

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF NETCONG HELD OCTOBER 2, 2014 AT THE NETCONG MUNICIPAL BUILDING, 23 MAPLE AVENUE, NETCONG, NEW JERSEY COMMENCING AT 7:30 P.M.

Mayor Nametko called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

STATEMENT OF OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT

The Borough Clerk read the following statement:

Adequate notice of this meeting as defined by the Open Public Meetings Act has been provided by:

1. Posting a notice of said meeting in the space provided for such announcements at the Borough Hall on January 10, 2014.
2. Publishing a notice in the Daily Record, the official newspaper of the Borough of Netcong on January 15, 2014 and mailing a copy to The Star Ledger on January 10, 2014.

ROLL CALL

Those in attendance were Councilwoman Butler, Councilman Hathaway, Councilman Koster, Councilman Laureys, Councilman Still, Councilman Sylvester and Mayor Nametko. Also present were Mr. Blakeslee, Borough Administrator and Mrs. Eckert, Borough Clerk.

NCP PRESENTATION

Mr. Bill Lerman introduced himself as a property owner of Netcong and the President of the NCP. He has been on the board of the NCP since its inception. He provided some explanation on the assessments. He also provided some recent background leading up to today's presentation. He listed the accomplishments by the NCP for 2014. He also discussed some pending projects. A local businessman was hired to design a new logo. He provided some detail on their advances with the website and social media to rebrand the NCP.

Councilman Hathaway who is the Council liaison for the NCP read the following letters as requested by the business owners who were unable to attend tonight's meeting.

- Stephen Fredericks – Growing Stage Theatre:

I regret not being able to attend the meeting this evening, but the Growing Stage is busy with its final dress rehearsal tonight before we launch our 33rd season which will highlight the 20th anniversary of our organization purchase of the Palace Theatre. Late last fall I was asked by members of the Netcong business community to consider putting my name forward as a candidate for the Netcong Community Partnership (NCP) and I did so for several reasons, first of which was to give back to a community that has so earnestly supported our efforts. Work by our organization that included taking a building that was in such a state of disrepair and neglect that it was literally between us and a bulldozer if it was to remain in existence. Our success in that effort has been well documented. The fact that that same building today welcomes between fifteen to eighteen thousand people into Netcong annually is a testament that nothing is impossible. One of the comments made at the contentious meeting in January stung me in particular, and has stayed with me throughout my brief time as a trustee of the Netcong Community Partnership - that "nothing will ever change here in Netcong." Thankfully I did not accept that small-minded concept back in 1995, I still don't today, and I believe strongly that the Netcong Community Partnership can be an effective agent of positive change here in our community. Since January, under the guidance of our Executive Director, the majority of our board has worked together to continue the process of not only reversing many of the mistakes of previous boards, but more importantly moving the organization forward.

- *We established new goals and objectives that would strengthen our ability to serve both the businesses and the residents that would benefit from a vibrant business community.*
- *We redesigned the website and branding for the organization to meet the growing role that social media now holds for customer awareness.*
- *We began to broaden our committee structure to engage members in actively participating in the workings of the NCP to both strengthen our mission and to build new relationships that will help sustain the organization for years to come.*
- *The NCP assisted the town in the Annual Netcong Day event with many of our trustees and Executive Director providing many hours of assistance, before and during the day to **ensure its success.***
- *And most recently, we filed the necessary paperwork to give the NCP the necessary not for-profit status required to bring in contributed income that holds great potential for our community.*

The Board and the Executive Director of the NCP accomplished much of this in our first six months before efforts were begun to unravel our work by conducting a biased survey filled with misinformation, false promises, and unsubstantiated claims. The Board of the NCP has been soundly criticized for not coming to defend ourselves against such false accusations, but the majority of our Board chose not to feed the frenzy created by one - we chose instead to continue to move forward in our efforts to serve the businesses and residents of Netcong in hopes that our actions would provide enough incentive for the Mayor and Town Council to shut down what can only be described as a witch hunt. We were wrong in that assumption, but implore the Town Council to join us now in moving forward. Suggestions have been made to shut the NCP down for a year to evaluate how best to proceed - nothing could be worse. Rather than focusing on the failures and mismanagement of the NCP in the past - look instead to the significant progress that has been made over the past two years. "The most talented board of professionals ever" is how we were lauded by the Mayor in January. How can the businesses or residents of our community ever be benefited by a decision that would essentially be working backwards? Claims that there is a disparity in our finances because too much of our overall budget is dedicated to our Executive Director's salary is one that is baseless. Take another look at the countless hours Mrs. Thomas provides our community that aren't paid for; look at her credentials and expertise that she shares with both our board and this town's administration; consider the structure she provides our volunteer board on a weekly basis that allows us to succeed; and taking all that real information into consideration - break it all down - she is probably making less than minimum wage. To me, that is a greater disparity to be concerned with. The survey conducted by the town shows a clear majority of responses that the NCP is not wanted. No it doesn't. Rather it demonstrates through the "I don't know" portion, something that we are already aware of and that is

