

BOROUGH OF HIGHLAND PARK

WORK SESSION MEETING

March 26, 2024 – 7:00 PM

A Work Session Meeting of the Highland Park Mayor and Council was held on Tuesday, March 26, 2024, and was called to order by Mayor Foster at 7:00 PM. Annual Notice of this meeting was provided to The Home News Tribune, the Star Ledger and the Highland Park Planet on January 5, 2024 and was posted on the Borough website at [www.hpboro.com](http://www.hpboro.com) and on the bulletin board at Borough Hall, 221 South Fifth Avenue, Highland Park, NJ and has remained continuously posted as required by law.

**Pledge of Allegiance.**

Flag salute led by Councilman George.

**Roll Call:**

Present: Mayor Foster, Councilpersons, Canavera, Hale, Hersh, Postelnik; George, Borough Administrator Jover, Borough Attorney Shah.

Absent: Councilwoman Kim-Chohan

**Discussion Items**

1. Council and Work Session Meeting Formats (EF). – None

2. 2024 Municipal and Utility Budget (TJ)

Teri Jover, Borough Administrator provided the 2024 budget presentation. She reviewed the distribution of tax dollars between the schools, municipality, county and public library and provided a breakdown of the municipal budget by key spending areas, namely public safety, public works, general services and administration, statutory costs (pension, FICA), insurance, capital improvements and debt service, library and grants. She reported that the average property tax bill would increase by 3% or \$366.55 over the prior year. With respect to the utility budget, she noted increases in purchase of water and sewer processing costs that will require a minimum of a 10% rate increase in 2024. She spoke about the 2024 capital improvement plan highlights, including a new roof and renovations at the Community Center, a new roof at the Environmental Center, upgrades to Molimock-Graff Park, a garbage and recycling truck replacement, replacement of vehicles and sewer system improvements. She indicated that budget introduction is will likely be at the April 16, 2024 Council meeting.

3. 2024 Main Street Highland Park Budget (Hale)

Councilman Hale provided an overview of the Main Street Highland Park (MSHP) budget. He noted that the proposal includes a 5% increase in the BID tax as well as additional allocations from the Borough and funding from the NPP program for projects on Woodbridge Avenue. He noted that the increases are targeted toward supports for existing downtown businesses, including more funding for signage and façade grants, small business grants, coupon mailers, gift card programs. He indicated that MSHP and the Borough will be collaborating identifying opportunities for the Borough to further support some of their existing programs, such as the 5K and food assistance programs, in order to increase MSHP capacity to focus on downtown business development and recruitment.

4. Community Energy Plan (Hersh/TJ)

Teri Jover presented the Community Energy Plan, which was made possible through a grant from the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. She provided an overview of the six strategy areas: 1) reduce energy consumption and emissions from the transportation sector; 2) accelerate deployment of renewable energy and distributed energy resources; 3) maximize energy efficiency and conservation and reduce peak demand; 4) reduce energy consumption and emissions from the building sector; 5) support community energy planning and action with an emphasis on encouraging and supporting participation by LMI and environmental justice communities; and 6) advance the clean energy innovation economy. Ms. Jover indicated that the adoption of the Community Energy plan was scheduled for the April 2, 2024 Council meeting, and the next steps would be to close-out the community energy planning grant, apply for community energy planning grant implementation funds, and reconvene Ad Hoc Committee annually to help the Borough reset and re-establish priorities.

**Public Participation.**

Mayor Foster opened the floor for public participation.

Lois Lebbing, North 2<sup>nd</sup>, stated that she recalled that there used to be a Chamber of Commerce and it was dissolved in order to create Main Street Highland Park. She indicated that the Main Street was going to take over economic development activities, but that didn't happen. Ms. Lebbing asked that the library flat roof be replaced with a pitched roof. She asked if the MCUA has capacity to handle the Borough's proposed redevelopment projects and also asked if the big reveal of redevelopment is happening this month at the high school.

Abby Stern Cardinale, Harper Street, said that if the Community Center is closed during renovations during the month of July the Borough should make sure that the Library will be open, as it is important to not have both public spaces closed at the same time. She also reminded about code red and finding locations for individuals to take shelter from the heat in the summer.

There being no one further to comment, Councilman Hale motioned to close public session, seconded by Councilman George and carried by affirmative voice vote of all Councilpersons present, public session was closed.

Mayor Foster called upon Councilman George for comments related to the library and the timing around the Community Center renovations. Councilman George said the library roof project is designed around replacing the entire flat roof system. The reconstruction of a pitched roof was found not to be feasible. The system was redesigned to elevate the duct work off the ground, which has been a part of the ongoing leak issues. He indicated that the timing of the Library and Community Center projects should work out as the library is on target to reopen in June.

Mayor Foster indicated that the Borough would look into the questions regarding sewer capacity.

Mayor Foster said that downtown plans are almost ready to share, but not this month. She said once it is ready we will have everyone come together as she made that promise and will keep that promise.

There being no further business, on motion made by Councilman George, seconded by Council President Hersh and carried by affirmative voice vote of all Councilpersons present, the meeting adjourned at 9:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Santiago  
Borough Clerk