MOUNT PENN BOROUGH
BOROUGH COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING
March 18, 2025

The Mount Penn Borough Council met for a Business Meeting on March 18, 2025, at Borough Hall at 200 N. 25th Street, Reading, PA 19606. Council Vice President Rick Lombardo called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and adjourned at 8:01 PM.

Council Vice President Rick Lombardo, Council Member Thomas Baer, Council Member Christine Dise, Council Member Michael Kindlick, Council Member Roger Stief, and Mayor Ryan Maurer were in attendance. Staff and Professional Members present were Borough Manager Hunter L. Ahrens and Chief of Police Ray Serafin. Council President Troy Goodman was absent.

Others in attendance were Donald Longlott, Sergeant Wayne Levy, Chris Mayer, and several community members.

Meeting Opening and Pledge to the Flag

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

Public Comment

Donald Longlott - 115 North 25th Street addressed the council regarding concerns about code requirements for fencing on his roof. He explained that he was recently approached about installing a fence due to a door on his roof, which he has not had issues with for 45 years. Mr. Longlott expressed concerns about the aesthetic impact and potential devaluation of his property if required to install fencing or planks. He questioned the liability issues and safety concerns, noting that the door is locked from the inside. Mr. Longlott requested information on possible variances or exceptions and asked where he could obtain a copy of the relevant code.

The Borough Manager offered to provide Mr. Longlott with a scanned copy of the specific code provision and took his contact information to follow up. It was noted that the full code books are expensive and extensive. The council agreed to have the codes officials review the situation and provide more information to Mr. Longlott.

Discussion of AVMA Fees for Municipal Garage Project

The Borough Manager explained that the council needed to formally endorse the concept of making AVMA whole for any review fees related to the new municipal garage facility project. It was clarified that this would not include full land development review fees, as that process had already been completed with Exeter Township. He shared that an anticipated cost could be $2,000 or less than.

Council members recalled previous discussions where it was agreed that small costs incurred by AVMA should not be a problem, but formal approval was needed. The council agreed to move this item to the voting agenda for the next meeting to approve the formally reimbursing of AVMA's review fees.

Discussion of Check Signers Update

The Borough Manager proposed updating check signers for borough accounts, suggesting Rick Lombardo, Tom Baer, and Ryan Maurer as check signers due to their availability during the day and involvement in financial matters. The council agreed with this proposal. The Borough Manager requested signatures from these individuals that evening to prepare for upcoming check runs in April, particularly as tax payments begin to come in for the solid waste fund.

Discussion of Proposed Employee Handbook Changes

The Borough Manager presented proposed updates to the employee handbook, which the personnel committee had reviewed. Key additions included a basic employee code of conduct, an ethical code of conduct, and provisions regarding nepotism and conflicts of interest.

Council Member Dise raised questions about employees' awareness of PennDOT and state policies referenced in the handbook, particularly regarding equipment use while under the influence. The Borough Manager explained that CDL drivers are aware of these regulations through their licensing process but agreed that a footnote could be added directly referencing the US Department of Transportation regulations for clarity.

The council agreed to review and vote on the proposed changes at the next meeting.

Discussion of Snow Emergency Routes Ordinance & Costs

The Borough Manager presented a memo outlining proposed snow emergency routes and signage requirements. The estimated cost for signage was $3,591.00 for 30 signs. The council discussed which streets would require signage and the need to update information on the borough website regarding snow emergency routes.

The council agreed to seek input from the Chief of Police regarding appropriate fines for violations and to have the Solicitor draft a final ordinance. It was decided that the Mayor would continue to be responsible for declaring snow emergencies, with provisions for designating alternates in case of absence.

The Borough Manager agreed to review a draft ordinance based on Lower Alsace Township's existing ordinance for review at the next meeting, with the goal of advertising in April and formal approval in May.

Discussion of Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance Update

The Borough Manager discussed the comprehensive plan update with Lower Alsace Township. The County of Berks was identified as a potential low-cost option for completing the plan, with a ballpark cost of $40,000; the costs would be covered by a Municipal Assistance Program (MAP) grant which would pay for half of the project, while the member municipalities would need to pay for the other half.

The timeline for the comprehensive plan update was discussed with the Borough Manager, noting that it would likely take until next summer to begin the process if using the MAP grant. Given this timeline, the Township was moving forward with some zoning ordinance updates proposed by Lower Alsace Township's Planning Commission, and the Borough may want to consider updates regarding rental properties in that package.

