

MOUNT PENN BOROUGH
BOROUGH COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING
April 30, 2024

The Mount Penn Borough Council met for a Business Meeting on March 26, 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 9:08 PM.

Members in attendance were Council Vice President Roger Stief, Council Member Thomas Baer, Council Member Christine Dise, Council Member Michael Kindlick, and Council Member Richard Lombardo. Staff and Professional Members present were Borough Manager Hunter L. Ahrens, Solicitor Tom Klonis, Chief of Police Ray Serafin, and Engineer Ty Leinneweber. Mayor Ryan Maurer and Council President Goodman were absent.

Others present included Jennifer Lopez, Roberta Banks, Amanda Stief, George L. Saltzman III, Shannon Billman, Kevin Sidella of Hera Registry, Jose Martins of J.P. Mascaro and Sons, and John Theodossiou of Mt. Penn Fire Company.

Public Comment

Amanda Stief, 125 N. 25th Street – Mrs. Stief asked if there was a draft of the permit parking ordinance. She specifically commented that fees should not be the burden of the local residents. Mrs. Stief also discussed school pickup issues occurring on Filbert Avenue and their challenges to residents.

Chief Serafin responded that he would work to have officers present to help relieve some of the congestion and challenges occurring with the school pickup.

Mr. Lombardo commented that the Borough awaited additional data before implementing an ordinance. He asked Mr. Ahrens if there was an update on the traffic study. Mr. Ahrens shared that the district took traffic counts, but there was no update on the timeframe, which was previously expected to be completed in late May.

Jennifer Lopez, 2413 Cumberland Avenue – Ms. Lopez commented that the Police Department ticketing drivers without removal of the vehicles still creates challenges for residents because their parking spots are not preserved and can be used. She also commented that the public should be able to review the permit parking ordinance draft to understand and properly comment on the draft. She shared that it was important for the residents' perspective to be included in the review process.

Regular Approvals

Thomas Baer motioned to approve the February 20th, 2024, Special Meeting minutes. Yrisol Garcia seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Engineering Items

Mr. Leinneweber explained that the next step in approving the ADA Ramps project for 2024 was to approve bid documents to be approved before being issued for bidding.

Roger Stief motioned to approve the authorized issuance of bids for the ADA Ramp Project for 2024. Michael Kindlick seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Stief asked if there was a discussion with the Borough Engineer and Borough Staff on issuing a notice of violation to the School District because their use of parking spaces was inconsistent with previous Zoning Decisions, and they were hosting dumpsters. Mr. Ahrens and Mr. Leinneweber responded that they had not. Mr. Stief commented that the problem had been occurring for about a month and should have already been followed up on by the office, and they should have notified the Borough Engineer.

There was some discussion about the issue, and Mr. Klonis responded that the Council should make a motion to direct the Engineer or Staff to review the problem and issue a Notice of Violation if appropriate.

Roger Stief made a motion to approve the direct Borough Engineer to investigate the issue of dumpsters being inappropriately within the school parking lot, which is required to be used for parking only, and issue an NOV if appropriate. Michael Kindlick seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Baer and Mr. Stief sought clarification about the school district's activities in the rear alleyway as part of their building permits. Mr. Klonis commented that the district would need consent from residents to close access to the alley. Mr. Ahrens shared that he had discussed that issue with the School District, and he, the school district, received verbal consent from the property owners for that work to be completed. Mr. Klonis added that the Borough does not typically find it appropriate to get involved in matters related to private property rights because it's out of the Borough's jurisdiction.