that we need to improve our communication process and not only to the businesses and property owners, but to the town council and our residents. We can do that and have already begun measures to resolve that issue. Finally, the comment has been made that we really don't serve the businesses in town. In part that is a true statement - because we also serve the residents of Netcong that live in this town. We serve those that have the expectation that their downtown is going to be safe and vibrant; those that have a pride in the town's history and want its reputation beyond our borders to be one that is celebrated; those that want to see the storefronts filled and not vacant; those that want to see the Town of Netcong succeed and not be held back by the negative concept "that nothing will ever change." There is work to be done and the NCP is posed to be utilized as an effective agent of change for the Economic Development Committee of our Town Council, our Business Community, and most importantly, for the residents of Netcong. I would appreciate your consideration in allowing us to get back to the work at hand and the mission we were charged to serve. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen L. Fredericks

Founder & Executive Director

The Growing Stage -The Children's Theatre of New Jersey

- **Dr. Ginter – Maple Ave:**

I have been associated with NCP since its inception. I have seen the struggles, successes, and failures over the years. Don Smart, Stuart Kopperweis and others tried to... right the ship. The early successes of the NCP were tied to the sign grants, store front facades and farmers' market. Once these programs were in decline and not having a paid permanent director, the NCP lost its direction. The NCP survives to this day because of its leadership and a substantial financial cushion. In an effort to prove itself the NCP became broader based and assumed tasks that, in my opinion, were not philosophically compatible with the goals and direction of the original NCP business community. And it did not have the funds to support this ambitious undertaking. We are at a cross-road. Three camps exist as to the fate of the NCP. The first group wants it to continue, business as usual. The second group wants it to cease operations ASAP. The third group, if I read the survey correctly, wants the NCP to continue but with changes. What is important, I believe, is that the third group can see value but not results for the money spent; value received but not always easily defined.

The NCP has a good foundation, very capable leadership, all volunteer, which is its best asset. But certain areas have to be addressed. The town council has to assume a greater responsibility for many of the tasks the director and the NCP are currently engaged in. The NCP has to focus on goals that are commensurate with the revenue available to them; this includes changing the tier system which I was opposed to from the very start of the NCP. Many of the provisions of the by-laws and day to day operations of the NCP are based on a far larger base than Netcong can provide logically and sensibly.

I am a tax payer like everyone else and I will gripe like everyone else. But one thing I have learned is that if you can't fix the problem then you are equal to the problem –no better. In my opinion without changes the NCP is doomed and Netcong will suffer a setback. With proper changes the NCP will again have the ability to prove itself.

Respectfully,

Winfred R. Ginter

- **Maria Patamia – Fenucci's Restaurant**

My name is Maria Patamia, I reside at 34 Center Street, Netcong, New Jersey. I apologize for not being able to attend this meeting as I have a busy restaurant on Thursday evenings that I must tend to.

Fifty-one (51) years ago my parents decided to bring their family to America for a better life. Having relatives in the area, my parents found work at the Dover Handbag Co., here in Netcong. They immediately knew Netcong was a special place, which led them to make their first investment in the Borough of Netcong .Over the past 51 years we purchased our first home, built our second home, maintained our first purchase as a rental property, built a third home, purchased a vacant commercial

building and restored it into a successful restaurant, purchased a neglected historical building and restored it into a respectable residential and commercial landmark. We have done all of this because we love Netcong and want to invest in our community to make it a better place. It has been two (2) years since we purchased, restored and revived two landmark commercial properties in the Boro.

