentation of the financial statements.

Borough Auditor Higgins spoke as to the Swim Club Budget and improvements made in its finances.

The Borough of Leonia has seven recommendations from the audit, with six of them being repeats. Two of the recommendations are related to material weaknesses, one in financial reporting and the other relating to expenditures in excess or without appropriations.

Mayor Zeigler questioned why there were repeat items from the previous year and asked if there was an action plan to make the corrections as recommended. CFO Abbasi responded that he is actively working with the Borough Auditors to clear up most of the items and there is a plan in motion to correct these items on a schedule.

Borough Auditor Higgins stated that the biggest concern is that there was very little time for corrective action. The hope is that all the transactions for this year will be cleared up and brought up to timeliness and correctness soon.

Mayor Zeigler questioned if this goal would be achieved, to which the CFO confirmed.

Borough Auditor Higgins made note of his communication with the School Business Administrator to make corrections to transactions between the two autonomous entities.

Councilman Ziegler noted that what the Auditor said is incredibly important. Councilman Ziegler exclaimed his frustration that the members of the Finance Committee were made aware that the General Ledger and Cash Ledger were not in sync. The Councilman's frustration stems from the fact that the previous CFO was paid an extra amount of money to clear up this very problem. Councilman Ziegler stated that the possibility of clawing back those funds must be discussed.

Mayor Zeigler noted his remembrance of the conversation where the Borough Auditor spoke as to the presence of a material weakness.

Borough Auditor Higgins recalled the entire idea of the Edmunds system and linkage was required to be accommodated, with this being the result.

Chief Financial Officer Abbasi noted that to Borough Auditor Higgin's point, one of the things that upset him the most is when there is an over-expenditure. There was a workaround in the system previously where Department Heads could over-expend. Work has been done to resolve this issue and one of the material weaknesses.

Councilman Ziegler questioned if there was any evidence of fraud or malfeasance. Borough Auditor Higgins replied that if there was it would have been reported.

Councilwoman Davis stated her appreciation of the time taken by the Chief Financial Officer in educating the Mayor and Council about the Borough's finances.

### ***Public Comment***

The record will reflect that no such comments were entered into the chat window accessible through GoToMeeting nor via the United States Postal Service or Email.

### ***Adoption of Ordinances***

#### **Ordinance 2023-18**

The Borough Clerk read the title of the ordinance into the record:

“ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING A SPECIAL EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION PURSUANT TO N.J.S.A. 40A:4-53(a) FOR THE PAYMENT OF THE PREPARATION OF A REVISED AND UPDATED APPROVED DIGITAL TAX MAP OF THE BOROUGH OF LEONIA, COUNTY OF BERGEN, NEW JERSEY”

Let the record show that no members of the public came forward for the public comment portion of the adoption of ordinance 2023-18.

Councilman Ziegler motioned that ordinance 2023-18 be adopted on second reading. Seconded by Council President Grandelis.

On a roll call, the vote was recorded as follows:

Council President Grandelis:	aye	Councilman Hesterbrink:	aye
Councilwoman Davis:	aye	Councilwoman Terrell:	absent
Councilman Fusco:	aye	Councilman Ziegler:	aye

### ***Non-Consent Resolutions***

#### **RES. 2023-201 GZA Change Order Proposal**

[2023-201\\_Change Order No. 1\\_Removal of Drums\\_GZA\\_09.18.2023.pdf](#)

Motion by Councilman Fusco, second by Council President Grandelis, that Resolution #2023-201 be removed from the table.

On a roll call, the vote was recorded as follows:

Council President Grandelis:	aye	Councilman Hesterbrink:	aye
Councilwoman Davis:	aye	Councilwoman Terrell:	absent
Councilman Fusco:	aye	Councilman Ziegler:	aye

Motion by Council President Grandelis, second by Councilwoman, that Resolution #2023-201 be discussed.

Councilman Ziegler noted that the requested documentation from GZA has not been forthcoming, with there being no cause to discuss it further.