Regular Approvals (Continued)

Roger Stief motioned to approve the February 27th, 2024, Business Meeting minutes. Yrisol Garcia seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Roger Stief motioned to approve the March 6th, 2024, Special Meeting minutes. Christine Dise seconded the motion. Mr. Kindlick noted that the agenda had an incorrect date. Mr. Klonis shared that it was De Minimis who had requested that the motion continue. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Michael Kindlick made a motion to approve the April Financial Report. Thomas Baer seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Presentations

Hera Registry – Kevin Sidella of Hera Registry introduced himself and the company Hera Registry. The company works as a tool for municipalities to identify and lay claim to foreclosed and vacant properties to establish a line of communication and fees owed, and it works as a tool against blight. Mr. Sidella shared that the company creates a revenue stream for the municipality by passing on a percentage of the fees collected and does not otherwise charge the municipality. He estimated that 90% of the foreclosed properties and 30% of the vacant properties being registered was a good measure of success.

Mr. Ahrens commented that there was a request to change the underlying ordinances' definitions for vacancy to be enforceable with Hera Registry's program. In addition, they requested an increase in the fees set under the Comprehensive Fee Schedule. Mr. Ahrens concluded that staff believes this would be an excellent organization to contract with and that it will work to enforce an existing Borough Ordinance.

Mr. Lombardo initiated a discussion about the inaccessibility of certain streets for municipal service vehicles, including Ambulances, Sanitation Vehicles, and Fire Apparatus. Jose Martins from J.P. Mascaro commented from the Sanitation Hauler's perspective: J.P. Mascaro has been unable to appropriately access Center Street and Glen Terrace to service the homes. In previous months and years, they were backing the sanitation vehicles up the street, which was done to service the properties, but it was something that should not have been done. He recently added that a car was struck when the company did that, and J.P. Mascaro had a significant payout to the homeowner. Since then, J.P. Mascaro has not collected like they had been.

Fire Chief John Theodossiou shared that most residents respect where parking restrictions exist, but the Fire Company often runs into situations where streets are inaccessible because parking restrictions do not exist for specific streets, which prevents a wide enough turning radius for a fire truck to turn into some of these streets.

The Council discussed restricting parking spots to prevent parking in certain areas that control the Fire Company from having a wide enough turning radius. Christine Dise commented that parking restrictions specific to certain days would not align with holidays and irregular collections of the sanitation company.

The consensus of the Council was to have Mr. Lombardo, Mr. Martins, and Mr. Theodossiou meet to establish a recommended list of streets.

Mr. Lombardo accepted public comment from Shannon Billman, who wanted to comment publicly but could not get to the meeting at the start.

Shannon Billman, 2515 Philmay Terrace – Asked how long the school district would be permitted to make a noise with their work at the school.

Mr. Ahrens reviewed the Borough's activities, including two notice letters advising that the Police would be dispatched for subsequent activities. Mr. Ahrens shared that the Police would need to take decibel readings to demonstrate an ordinance violation.

There was a discussion with the Chief of Police and Council about the appropriate enforcement of noise restrictions. The Chief of Police and Solicitor Klonis advised the public that if future instances of noise violations occur, the resident should call the non-emergency police number.

George Saltzman, 6 Earle Gables Court – Mr. Saltzman commented that he was concerned about double parking on several Borough streets and that the Police needed to address it because it was chronic. Mr. Klonis and Chief Serafin advised Mr. Saltzman to call the non-emergency police number to call the police department. Mr. Saltzman and Mr. Stief emphasized that it was important that the Police write tickets for these issues so that folks are not avoiding penalties.

Reports

Mr. Lombardo shared that there was a previous commitment by the Borough to contribute \$10,000.00 to the Mt. Penn Fire Company for the upfit of a Ladder Truck, totaling \$1.5 million. Mr. Stief asked if that was budgeted. Mr. Ahrens responded that it was not, but it would be workable for the Borough to make that contribution. The council determined that a discussion would resume in September of this year and could be budgeted for 2025.

Mr. Ahrens reported that AVMA had formally requested they participate in an interview process to find a new board member. Mr. Ahrens added that he wanted to understand from the Council if they could participate and advertise the opening. The consensus of the Council was to advertise the opening and allow two AVMA board members to participate in the interview process with the Personnel Committee.

