

MOUNT PENN BOROUGH
BOROUGH WORKSHOP MEETING
October 21, 2025

The Mount Penn Borough Council met for a Workshop Meeting on October 21, 2025, at Borough Hall at 200 N. 25th Street, Reading, PA 19606. Council President Rick Lombardo called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and adjourned at 9:18 PM.

Council President Rick Lombardo, Council Vice President Christine Dise, Council Member Kelly Dudash, and Council Member Yrisol Garcia were present. Council Member Michael Kindlick arrived at 7:05 PM. Mayor Ryan Maurer, Council Member Thomas Baer, and Council Member Troy Goodman were absent. Staff and professional members present was Borough Manager Hunter L. Ahrens and Streets Laborer Richard Lombardo, III. Several community members were also in attendance, including Phil Salamone, Director of Operations for Lower Alsace Ambulance Association, and Patrick McDevitt.

Attendance Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. A roll call was conducted, and all members of both boards were accounted for.

Discussion of Federal Government Shutdown on EMS Providers

Mr. Salamone from Lower Alsace EMS explained that he had sent municipal leaders a notification about the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) stopping ambulance payments for Medicare beneficiaries for services provided from October 1st onward. He noted this was unprecedented as payments had continued during previous government shutdowns.

Mr. Salamone explained that he had frozen all non-discretionary spending as a precaution but informed the council that CMS had reversed their decision as of today [October 21, 2025]. He mentioned this was a good development, but emphasized ongoing challenges for ambulance agencies:

- Many ambulance companies in the county are operating on reserves;
- Services cannot charge for medications administered, equipment used, or additional manpower;
- These financial constraints have been in place since 1998; and
- The Center for Excellence in Local Government (CELG) at Albright College highlighted two agencies within the county that could be at risk of insolvency in 2025.

Mr. Salamone noted that while Lower Alsace EMS is following CELG recommendations, the shutdown remains a concern. He explained that if Pennsylvania's medical assistance program were affected, they would face serious financial issues. He emphasized this was a federal issue dating back to the Balanced Budget Act of 1998, which created an ambulance fee schedule that doesn't account for the expanded scope of services ambulances now provide.

Mr. Lombardo suggested forming a committee with state legislators like Senator Schwank and Representative Rusnock to address these issues. Mr. Salamone agreed this would be helpful, noting ambulance services need to become self-sufficient.

Discussion of Allan Myers Road Project

Mr. Lombardo, III reported on the Allan Myers road project. He explained that there was a meeting last Friday with Allan Myers, Mr. Ahrens, and Mr. Leinneweber regarding UGI service line depths. Allan Myers had concerns about milling down 12 inches where some service lines were approximately 10 inches deep.

After reaching out to UGI, their engineering department responded today that they would get their field team to lower the service lines. Mr. Lombardo, III stated that his contact at UGI indicated they could have a crew start work next week if permits are submitted and approved.

The council discussed the timeline, with Mr. Lombardo, III noting that UGI is responsible for ensuring their lines meet the 18-inch federal regulation standard. UGI had estimated it would take about a day per service line to complete the work, with approximately 11 service lines needing adjustments.

Mr. Ahrens mentioned that Allan Myers and Doug Lamb Construction started doing restoration work for cracked cement areas but has not yet confirmed receipt of the UGI information. He expressed optimism that the project could still be completed this year if UGI begins work within the next two weeks.

Mr. Lombardo, III also reported that the Hill Avenue stormwater pipe work has been completed by M&A Excavating.

CY 2025 Draft Budget Presentation

Mr. Ahrens presented the 2026 draft budget, explaining his focus on creating a document that meets four goals: serving as a policy document, financial plan, operations guide, and communication tool. He noted the budget follows Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) standards. Key points from the presentation included:

Fund Balances:

- Projected December 31, 2024 fund balance was just shy of \$1,200,000
- Projected December 31, 2025 balance is just over \$1,000,000
- Projected December 31, 2026 balance would decrease to just over \$600,000

Operating Differences:

- General Fund: Projected deficit of nearly \$70,000
- Street Light Fund: Small deficit of \$206
- Fire Fund and Ambulance Fund: \$1,000 surplus each
- Solid Waste Fund: Deficit of about \$20,000 if trash fee isn't adjusted

Solid Waste Fund Issues:

- The general fund paid for January-March JP Mascaro bills creating a debt of \$146,775.90
- A collection rate of 96% was factored into calculations
- The proposed break-even rate would be \$488.98 per household (an increase of \$38.98)
- Council discussed whether this increase was reasonable compared to private haulers