Motion by Councilman Ziegler, Second by Councilman Fusco, that Resolution #2023-201 be tabled

Council President Grandelis:	aye	Councilman Hesterbrink:	aye
Councilwoman Davis:	aye	Councilwoman Terrell:	absent
Councilman Fusco:	aye	Councilman Ziegler:	aye

**RES. 2023-219 2022 Audit Review**

[2023-219\\_2022 Audit Review\\_10.16.23.pdf](#)

Motion by Council President Grandelis, second by Councilman Ziegler, that Resolution #2023-219 be approved.

On a roll call, the vote was recorded as follows:

Council President Grandelis:	aye	Councilman Hesterbrink:	aye
Councilwoman Davis:	aye	Councilwoman Terrell:	absent
Councilman Fusco:	aye	Councilman Ziegler:	aye

**RES. 2023-220 2022 Corrective Action Plan**

[2023-220\\_Corrective Action Plan\\_10.16.23.pdf](#)

Motion by Councilwoman Davis, second by Councilman Fusco, that Resolution #2023-22- be approved.

On a roll call, the vote was recorded as follows:

Council President Grandelis:	aye	Councilman Hesterbrink:	aye
Councilwoman Davis:	aye	Councilwoman Terrell:	absent
Councilman Fusco:	aye	Councilman Ziegler:	aye

**Consent Resolutions**

**RES. 2023-221 Authorize Bill List**

[2023-221\\_Authorize Bill List\\_10.16.23.pdf](#)

[2023-221\\_Bill List Backup\\_10.16.23.pdf](#)

**~~RES. 2023-222 Authorize Salary Increase for Administrative Assistant to the Police Chief~~**

~~[2023-222\\_Authorize Salary Increase for Administrative Assistant to the Police Chief\\_10.16.23.pdf](#)~~

Motion by Councilwoman Davis, second by Council President Grandelis, that the Consent Agenda be approved.

On a roll call, the vote on the Consent Agenda was recorded as follows:

Council President Grandelis:	aye	Councilman Hesterbrink:	aye
Councilwoman Davis:	aye	Councilwoman Terrell:	absent
Councilman Fusco:	aye	Councilman Ziegler:	aye

**RES. 2023-222 Authorize Salary Increase for Administrative Assistant to the Police Chief**

[2023-222\\_Authorize Salary Increase for Administrative Assistant to the Police Chief\\_10.16.23.pdf](#)

Pulled by Mayor Zeigler for further discussion.

Motion by Councilwoman Davis, second by Councilman Ziegler, that Resolution #2023-222 be approved.

Mayor Zeigler noted that this type of resolution should be discussed at a council meeting before being brought forward to vote.

Councilwoman Davis stated that she had a discussion with the Police Committee and the money was made available due to several retirements within the department. In this situation, there is an individual who is performing duties that often would be part of a higher job description and in some situations performed by two people. These duties were given after their initial hire.

Mayor Zeigler commented that if this position is needed to be regraded or retitled then that is what the Mayor and Council should be doing as there should be a better process in place.

Councilwoman Davis noted that Councilwoman Terrell is in the process of working on an updated list of the positions and salaries within the Salary Ordinance but due to the sense of urgency, it is being brought forward now as a resolution. If there was the need to fill this position in the future, there might be the need to hire two part-time individuals or change the name of the role.

Council President Grandelis stated that in the Human Resources role of the prior Borough Administrator, he had asked that they look into job roles and titles to be carried into 2024.

On a roll call, the vote on the Consent Agenda was recorded as follows:

Council President Grandelis:	aye	Councilman Hesterbrink:	aye
Councilwoman Davis:	aye	Councilwoman Terrell:	absent
Councilman Fusco:	aye	Councilman Ziegler:	aye

***Unfinished Business***

**Fireman Memorial – Louis Grandelis**

Council President Grandelis stated that there is an update yet to come on this topic.

