

MOUNT PENN BOROUGH
BOROUGH COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING
December 28, 2023

The Mount Penn Borough Council met for its monthly Business Meeting on November 28, 2023, at Borough Hall located at 200 N. 25th Street, Reading, PA 19606. The meeting was called to order by Council President Troy Goodman at 7:30 PM and adjourned at 9:34 PM. Members in attendance were Mayor Ryan Maurer, Council President Troy Goodman, Council Member Christine Dise, Council Member Jason 'Tuan' Duong, Council Member Michael Kindlick, and Council Member Roger Stief. Council Member Jim Cocuzza was absent. Staff and Professional Members present were Office Administrator Hunter L. Ahrens (virtually) and Solicitor Thomas Klonis. Council Members Jim Cocuzza and Rick Lombardo joined the meeting at 9:02 PM.

Others present included Amy Johnson, Susan Arnold, Tianna Schaeffer, Dr. Heidi Rochlin, Mark Dise, Amanda Stief, and several members of the public.

Mr. Goodman opened the meeting with a pledge to the flag at 7:30 PM. Roll calls were made with one member absent. A quorum was present.

Public Comment

Amy Johnson, a Lower Alsace Township Resident, made public comments regarding the cooperation of the Antietam School District, Lower Alsace Township, and the Borough of Mount Penn. Ms. Johnson shared that there were a lot of plans not yet determined, but that the Borough should commit to finalizing plans for the next school year. Mrs. Dise responded to Ms. Johnson's comments and emphasized that the Council does not want to see any student not able to attend school next year. Mrs. Dise also shared that there would be additional liaison committee meetings between the district, township, and borough would continue to meet. Ms. Johnson reflected that she did not see cooperation between the three entities, and she was concerned that her concerns were not being adequately addressed.

Mr. Duong responded to Ms. Johnson's comments saying that accusations were circulating in the community about Borough Council regarding the relationship with the School District. Mr. Duong shared those accusations that the Borough Council was not cooperating with Antietam School District was misinformation. Ms. Johnson responded that she could only respond to what was being shared with her, which was the source of her concern.

Mr. Kindlick added that he believed the Liaison Committee, between the Antietam School District, Lower Alsace Township, and the Borough of Mount Penn, was a step in the right direction.

Susan Arnold, a Mount Penn Resident, made a public comment that sought clarity about comments she reflected that were made by Council Members and the Mayor to the effect of Antietam School District needing to merge with another district. Mrs. Dise responded that those comments did not reflect her opinions but emphasized that her priority was to see students in school. Mr. Maurer responded that he was entitled to his opinion and accepted the criticism, but shared that education is a priority for him based on his background. Mr. Maurer also shared that he was concerned about comments by

community members criticizing the Borough's local State Representative for work they have done in the most recent state budget process as unproductive.

Tianna Schaeffer, a Mount Penn Resident, made public comments that emphasized her strong desire to see a finalized plan completed that ensured that her children would be in school in the next school year. Mr. Goodman responded that there were Zoning issues that needed to be resolved with the district, but that he did not see a cause for concern with the district's proposal thus far. Ms. Schaeffer asked had the Borough considered a text amendment that would resolve the Zoning issues to bring certainty for the district. Mr. Klonis reviewed the process of a text amendment, emphasizing that an amendment process is an involved process, but the most expedient route for the district to seek relief would be for them to seek relief from the Zoning Hearing Board.

Mr. Duong shared that he was concerned that the district's solicitor was sharing a narrative that this process of a text amendment was simple, he emphasized that it was not. Mr. Ahrens shared that the district had received a draft application for a rezoning application, which allowed them to start developing an application, but they had not been sent a finalized version of that application.

Dr. Rochlin, Superintendent of the Antietam School District, shared that she believed the Liaison Committee was a step in the right direction. She elaborated that it seemed new requests or requirements were continuing to arise as they were attempting to solidify a plan, which seemed to be delaying the finalization of a plan. She also shared that at the last liaison committee meeting, reservations were raised on the Borough's part that did not indicate all parties in the liaison committee agreed with a path forward.

Questions were asked what the objective of the liaison committee was intended to be. Mr. Klonis responded that the liaison committee's objective was to make a recommendation to the whole of Borough Council that would seek agreement with Antietam School District, Lower Alsace, and the Borough.

Mr. Duong emphasized that these processes oftentimes when a project of this scope is undertaken, it takes a long time to get everyone to agree on a path forward, but the liaison committee meeting was meant to facilitate a process that was concluded more quickly.

