

MOUNT PENN BOROUGH
BOROUGH COUNCIL VOTING MEETING
March 6, 2024

The Mount Penn Borough Council met for a Special Meeting on March 6, 2024, at Borough Hall at 200 N. 25th Street, Reading, PA 19606. Council President Troy Goodman called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and adjourned at 7:41 PM.

Members in attendance were Council President Troy Goodman, Council Vice President Roger Stief, Council Member Thomas Baer, Council Member Christine Dise, Council Member Yrisol 'Iris' Garcia, Council Member Michael Kindlick, and Council Member Richard Lombardo. Staff and Professional Members present were Borough Manager Hunter L. Ahrens, Solicitor Thomas Klonis, and Engineer Ty Leinneweber. Mayor Ryan Maurer was absent.

Others present included Patrick McDevitt, Tianna Schaeffer, Susan Arnold, Marina McGough, Lorraine Storms, Holly Rigg, Kate Flowers, Amy Johnson, Antietam School District Superintendent Dr. Heidi Rochlin, Antietam School District Board Member Kyla Ramsey, Antietam School District Solicitor Joan London, Esq. and several other members of the public.

Public Comment

Susan Arnold, 2228 Fairview Avenue – Ms. Arnold sought clarification on the process of community comments being offered to the Zoning Hearing Board and their subsequent sharing with the public. Mr. Ahrens clarified that only the Zoning Hearing Board Solicitor would receive that information. Ms. Arnold then questioned the acceptance of these comments. Mrs. Dise explained that they were being collected to ensure that community members who couldn't attend the Zoning Hearing Board meeting at 4:00 PM could still share their perspectives with the Zoning Hearing Board through the Solicitor.

Patrick McDevitt, 2321 Grandview Avenue – Mr. McDevitt indicated that he was concerned about the public comments being made privately, which could prejudice the Zoning Hearing Board against the Antietam School District.

Marina McGough, 2619 Cumberland Avenue – Ms. McGough asked for further clarification about how the public comment information was being disseminated to the Zoning Hearing Board and for what purpose. The council responded that the public comments were being compiled and presented to the Zoning Hearing Board to ensure that all perspectives were considered during their decision-making process.

Action

Mr. Kindlick introduced the support letter for the Mount Penn Elementary Center. School Solicitor London requested a copy of the letter being discussed by Borough Council, which was provided. Mr. Kindlick shared that the Borough, School District, and Attorneys for both entities met for approximately eight hours over two meetings to craft support letters for the Mount Penn Elementary Center and Mount Penn Primary Center that both parties could agree with that would grant the school district flexibility for the foreseeable future and protect the balance of the local neighborhood around the Mount Penn Primary Center.

Mrs. Dise asked if the letters were crafted to avoid changes that would necessitate changes to an understanding that the School District and Borough were able to agree on as to their plans. Mr. Kindlick and Mr. Klonis shared that it grants flexibility to the School District so that the letters representing the Borough's understanding of the agreement would not change.

Mr. Goodman asked if a parking plan had been agreed to. Mr. Kindlick responded that there was an agreement on the total number of spots for both buildings that would be required to be maintained. Mr. Goodman indicated that the plan, which included parking at the A-Field, was unrealistic because it was unlikely that staff or students would park at the A-Field instead of on the streets. Solicitor London responded that this agreement allows the district to meet the Zoning requirements for parking, but the district was committed to making that plan work.

Ms. Garcia responded that it was unrealistic because community members, especially faculty or staff, would not park there in adverse weather conditions and walk up to the Elementary Center or Primary Center. Solicitor London responded that the district would enforce adherence to the parking plan that was agreed to, which may also include a shuttle to transport faculty or staff from the A-Field.

Mr. Baer and Solicitor London indicated that someone worked in the City of Reading; they often had to park some distance from their work location to get to work, which was a similar expectation to what the district was proposing. Mr. Stief asked if the school district's teacher union had been consulted on this plan. Solicitor London responded that the administration was having those concerns. Mr. Stief asked whether there would be pushback to adherence to a school district policy mandating they follow the plan. Mr. Kindlick responded that it was a matter for the school district to consider, not the Borough, to change their plan.

Mr. Kindlick also commented that the parking at the A-Field was overflow parking that depended on larger enrollment than proposed at the building. Priority parking would take place at other locations. Solicitor London agreed that the first parking spaces would be at the buildings before using parking at the A-Field.