It has been two (2) years since I was nominated and elected to the Netcong Community Partnership. As a new business and commercial property owner in the Boro of Netcong, I was and still am very interested in contributing as a member of an organization that devotes its time towards making Netcong an even better place.

I never viewed the NCP as an organization devoted to "building" my business. That was my responsibility. I never expected the NCP or any of its trustees to "bring people in the door". That was my responsibility. I certainly never expected the NCP to carry out its mission without a contribution from me as a business owner. What I did expect from being on the NCP was to be a part of an organization that worked to create an environment that is appealing to visitors, residents, businesses and prospective new businesses. Just this past year our work included; countless hours of negotiations with prospective new businesses to fill the empty buildings downtown, we created and continue to work on our Netcong Brand through social and print media outlets, we awarded several sign grants, we provided the floral displays around downtown; we organized the vendors, entertainment and the Free Kid Zone at Netcong Day as well as contribute to the holiday parades. All of this to present Netcong to visitors as a friendly and inviting place to dine and/or shop.

We have spent a good portion of 2014 developing goals and objectives and identifying critical areas needing improvement within our business district. When tasked with contacting each and every business or commercial property owner to let them know "WHO WE ARE", we were unable to secure a "MASTER LIST" of such from the Borough. Why, because one didn't exist. I, personally, spent umpteenth hours, away from my business, creating this master list from three (3) outdated ones.

This is what NCP has been doing. We have been doing everyone else's job! There is a tremendous value in having an organization dedicated to providing services to businesses, with the right tools. We had been asking for those tools for many months, when it was apparent they were not available, we spent our valuable time collating the info ourselves.

Our public meetings are held monthly and are open to anyone. Very few attend. The few business members that do, continue to express that the NCP "does nothing for me".

I implore you, Council, to vote in the best interest of the majority of Netcong businesses and in the best interest of the residents of our town to retain the NCP with its full functioning state of providing the "niceties" so many have become accustomed to. As for those commercial property/business owners here tonight who feel there is no value in this organization, ask yourselves one question before you speak to this notion:

"How have I contributed to Netcong as a commercial property/business owner to make Netcong a better place?"

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

- Kathy Robbins – Manager for Fulton Bank of NJ – Netcong Branch –Treasurer of the NCP. Mrs. Robbins explained her involvement with the NCP. She stated that all members are volunteers who put in numerous hours and despite the recent distractions are eager to rebuild the organization.
- Leigh Ann Vanhagen – 8 Main St.:

For those who don't know me, I am a licensed professional planner, both nationally and in New Jersey. I have worked in the private sector as a consultant and been a small business owner. Currently, I am a researcher at the Blaustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University. Most people do not really know what planners do and I would like to take a moment to share with you the types of initiatives I work on. For example, writing municipal master plans, completing environmental and health impact assessments, creating community surveys, doing cost-benefit analyses,

researching best practices and cutting-edge technologies, running public meetings and focus groups just to name a few things. In short, my skills and experience revolve around creating economic and socio-economic solutions to create great places across New Jersey. I was asked to join the NCP in January as the Mayor's appointment specifically to help with a strategic plan and to share my experience with economic development and revitalization. Being new to the board I was immediately impressed with the expertise brought to the table. People like Stephen Fredericks from the Growing Stage, Vic Pocarobba from ShopRite, Kathy Robbins from Fulton Bank and especially Gina Thomas our Executive Director. These Board members are amazing assets to our town. They are forward thinkers with a clear understanding of what it takes to improve the economic vitality of the town. I've known Maria Patamia for much longer than my tenure on this Board and I know she is a person who does what it takes to get stuff done. You always want Maria on your team because she is a hard worker and the experience she brings to the group is phenomenal. Bill Lerman and Dr. Ginter also put in a significant amount of skill and expertise into making NCP an amazing organization.

Since January, we have developed a new mission and vision. We also developed new goals and objectives that have specific tasks associated with each goal. The new plan wasn't made in a vacuum that disregarded the systemic problems that the NCP and Borough have faced. It is a bold but reasonable guidance document on how the NCP is moving forward both through internal changes and initiatives and improvements that can directly affect the businesses and property owners. I hope you have had a chance to read it.

