

MOUNT PENN BOROUGH
BOROUGH COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING
February 25, 2025

The Mount Penn Borough Council met for a Business Meeting on February 25, 2025, 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 8:12 PM.

Members in attendance were Council President Troy Goodman, Council Vice President Rick Lombardo, Council Member Thomas Baer, Council Member Christine Dise, Council Member Yrisol Garcia, Council Member Michael Kindlick, Council Member Roger Stief, and Mayor Ryan Maurer. Staff and Professional Members present were Borough Manager Hunter L. Ahrens, Borough Solicitor Tom Klonis, Chief of Police Ray Serafin, and Codes Administrator Arthur Kelly.

Amanda Stief and several community members were present.

Public Comment

There was no public comment noted during this portion of the meeting.

Community/Economic Development Presentation

Borough Manager Ahrens presented an abstract strategy for economic development for the Borough. Key points included:

- Identification of three main challenges: high taxes, decreasing home ownership, and aging homes.
- Opportunities highlighted were good transportation access, proximity to Route 222, potential benefits from economic development in the Greater Philadelphia area, affordable and diverse housing stock, and natural geographic features (Mt. Penn and Mt. Neversink) for outdoor economic development.

Mr. Ahrens proposed creating an atmosphere along Perkiomen Avenue similar to outdoor recreation retailers, leveraging the presence of Mt. Penn and Mt. Neversink. This strategy aims to create a competitive advantage by focusing on an outdoor economy, which aligns with state grant priorities.

Next steps outlined included:

- Conducting a market analysis through a STMP Grant
- Exploring tax incentive programs like LERTA
- Discussing opportunities with the Reading Area Transportation Study Committee
- Developing a comprehensive plan and zoning update

He emphasized that this strategy aims to position the borough for future opportunities rather than directly purchasing properties or businesses. The council was asked for feedback on this concept as a central strategy to build upon.

Discussion followed, with council members expressing interest in the concept and its potential alignment with the Mt. Penn Preserve partnership. The council agreed to appoint Mr. Kindlick and Mr. Maurer as the borough's representatives to the Mt. Penn Preserve Partnership meetings.

Troy Goodman moved to appoint Mike Kindlick and Ryan Maurer as the borough's representatives to the Mt. Penn Preserve Partnership. Yrisol Garcia seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Street Sweeping Penalties for 2025

The council discussed the approach for street sweeping in 2025, focusing on notifying residents and handling violations. They agreed to continue using temporary signs placed 24 hours in advance and explore additional notification methods.

The council debated whether to tow violators or attempt to contact them first. After discussion, they decided to authorize the police to tow vehicles at their discretion, following attempts to contact owners.

Rick Lombardo moved to authorize the police to tow violators of street sweeping regulations at their discretion after attempts to contact owners. Roger Stief seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The dates for street sweeping were confirmed as May 19th to May 23rd, 2025. The council instructed the borough manager to ensure this information is included in the spring newsletter, water bill notifications, and on Facebook.

Chief of Police Search Process

Mr. Lombardo presented the Borough's recommendation for the next Chief of Police search process:

- Hire internally from three current candidates
- Bring in a panel of three external chiefs to conduct the first round of interviews
- Have the personnel committee of the police commission conduct the second round of interviews
- The entire board of the commission would then vote on the final selection

The council discussed the merits of using local chiefs versus those from outside the county for the external panel. Concerns were raised about potential conflicts of interest with local chiefs.

After debate, the council agreed to support the proposed process, with the suggestion to consider including chiefs from outside Berks County in the external panel.

Rick Lombardo moved to support the police commission's proposed Chief of Police search process, with consideration given to including chiefs from outside Berks County in the external panel. Thomas Baer seconded the motion. The motion passed with a 6-1 vote with Messrs. Baer, Goodman, Kindlick, Lombardo, and Mlles. Dise and Garcia voted in the affirmative, and Mr. Stief voted in the negative.

Accept the Resignation of Bob De Long from the Planning Commission

The council reviewed the resignation email from Bob De Long from the Planning Commission.

Rich Lombardo moved to accept Bob De Long's resignation from the Planning Commission. Christine Dise seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The council then discussed the process for filling the vacant position.

Rick Lombardo moved to post the Planning Commission vacancy on the borough website and Facebook page. Roger Stief seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Council members suggested considering Amanda Stief for the position but agreed to review all applications received.

