

Approved, January 24, 2023

Municipal Building
Park Ridge, NJ
January 16, 2023 – 7:00 P.M.

Special Meeting of the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Park Ridge was called to order at the above time, place and date.

Present: Councilmember Hoffman, Councilmember Ferguson, Councilmember Cozzi, Councilmember Capilli, Councilmember Goldsmith, Council President Fenwick and Mayor Misciagna

Also Present: John Schettino, Borough Attorney
Julie Falkenstern, Borough Administrator
Magdalena Giandomenico, Borough Clerk
Stephen Edelstein, Weiner Law – Labor Attorney

Mayor Misciagna read the compliance statement earlier as required by the Open Public Meeting Act, P.L. 1975, and Chapter 231.

Mayor Misciagna Read the following statement:

Statement on Julie Falkenstern

I want the record to show I am opposed to firing Julie Falkenstern at any of the three jobs she performs for the Borough of Park Ridge.

As Borough Administrator

I have worked with at least 3 or 4 borough administrators during my tenure at Park Ridge and Julie has been the most effect administrator I have worked with.

She has proven to be dedicated to her job.

She is rarely out sick or late to work.

She has never gotten a bad review by any council. Ever.

She attends Park Ridge public events outside of her normal workday.

During our builder's remedy lawsuit her knowledge of land use and her many years of experience with planning and zoning undoubtedly helped us during negotiations and the final outcome would have been much worse without her involvement.

This knowledge and experience will **WITHOUT DOUBT** be useful in 2025 (just 2 years from now) when our next round of affordable housing required come down from the state, **this is a time where this council should be circling the wagons and getting people experienced with land use and affordable housing ON OUR team not letting them go to help the next town.**

During COVID

Most days during COVID Julie was either the only employee in the office of 1 of a handful.

During that time, she worked overtime without compensation. She helped me coordinated efforts with our congressman's office to find out how our seniors were doing at the atrium and getting information to their families most of who were desperate to find out if they were well or sick.

Her relationship with the Congressman's staff undoubtedly helped us get the MUCH-needed funds for our water treatment facility over 3.4 million dollars in just this year alone. She stayed on top of the constant requests for more information that if we missed even one request would've ended of application. (Like many other towns) costing our rate payers millions of dollars. From day one of the Pandemic, on a daily basis, she coordinated our OEM team with OEM coordinator Sgt Babcock to assure we had the latest correct information and medical supplies for borough employees first and then residents. She was THE person that worked with the county officials, state officials and grant writers to MAKE SURE we documented and submitted our costs during that time thereby assuring Park Ridge was reimbursed for those costs. That saved Park Ridge hundreds of thousands of dollars. NOT every town was reimbursed to the same degree as out town and Julie was the key person that made that happen. We are better **financially** due to Julie's efforts. **Service wise** is the same.

During COVID Julie shopped for many of our seniors who could not get out of their houses. She delivered groceries put up much needed prescription medication and those that could leave their homes she gave rides to. I witnessed her delivering groceries to one senior and leaving them at the front door and calling them to make sure they received them because at that time we weren't sure how contagious COVID was.

When the Vaccinations became available Julie and our entire staff made phone calls and surfed the web to schedule vaccination appointment to anyone that was at risk. I have gotten calls from resident with tears thanking the borough for getting them or their parents an appointment and most specifically thanked Julie.

Utility board

Julie has been instrumental in helping with the departure of our long time Director of operations Bill Beattie. Bills institutional knowledge was vast, and his replacement needed to get up to speed quickly. I'm sure Paul Longo would say Julies help kept our Utility running like a well-oiled machine as he learned the ropes and got comfortable in his new role. He called me to express his disappointment at the prospect of Julie leaving.

These are just a few areas that I think Julie has done a great job for our borough. I also believe her management skills with our staff will be missed and wonder if any council member asked our employees what they thought because after all that is important.

I think my biggest disappoint in this move by the council is that it is not in the best interest of the residents, any savings will be inconsequential and the impact on our service will be great.

I encourage the council to change course and keep Julie as Administrator.