Mr. Ahrens shared that discussions with the STMP work group were continuing. He had a second operations meeting with them to discuss administration and office operations with the STMP team.

Mr. Ahrens shared that there was no change from the last meeting, and the Borough will continue to work through the STMP program before determining how to move forward.

Mr. Ahrens shared that street sweeping would occur from May 20 until May 24, 2024. Mr. Lombardo commented that there would be no towing of vehicles violating the temporary police order related to sweeping.

Christine Dise made a motion to approve the Contract for the Street Sweeping Vehicle Rental. Yrisol Garcia seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Ahrens shared that there was no update on the financial disbursement of the multi-municipal garage for the Borough of Mount Penn and the Borough of St. Lawrence. Mr. Ahrens shared that he was led to believe there would be no changes to the grant agreement regarding the boroughs working together. Mr. Ahrens shared that he would need some direction on how to share the garage with St. Lawrence but suggested a term lease that guaranteed the total square footage inside the garage.

Mr. Ahrens shared that the initial Codes Complaint Policy was still being reviewed for the Council's approval.

The Council discussed the alleyway closure behind the Primary Center, which was related to their building permits. Mr. Ahrens summarized that the Borough was advocating the School District for each property to maintain pedestrian access to the rear of their properties and verbal consent of the residents living around the alleyway, and he emphasized that the Borough did not have jurisdiction to be directly involved in the matter. Mr. Klonis concluded that this could not be something Borough is involved in, or else it would open the Borough to liability.

Mr. Ahrens and Mr. Klonis shared that they were still waiting on the revised escrow agreement for the Borough of Mount Penn and Antietam School District for the Building Permit fees.

Mr. Baer asked for clarification on why there were only three parking violations issued in the prior month by Central Berks Police Department because that appeared to be a low number. Chief Serafin shared that there was monthly fluctuation and no consistent concentration on parking enforcement. Mr. Baer and Chief Serafin engaged in a discussion about staging Police Officers for a deterrence effect.

The Council and the Chief of Police discussed traffic congestion and parking enforcement around the Mt. Penn Primary Center. Chief Serafin concurred that a challenge existed with staging parent pick-up and drop-off around the Mt. Penn Primary Center. Chief Serafin commented that the department would work to do better.

Mr. Klonis shared that an appeal of the Zoning Hearing Board decision had been filed with the Court of Common Pleas. Mr. Klonis shared that he would not be involved in the appeal, and it would be the responsibility of the Zoning Hearing Board solicitor to handle the appeal.

Resolutions

Mr. Ahrens shared that the resolutions included changes supporting the hourly rate charges for public institutional construction projects. The electrical, plumbing, and HVAC resolutions included additional inspections and process regulations.

Michael Kindlick made a motion to adopt Resolution 39-24 governing Electrical Permit Standards. Thomas Baer seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Michael Kindlick made a motion to adopt Resolution 40-24 governing Plumbing and HVAC Permit Standards. Thomas Baer seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Thomas Baer made a motion to adopt Resolution 41-24, which set a Comprehensive Fee Schedule. Michael Kindlick seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Old Business

Mr. Stief asked for clarification about why Penn Terrace was excluded from the draft ordinance. Mr. Ahrens shared that it was not intentional, and he would be happy to receive edits from the Council.

Mr. Stief shared that he had shifted the responsibility of the newsletter to the Borough Office.

Borough Council recessed to Executive Session at 8:40 PM

New Business

Mr. Klonis shared that review of the School District's use of dumpsters in parking spaces. Mr. Klonis shared that if Mr. Ahrens could ask the school district to make a change and that change is made, then a Notice of Violation would not be necessary. The Council continued discussing how to approach the review of the Notice of Violation for the dumpsters issue. Mr. Ahrens recapped that the Borough would conclude the matter by next Friday.

Adjournment

Michael Kindlick made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 PM. Christine Dise seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Submitted,

Hunter L. Ahrens
Borough Manager