

Little Egg Harbor Township Special Meeting

SEPTEMBER 27, 2024

6:00 P.M.

Mayor Blaise Scibetta called the Little Egg Harbor Township Special Committee Meeting to order and lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Time: 6:00 p.m.

3. OPEN PUBLIC MEETING STATEMENT

Township Clerk Kelly Lettera read the Open Public Meeting Statement:

"This Special Meeting is called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meeting Law. Notice of this Special Meeting of September 27, 2024 was duly advertised, posted in the Municipal Complex, and has remained posted as required under the aforesaid statute. The Municipal Clerk is directed to include a record of this statement in the minutes of the Special Meeting."

4. ROLL CALL:

Present: Mr. Kehm; Mr. Laney; Mayor Scibetta

Absent: Mr. Gormley; Mr. Maxwell

5. PRESENTATION: Family Promise of the Jersey Shore

[A nonprofit organization seeking to purchase 7 Gifford Road (Old Town Hall) for the official purposes of the nonprofit organization]

Elizabeth Golla, Executive Director of Family Promise of the Jersey Shore provided the public with what her organization does and the purpose of why they are looking to purchase the building. She stated Family Promise of the Jersey Shore, formerly known as Family Promise of Southern Ocean County, has been in Little Egg Harbor Township since 2009 addressing family homelessness and to date have never had an issue with the police or fire and the program continues to grow since COVID. She stated there is a need in the community due to the cost of living, food and gas being so high. She stated most people make too much to qualify for any type of assistance and that's where Family Promise comes in to temporarily assist in times of need. She stated every family is screened to see if the program is the best fit for them. She stated those screenings consist of drug and alcohol and a full criminal background. She stated often times families do not know their rights and are often kicked out of a rental with minimal or no prior notice and are unable to qualify for assistance because they work and make too much money. She stated due to us being from a shore community it is difficult to find rentals during the season and those families are often times living in their car. Family Promise brings the family into a safe space, makes sure the parents are continuing their employment or find them better jobs and keep the kids in the school district they were in previously. She stated Family Promise provides families with a safe place to rest their head at night and know their toothbrush is going to be there in the morning. She stated the Family Promise Program helps families find permanent housing by linking them to landlords in town. She stated every family that has gone through and graduated the program, has found permanent housing and none have not gone back into homelessness. She stated that is their track record since 2009. She reiterated the program is safe. She stated FP is looking to purchase 7 Gifford to provide a safe place for these families and not ship them to a hotel room or move them every day. She stated the program is the same program that has been in Little Egg since 2009 with the same criteria, nothing will change except for location and size. She stated the program can be an opportunity in the community to make sure that families know that they care and love one another and that FP has the opportunity to make a change, lift people up and stabilize them during a difficult time in their lives.

Ms. Raj from Family Promise stated she is the shelter case manager currently for Family Promise of the Jersey Shore. She works one on one with the families that are in the shelter program. She reiterated that every family who has come into the program graduated and has permanent housing. She stated she has cried, prayed and fought for every family in the program. She stated she has seen the program work. She stated it is important for the families to feel love, safety and that they will be ok. She stated she works one on one with the parents to build resumes for employment opportunities, budget building and financial planning and provide them with opportunity.

Ms. Staub from Family Promise stated she has worked with Family Promise for six years. She stated she is the front end and the operations administrator filtering all the calls that come in. She read a letter from Susan Raylman, a Counselor at Pinelands Regional School District stating what a great organization Family Promise is and she has worked with them for years helping families in the School District. The Municipal Clerk will include a copy of Ms. Raylman's letter in the original minutes.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Scibetta invited anyone from the public to speak.

Ms. Johnson of Golf View Drive stated she has worked with family promise through St. Theresa's church for the past six years. She stated it is a wonderful program. She stated when people hear the word shelter, perhaps they think of Atlantic City where there are people outside, smoking, drinking, whatever. She stated Family Promise is the opposite of that. She stated over the last couple of years her pastor has allowed a few families with a place to stay but only for two weeks and they are out with kids, working, showering at offsite locations and are exhausted when they return. She stated FP allows for families to have structure, food and feel safe. She stated curfew is 9 o'clock for children and 10 o'clock for adults. She stated it was truly a wonderful experience for the church and good families.

Ms. Clanton of Falcon Drive stated that she went through the Family Promise program in 2010. She stated she is now a home owner, and during her time in the program she did work full time. She stated that to get a new place is really a great thing and would really help so many more people and provide more stability that she believes families could use.

Ms. Sackovitch of Main Street stated she works in town and has done volunteer work for Family Promise providing their families with child identification cards at no charge. She stated she has seen firsthand the wonderful work that FP does with families.

Ms. Skelly of Wisteria Drive stated it seems as though FP has a fantastic program and has helped many families. She questioned the price of the building, what the cost in renovations will be, where the funding is coming from, the amount received for funding, how long the grant funding will last, and did the township review the fine details of the grant application. Ms. Skelly asked if the regulations can be loosened pertaining to discrimination on those who have alcohol or drug problems. She questioned the process of when a person comes into the facility that is under the influence. She also questioned how long the grant funding term is for.

