



JEFF GRAYZEL

MORRIS TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

EMAIL UPDATE

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Newsletter #2

Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Supporters,

I am pleased to be sending you this second in a series of e-newsletters since my swearing in as a Morris Township Committeeman five months ago. I will be sending newsletters containing highlights and some commentary monthly after each Township Committee meeting in order to keep you informed of happenings in our municipality. If you did not see the first newsletter I sent out then you can view it on my website at www.JeffGrayzel.com

Police Department Promotions...

The Township Committee meeting that took place Wednesday October 17 opened up with a presentation by our Chief of Police. Morris Township recently had one of our two Captains retire, and with this spot opening up a chain of promotions has occurred. Chief Loughman presented the newly promoted officers to the Township Committee. My congratulations to these men for their service to the Township, and best wishes for success in their new roles.

Ordinances...**Recreation facilities**

The meeting then moved to the Ordinance section. The first item on the agenda was the introduction of an ordinance forming a new 501(c)3 charity to raise money for new recreation facilities. The Township is looking for outside funding to improve and increase recreations facilities, because our assets meet neither the present needs nor the long term needs of our Township. Mayor Nace announced that he will be appointing 2/3 of the members to the Board of Trustees.

PBA contract

The second item was an ordinance to approve a contract settlement with the Policemen's Benevolent Association (PBA). The PBA represents the patrolmen on our police force. Their contract expired on 12/31/05 and the Township has just reached settlement on a new contract. The Police Officers union (FOP) reached a settlement two months ago. Two additional unions representing the Firemen and the Department of Public Works have been without a contract since 12/31/05 and negotiations are ongoing.

Re-zoning 250 James street to allow Townhouses

The third – and most important -- item on the Oct. 17 meeting agenda was a re-zoning of an "Office/Lab" zone parcel at 250 James Street containing a vacant office building (former Verizon site) to "TownHouse - 4 per acre". This change to our Master Plan is a direct response to the land owner's request to rezone. His request included display of a concept plan which included almost 100 units. Upon approval



of his request, he would be able to seek Planning Board approval of a development plan which would be governed by the new zone. Up to 92 townhouses could be built. Details can be found in the 9/14/07 article from the Star Ledger, which I have included below for your convenience. The re-zoning ordinance does not impose occupant age restrictions, so this would also add more children to our school system. The ordinance was approved by a vote of 4-1, with my vote being the lone dissenting vote.

The reason I voted "no" was two-fold. **First**, I felt that this re-zoning proposal was premature and was rushed forward with incomplete discussion of possible alternatives. The sole purpose of the rezoning hearing was to respond to the land owner's desire to build his development. The public was less well represented during the "due process" than the applicant. Certainly there needed to be more public comparison of the consequences of alternatives, and some higher level questions asked and answered publicly:

1. What if the zone remained unchanged?
2. What is the most appropriate zone for the area, and use for the land?
3. Would it be best for Morris Township to encourage single family residences or some use other than the one allowing highest profit for the land owner/developer? How about a less-dense Townhouse development?
4. Does Morris Township need any facilities itself that could be placed at that location?

Second, I do not think the Township got a good deal. We allowed a property that was valued at \$10 million on our tax rolls to be rezoned into something that will have an ultimate tax value of \$60 million - \$90 million. We just gave the developer a windfall of \$50+ million dollars. The only thing we get in return is the tax revenue from the new housing units. BUT we also get the increase burden on our town services and our school system. If this deal was going to happen then we should have gotten more back for our town. We should not allow a developer to profit off of us without allowing the municipality to share in that windfall. For example, why did we not preserve 3 of the 23 acre site for a desperately needed soccer field? This location would be a perfect spot for one because there are currently not a lot of residences surrounding the property. Instead, we got virtually nothing in return. The developer will build it, and then walk away with a windfall in his pocket. This was not a "win-win" for Morris Township!!

The other members of our Township Committee believed this is an appropriate project for Morris Township and wanted to move forward quickly. A complete, public discussion of alternatives did not take place.

The next step in the process is a formal site plan presentation by the developer. I will let you know when a date for this has been scheduled.

Public Commentary...

At every meeting there is a "public commentary" portion where any citizen can make a statement concerning anything related to Township matters. The people who spoke last Wednesday night made comments relating to:

- » The need for a turf field (preferably with lights)
- » The need for more sidewalks
- » A request to broadcast meetings on cable TV
- » Parking at the Convent Train station

Regarding Cable TV...

At the July meeting of the Township Committee, I brought up the issue of broadcasting our Township Committee meetings on cable TV. I personally did the research as to how to get a

Morris Township public access channel on the new Verizon FIOS network. Again, the Mayor sent this to sub-committee for review and said publicly that they would not get to it for several more months. Getting our Township Committee meetings aired on the local public access channel is one of my top priorities.

Jeff's Comments...

The final portion of the meeting allows for each member of the Township Committee to make comments. I spoke about the following:

» I made an additional comment related to the re-zoning of the James Street property and spoke of the need for the Township to take control of development in town, and not just allow a developer to come in with any proposal. Let's be pro-active instead of reactive!

» Also related to the 250 James Street development, I spoke of the "intangibles" related to this project that one cannot put a cost on:

- At what point do we have enough people in our Township?
- Is a dense townhouse development the kind of thing we want in our community or should we be directing development towards single-family homes?
- What is the intangible cost of putting 180-200 more cars on our local roads and the ensuing traffic that will result ?

» I informed the public of limited forward progress on the Open Appointments ordinance which I had proposed at the last meeting, which the Mayor sent to a sub-committee. See my website for more information on this ordinance I have proposed. I will continue to push for adoption of this ordinance.

» As Deputy Fire Commissioner, I informed the public of our firehouse inspection night which took place the previous Friday night. This entailed a visit to each of the 5 firehouses in town and a review of our squad and the equipment.

» Lastly, I requested that the Planning Board revisit the "tear-down" ordinance which they attempted to put together last year, but failed to reach consensus on. We need an ordinance of this type to ensure that new construction fits with the character of our neighborhoods.

The Next Meeting...

The Township Committee meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday November 7th**. Please try to come out to the meeting. Your presence improves the quality of the proceedings, and your questions require the Township Committee to be responsive to our citizens.

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