***New Business*****Redevelopment Plan – Next Steps – Mayor Zeigler**

Mayor Zeigler made the statement that in his belief it would be unfair to the public if the Mayor and Council tried to take any substantive action before the end of the year. It is not the desire of the Mayor and Council to slide anything past the public. Mayor Zeigler is not thrilled to delay the process by another two and a half months but the most important thing is that it is done right.

Councilman Hesterbrink raised the concern that within the redevelopment plan at least 2/3rds of the area is within a flood zone. Councilman Hesterbrink believes that the redevelopment plan makes sense but he does not see any guidelines or precautions that need to be taken to ensure that whatever is to be built there will withstand the climate that will be had in the next 50 years. The plan itself has all the right words but is missing the practical steps to ensure that nothing will be built in the area that will flood within the next 5 to 10 years. Councilman Hesterbrink stated that in his opinion these discussions should be held first before any vote on the plan.

Mayor Zeigler reiterated his stance that the process not proceed until the end of the year.

Councilman Ziegler noted his agreement with both the stances of Councilman Hesterbrink and Mayor Zeigler. Councilman Ziegler stated that it makes sense to take up this project with a new administration.

Councilman Fusco agreed with the notion that the redevelopment plan should not be rammed through but made note of his deep disappointment with the feedback that has been received in the past hearings. Individuals who have never been part of the process have made comments asking to either scrap the entire plan or study items that have already been studied as part of the years-long process. Councilman Fusco expressed disappointment that the redevelopment plan has become a political issue which it should not be as it was done with the intent to improve the tax base of the municipality, which will be severely hampered over the next couple of years if nothing is done. The public will be faced with an incredible amount of tax increases in this scenario. Councilman Fusco reiterated his agreement that this should be continued with a new administration but expressed his hope that they will take quick action upon it.

Mayor Zeigler spoke as to the amount of hard work that went into the redevelopment plan and to the attempts that were made to turn it into a political issue with the false statements that the Mayor and Council were not acting in the best interest of the public.

**Borough Administrator – Mayor Zeigler**

Mayor Zeigler explained the need to move the recruiting process forward for the hiring of a new Borough Administrator and tasked the Finance and HR Committee with reviewing the current job description and putting it out into the market as soon as possible. It was requested that an update be provided in November as to the recruiting process.

**Haunted Hills – Councilman Ziegler**

Councilman Ziegler mentioned a proposed event by the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to occur on Friday, October 27, 2023, at Highwood Hills called Haunted Hills. No documentation was

given for a certificate of insurance for the event, with there being a need to receive it. Councilman Ziegler wished to know if due to time constraints, there could be an approval by the Mayor and Council pending the receipt of a certificate of insurance.

Acting Administrator Tamagny provided an explanation as to the process for an event.

Councilman Hesterbrink explained that the proposed event is rather common as similar events have been held in Tenafly and other municipalities. Councilman Hesterbrink explained that it is a hike in the woods for children with adults present. There will be no fire or food being prepared during the event.

Councilman Grandelis explained further the event and its specifics.

Motion by Councilman Ziegler, Second by Councilwoman Davis that the Mayor and Council approve the Haunted Hills proposal pending the successful completion of insurance requirements. All members of the Governing Body present voted in favor.

### **Public Comment**

Martin Breckheimer, 164 Paulin Boulevard, spoke as to his concern over traffic on Fort Lee Road and its urgent nature as it has been occurring even more frequently. Mr. Breckheimer spoke as to the potential danger the traffic poses for ambulances and emergency vehicles as well as the problems caused by the constant honking. Mr. Breckheimer asked the Mayor and Council if anything could be done to resolve these issues.

Gabe Centrella, 165 Paulin Boulevard, spoke as to how it took him twenty minutes to leave his driveway due to traffic. Mr. Centrella spoke as to how on Sundays there is always a line of cars and that they often honk.

