

NORRISTOWN MUNICIPAL COUNCIL WORK SESSION
July 21, 2020

The virtual Council Work Session of July 21, 2020 was called to order by Council President Derrick Perry at 6:30 PM by way of the GoToMeeting.com application.

There was a **Moment of Silence** followed by the **Pledge of Allegiance**. The following Council members were connected to the online meeting:

Valerie Scott-Cooper
Thomas Lepera

Hakim Jones
Rebecca Smith

Sonya Sanders
Derrick Perry

Heather Lewis

Also present were: Crandall Jones, Municipal Administrator; Chief Mark Talbot, Norristown Police Chief; Patrick Hitchens, Acting Municipal Solicitor; Jayne Musonye, Director of Planning & Development; Norman Butts, Director of Finance; Thomas Odenigbo, Director of Public Works and Amrinder Singh, Building and Codes Manager, Chief Thomas O'Donnell, Norristown Fire Chief, Erica Genuardi, Director of Parks and Recreation.

Motion to Approve Minutes

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper, seconded by Councilman Lepera**, to approve the Minutes of the July 7, 2020 virtual Council Meeting. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Executive Session Announcement

Council President Perry announced that Council met in Executive Session prior to tonight's meeting to discuss real estate and legal matters.

Announcements

Keep Norristown Beautiful Clean-Up – register to volunteer at KNB@norristown.org.

Photo Contest – the best photos will be featured on our social media pages and website throughout August. There will be one winner in each category: Riverfront, Summer in the City, Architecture. Email your name, address and category to PIO@norristown.org no later than July 24, 2020.

Public Comment

Maccabee Hirsh, 1745 North Hills Drive

Good evening, Council members. I want to thank Rep. Hakim Jones and Vice President Rebecca Smith. I have spoken to hundreds who are now aware of the sewer sale. These people also thank you for voting against the sale to Aqua America. The petition to repeal Ordinance 20-11, the sale of our sewer system, gathered over 1,000 signatures in just 12 days. This was achieved through difficult Covid-19 realities. Starting with just a few volunteers, NOPE (Norristown Opposed to Privatization Efforts) continues to grow. If given time, this petition would have yielded thousands more signatures.

This is not business as usual. This is more than that. Do the research into Aqua America as your colleagues did. Look past the dollar signs and think about the fundamental nature of losing local control of this essential water utility to the for-profit Aqua America. I ask the other Council members who voted yes towards the sale: will you rethink your vote and what it truly means for the future of Norristown?

Sincerely,
Maccabee Hirsch

LeRoy James Watters III, 1 E. Indian Lane, West Norriton

Hi, everyone. I hope you all are doing well. Since the start of the virus crisis, there has been a search for a machine that would kill it. I believe this device has been found. The following information, I believe, will clean the air inside buildings enough to return to the “Old Normal” as far as the air quality improvement, for all the workers in those buildings. All public meetings could resume, school buses, and classroom, would be safer. Please let me know what you think.

Sincerely,
Jim Watters

David McMahon, 721 Haws Avenue

Good evening everyone. My remarks here tonight are more directed to the public and less so to the members of Council. Our organization, Norristown Opposes Privatization Efforts aka NOPE would like to let the residents of Norristown know how much we all appreciated all the conversations we had in the past few weeks. We formed to oppose the surrender of a local public utility to the executives and shareholders of Aqua PA and in 12 days from July 4th to July 15th we spoke with and collected the signatures of over 1,000 residents who also wanted to clearly register their opposition to this plan. It was truly a pleasure meeting so many of you stopping by the Dunkin Donuts parking lot to talk about this issue. As the days went by, it was easy to see the awareness building. From at first, just stopping by to ask questions, it became clear people were coming to sign the petition because their friends and neighbors talked with them and directed them to us. I personally never spoke to anyone who supported the idea and so when Council members say they are acting as our representatives in this virtual payday loan scheme, remember that 1,030 signatures represents more Norristown registered voters than any Council member received in an election.

