

The regular meeting of the Borough Council of the Borough of Sinking Spring was called to order on Thursday, September 14, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. by Council President Tracy Peterson. After the pledge to the flag, Elizabeth Eagelman called the roll reflecting the following Council Members present:

Tracy Peterson
H. David Miller (Absent)
Denise Stine
Lisa Gantner
Brian Hoffa
Robert Metzgar (arrived at 7:06)
Patrick Giambalvo (arrived at 7:14)

Other officials present were Mayor Gary Cirulli; Charles Haws, Barley Snyder, Borough Solicitor; Brad Smith, Engineer, ARRO Consulting; Michael Hart, Borough Manager; Police Chief James Oxenreider; and Elizabeth Eagelman, Borough Secretary, who recorded the minutes of the proceeding.

VISITORS/PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was one visitor in attendance, Mr. Chazz Aden from Representative Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz's office. Mr. Aden stated that he was just there to see if Borough Council had any questions or needed any assistance.

CORRESPONDENCE:

There was no correspondence.

APPROVAL OF THE BILLS:

Mrs. Peterson asked for a motion to approve the bills for August 2023. Mrs. Stine made a motion to approve the bills, seconded by Mrs. Gantner. AYES – 4, NAYS – 0 ABSENT - 3. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mrs. Peterson asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 10, 2023 Council Meeting. Mrs. Gantner made the motion to approve the minutes; seconded by Mrs. Stine. AYES – 4, NAYS – 0, ABSENT - 3. Motion carried.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Mrs. Peterson asked for a motion to approve the Treasures Report for August 2023. Mrs. Stine made a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report; seconded by Mrs. Gantner. AYES – 4, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 3. Motion carried.

WESTERN BERKS FIRE DEPARTMENT:

Mr. Renshaw stated that his August Activity Report is included in everyone's email packet. He mentioned that they had 131 calls this month and that the trend of having over 120 calls per month is continuing. He also mentioned that on October 14th they will be having their Open House in Wernersville at the station on Stitzer from 10 am to 2 pm.

Mr. Renshaw explained that a few months ago, they wrapped up their ISO (Insurance Services Office) evaluation which grades the fire departments on their ability to respond to house fires and building fires. He mentioned that it is how insurance underwriters determine the insurance for your home. He stated that they also grade the dispatch center and the water delivery system. He explained that the last time this was done they graded the four municipalities separately but this time it was on the Fire Service Responsibility Area which is a 32 square mile coverage area and a lot of it does not have fire hydrants. He reported that we maintained our score of 4 (1 being the best and 10 being the worst).

Mr. Metzgar arrived at 7:06.

Mr. Renshaw advised Council that he was contacted by the Township Manager from Bern Township concerning their fire department which is Greenfields Fire Department. He mentioned that they are an all-volunteer department and don't have a ton of personnel and they are really struggling with the administrative side of things and asked for his help. He stated that they put together a proposal for them where he would take over the administrative oversight of the Bern Township Greenfields Fire Company and they would pay Western Berks Fire Department a contractual fee for a year or two years where we can implement systems and processes that we have found successful for us.

WESTERN BERKS AMBULANCE:

Mrs. Peterson stated that their August Activity Report is included in the email packet.

REVITALIZATION:

Mr. Hoffa went over the BOSS August 2023 Report to Borough Council. He mentioned that they are working on the Façade Improvement grant projects. He also mentioned that they had their second meeting with SCTA on September 6th and discussed a mobility hub and scheduled the next meeting for January 2024. He stated that they have a meeting coming up on Tuesday, November 21st at 12:00 p.m., with local senate and congressional representatives, State, County and Local Representatives to present the SSB Revitalization Project to date and ask for their help.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS/POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

Mr. Giambalvo arrived at 7:14 p.m.

