

MOUNT PENN BOROUGH
BOROUGH WORKSHOP MEETING
November 18, 2025

The Mount Penn Borough Council met for a Workshop Meeting on November 18, 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 9:17 PM.

Council President Rick Lombardo, Council Vice President Christine Dise, Council Member Thomas Baer, Council Member Troy Goodman, and Council Member Michael Kindlick were present. Council Member Kelly Dudash and Council Member Yrisol Garcia were absent. Staff and professionals present included Borough Manager Hunter L. Ahrens. Several community members were present, including Lynn Wilson of AVRCC.

Meeting Opening and Pledge to the Flag

The pledge was led by council members.

Attendance Roll Call

Mr. Ahrens noted that there was a quorum present, with two members absent.

Public Comment

Lynn Wilson, Antietam Valley Recreation Community Center (AVRCC) – Ms. Wilson made a public comment regarding a donation request. She explained they are negotiating their lease with the water authority and face challenges financing the maintenance of the entire park while it's open to the public. She noted that Lower Alsace Township has agreed to take over certain maintenance responsibilities, including trash collection and maintaining the tot lot and courts.

Mr. Goodman mentioned he had requested a donation of \$3,000 to help with maintenance at the facility. The council discussed whether funding or manpower would be more beneficial, and Ms. Wilson confirmed that funding for mowing would be most helpful. She also mentioned challenges with their diving board stands and aging filter system, which may cost around \$100,000 to replace.

Council requested a formal letter from AVRCC detailing the request before it could be voted on at a regular meeting. There was general consensus to support the request.

CY 2026 Draft Budget Presentation

Mr. Ahrens presented the draft budget for 2026, noting it serves multiple objectives as a policy document, financial plan, operations guide, and communication tool. He explained the budget follows Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) standards.

Key points included:

- The all fund balance is projected to be approximately \$800,000 at year-end.
- Public safety accounts for 55% of expenditures (excluding grants), with 75% of that being for the police department.

- The sustainability of the solid waste fund was addressed with an increase to the annual fee totaling \$490 per household.
- The current deficit projection has been reduced from \$224,000 to approximately \$170,000.
- The revised end-of-year projection for the general fund balance is approximately \$616,000.
- Health insurance costs represent the largest staff-related increase due to enrollment changes.

Mr. Ahrens discussed the proposed tax increases, including a 1 mil increase specifically for police pension expenditures, and a \$40 increase in refuse collection fees (to \$490) to offset the JP Mascaro contract costs.

Discussion of CY 2026 Budget Requests

Several budget requests were discussed:

- **TRAN (Tax Revenue Anticipation Note):** Mr. Ahrens explained that due to the Allan Myers contract situation and audit scheduling issues, a TRAN would be needed to ensure cash flow until tax money comes in. The borough would likely need around \$800,000, with professional fees of \$5,000-\$8,000 to set it up. Council discussed obtaining quotes from multiple banks including PNC, M&T, and Fulton.
- **Economic Development Opportunity:** Mr. Ahrens introduced a proposal to lease the old Montessori school building at South 23rd Street and Fair View for \$12,000-\$15,000 annually. The idea would be to hold the property while seeking a commercial buyer or lessee. After discussion, council determined that while it was an interesting opportunity, the financial risk was too great given the borough's current budget situation.
- **Police Department Budget Issue:** The police department discovered an error in their budget after the previously discussed 7.5% increase, with underestimated insurance increases creating an additional \$146,000 deficit. The council debated options, including using the police department's fund balance (which would create a larger problem next year), or implementing additional tax increases. After extensive discussion, the consensus was to increase taxes by 1.25 mills, representing a 7.8% increase for homeowners, which would equate to approximately \$112 more per average household.
- **Water Authority Collaboration Proposal:** Council discussed the possibility of having borough staff and water authority staff consolidate to achieve cost savings and protect the water authority from being sold in the future. This would involve the borough taking over staffing while the authority would remain a separate legal entity. Mr. Baer was tasked with discussing further with Ms. Dudash and with approaching the other members of the water authority board about this concept, with emphasis on presenting it as a way to protect the authority from future sale rather than as a cost-saving measure.