When I was appointed to the NCP, it was with the clear understanding that we had one year to help improve the organization when in fact, we ended up with four months before much of our volunteer time and efforts got sidetracked with talk of surveying the businesses and property owners about the value of the NCP. We found ourselves spending days working on updating the Borough's incomplete business lists and defending actions of the past - none of which have anything to do with the current Board as you see it today. As you recall, Steve and I attended a Council meeting to discuss these issues. It took a lot of time on NCP's side and on the Borough staff side to deal with the detractors. I know the Council chose to create your own survey after agreeing we would work on it together and I would like to put my Rutgers University hat on and talk about the survey. Simply put, statistically the number of responses you received is not enough to make a valid conclusion. First, less than half of the business and property owners who were surveyed responded. Second, seventy percent (70%) of the business owners did not respond. 70%1 That means you have two property owner responses for every one business response. Clearly, the interests of property owners versus the interests of business owners are not the same. With so few responses the margin of error is somewhere around 8.4%. That is a large margin of error. I conduct surveys and work with researchers who use survey data to help make policy decisions across the state. I would not recommend making a policy decision based on the outcomes of this survey when there is such a large margin of error. Survey design is very tricky. Believe me, I know how difficult it is to design a valid survey. Because it is so tricky, I usually work with survey design professionals. The main issue with your survey design is you only asked yes/no/don't know type questions. These types of questions are considered biased. They leave no room for variations or opinions that are not strongly felt. For example, "No" and "yes" sound like awfully strong opinions when the answers could have been "probably not" or "maybe so." Have you ever taken a customer satisfaction survey that didn't ask you to rate your satisfaction on a scale of, say, 1-5? I never have and if it's from a reputable company, neither will you. You have a survey with low sample size and a large margin of error. You cannot make a valid decision using these results. I also decided to get a second opinion on this survey from one of the state's most qualified survey designers at the Bloustein Survey Research Center. He concurred with my findings and added his own issues. I can share those concerns with you at another time if you are interested.

Okay, I'm sure I've droned on enough about statistical significance. Even I get a glassy-eyed look when talking statistics. Let me tell you what NCP would be doing instead of this right now if this survey issue never emerged to sidetrack our process. Committees were formed to address our goals and objectives which you all have copies of. Because of my profession position, I would be working on a marketing report for the town. As I am sure you all know, marketing studies are expensive endeavors that consultants charge a nice fee for. However, I work with brilliant and eager planning students who love digging in to these types of analyses. I can leverage their work to help our town. Wouldn't it be nice to have a study to help identify the market potential for both new and existing retail goods and service businesses in the commercial district? That is what an organization like the NCP

can be doing. I'm such a planning nerd, I'm excited about doing this, however a project like this doesn't happen without a paid staff person to help with the everyday details. This is the direction the NCP is heading.

Now let me put my resident hat on. As a resident, I understand that a business assessment doesn't just go away and upkeep and services remain the same. I have no doubt that the burden will be shifted to the residential taxes and as a taxpayer in this community, I have a real problem with that. When I have mentioned the situation to my neighbors, they have a problem with it too.

Are you really ready to stop NCP in its tracks now by either disbanding the group or suspending the assessment? I really hope not. Maybe I'm optimistic, but I have faith in my elected government leaders to recognize when they have a good thing going and can make the decisions that work to improve our town and not to let it stagnate or worse. These detractors are not the people that elected you into office and they certainly are not the ones who will help keep you there.

- Vic Pocerobba – Ronetco Shoprite- Mr. Pocerobba explained that he was on the NCP board for 4 years – with two of those years as president. He stepped down this year due to a heavy work schedule. He stated that change is inevitable. He added that if you don't change you fall behind. He also noted that everyone wants to benefit Netcong. He feels the disgruntled members of the NCP have raised awareness that change is needed for the NCP.

The Mayor and Council were thanked again for providing the opportunity for the NCP to make this presentation.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Agenda Meeting of September 4, 2014
- Regular Meeting of September 11, 2014

A motion to approve the above listed minutes was made by Councilman Still and seconded by Councilman Hathaway.

Roll Call for 9/4: 6 Yes

Roll Call for 9/11: 5 Yes Abstain: Councilman Koster

PUBLIC PORTION OF MEETING

The Mayor opened the meeting to the public.