Amy Johnson again emphasized that a concrete plan was necessary to give clarity to teachers, students, and community members, and asked that Borough Council contribute to agreement between the other two parties.

There were no other public comments.

Engineers Report

Mr. Ahrens presented the Engineer's Report. Mr. Ahrens summarized the action items as approval of a change order that would increase the total cost of the ADA Ramp Project by \$7,820.00; related to the change order, the total contract cost would be increased by \$7,280.00 and the final payment to Drumheller construction would be \$21,838.54.

A motion was made by Tuan Duong to approve the change order request by Drumheller Construction to increase the total project cost by \$7,820.00 to a total amount of \$162,576.00. The motion was seconded by Christine Dise. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

A motion was made by Michael Kindlick to approve the change order request by Drumheller Construction to approve a payment application for the balance of the total project of \$21,838.54. The motion was seconded by Roger Stief. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Ahrens shared that the final approval item for the Engineer's Report was final approval and authorization to execute the contract with J.P. Mascaro for Solid Waste, Recycling, and Leaf Collection services.

A motion was made by Christine Dise to approve and execute the contract with J.P. Mascaro for Solid Waste, Recycling, and Leaf Collection Services for the years 2024 - 2026. The motion was seconded by Michael Kindlick. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Minutes and Treasurer's Report

Mr. Goodman requested motions to approve the minutes and treasurer's reports for the Borough. The motions are included below:

A motion was made by Roger Stief to approve the minutes for the November 28th, 2023, Borough Council Meetings. The motion was seconded by Christine Dise. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Ahrens shared that the list of the current bills reflected a large number of expenses, which were now current, but many revenues were still outstanding and needed to be brought current quickly.

A motion was made by Tuan Duong to accept the Treasurer's Report for the period of November 29 – December 28, 2023. The motion was seconded by Roger Stief. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Liaison Reports

Mr. Maurer shared that the Police Commission would hold a Reorganization meeting on January 11, 2024, at 6:30 PM at Borough Hall.

Council Presidents Report

Mr. Goodman asked Mr. Ahrens if there were any updates from DCED about the STMP grant application filed earlier in the month. Mr. Ahrens shared that he had no formal updates from DCED, but he had a Microsoft Teams call set up with the Department in the first week of January.

Mr. Ahrens shared that the Teams call was also intended to discuss the merger process. He added that Mr. Pottiger, Manager of Lower Alsace Township, requested an update from the Borough about the next steps in the Merger process and the intention to set up another public meeting.

Committee Reports

Mr. Stief shared the Streets Committee Report. Mr. Stief shared that there was a Hometown Hero Banner application that contained an error that was caused by the Borough Office. Due to that error, Mr. Stief was requesting that the banner be replaced for the family at the Borough's cost. There was agreement amongst the Council to this and Mr. Stief asked that Mr. Ahrens forward the corrected copy to the Council.

A motion was made by Roger Stief to approve the replacement of the Jeanne Gallagher Hometown Hero Banner by Borough Funds. The motion was seconded by Christine Dise. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Goodman shared the Parks and Public Property Committee report, specifically that there had been repairs to Borough Hall's hot water heat, pressure release valve, and thermostat in the Road Crew Garage.

Mrs. Dise shared the Solid Waste Committee report, specifically that a new Solid Waste, Recycling, and Leaf Collection contract would begin on January 1st, 2024. She also shared that the new calendar had been circulated in the community and extra calendars would be available at Borough Hall.

Mr. Stief shared the Personnel Committee report. Mr. Stief shared that the Ordinance draft for the Borough Manager's position had been completed and advertised. Mr. Klonis reviewed the ordinance with the Council.

A motion was made by Roger Stief to adopt Ordinance 890 Creating the Office of the Borough Manager. The motion was seconded by Michael Kindlick. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

The Council congratulated Mr. Ahrens on the position of Borough Manager being established and his impending appointment to the position. Mr. Ahrens shared that now the hard work begins.

Mrs. Dise asked Mr. Ahrens to share an update on the Rental Property Registration program as the Codes Committee Report. Mr. Ahrens reviewed the activity that had been completed to send out all rental property notices to register for their rental license by January 31st and shared about the process intended to bring community members into compliance if they had not completed their application by January 31st.