We should be looking to keep our entire team together, we can Keep a stand along Administrator in

Julie, and give our Clerk a much-deserved pay increase as well. This shouldn't be rushed and I feel this is being pushed through without considering the long-term consequences

Council President Fenwick made a motion to go into Closed Executive Session and seconded by Councilman Hoffman confirm. Motion carried unanimously at 7:10pm. A motion made by Council President Fenwick and Seconded by Councilman Goldsmith to confirm to go back out to Open Public Meeting at 7:13pm. Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR:

Mayor Misciagna asks if anyone present wishes to be heard on any matter.

Upon recognition by the Mayor, the person shall proceed to the floor and give his/her name and address in an audible tone of voice for the records. Unless further time is granted by the Council, he/she shall limit his/her statement to five (5) minutes. Statements shall be addressed to the Council as a body and not to any member thereof. No person, other than the person having the floor, shall be permitted to enter into any discussion, without recognition by the Mayor.

Speaker:

- 1. Mr. Hunt- 2 Mayer Place** – Mr. Hunt expressed his disappointment with the governing body members about the prospect of firing the Borough Administrator and how unhappy he is about the situation.
- 2. Past Councilmember Metzdorf** – 69 Glendale Rd – Mr. Metzdorf stated how he thinks the Council should reconsider firing Julie and expressed how helpful she has always been to him in his tenure as a Councilman and various board member. He also read the following statement on behalf of three residents:

Hon. Keith Misciagna
Clrs Fenwick, Goldsmith, Hoffman, Cozzi, Ferguson and Capilli
Borough of Park Ridge, NJ

Dear Mayor Misciagna and Council members:

We write as residents of the Borough of Park Ridge in support of Borough Administrator, Julie Falkenstern.

As Falkenstern's long-time tenure, residents and of are Park aware Ridge, of we and recall have how the personally Borough experienced functioned prior improvements to Ms. in the apparent morale of the Borough staff, as well as in the relationship between staff and the public. Reflecting these improvements, our experience has been that the staff on the whole has become noticeably more responsive to phone calls requesting information and assistance. We attribute positive change in large part to the office policies, interpersonal skills and management style of Ms. Falkenstern.

During the initial phases of the pandemic, we became aware Ms. Falkenstern went out of her way to assist seniors and other vulnerable residents in our community by delivering vital prescriptions and other supplies, becoming an essential lifeline to those unable to venture forth to engage in important facets of daily living. She may, indeed, have literally saved lives in our community by going far above and beyond her call of duty.

In the course of my six years of service as Chairman of PKRG-TV, I, Howard Fredrics, have on countless occasions, witnessed Ms. Falkenstern working late into the evening at Borough Hall to handle urgent matters of concern to residents and Borough officials, as well as having seen her come in on weekend and holidays to do whatever was necessary to support the needs of the people of Park Ridge. I cannot imagine a harder working, better colleague with whom to serve.

Our Borough has been made stronger by virtue of the efforts of Julie Falkenstern, who brings a wealth and breadth of talents and skills to her position, far beyond that which most neighboring Borough administrators would be expected to bring, including an in-depth knowledge of land use, as well as purchasing and acquisitions. Put simply, she is the essential go-to contact person for any questions one might have about Borough services and for finding solution to resident problems and concern. She is the veritable glue that holds the Borough together.

We hope and trust that the Mayor and Council will listen to the views of the people of Park Ridge and retain Ms. Falkenstern in her present position.

Dr. Howard Fredrics
Lori Fredrics
Charlotte Joachimowicz
5 Duke Court

3. **Don Schwamb – Bears Nest** – Mr. Schwamb stated how he has been a planning board member for decades and past Chairman, serves on the Open Space committee and committee for maintenance agreements for the Bears Nest, all which have had him work with Julie over the past few years. HE would like to express his opposition to her being fired and states how knowledgeable and helpful she has been to him and other on the boards.
4. **Past Councilmember and Current Utility Board Member Metzdorf** – 69 Glendale Rd – Mr. Metzdorf asked stated he believed the reason is politically and financially driven.
5. **Past Councilmember and Current Utility Board Member Michael Mintz** – 66 3rd St. – Mr. Mintz summarized his involvement with the various boards in town and his tenure as a Councilmember. He stated he is against Ms. Falkenstern getting fired and that there is enough money to pay both the Business Administrator and the Clerk. He believes the decision is driven politically.
6. **Mr. Hunt- 2 Mayer Place** – Mr. Hunt stated that this discussion should have been held during a regularly scheduled Mayor and Council meeting not a special one whose occurrence is unknown to most.
7. **Cheryl Jones** – 65 Linden Ave. – Ms. Jones stated that she does not know Julie, but based on the discussion and everyone's comments, she would like the Council to reconsider.