Discussion of Vacancy Board Chair

The Borough Manager explained the need to appoint a vacancy board chair to break ties in the event of a council member vacancy. The council discussed potential candidates, including former elected officials or current school board members who are Mt. Penn residents. Jim Cocuzza was suggested as a potential candidate. The council agreed to reach out to Mr. Cocuzza and other potential candidates and make a decision at the next meeting.

Discussion of Police Commission Updates

Mayor Maurer reported on a recent police commission meeting. He informed the council that the police commission requested Mt. Penn Borough Council to appoint one person to assist with the deputy chief interview process, possibly someone in Law Enforcement at another department. The mayor explained that Lower Alsace Township had voted against the previously discussed plan to involve outside chiefs in the interview process, citing their belief that they knew the department better than outside chiefs would.

The council expressed disappointment in the change of plans but agreed to vote on appointing a representative at the next meeting to move the process forward.

Discussion of Borough Council Self-Assessments

Council Member Stief introduced the concept of conducting borough council self-assessments. He explained that this process could help evaluate the board's performance, identify areas for improvement, and strengthen governance practices. The council discussed the potential benefits of such an assessment, including understanding roles and responsibilities, promoting accountability, and identifying strengths and weaknesses.

The Borough Manager offered to prepare a draft assessment, which could be completed anonymously. The council agreed to review the concept further and potentially vote on implementing the self-assessment at the next meeting.

Accept the Resignations of Troy Goodman

The council acknowledged Troy Goodman's resignation. It was noted that the resignation would not take effect until formally accepted by the council at the next business meeting. The council discussed filling the vacancy and updating council leadership positions.

Reports

Fire Company

It was reported that the fire company had been awarded a grant of $328,845 to extend and modernize the firehouse engine room. This was noted as the largest award recipient in Berks County.

Water Authority

No report was given.

Sewer Authority

No report was given.

Planning Commission

No report was given.

Central Berks Regional Commission

No report was given.

Borough Council President

No report was given.

Public Works Committee

No report was given.

Personnel Committee

It was noted that there would be an executive session on personnel matters following the meeting.

Codes Committee

It was mentioned that a report would be provided at the next meeting.

Finance Committee

The Borough Manager reported that the treasury report was being completed and would be forwarded to the council once signed.

Community Relations Liaison

No report was given.

Merger Ad-Hoc Committee

Mayor Maurer reported on the status of merger discussions with Lower Alsace Township. He noted that the committee sent a letter to Lower Alsace, but no response had been received yet. The council discussed Lower Alsace's apparent lack of interest and considered disbanding the merger committee. It was agreed to wait until Lower Alsace's next meeting before deciding whether to formally withdraw from the merger process.

Borough Mayor

No additional report was given.

Chief of Police

No report was given.

Codes Administrator

No report was given.

Solicitor

No report was given.

Borough Engineer

No report was given.

Borough Manager

The Borough Manager informed the council about a potential issue being considered by the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee regarding the removal of tax-exempt status for municipal bonds. He prepared letters to congressional representatives opposing this change and requested the Council’s approval during the voting meeting to send them. The council discussed the political implications of taking a stance on this issue and agreed to review the letter and consider it at the next meeting.

Ordinance Updates Pending

Dumpster Permit Ordinance

No updates were provided.

Road Closure Ordinance

No updates were provided.

Street Access Ordinance

No updates were provided.

Noise Ordinance

No updates were provided.

Handicap Ordinances

No updates were provided.

Other Business

Council Member Stief addressed concerns about recent actions taken by Mayor Maurer and Council President Troy Goodman regarding the mayoral election. He expressed disappointment and hurt over what he perceived as targeting behavior. Mayor Maurer apologized for any hurt caused and agreed to move forward in a spirit of professionalism. The Council agreed on the importance of working together for the benefit of residents despite, especially when personal disagreements arise.

Announcement of Personnel Committee Meeting on Personnel Matters on March 11, 2025

The Borough Manager noted that this announcement complies with the committee organization memo, which requires notification to the Council of all non-public personnel committee meetings that address personnel matters.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:01 PM, with the council moving into an executive session on personnel matters.

Executive Session on Personnel Matters

An executive session on personnel matters was held following the adjournment of the public meeting.