The first item was to approve advertising the D-1 Downtown District Zoning Ordinance/Form Based Code. Mr. Hart stated that we had to send it back to the Berks County Planning Commission for review since we made changes to it, and we have not heard back from them yet. Mr. Haws stated that we must advertise it in the newspaper no more than 30 and no less than 7 days before we have a public hearing which we could run at or before the regular meeting in October. Mrs. Peterson and Council decided to table this until we get a response from the BCPC. Mr. Hoffa mentioned that they are still working on the design guidelines but do not need to have that in place to publish this form-based code. Mr. Metzgar also mentioned that they need to look at the SALDO and make some updates. Mr. Haws mentioned that things that are put in the SALDO, Council can waive.

The next item was an update on the Borough Code. Mr. Hart stated that we received the final draft, but a few items were not changed so we contacted General Code and they are making the corrections free of charge. Mrs. Peterson stated that we will table this also until we hear back from General Code.

The next item was the approval of Resolution No. 2023-08 – LSA Grant for Western Berks Ambulance for \$500,000.00. Mrs. Stine made the motion to approve the Resolution; seconded by Mrs. Gantner. Mr. Hart stated that he doesn't know if he will have to administer the grant if it is awarded since the Borough is the one applying for it, and we will have to have our auditors audit it before we can close it out so we will have their fee also. Mr. Haws stated that Council can authorize making the request, and then if the grant is approved and you see what the grant requirements are then we can talk about what kind of security we get from the ambulance association. Mr. Aden mentioned that he has seen grants like this and that if we send him the information, he will check on it for us and that they will send a letter of support also. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS/POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

The first item was to approve Resolution No. 2023-04 authorizing the submission of an application to the Municipal Assistance Program for a grant of \$25,000.00 for planning assistance for a project to plan for complete streets infrastructure below grade of a new local connecting street to be designated as the chief commercial street of the borough's New Town Center. Mr. Hoffa mentioned that it is a matching grant. Mr. Hoffa made the motion to approve Resolution 2023-04; seconded by Mr. Metzgar. Mrs. Stine asked if we have the matching funds. Mr. Hart stated that we do. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

The next item was to approve Resolution No. 2023-05 – authorizing an application requesting a Category 4 Facilities Local Share Assessment grant up to \$250,000.00 from the Commonwealth Financing Authority to be used for pedestrian safety enhancements at the intersection crosswalks of Penn Avenue and South Hull Street in the Borough. Mr. Hoffa made the motion to approve Resolution 2023-05; seconded by Mrs. Gantner. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS/POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS (Cont.):

The next item was to approve Resolution No. 2023-06 – setting the 2024 Police Pension member contribution rate at one half of one percent (0.5%). Mr. Hoffa made the motion to approve Resolution 2023-06; seconded by Mr. Metzgar. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

The next item was to approve the PMRS Plan Amendment setting the 2024 Police Pension Member Contribution Rate at one half of one percent (0.5%). Mrs. Gantner made the motion approving the PMRS Plan Amendment; seconded by Mr. Hoffa. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

The next item was to approve the 2024 Police Pension MMO of \$0. Mrs. Stine made the motion approving the 2024 Police Pension MMO; seconded by Mr. Metzgar. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

The next item was to approve the 2024 Non-Uniform Pension MMO of \$59,241.00. Mr. Hoffa made the motion to approve the 2024 Non-Uniform Pension MMO; seconded by Mrs. Stine. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

The next item was to approve Resolution No. 2023-07 – Approve and Adopt the Revised and Restated Emergency Operations Plan. Mr. Hart explained that every few years the West Side Emergency Management comes up with a new policy and a new plan and this is our year to renew it. Mr. Giambalvo made the motion to approve Resolution No. 2023-07; seconded by Mrs. Stine. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

The next item was to approve the Village Greens Revised Lighting Plan per the Planning Commissions recommendation. Mr. Hoffa made the motion to approve the Village Greens Revised Lighting Plan; seconded by Mrs. Gantner. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

