

Fairness In Taxes

Meeting Minutes 9-5-14

Board Attendance: Leo Burke, Bill & Sheila Hartranft, Michael Hinchman, Vic Staniec & Jim Tweed

Meeting opened by Michael Hinchman with Pledge Allegiance at 3:00 P.M.
Michael had invited Keith Hartzell as a guest speaker, but he was unable to attend.

Education Report – Vic Staniec

- The City of Longport had requested of the NJ Education Dept. that their students be able to attend Ocean City High School instead of Atlantic City High, but were turned down to prevent racial imbalance in Atlantic City High. The secretary of Education then reversed that decision and Atlantic City High filed suit for a temporary injunction against Longport to prevent this but were turned down. Ten students from Longport will be attending Ocean City High this year. There are a total of 177 students from sending districts who will attend in 2014/15. Only 5% of those 177 can be choice students
- There is a surplus of \$150,000 in tuition reserve, plus \$150,000 already in reserve totaling \$300,000.
- The Ocean City Red Raiders were originally the Ocean City Raiders. The current logo “O (bald eagle) C” was adopted by the class of ’61. They have decided on a new logo which will be a “red tailed hawk with O.C.H.S. beneath it. It will be red and white on a black field.
- The current student population is 1200.
- Asked about undocumented or non-citizen students, Vic stated the school is not permitted to ask about citizenship.
- Asked about the school’s rating he said there is no national rating. Vic informed us that Zillow, a real estate web site does rate the schools in the district they operate in and O.C. ranks #7 of 10.
- The contract for the school district has not been ratified, but will be decided by the 4th Wednesday in September. No information will be made available until then. It is expected it will be a 3-year contract.

Should 2nd Home Owners in O.C. Gaining Voting Rights in Municipal Elections? – Jim Tweed

Jim read the following proposal for consideration: “Fairness in Taxes supports the right of non-resident property owners who are citizens of the United States, at least eighteen years of age, holding 50% or more ownership interest in real property located within the municipal boundaries of the City of Ocean City, and paying a minimum of one thousand dollars per year in property taxes, to vote as an individual for the election of Mayor and City Council members only. Owners of multiple properties should choose one location to determine the ward in which they may be registered.”

At this point Vic Staniec asked to give a statement which was “Fairness in Taxes already represents all the tax payers, permanent residents and 2nd homeowners alike, and we should not be wasting time on this debate.”

Jim then presented a list of statements from people opposed to this effort, each followed by his rebuttal .

1. **Why bother, it won’t change things.** Response – it would mean representation of these owners not control of the elections.
2. **It will change things.** Response – non-residents currently have no stake.
3. **There would be no High School if they had their way.** Response – there is no evidence to support this conclusion. Non-resident property owners could just as likely support a shift of revenues from operations to capital improvements which tend to strengthen their property values, such as schools, roads and access to medical services.
4. **They would have a hidden agenda.** Response – the agenda is in the open—fairness. Taxation without representation is simply wrong.

5. **Short sighted.** Response – For decades Ocean City has over-funded its salaries and benefits on the operations side of the budget, and under-funded capital investments in its future. Are we better off?
6. **Multiple property owners would get multiple votes.** Response – This argument is a red herring (a logical argument based on a false premise). The right attaches to the owner, not the property.
7. **One person, one vote.** Response – each property owner would have only one vote for elected officials in the municipality where they are taxed.
8. **Non-residents don't know the issues.** Response – irrelevant because nowhere in the United States is being an informed voter a requirement for the right to vote. As with anyone who has a vote it is easy to become educated regarding the issues. Even easier now that everyone has the “web” as a resource.
9. **The Tory argument.** Response – Britain claimed we were already represented by Parliament. Clearly the colonials disagreed.
10. **They were aware going in; so what.** Response – Yes, in the U.S. we are free to live where we wish and also free to make change.
11. **The selfish argument, “I didn't have this right, neither should they”.** Response – at one time individuals under the age of twenty-one could fight in wars, but not vote at all. This was taken care of through a constitutional amendment in 1971.
12. **Move here if you want to vote here.** Response – Doesn't deal with the issue of the right to vote.
13. **It will never happen here.** Response – even if the State permitted this move, the City would still have the final say. For 82 years after slavery was abolished, there was no vote for blacks until 1965. It was a 72-year wait for women. Once the only people who could vote were white, male, property owners. In the long view, this is probably inevitable.
14. **To heck with fairness.** Response – my favorite; there is no pretense and that I can respect.

Jim Tweed's closing thought - personally, I believe FIT not taking a stand may be cowardly. What good is it to gain the respect of others if I lose my self-respect. That is why I support this.

Additional Discussion

- We should find out how all our membership feels about this issue.
- Audience member – why a \$1,000 minimum in taxes? Part of the law is drawing lines rather than having anything open-ended.
- Renters are full-time residents but not property owners. They have the right to vote.
- Where will it go from here?
- Leo Burke – everyone wants some control and involvement. All taxpayers should have a say. FIT may be an entity without power. They pay the taxes; they deserve the right to vote on who spends their taxes.
- Do a husband and wife both get to vote? Yes, because each would hold 50% ownership in the property.
- Bill Hartranft noted that under the current system only 33% of those eligible to vote actually did. It defeats the argument that non-residents would not be interested in the issues.
- A Delaware resident noted that Rehoboth's 2nd home owners have had this right for 70 years. There are also three seats on their City Council reserved for non-residents.
- It was suggested that we invite the Mayor of Rehoboth to be a guest speaker at a FIT meeting to hear what he/she has to say about this issue and learn more about how it works for them .

Proposed by Vic Staniec, seconded by Jim Tweed and carried unanimously it was resolved to postpone further discussion until we; 1) take a survey of the FIT membership on this issue and, 2) invite a mayor from a municipality where they have non-resident voting rights to speak at a public meeting which FIT would sponsor.

Finances – Bill Hartranft

- A little more than 50% of our members have paid their dues for 2015. No further comments at this time.

Secretary – Sheila Hartranft

- We still need articles for the next Newsletter. We missed a summer Newsletter but should make every effort to put one out for the fall, before the winter Newsletter requesting dues goes out.

- The web site has now been updated, but does need newer information on the current issues of the City. Michael Hinchman said that any news articles that make it to print can be forwarded to Jim Rudolph for inclusion on the web site.
- When we advertise our meetings with the media, we should make every effort to give a topic of discussion to encourage higher attendance.

Miscellaneous

- Michael was informed by Keith Hartzell that there are now 261 City employees; up from 253. He has asked for a list with salaries and start dates.
- A grant for the skate park has been applied for. They do need to pick a spot in order to submit the application, but that location can be changed after they receive the grant.
- Chuck Firensky noted that even though he is a part-time resident, he received a notice for Jury Service from Cape May County. He was informed by the County Clerk, that they simply send them out to any and all tax payers. He now needs to provide proof of residency in PA to be taken off their mailing list for jury service.
- Someone also noted that Sea Isle City attempted to obtain voting rights for non-residents, but was not successful, and maybe we should find out how they proceeded and what were the drawbacks.

Meeting adjourned at 4:45 P.M.

Next meeting scheduled for Friday, October 3, 2014. This will be our annual Membership Meeting.

Respectively submitted by:

Sheila Hartranft, Secretary