Ms. Golla stated the price of the building is \$650,000, which is what it was appraised as, funding is coming from a grant through the county that they themselves wrote with the regulations and fine print, the renovation cost cannot be answered until professionals are able to get into the building and assess it. She also stated that the grant is one time funding for the acquisitions and rehabilitation of the building and does not go into program details or services for the building. Ms. Golla stated if a resident comes to the facility under the influence they are removed immediately from the FP program.

Melanie Appleby, Township Attorney, stated she has no information on the grant and at this point the township is in the process of working on the contract for the sale of the property. She stated there will be deep restrictions in the contract if something happens, the township has the first right to purchase the property back. She stated this ordinance is only in the first stage for the contract of the building. She stated a Planning Board application, workshop, public hearings still need to take place for the details and design of the building and property.

Ms. Bellman of Newport Way stated she had the pleasure of being able to make meals when those families come through their church. She stated these families are lovely people who have worked hard their whole life, fallen on hard times and just need a little help. She stated she does not work for FP but chooses to sit with these families make a meal and sit and break bread with them. She stated decisions have to be based off on the integrity of a company that has been in existence for fifteen years with not one problem.

Ms. Seiman of Lake Winnepesaukee Drive stated she is a volunteer working with Family Promise. She stated these are people of integrity who have fallen upon hard times. She stated the families are screened very, very well and no one is going to run into these people knocking on your door at night, or during the day, they have no reason to. She stated they have everything they need in the program and in the building.

Ms. Cabanas of Tiller Court stated she was unaware of all of this prior to tonight's special meeting although she is happy she attended the meeting. She stated she assumes all contracts that are signed for funding will be looked over thoroughly by the Committee and Attorney. She stated at this point from what she understands it is only for the sale of the old vacant dilapidated building that is no longer being used and could use renovations. She stated she feels it's a win win situation.

Ms. Nelson of Marina Way questioned the plan for the interior of the building and how many units are they looking to have.

Ms. Golla stated at this point there is no plan. She stated the building is in disarray and until the contract of sale takes place they cannot get in there with professionals to even come up with a plan. She stated that all gets done through the planning and design phase of the building. She stated the families would stay together in a large living space for each individual family. She stated the families are not separated like in other shelters. They are dormitory style/efficiency so each family has their own private space, kitchen and a shared bathroom area. She hopes they can accommodate up to eight families. She stated life skills are also taught to the families on how to manage and save money while in the program. Ms. Golla stated monthly regular mental health counseling is also provided with a link to other services and resources outside FP.

Mr. Witbeck of Great Bay Gospel Fellowship stated he has been helping with Family Promise for 13 years at his church. He stated he spent many nights hosting families and providing families a place to sleep at night. He stated how terrific the families and safety is not an issue. He stated if there's any group you can trust, it is Family Promise.

Pastor Hartman of Lighthouse Alliance Community Church stated the Church has been there for twenty five years and FP currently rents office space upstairs. He stated families have been hosted four to six times a year for over fifteen years and they have never had a problem. He stated FP are experts at connecting people in need to programs within the county. He stated the rough ones are the people that they receive at the Church to get a shower, food and clean clothes. FP is a national organization and the rules and regulations are already set up and cannot be swayed.

Ms. Wilson of Hillcrest Lane stated she has lived in Little Egg her whole life and is a realtor, homeowner and landlord and now a member of FP board. She stated FP is housing people in times of need so families are not out on the streets and children can have a safe place to rest their heads at night. She stated her experience with FP being an owner, landlord, working with landlords, working with the church to feed, house, cloth, donate has been nothing but a positive experience.

Ms. Sayer of West Chester Drive stated she thinks this is a very important, impactful, and emotional issue taking in consideration other real world perspectives, such as the reality that homelessness does not just go away. She stated even adequate shelter provided for people is not going to simply stop homelessness unless their situation changes. She stated half of this country is living paycheck to paycheck. She stated reality is that homeless people cost more to the state by being homeless. She stated according to charity navigator which she stated is a reputable nonpartisan type of source that FP is a national program, rated as an excellent standard as far as transparency and accountability for their finances and records and a four and a four rating for nonprofits all over the country.

Mr. Gram who resides in Tuckerton Borough stated she is proud to say she I part of a community that is helping the homeless families in the community. She stated she has been to church and has seen all that FP does to help the families in need.

Mr. Debella of Tall Timber Drive stated he has helped the families in need at the Lighthouse Alliance church. He read a verse by Matthew stating that is what FP does.

Mr. Skelly of Wisteria Drive asked who will be reviewing the fine details of the grant funding and contract.

Mayor Scibetta stated the Township Attorney, Melanie Appleby will be reviewing and creating the contract of sale, which is the first step in the process.

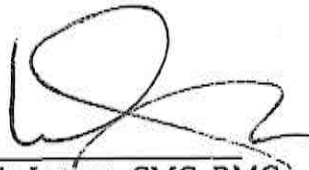
No additional comments from the public.

7. **Motion to Adjourn:** Kehm

Second: Laney

All in Favor

I hereby certify the foregoing minutes were formally approved by the Little Egg Harbor Township Committee.


 Kelly Lettera, CMC, RMC
 Township Clerk