Mr. Klonis also discussed the need for a variance in the application from the School District for the Mount Penn Primary Center because their additional designated on-street and off-street parking spaces were farther away than the Zoning Ordinance permitted, for example, the A-Field is greater than 500 ft. away, which needed a variance. In addition, a variance for off-street parking at St. Catherine's of Siena church required a variance from the requirement of 400 ft. School Board Member Kyla Ramsey commented that these locations were confirmed in rental agreements with the School District.

Ms. Garcia commented that many residents have challenges and barriers to the parking plan being solidified, including challenges to individual mobility and adherence by staff members to any policy the school district adopts.

There was a discussion about the required parking spaces. When drafting the letter, the agreement was to maintain 275 parking spaces between both buildings, accommodating the school day needs and the afternoon and evening activities needs for assemblies and games between both buildings. Mr. Ahrens

shared that when Mr. Leinneweber made additional calculations, he concluded that the required parking number could be lower at 235 because the parking available between both the Elementary Center and Primary Center could accommodate parking at the Primary Center for afternoon and evening activities by participants parking wherever they needed to. The School District added that they counted more than 300 parking spots, while the Borough concluded that they counted approximately 276-294 parking spots.

Mr. Ahrens added that the driving population was anecdotally small. Therefore, the required parking today was smaller than the total available, but the Borough's consistent position was to have parking to accommodate the maximum use of the buildings.

Ms. Garcia commented that the additional staffing needed for both buildings in the Borough would take away from parking available to residents, especially those with mobility challenges. Mr. Goodman asked if there were going to be changes in staff numbers. Ms. Ramsey commented that all staff were already in the area, which would decrease staff when students are moved away from the current building's use. Ms. Ramsey added that the School District would consider having their School Resource/Police Officer ticket violators of the policy the district would adopt. Ms. Garcia emphasized that the concerns for accommodating residents with disabilities had not been adequately addressed prior, and the plan presented required the district to fulfill promises that she did believe they had met in the past.

Michael Kindlick made a motion to approve and submit to the Zoning Hearing Board the draft letter to support the Antietam School District's Special Exception and Variance Application for the Mount Penn Elementary Center. Rick Lombardo seconded the motion.

Mr. Stief commented that he would not support either letter of support. Mr. Stief commented that an event occurred with a school district staff member during school hours on his property, which was unacceptable.

Mrs. Dise asked if the district would need to adjust its plan to fit all students in the Elementary Center and Primary Center area if that would impact the total parking available and required. Solicitor London responded that it would not. Ms. Ramsey replied that the parking spots necessary under the Borough's calculation would accommodate grades K-12.

Mr. Ahrens commented that the understanding of the Borough is that the required parking spaces at the Elementary Center of 95 spaces total was based on having 600 students as well as the Faculty and Staff at the building, which was a number greater than the district's enrollment.

The motion was agreed to 5-2, with Mrs. Dise and Messrs. Baer, Goodman, Kindlick, and Lombardo voting in the affirmative; and Ms. Garcia and Mr. Stief voting in the negative.

Mr. Kindlick commented that there was a difference in the grade levels, and the Borough listed the required number of spaces as 180 total.

Michael Kindlick motioned to approve and submit the draft letter to the Zoning Hearing Board to support the Antietam School District's Special Exception and Variance Application for the Mount Penn Elementary Center. Rick Lombardo seconded the motion.

Mrs. Dise asked if the School Resource/Police Officer had time in her schedule to ticket the violations of this policy successfully. Dr. Rochlin responded that the district would accommodate the policy's needs to make the situation work. Ms. Ramsey added that she believed the School Resource/Police Officer would be spot-checking and not spending excessive time writing these tickets.

The motion was agreed to 4-3, with Messrs. Baer, Goodman, Kindlick, and Lombardo voting in the affirmative; and Mses. Dise, Garcia, and Mr. Stief voting in the negative.

Mr. Ahrens shared that the letter from the Council that would include community member communications on any side of the Zoning Hearing Board's decision on the Mount Penn Elementary Center would be faithfully shared with the Zoning Hearing Board as an appendage to the letter that Borough Council would send. Mrs. Dise asked if those comments would be shared with other community members in response to concerns that information could be shared inappropriately. Mr. Ahrens responded that they would only be sent to Mr. Sobotka when the time window ended per the letter.

Christine Dise made a motion to adopt the cover letter to the resident's comments for the Zoning Hearing Board's hearing on the Mount Penn Elementary Center. The motion was seconded by Richard Lombardo. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Adjournment

Roger Stief made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:41 PM. Rick Lombardo seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Submitted,



Hunter L. Ahrens
Borough Manager