



Borough of Collingswood

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M. JAMES MALEY, JR.
Mayor
Director of Public Safety & Affairs

BRADFORD C. STOKES
Administrator

JOAN C. LEONARD
Commissioner
Director of Public Works, Parks and Recreation

May 22, 2009

MICHAEL A. HALL
Commissioner
Director of Finance & Revenue

Mayor and Council
Borough of Woodlynne
200 Cooper Avenue
Woodlynne, New Jersey 08107-2199

Re: Continuation of Cooperative Policing Agreement

Dear Mayor & Council:

We are writing to confirm changes being implemented in Collingswood's police operation in order to continue under the current agreement in Woodlynne and, more importantly, to request that the Governing Body reconsider its decision made approximately one year ago to end Collingswood's performance of housing inspections in Woodlynne.

First, after being informed that no other community has expressed an interest to perform police services in Woodlynne, and after weeks of discussion internally and with Mayor/Administrator Fuentes, changes have been made to police operations that will enhance the number of man hours of police patrolling the streets of both our towns through June 30, 2010. We will be reducing the police work force by three persons but making changes in work rules limiting the number of officers that may take vacation at any one time, moving administrative supervisors back onto the street, and ending our Borough's participation in another Interlocal Agreement providing a Tactical Team that involves substantial training hours that limited officers patrol time. We believe these changes will enhance the policing efforts in Woodlynne and in Collingswood. We met with Mayor/Administrator Fuentes on May 13, 2009 and advised him of these changes in the police operations.

On a second issue, housing inspections, we also met and discussed these issues with Mayor/Administrator Fuentes on May 13, but we did not see eye-to-eye. We request that the Governing Body consider reinstating its agreement with Collingswood to have the Borough's Fire Department perform rental registration and fire inspections in Woodlynne. It has been our experience in Collingswood over the last twenty years that police efforts go hand-in-hand with competent, aggressive housing code enforcement. We have found that strong police presence alone is not sufficient to turn the tide on crime. We believe that the first two years of our cooperative agreement with Woodlynne demonstrated that the coordinated effort between our police force and our fire department's housing inspections were beginning to make substantial improvements in fighting crime in Woodlynne.

At the time of discussions of renewals of the police agreement in the spring and summer of 2008, there arose a disagreement regarding Collingswood's request for increased compensation under our housing inspection agreement. Under the prior agreement, Collingswood performed all services and Woodlynne was responsible to pay up to \$26,000 and then all fees collected above that figure would be paid to Woodlynne. In 2004, the housing inspection program cost Woodlynne \$4,930. In 2005, the housing inspection program cost Woodlynne \$3,850. In 2006, as Collingswood began to get a handle on the inspections and found a number of rental properties that had not been previously identified, Collingswood paid Woodlynne \$29,855 for allowing us to do the housing inspections. Let us just repeat that, in the second full year of the program, Collingswood paid Woodlynne \$29,855 for doing nothing. In 2005, Collingswood completed 714 inspections; in 2007, we completed 1,034 inspections. We request the entire governing body examine your housing inspection program today.

The disagreement with Mayor/Administrator Fuentes in 2008 occurred over our request to increase the amount that would be paid to Collingswood before money would be paid to Woodlynne because of the increased expense and time spent on the housing inspections by Collingswood. Based on the 2006 inspections, this would have, potentially, meant that Woodlynne would only receive \$10,000 to \$15,000 while being responsible to perform none of the housing inspection work. Collingswood's inspection services were terminated by Mayor/Administrator Fuentes because of this financial issue.

There is one other relevant issue we believe must be addressed. We regret to have to discuss internal Woodlynne personnel operations but we feel we must because these issues affect, we believe, our mutual public safety concerns. At the time when Woodlynne ended Collingswood's housing inspections, the Mayor had recently been appointed as the full-time paid Administrator for the Borough. With the ending of the housing inspections by Collingswood, Woodlynne hired a relative of the Mayor to perform these housing inspections. It is the consensus of our Police Department that the Mayor/Administrator's relative and the other inspector, have not been effective in housing enforcement.

The Collingswood Fire Department has been trained through Rutgers University's Housing Course. We urge you to determine what training your inspectors have. At our May 13 meeting we were advised there is nothing more to do than "work off a checklist" We believe that is horribly insufficient. We were also told that sometimes the inspectors had to "back off" because they "were scared" and "live" in Woodlynne.

Our Police Department reports that they have found the enforcement officers to be afraid of some of the property owners and that occupants in properties have threatened these individuals and that the individuals will not swear out formal complaints; our Police Department has found these individuals to not understand their purpose in investigating and seeking out compliance with all housing code issues. Our Police Department has found that attacking crime with simple police patrols does not solve the issues created as the condition of the properties continues to worsen and become hangouts for criminals. We discussed these issues with Mayor/Administrator Fuentes on May 13, 2009. He was not interested in making any change in the inspection process. He was vehement in that position,

We invite the Governing Body to meet with Chief Garrity and Sergeant Prince to review their experience with the inspections. Sergeant Prince has the experience of the inspection process in Collingswood and Woodlynne and is in the best position to candidly give you information on both the rental registration and the property maintenance issues he has personally experienced. We believe the Council must investigate these issues themselves because the Mayor/Administrator is personally involved in the existing process. We believe a change is necessary to provide effective housing code enforcement in Woodlynne.

We are taking this extraordinary step of contacting the entire Governing Body because we believe that the first two years of our agreement, where Collingswood was performing police operations and housing inspections, were having a positive effect on crime fighting and improvement of the neighborhoods. Based on our experience in Collingswood over the last 20 years, and our experience in Woodlynne during the first 2 years of our agreement, we firmly believe that these two efforts go hand-in-hand. We believe that if the housing inspections had continued over the last year that we would not have had the difficult issues confronting us over the past few months of increased criminal activity in Woodlynne, requiring greater investment of Collingswood resources. We want the crime issues to improve for Woodlynne so public safety improves for Collingswood.

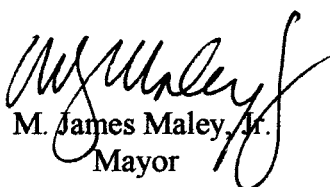
We firmly believe that if Collingswood is able to resume its system of housing inspections, that there is a strong likelihood that the Shared Police Agreement with Woodlynne would be able to continue beyond the June 30, 2010 expiration date. We are equally firm in our belief that if Collingswood is not able to return as the housing inspection service for Woodlynne, that Collingswood will almost certainly not continue to provide police services after June 30, 2010. This decision is yours and we believe it will determine Woodlynne's future. Please conduct your own inquiry into these issues.

On behalf of the Borough Commissioners, we are asking the entire Governing Body to please consider our request and to provide us with a response. We are taking this step because of the extraordinary circumstance of your Mayor operating as your full-time Administrator, being personally involved in attending or performing the inspections, and his family relationship with one of the inspectors involved. We believe that it is an issue that should be reviewed and addressed by the elected officials of the community that do not have any bias or other interest that might cloud a judgment to be made in the best interest of the citizens of Woodlynne.

We look forward to your response regarding the housing inspections. Thank you for your consideration.



Michael Hall
Commissioner



M. James Maley, Jr.
Mayor



Joan Leonard
Commissioner

MJM/kjk

cc: Thomas Garrity, Chief
Bradford C. Stokes, Administrator
Joseph M. Nardi, Esq.
Michael McKenna, Esq.