Mr. Goodman asked if there was a process in place to prevent residents who owed taxes or trash fees from being able to secure a rental license. Mr. Ahrens shared that internal processes would drive that process and there were approximately \$60,000 in unpaid taxes or fees, which needed to be recouped. That would be done by matching the applications against a list of unpaid taxes or fees.

Finance Committee and 2024 Budget

Mr. Maurer asked Mr. Ahrens to report on the 2024 Budget. Mr. Ahrens shared that there were two budgets presented to the Borough Council. One of the presented budgets included a 0.75 mill tax

increase to close an approximately \$80,000.00 budget deficit. The second presented budget had no increase. The budget deficit would be closed by the fund balance that the Borough currently holds.

Mr. Ahrens shared that a budget needed to be adopted this evening because DCED requires a budget to be approved by December 31st of each year. Mr. Ahrens also shared that the Borough Council could reopen the budget in January if they were uncomfortable with the outcome of the budget product.

Mr. Maurer asked what the budget deficit would be after a 0.75 mill increase would be; Mr. Ahrens responded that the remaining deficit would be slightly more than \$18,000.00. Mr. Maurer commented that the Borough's responsibility is to pass a balanced budget. Mr. Duong added that it hurts taxpayers more when large increases are adopted in a single year.

Mr. Stief asked for an update on the hydrant rental fees that had been included in the budget. Mr. Goodman shared that the fee was removed from the Borough's expenses. Mr. Ahrens shared that the fee was created to prevent abuse of the hydrants to ensure responsible use of the water needed by any government agencies in the community.

A motion was made by Tuan Duong to accept the 2024 Budget that included a 0.75 tax millage increase under Resolution 28-23 with all fund revenues of \$2,728,568.48 and all fund expenditures of \$2,737,307.09. The motion was seconded by Troy Goodman. Mr. Goodman requested a roll call vote. Duong – Aye; Stief – Aye; Lombardo – Absent; Goodman – Aye; Kindlick – Aye; Dise – Aye; Cocuzza – Absent. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Klonis reviewed the corresponding tax ordinance with the Borough Council which reflected a 0.75 tax millage increase to the Real Estate Property Taxes.

A motion was made by Tuan Duong to adopt Ordinance 891 Setting Real Estate Property Taxes which included a 0.75 tax millage increase. The motion was seconded by Troy Goodman. Mr. Goodman requested a roll call vote. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Ahrens shared that the next item to consider was Resolution 29-23 to approve the trash and recycling fee for 2024 in the amount of \$450.00 per year.

A motion was made by Roger Stief to adopt Resolution 29-23 setting the annual fee per household at \$450.00. The motion was seconded by Christine Dise. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Ahrens updated the Borough Council on revisions being made to the annual fee schedule. Specifically, the fee schedule should be updated to include all knowable expenses to the Borough that an applicant should bear. Mr. Ahrens shared the example of a road closure permit. Mr. Goodman asked if the fee schedule would be approved at the Reorganization meeting; Mr. Ahrens responded that it would be.

A motion was made by Roger Stief to approve the movement of the mobile phone carrier to AT&T FirstNet. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kindlick. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Goodman sought a motion to approve the non-union health insurance agreement for 2024.

A motion was made by Roger Stief to approve and execute the Non-Union Teamsters Health Insurance Agreement for 2024. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kindlick. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mr. Ahrens sought post-purchase approval for the purchase of iPads and associated accessories for a total of \$5,119.94.

A motion was made by Michael Kindlick to approve the purchase of iPads and associated devices in the amount of \$5,119.94. The motion was seconded by Christine Dise. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Change of Accounting Methods and ERP Service

Mr. Ahrens shared that when the Borough had been moved from QuickBooks Desktop to QuickBooks Online a few years ago, the basis of accounting was changed. Mr. Ahrens shared that the cash basis of accounting was better for the Borough's operations, which was an underlying issue with the current QuickBooks profile.

Mr. Ahrens shared that in addition to a change to the basis of accounting, the Borough was not currently using an appropriately segregated Fund Accounting method. This meant that the General Fund, Liquid Fuels Fund, or other funds were kept separate from each other, which was not appropriately being done.

Mr. Ahrens shared that a reason that QuickBooks Online was moved from QuickBooks Desktop was security updates and support being ended. Mr. Ahrens shared that was not true for newer software programs of QuickBooks Desktop. Mr. Ahrens also shared that he was more familiar with QuickBooks Desktop as opposed to QuickBooks Online and his concern was the lost time in sorting the Borough's finances.