The next item was to approve Hiring a Part-Time Police Officer. Chief Oxenreider stated that they would like to hire Mr. Deron Mandel who is a 15-year veteran of the Central Berks Regional Police Department. He mentioned that Mr. Mandel will fill the vacant position left when Office Planer resigned. Mrs. Stine made the motion to approve hiring Mr. Deron Mandel as a part-time police officer for the Borough; seconded by Mrs. Gantner. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

BRAD SMITH – ARRO CONSULTING – ENGINEER:

Mr. Smith went over the highlights of his report. He stated that they are moving along with the Phase 2 construction and should be paving by the beginning of next month. He mentioned that he contacted the Berks County Conservation District today about making a change to their plan to delete the amended soils from the contract. He stated that he does not know why Ludgate included those in the plan and that they serve no purpose. He also mentioned that they had some questions about the grade on Cacoosing and his staff is working on that.

BRAD SMITH – ARRO CONSULTING – ENGINEER (cont.):

Mr. Smith mentioned the MS4 and Pollution Reduction Plan and that they have gone through and selected some possible projects for the Borough to do to meet the MS4 requirements. He stated that they contacted DEP about those projects and that they seem willing to approve such projects, but we will have to get permission from either Spring Township or Lower Heidelberg Township once the project is selected.

CHIEF OXENREIDER:

Chief Oxenreider went over his August 2023 Activity Report.

CHARLES HAWS – BOROUGH SOLICITOR:

Mr. Haws mentioned that there were a few Variance Request Applications filed in the last month and there are hearings scheduled for them. He stated that Council can offer support for or opposition of the requests in advance of the hearing. Discussion ensued.

MIKE HART – BOROUGH MANAGER:

Mr. Hart mentioned that with the Phase 2 Project moving along we have been getting a lot of payment requests in. He stated that as we pay the invoices, he is submitting for reimbursement from the grant funds.

ELIZABETH EAGELMAN – BOROUGH SECRETARY:

Mrs. Eagelman mentioned that she started working on the Resolution for the 2024 Council meeting dates. She mentioned that the Reorganization meeting is supposed to be held on the first Monday of the new year, but that would be January 1st which is a Holiday. Mr. Haws stated that it would then be Tuesday January 2nd but we can verify that. She asked if Council wanted to make any changes to the meeting dates or stay with the second Thursday of each month. Council agreed that the second Thursday seems to be working good.

TRACY PETERSON – LIBRARY:

Mrs. Peterson reported that the Childrens Librarian, Christine Weida, handed in her two weeks' notice today. She stated that we have an inside candidate that would be great in that position, Miranda Zaborowski. Mrs. Peterson made a motion to hire Miranda Zaborowski as the Childrens Librarian for 25 – 30 hours per week at a rate of \$16.00 per hour; seconded by Mrs. Stine. AYES – 6, NAYS – 0 ABSENT – 1. Motion carried.

Mrs. Peterson thanked Mr. Hart and Mrs. Eagelman for sending out the emails and posting on Facebook with information about the roadwork.

MAYOR GARY CIRULLI:

Mayor Cirulli stated that he wanted to make Council aware of an issue. He stated that Chief Oxenreider contacted him about an invoice that they received regarding the Crossing Guard for Wilson School District. He explained that the policy is that when there is a crossing guard in the Borough then the Borough is responsible to pay half the cost, but they moved the crossing guard out of the Borough, and they are still billing us for it. He stated that he will speak to the superintendent about it.

LISA GANTNER – RECREATION:

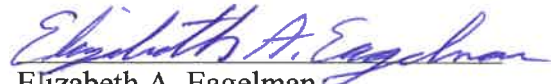
Mrs. Gantner mentioned that the dead trees on Shillington Road at Hofmann Industries that Mr. Miller asked the developer to remove, have been taken down.

Mayor Cirulli mentioned that the pine tree at the corner of Mull Avenue and Weidman Avenue at the cemetery needs to be cut because it is hard to see past it when you are trying to pull out. Mr. Hart mentioned that we just received a call from the caretaker of the cemetery, and they were advised of the issue.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Hoffa made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Elizabeth A. Eagelman
Borough Secretary