Consider Pay Application(s) for Road Improvement Projects

The council reviewed pay applications for the road improvement project, with \$122,000 due for Contract B and \$45,953.78 for Contract A. There was consensus to write the checks this week and formally approve at next week's meeting to expedite reimbursement.

Discussion of Statewide LSA Grant Application

Mr. Ahrens reported he is waiting for the estimate from SDE for the borough hall basement renovation and information from the school district to complete the LSA grant application. The application will include approximately \$450,000 for the school, \$360,000 for the police station, \$150,000 for the borough hall basement renovation, and \$82,000 for a vehicle for the fire company, totaling about \$1 million.

Discussion of Updates to 2021 ICC Codes Family

Mr. Ahrens informed council that the state has adopted the 2021 codes, effective January 1, 2026. He has requested feedback from inspectors but noted the accessibility code implementation has been delayed by courts. A resolution to update the borough's codes would likely be passed at the December meeting.

Discussion of St. Lawrence Winter Assistance Request

Mr. Ahrens shared that St. Lawrence Borough had requested assistance with snow plowing due to their road master leaving for another position. Ahrens presented a draft contract that would have Mt. Penn's crew support St. Lawrence, with explicit language stating that Mt. Penn's obligations always supersede any support provided. St. Lawrence would pay for the crew's time plus a mileage reimbursement of \$1.40 (2025) and \$1.45 (2026) per mile.

Some council members expressed concerns due to past intergovernmental issues, particularly regarding a joint garage project that didn't materialize. Others viewed it as an opportunity to be the build the relationship. No formal decision was made pending St. Lawrence's approval of the agreement.

Safety Net Sanctuary Contract

Mr. Ahrens reported he had contacted Safety Net Sanctuary and was awaiting a response from their director and attorney. They confirmed they have their own insurance, and the price would remain the same as last year at approximately \$1.50 per resident.

No Nonsense Neutering Contract

Mr. Ahrens prepared a one-page contract with No Nonsense Neutering for 10 cat vouchers at a total cost of \$400. The borough would only be billed once vouchers are used. The contract is ready for review.

Donation of Excess Funds to Shop with a Cop Program

Council discussed donating \$553 remaining from the block party funds to the Shop with a Cop program. They decided to donate \$500 to the program and use the remaining \$53 toward the holiday decoration contest. Council emphasized the need to clearly communicate that these were not tax dollars being donated.

Lower Alsace & Mt. Penn Merger Updates

A meeting with DCED (Department of Community and Economic Development) is scheduled for Thursday, November 21st at 3:30 PM via Teams to discuss next steps in the merger process. Several council members expressed interest in attending virtually.

Minutes for October 28, 2025 Meeting

There were no issues raised with the minutes from the October 28th meeting.

Reports

Fire Company

Rick reported that Santa Claus would be visiting on December 19th (Friday). He also noted they had been called to a medical facility on Perkiomen Avenue three times over the weekend, and the facility has not installed a Knox box as required by code.

Ryan announced that Mt. Penn Fire Company had been approved as a charity for JPMorgan's corporate giving program, and a donation would be forthcoming.

Central Berks Regional Commission

Ryan reported they are going to arbitration with the union on an issue, expressing confidence in winning but acknowledging the other side feels the same.

Community Relations Liaison

Christine reported that a post about the holiday lights competition went up, and judging would take place after Thanksgiving. The competition will award prizes of \$75, \$50, and \$25 for the top three displays.

Adjournment

The Borough Council announced they would enter a brief executive session following the meeting to discuss personnel matters.

Thomas Baer made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Christine Dise seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:18 PM.