

# Readington hires law firm to handle document requests

Mayor says there have been 117 document requests

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**READINGTON TWP.** — The Township Committee has hired another legal firm on an “as-needed” basis, this time to handle what Mayor Gerard Shamey said are extensive requests for public documents from two residents.

Ironically, some of the material requested by residents Donald Baldwin and Edward Dudzinski concerned legal bills. Baldwin has been of vocal critic of the committee, and Dudzinski ran for Township Committee but was defeated by the incumbents in the June Republican primary.

Shamey said at Monday’s Township Committee meeting that the volume of documents officially requested had become overwhelming for the regular attorney and Township Administrator Vita Mekovitz.

“It’s their right to file requests,” Shamey said before adding, “It’s become necessary to hire outside help” after receiving requests for about 117 items. He said that cost would be passed on to taxpayers and a large part of the material had already been posted on the township Web site.

The committee voted 5-0 to hire the firm of Mason, Griffin and Pierson, at a cost of \$175 per hour for attorney services and \$85 per hour for a paralegal.

Asked how much the township would spend in legal fees for the firm, Shamey responded, “That’s up to Mr. Baldwin and

Mr. Dudzinski.”

In another discussion, Shamey reported on the already-released news that the township had filed in state Superior Court to begin condemnation proceedings against Solberg Airport. The decision came after many months of “evasive” answers to the township’s efforts to negotiate an agreement to limit future growth at the air facility, said Shamey.

## Criticizing The Committee

But resident Karen Jenkin chided the committee, especially the mayor, for not releasing the information the lawsuit had been filed on Sept. 15 during his report at the Sept. 18 Township Committee meeting.

Jenkin said the Township Committee had accused the Solbergs of not negotiating in good faith, but said she didn’t believe that withholding information about the lawsuit’s filing three days earlier had shown good faith for the township. “Now who’s being sneaky?” she asked. “It bothers me and it bothers a lot of other people I have spoken to.”

Shamey responded vigorously with the contention that the lawsuit had been discussed in executive session but not discussed in public that night on the advice on the township’s special attorney.

“Now we are in a legal area, and we have to proceed cautiously in this,” the mayor said. He said the information had

been fully released with documents and a public statement on Sept. 22, the day the Solbergs were served with the lawsuit.

William Courtney, a resident who is also running as a Democrat for a Township Committee seat in the November election, said the filed lawsuit could have been released on Sept. 18 because the court papers became public record as soon as they were officially filed on Sept. 15.

In other business, Jenkin said the large number of deer is a continuing problem in her neighborhood, and also asked if the township is planning to pick up dead deer from roads now that the state has officially abandoned the job this month.

Shamey said that the only credible advice municipal officials have received for deer control is to kill more of the animals. Officials said the hunting season has been extended on larger tracts, but there is no safe way to hunt on acres of suburban lawns that appeal to deer appetites.

Shamey said the township had already hired a firm to remove deer carcasses at a previous meeting.

On Monday night, the committee acknowledged receipt of a resolution from Bethlehem Township opposing the county’s lawsuit arguing that deer carcass removal is the state’s responsibility. But no action was taken by the committee, and Shamey said afterwards he had not had time to read the county’s lawsuit.