Lydia Maurice, 392 Grand Avenue, stated that she does not believe it is fair that individuals who do not attend meetings such as the Mayor and Council and Planning Boards make divisive comments about what they are doing. Ms. Maurice as a resident is concerned with redevelopment but knows that things will work out in the end. Ms. Maurice feels that it is unfair to both boards to make these disparaging comments. Ms. Maurice thanked and expressed her appreciation to the Mayor, Council, and Planning Board for doing what is necessary to make the municipality better.

Mayor Zeigler acknowledged the concerns of those residents who spoke to traffic. Mayor Zeigler encouraged them to contact Senator Gordon Johnson's office and register their complaints with him. Mayor Zeigler spoke about the importance of residents holding state legislatures accountable.

Acting Administrator Tamagny spoke as to the enforcement actions that are currently underway to help alleviate the traffic issue. The residents were encouraged to call the Police Department and report excessive honking. Acting Administrator Tamagny spoke further as to the challenges relating to traffic control faced by the municipalities.

Mayor Zeigler explained that the Cross Bronx Expressway is the real root of the problem, and both the current and prior Mayor of New York City were unresponsive to his attempts to discuss the issue.

Councilwoman Davis spoke as to the Police Committee's understanding of the traffic issue at hand and the challenges faced in enforcement.

Mayor Zeigler thanked Ms. Maurice for her comments.

A letter was sent by Alec Melman, 172 Highwood Avenue, requesting to be read into the record:

"Setp 29, 2023

To the Mayor and Council:

Re: Street Safety, Speed Humps and Broad Ave TAP grant Overlay

I have been following the ongoing discussions regarding street safety and maximizing the impact of the grant funding we have for Broad Ave.

I was heartened to hear during a council meeting this summer the mayor and police chief considering speed humps- for the first time in my recollection -- among other traffic safety ideas.

My neighbors directly across the street and I would GLADLY welcome speed humps on Highwood Ave, even on a trial basis, in front of our homes. Our issue is not with the number of cars that travel on our block, which is reasonable, but simply the speed with which they travel. Speed humps or large planters to narrow the road width would be greatly appreciated to reduce speeding on our street. Please consider us a willing test subject for either of these ideas.

As to the TAP grant discussion at a recent council meeting, it sounded like we want to ensure we maximize the money being made available to us. I noticed that our central business district, and all of Broad Ave, lack safe and convenient bike racks. Is it possible to add in-road bike racks in various locations throughout the project area? For example at the proposed crosswalk at Woodland Pl, where there is not enough room for a parking space, could we make that an in-road bike rack location? It provides bike parking as well as gives space (aka daylighting) between the last parking spot and the crosswalk.

Other potential bike rack locations:

1. The municipal lot next to Dantes.
2. Near Dunkin Donuts.
3. On the street between CVS and the post office.
4. Adjacent to any bus station to encourage multi modal transit.
5. Adjacent to the Dudley Allen playground.

If we need to find ways to spend the money, adding bike racks seems like an easy addition.

Finally, at a prior brainstorming meeting with our TAP grant engineers, I suggested that we narrow Broad Ave at the northern end of town by building the new sidewalk in front of and adjacent to the existing curb line from Vreeland Ave to the NJ Turnpike overpass. This would have three benefits: It would save the trees currently in the way of the originally proposed sidewalk location, it would narrow the roadway making it safer for pedestrian crossings (while still maintaining enough room for bike lanes), and it would preserve residents property such as buried sprinkler systems. Was this included in the final design? If not, is there time to add this, considering it looks like we'd have the funds to do so under this grant?



Thank you for your time and attention!

Best,  
Alec Melman  
172 Highwood Ave.”

For the sake of Clarity, Mayor Zeigler commented that they did not recommend speed humps but portable speed bumps.

Let the record reflect that no further comments were made by the public in person or virtually via GoToMeeting.

***Adjournment:***

There being no further business to come before the Mayor and Council, on a motion by Councilman Ziegler, second by Councilwoman Davis, and unanimously carried, to adjourn this meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Mandel,  
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