8. **Ray Mital** – 8 1st Street - Mr. Mital was a board member for several years and worked well with Julie and would like the Council to reconsider terminating Ms. Falkenstern.
9. **Ray Connelly** – Park Ave. – Mr. Connelly read an employment statue from 1969 and stated he has never met Julie, but would like to safeguard the Borough from any possible lawsuits.
10. **Mr. Hunt- 2 Mayer Place** – Mr. Hunt asked the Council to reconsider the decision to terminate Ms. Falkenstern.

Ms. Falkenstern stated that she appreciates everyone support and coming to the meeting to speak on her behalf, she thanked everyone for coming.

Mayor Misciagna asks for a motion to table Res. No. 023-036 - Res. Terminating Julie Falkenstern as Borough Administrator and QPA

A motion was made by Councilmember Ferguson and seconded by Councilmember Capilli to confirm.

AYES: Councilmember Hoffman, Councilmember Ferguson, Councilmember Goldsmith, Councilmember Capilli, Councilmember Cozzi and Council President Fenwick.

**BOROUGH OF PARK RIDGE
RESOLUTION NO. 023-036**

**RESOLUTION TERMINATING JULIE FALKENSTERN FROM THE POSITIONS OF
BOROUGH ADMINISTRATOR AND QUALIFIED PURCHASING AGENT**

WHEREAS, Julie Falkenstern has served as the Borough Administrator of the Borough of Park Ridge since December 1, 2017, in accordance with Borough Ordinance IV §2-35.2; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Council additionally assigned Ms. Falkenstern the duties Qualified Purchasing Agent of the Borough of Park Ridge as of May 15, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Council have determined that they wish to terminate Ms. Falkenstern's employment in the positions of both Borough Administrator and Qualified Purchasing Agent effective immediately; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Julie Falkenstern's employment by the Borough of Park Ridge as both Borough Administrator and Qualified Purchasing Agent is hereby

terminated effective immediately, subject to the payment to her by the Borough of Park Ridge of an amount equal to her salary in those positions for the next three months following the adoption of this Resolution.

Mayor Misciagna asks for a vote for Res. No. 023-037 – Setting Salary of Magdalena Giandomenico as Borough Clerk

A motion was made by Council President Fenwick and seconded by Councilmember Hoffman to confirm.

AYES: Councilmember Hoffman, Councilmember Ferguson, Councilmember Goldsmith, Councilmember Capilli, Councilmember Cozzi and Council President Fenwick.

**BOROUGH OF PARK RIDGE
RESOLUTION NO. 023-037**

**RESOLUTION SETTING SALARY OF
MAGDALENA GIANDOMENICO AS BOROUGH CLERK**

WHEREAS, on July 24, 2018, Resolution No. 018-204 was adopted appointing Magdalena Giandomenico as Registered Municipal Clerk for a three (3) year term commencing April 11, 2018; and

WHEREAS, on April 13, 2021, Resolution No. 021-111 was adopted reappointing Magdalena Giandomenico as Registered Borough Clerk wherein she received tenure of office pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40A9-133.6; and

WHEREAS, Magdalena Giandomenico currently serves as the Borough Clerk in the Borough of Park Ridge; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Council seek to increase the salary for Magdalena Giandomenico providing her with an annual salary of \$110,000 effective January 16, 2023 and with a medical benefit cap of twenty-five (25%) percent effective January 1, 2023; and

WHEREAS, said salary increase falls within the salary range of the position established by the current Salary Ordinance of the Borough; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Park Ridge, State of New Jersey, the annual salary to be paid to Magdalena Giandomenico as the Borough Clerk for the Borough of Park Ridge is hereby fixed in the sum of \$110,000 effective January 16, 2023; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Ms. Giandomenico's medical and dental contribution levels shall continue to be based on the employee's salary at the percentages provided for by the Pension and Health Benefit Reform Act, PL 2011, Chapter 78 to a maximum amount of 25% of the employees chosen coverage's premium effective January 1, 2023; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a true copy of this Resolution should be sent to Magdalena Giandomenico within ten (10) days from the date of its adoption.