Approve Minutes for Borough Council January 28, 2025 Meeting

Rick Lombardo moved to approve the January 28, 2025, Borough Council meeting minutes. Roger Stief seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Approve Minutes for Merger Ad-Hoc Committee Feb. 13 Meeting

Roger Stief moved to approve the minutes for the February 13, 2025, Merger Ad-Hoc Committee meeting. Christine Dise seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Approve Minutes for Public Works Committee Feb. 18 Meeting

Christine Dise moved to approve the minutes for the February 18, 2025, Public Works Committee meeting. Thomas Baer seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Approve Minutes for Borough Council February 18, 2025 Business Meeting

The borough manager informed the council that these minutes were not yet complete and requested they be tabled for approval at a future meeting.

Reports

Fire Company

The fire company representative reported that Fastnachts would be held the coming weekend.

Water Authority

The borough manager reported on discussions with the Water Authority regarding fire hydrant fees and building rent. Key points included:

- The Water Authority board interpreted their motion to waive hydrant fees as being in perpetuity, contingent on the borough not raising rent.
- The current annual hydrant fee is \$5,000, while the authority pays \$32,400 annually in rent (\$2,750 per month).
- The authority also covers various overhead costs, including Wi-Fi, cameras, and IT services.

The council discussed drafting a new lease agreement with the Water Authority. They debated whether to formalize the authority's coverage of ancillary costs in the lease or keep it as an informal arrangement.

After discussion, the council agreed to:

- Draft a 5-year lease agreement
- Keep the rent at the current rate

- Include the waiver of hydrant fees in the agreement
- Consult with the Water Authority about their preference for including or excluding ancillary costs in the lease language

Rick Lombardo moved to table the Water Authority lease discussion pending more information from the borough manager's consultation with the authority. Michael Kindlick seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Sewer Authority

There was no report from the Sewer Authority.

Planning Commission

There was no additional report from the Planning Commission beyond the earlier discussion of the vacancy.

Central Berks Regional Commission

There was no report from the Central Berks Regional Commission.

Borough Council President

There was no report from the Borough Council President.

Public Works Committee

There was no additional report from the Public Works Committee.

Personnel Committee

The Personnel Committee reported there were two matters to be discussed in the executive session.

Codes Committee

There was no report from the Codes Committee.

Finance Committee

There was no report from the Finance Committee.

Community Relations Liaison

There was no report from the Community Relations Liaison.

Merger Ad-Hoc Committee

There was no additional report from the Merger Ad-Hoc Committee.

Borough Mayor

The mayor raised the issue of reviewing handicapped parking spots in the borough. He requested council support in establishing a review process for existing handicap spots, suggesting a renewal process every 2-3 years.

After discussion, the council agreed to implement an administrative process to monitor and check handicapped parking permits. The process will require permit holders to provide a copy of their renewed placard when it expires, with no additional fee or doctor's letter required for renewal.

Michael Kindlick moved to implement an administrative process to monitor and check handicap parking permits, requiring permit holders to provide a copy of their renewed placard upon expiration. Roger Stief seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chief of Police

Chief Serafin was asked about his anticipated retirement date and tenure. He responded with his intention to retire in February 2026 after 41 years of service.

Codes Administrator

The Codes Administrator reported on recent enforcement activities:

- Issued 35 warnings for un-shoveled sidewalks after recent ice, with most residents complying within 24 hours.
- Addressed issues with trash being put out before pickup day, with 95% compliance after warnings.
- Noted ongoing challenges with one non-compliant resident, resulting in a citation awaiting magistrate review.
- Announced a new inspector starting to complete inspections independently the following Monday; he is currently in training.
- Reported ongoing inspections at Hollywood apartments.

Solicitor

The Solicitor had no report.

Borough Engineer

The Borough Engineer was not present at the meeting.

Borough Manager

The Borough Manager had no additional report beyond the earlier discussions.

Ordinance Updates Pending

Dumpster Permit Ordinance

There was no discussion on this ordinance.

Road Closure Ordinance

There was no discussion on this ordinance.

Street Access Ordinance

There was no discussion on this ordinance.

Noise Ordinance

There was no discussion on this ordinance.

Handicap Ordinance

There was no additional discussion on this ordinance beyond the earlier conversation about the handicap parking permit review process.

Other Business

A council member inquired about the status of a letter sent to Lower Alsace Township regarding representation on a joint committee. The borough manager reported that there had been no official response, but unofficial feedback suggested that the main point of contention was the number of representatives (3 versus 5) proposed for each municipality.

Announcement of Personnel Committee Meeting on Personnel Matters on February 21, 2025

The council announced a Personnel Committee meeting scheduled for February 21, 2025, to discuss personnel matters.

Executive Session on Personnel Matters

The council agreed to adjourn to an executive session to discuss personnel matters, with no voting expected to take place afterward.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:12 PM to executive session with no further business to discuss.