General Fund Deficit Drivers:

- Solid waste fund loan: almost \$150,000
- Sinkhole project: almost \$100,000
- Street crew garage design fees not yet reimbursed from grant
- Unpaid MMO from 2022
- North 25th Street unexpected repairs
- Additional auditing fees
- Increased health insurance costs

Police Expenses:

- Increasing \$95,488.92 (7.5% increase)
- Originally proposed at 5.5%, increased to address structural deficit
- St. Lawrence accepted their contract

Regional Codes Increase:

- \$15,778.75 for both Mt. Penn and Lower Alsace
- Includes Central Berks codes doing zoning
- Includes increases for Alex, Arthur, and Jim
- Discussion about potentially switching from WebCBC software to a more robust system

Strategic Goals:

- Operational excellence
- Financial stewardship and accountability
- Sustainable infrastructure and environment
- Community well-being and public safety
- Place making
- Economic vitality

Potential Solutions Discussed:

- Adjusting the solid waste fee
- Using a Tax Anticipation Note (TAN) for short-term financing
- Transferring more eligible expenditures to the Liquid Fuels Fund

Discuss 2026 Potential Road Projects

Mr. Ahrens explained challenges in identifying 2026 road projects while the current Allan Myers project is still being finalized. He noted they need to get amendments to grants approved for other road work and have the Borough Engineer build the bid. Mr. Ahrens asked for council's blessing to provide road names in November so they could start working on them in December/January, with the goal of having the bid ready by February, opened in March, and approved in March.

Discuss Potential Grant Projects for Statewide LSA Grant

Mr. Ahrens shared the current committed grant applications included:

- Co-sponsoring the fire company's application for an emergency response vehicle (approximately \$70,000)
- Second part of the police station renovation (about \$350,000)

He asked if council had other priorities. Mr. Lombardo expressed interest in renovating the basement and meeting room of Borough Hall, though acknowledged this was a lower priority. Discussion followed about potentially relocating codes staff to the basement and whether this would require commission approval.

Discuss Animal Control Contracts for 2026

Mr. Ahrens shared that the budget continues with the Sanctuary for animal control services for stray dogs. He also proposed executing an agreement with No Nonsense Neutering to address feral cat issues. The service would cost \$40 per cat neutering, with the borough able to set a limit on how many procedures they would fund. The council agreed to allocate \$400 for 10 cats as a starting point, with the option to reassess later.

Discuss Permit Parking Program

The council discussed the permit parking program, particularly around the school. Mr. Ahrens noted that the school district's traffic engineer did not see an ongoing traffic issue compared to what they experienced after the flood. He suggested the improvement might be due to Dr. Matlack assigning parking spots.

Mr. Ahrens indicated council could consider removing the permit parking program as the available data suggested it was making a marginal difference. However, some council members expressed concerns about buses parking on streets during daytime; potential issues during winter weather and snow removal; and safety concerns with students not using designated crosswalks.

Mrs. Dise suggested waiting through the winter to see how the situation evolves, especially with the front entrance of the school now open. The general consensus was to continue the program through the school year and reassess based on how it functions during winter weather.

Discuss Updating Alarm Ordinance (No. 668)

Mr. Lombardo explained that the current alarm ordinance only addresses police responses to nuisance alarms, not fire alarms. He noted that the fire department had responded to CVS six times in just over a month for false alarms caused by people vaping in the bathrooms. The council agreed to update the ordinance to include fire alarms, allowing the borough to fine businesses for these nuisance alarms.

Discuss Economic Development Task Force

Mr. Ahrens reported that Patrick McDevitt and Marina McGhough had agreed to serve on the Economic Development Task Force. The group was still looking for three more members, particularly business owners from Perkiomen Avenue. Council members suggested potential candidates including Brian Lee, Roger Reto, and the owner of Antietam Academy.

Mr. Ahrens also mentioned a conversation with Exeter Township's zoning officer about the opportunity to create a main street corridor from the Exeter Giant Promenade all the way into Reading. This would involve coordinating with Mt. Penn, St. Lawrence, Exeter, and Reading to establish a Main Street program, which could access significant state funding. He noted that a full-time Main Street manager would be required, which is why expanding beyond just Mt. Penn would be necessary to sustain the program.

Adjournment

Michael Kindlick made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Kelly Dudash seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:18 PM.