Council President Fenwick made a motion to table Res. No. 023-038 – Res. Approving Payment to Julie Falkenstern for Serving as QPA

A motion was made by Council President Fenwick and seconded by Councilmember Cozzi to confirm.

AYES: Councilmember Hoffman, Councilmember Goldsmith, Councilmember Cozzi and Council President Fenwick.

NAYS: Councilmember Ferguson and Councilmember Capilli

**BOROUGH OF PARK RIDGE
RESOLUTION NO. 023-038**

**RESOLUTION APPROVING PAYMENT TO JULIE FALKENSTERN
FOR SERVING AS THE QUALIFIED PURCHASING AGENT OF THE
BOROUGH OF PARK RIDGE**

WHEREAS, the Borough of Park Ridge's position of Purchasing Agent became vacant on May 15, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Council identified Borough Administrator Julie Falkenstern to serve as the Purchasing Agent for the Borough pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40A:11-9(g); and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Council appointed Ms. Falkenstern to the position of Acting QPA with resolution 021-151 on May 11, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the personnel committee advised Ms. Falkenstern that her salary for the position would be affixed when she obtained her QPA License and that she would be compensated retroactively for the year 2022; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Falkenstern obtained said certification on July 15, 2022; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Falkenstern was advised by the personnel committee that an increase in her salary of \$20,000 would take effect January 1, 2022; and

WHEREAS, the Council introduced salary ordinance 2023-001 on January 4, 2023 setting the minimum salary for the QPA at \$10,000; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Park Ridge, County of Bergen, State of New Jersey that the mayor be and he is hereby authorized and directed to execute, and the Borough Clerk to attest, to any and all documents necessary to compensate Ms. Falkenstern for the work performed as the QPA from January 1, 2022 until January 16, 2023 in the amount of \$10,000; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of the within resolution be available for public inspection during regular business hours and pursuant to the laws of the State of New Jersey, County of Bergen and Borough of Park Ridge.

Council President Fenwick made a motion to table Res. No. 023-039 – Res. Appointing Magdalena Giandomenico as QPA

A motion was made by Council President Fenwick and seconded by Councilmember Cozzi to confirm.

AYES: Councilmember Hoffman, Councilmember Goldsmith, Councilmember Cozzi and Council President Fenwick.

ABSTAIN: Councilmember Ferguson and Councilmember Capilli

**BOROUGH OF PARK RIDGE
RESOLUTION NO. 023-039**

**RESOLUTION APPOINTING MAGDALENA GIANDOMENICO AS
QUALIFIED PURCHASING AGENT**

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40A:11-9, a municipality may by resolution designate an individual to serve as its Qualified Purchasing Agent; and

WHEREAS, Magdalena Giandomenico is presently enrolled in a class to obtain her certification as a Qualified Purchasing Agent; and

WHEREAS, the Governing Body has reviewed this matter and recommends that Magdalena Giandomenico be appointed as Qualified Purchasing Agent effective January 17, 2023 at an annual salary of \$10,000.00 upon adoption of the salary ordinance.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Park Ridge, State of New Jersey, that Magdalena Giandomenico be and is hereby appointed to the position of Qualified Purchasing Agent for the Borough of Park Ridge effective January 17, 2023; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Magdalena Giandomenico be paid an annual salary of \$10,000.00 upon adoption of the salary ordinance in her position as Qualified Purchasing Agent; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a true copy of this Resolution should be sent to Magdalena Giandomenico within ten (10) days from the date of its adoption.

ADJOURN

A motion was made by Councilmember Ferguson and seconded by Council President Fenwick to adjourn the Regular Mayor and Council Meeting. All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Magdalena Giandomenico".

Magdalena Giandomenico
Borough Clerk