Mr. Ahrens shared that this was reviewed with the Borough's Auditors, and the conclusion of Mr. Ahrens' review and the comments from the Auditor led him to recommend that the Borough revert to using QuickBooks Desktop and not renewing the QuickBooks Online program.

Mr. Kindlick asked to clarify the long-term support of the QuickBooks Desktop program, based on the previous information shared with Council. Mr. Ahrens shared on the previous experience with Intuits support, that the Borough was likely looking at 3-4 years without concern. Beyond that timeframe, the Borough should consider an alternative accounting software that was built for the government's use of Fund-Based Accounting.

Mr. Duong asked what the cost would be to the Borough if a change was made back to QuickBooks Online in a few years. Mr. Maurer shared that at that point, the Borough would seek an alternative

service. Mr. Ahrens clarified that the current online subscription would end in the Summer of 2024 so the Borough would be paying additional fees to switch to another service in the future.

Mr. Goodman asked that Mr. Ahrens share what the auditors shared with the Borough. Mr. Ahrens read the following, "Our recommendation is to use separate companies whenever possible in QB for the different funds. I believe the QB desktop version has more functionality. If that is what you are more comfortable with, that is probably a better option than continuing to unwind the online version. The one company approach and using classes or another indicator to separate funds often becomes intermingled." – Chris Turtell, CPA (Herbein CPAs & Advisors)

A motion was made by Christine Dise to identify QuickBooks Desktop as the Accounting and ERP Software for 2024 at a total cost of \$1,410.00. The motion was seconded by Mike Kindlick. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Committee Reports

Mrs. Dise shared the Public Relations Committee report, specifically some of the recent Facebook posts that were made by Mrs. Dise and Mr. Ahrens. Mrs. Dise also shared a request for a discussion of live streaming the Borough Council meetings. The Council discussed the best way to do that without inconveniencing staff or preventing the flow of the meeting. The consensus was that the Council would discuss the item after some additional research. The consensus was that the Council does not open the live stream to allow members of the public to verbally participate through a live stream.

Mrs. Dise shared the Antietam School District Liaison Committee update, specifically to consider a survey of the community related to their feelings about the School District's activities post-flood. Mrs. Dise asked Mr. Ahrens if he had a perspective. Mr. Ahrens shared that he saw some challenges with surveying at this time because there was a deficit of information about what community members were being asked about.

Mrs. Dise shared that a survey could inform the Council's activities within the Liaison Committee and would allow the process to be more transparent. Mr. Duong shared that a survey may have challenges being representative of the entire community.

Mrs. Dise also discussed the joint statement being made by the Borough Council with Lower Alsace Township and Antietam School District. The council discussed the statement and indicated their desire to see it completed as soon as possible and publicized.

Other Reports

Mr. Klonis made a statement to the Council regarding concerns about the Manager's Contract and the Solid Waste, Recycling, and Leaf Collection Contract. Mr. Klonis emphasized that if there was a need for things to be reviewed by the Council, he needed to receive them.

Mr. Ahrens shared that his monthly report was attached to the uploaded documents in Dropbox.

Old Business

Mr. Ahrens shared that a final contract draft from Safety Net Sanctuary had been provided to the Borough for approval. The Borough Council discussed, and Mr. Klonis reviewed the history of this which saw Safety Net Sanctuary replace the Animal Rescue League. Mrs. Dise asked who was responsible for contacting Safety Net Sanctuary when a dog had been found. Mr. Goodman responded that the call would go to the Police Department, and they would contact Safety Net Sanctuary.

A motion was made by Roger Stief to approve and execute the Safety Net Sanctuary Contract for Animal Control Services in 2024. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kindlick. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Mrs. Dise shared that funds from the Block Party in the Summer were still in the Borough's possession and needed to be determined where the funds should be directed. Mrs. Dise shared that originally it was supposed to go to relieve student lunch debt, but there was no existing debt, which meant that a new benefit would need to be selected.

New Business

Mr. Ahrens shared that the Borough's Emergency Management Coordinator had forwarded an All-Hazards Plan update request. Mr. Ahrens shared that this needed to be approved by resolution, which had not been prepared yet but would be brought to Council in January.

Adjournment

Mr. Duong shared that it had been a pleasure to serve as a member of the Borough Council during the last few months and appreciated getting to know the other members. Borough Council thanked him for his work.

A motion was made by Roger Stief to adjourn the meeting at 9:34 PM. The motion was seconded by Christine Dise. There was no further discussion. The motion was agreed to unanimously.