- Barrie Palumbo – 28 Hemlock Rd. Columbia (13 Maple Ave.) – Mrs. Palumbo mentioned names of people and /or business against the SID- they cannot afford this tax anymore. She explained that this is money that could be put back into their businesses. These businesses would like to establish an association based on volunteers and donations. They will still provide the services that exist but without the taxes being forced upon them. They have already contacted the Rotary and Recreation Commission about working together with them. They would also conduct fundraisers, which she described, to raise money for activities.

The Mayor asked why 'with all the expertise on both sides, why can't everyone work together?' He recommended that everyone "think out of the box."

Councilman Sylvester asked 'will they be able to run all the things the NCP did on donations? He did not believe it would work on only donations.

- Clifton Young – 32 Maple Ave. – is a renting resident. He feels everyone does a great job – they try to keep things moving. This situation sounds just like Congress, there are two sides fighting and no one wants to get together.
- Dave Weippert – 46 Main St. – made the statement "never appear to be more than you are and always be more than you appear." He then took out his cell phone and performed a Google search on Netcong Borough and passed around the image on the screen. He restated his earlier statement and stepped down.
- Kathy Renegar – 29 Dell Ave. – noted that she is the daughter of a small business owner. She feels new businesses coming into town would be looking for an organization like the NCP for guidance and services. Maybe a compromise is needed such as lower assessments with donations for supplementation. She has been a resident since 1999. She sees benefit to an organization such as the NCP as a needed support to attract businesses.
- Roxanne Gambino – 130 Main St. – she noted that she has owned a business in town for 31 years. She understands the volunteers of the SID have done a good job, but the extra tax is a true burden. She claimed that there is a new generation of business owners who could make a successful volunteer organization.
- Marty Pisano – 1 Maple Ave. – He reviewed both sides of this argument and stated that both sides consist of intelligent people. He asked how much is raised by this tax. He wants to know if it would be possible to offer a tax rebate for hardship on the assessment. He continued by asking 'Is there a lawful way to provide this?'

A motion to close the meeting to the public was made by Councilman Still and seconded by Councilman Hathaway
Roll Call: 6 Yes

ORDINANCE ADOPTIONS

1. **Ordinance 2014-12** – An Ordinance Amending Chapter 194, Land Development Procedures of the Code of the Borough of Netcong and Amending the Regulation of Fences

This ordinance was carried to the October 9th meeting.

CORRESPONDENCE

1. Letter from Roxbury Township - Pilot Gas Station

The Mayor would like to set up a meeting with himself, the Netcong Administrator and Police Chief and Roxbury Administrator and Police Chief sometime next week to discuss this situation.

2. Letter from Dr. Winfred Ginter – NCP

This letter was read by Mr. Hathaway during the NCP presentation

OLD BUSINESS

No old business was presented at this meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Fire Department Application for Netcong Fire Co. #2- Kaeleen Sylvester

A motion was made by Councilman Sylvester and seconded by Councilman Koster.

Roll Call: 5 Yes Abstain: Councilman Still

2. Junior Fire Fighter Application for Netcong Fire Co. #2 – Alex Wroblewski

A motion was made by Councilman Koster and seconded by Councilwoman Butler.

Roll Call: 5 Yes Abstain: Councilman Still

3. Junior Firefighter Application for Netcong Fire Co #2 – Brandon Olivo

A motion was made by Councilman Koster and seconded by Councilwoman Butler.

Roll Call: 5 Yes Abstain: Councilman Still

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR TO THE COUNCIL

- President Sylvester – took a ride with the Administrator on Friday to view properties with property maintenance violations. For some, a summons may be the only option. The Mayor stated summons should be issued 10 days after letters have been issued if problems are not resolved.
- Councilman Hathaway – the issues at the school (discussed at the last month's meeting) have been resolved. The dead tree and poison ivy on the fence have been removed.

MAYOR'S COMMENTS

The Mayor had no comments at this time.

RESOLUTIONS

1. **Resolution #2014- 93** – Requesting Approval of Items of Revenue and Appropriation – Municipal Alliance

A motion was made By Councilman Still and seconded by Councilwoman Butler.

Roll Call: 6 Yes

ORDINANCE INTRODUCTIONS

There were no ordinance introductions at this meeting.

CLOSED SESSION

There was no closed session at this meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

A Motion to Adjourn the Meeting was made by Councilman Still and seconded by Councilman Hathaway at 8:44 PM.

Roll Call: 6 Yes

Respectfully Submitted,

Cynthia Eckert, Borough Clerk