We would like everyone to know we are not done in opposing this ill-conceived financing strategy – one that ultimately drains resources from Norristown through a back door tax – as if we residents don’t understand that mandatory and inescapable sewer rate increases to a monopoly provider are simply a tax by another name. Every dollar Aqua doesn’t put in the ground here in new infrastructure and maintenance is money that leaves our community for good – and forever – since a sale would ultimately be final. So to be clear, ultimately a drain on Norristown’s already strained resources.

We want the residents to know that NOPE will continue to oppose this. We will be drafting charter amendments to prevent future sales of public assets without a public referendum. We will be pursuing a ballot initiative to stop this particular sale to Aqua PA. We will be encouraging our State Representative Matt Bradford to co-sponsor House Bill 2597 which would also mandate similar direct public input in utility and asset sales like this.

The decades of public policy that laid the groundwork for the financial distress cities like Norristown feel now, as compared to their more favored surrounding regions, will remain unaddressed and in fact will be made worse by privatization efforts like this. Creative policies and progressive financing strategies are what are called for in this moment. And we must challenge our elected officials at all levels of government to end the relentless commodifying of public goods that only heighten already existing inequalities. Enough of this demotion of citizens and residents into mere captive consumers.

This massive 82 million dollar public indebtedness is a short sighted policy choice that we will continue to tell our friends and neighbors about. We will remain in contact with all of you we have just recently met in this

fight. And we will be asking for your continued help in preventing this corporate takeover by Aqua PA, despite the best efforts of most council members to deliberately exclude true community engagement, is far from over. Don't let anyone tell you this is a done deal, this will go all the way to PUC hearings if need be. And as a reminder, the very sale that started the so-called "Blue Gold Rush" in New Garden Township – is still not final. There is still hope and still time to defeat this. Stay strong.

Rachel Fecho, 715 Noble Street

I respectfully request that Council persons remain on screen, listening, during Public Comment, unlike what has occurred in previous virtual meetings during Public Comment. In an in-person meeting, you wouldn't walk away during Public Comment, so I'm asking that you each show your constituents the courtesy to do that now. Norristown, I love you. I want what's best for you. Council, I know you want what is best for us too. I am not speaking to the Municipal Administrator here, just to Council, because he has shown both in his dealings here and in past appointments that he is all about the money and not about the people. You do not have to do what he says. You do not represent him, and he does NOT represent us. I'm asking YOU to please represent us as we elected you to do. Have you heard from residents telling you they want our sewer authority sold? I don't believe you have. And yet in the midst of a pandemic, with the complications of social distancing, during a heatwave, and in less than 2 weeks' time, we gathered more than 1,000 signatures of Norristown voters who don't want you to do this. There are so many angles we can (and will) and are already working on taking, to stop this sale, but the very best path forward would be for you, as a Council, to decide to repeal Ordinance 20-11. This will be what you are remembered for as a Council person, for better or for worse. Because I know you want what's best for Norristown, I hope you will make the right decision, now that there is no question that privatization would be bad for Norristown and bad for your legacy.

Presentations

Presentation by Larry Hebling, Community Engagement Manager of Retrievr

Mr. Hebling presented a Power Point video highlighting such issues as the impact of textile and electronics. He explained how the Retrievr app works, what they provide and the Municipal participation responsibilities. He asked that their flyers be distributed throughout the Municipality and that the Municipality engage in email blasts and other forms of social media. Mr. Tony Cuni demonstrated how to "share" Retrievr.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Lewis, seconded by Councilwoman Sanders**, to authorize a contract be signed by the Municipal Administrator and the Municipal Solicitor offering a convenient, curbside service to residents for electronic and garment disposal in order to reduce landfill fees and recycling contamination rates for the Municipality. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Municipal Administrator

Norristown Experience Commission & MOU for Council

Crandall Jones provided an in-depth explanation of the Norristown Experience Commission goals, one of which is to stimulate economic development. He noted that the Solicitor looked at the agreement to verify clauses for the protection of the parties involved to ensure effective local business connection and co-sponsorship and co-engagement in civic and chamber activities.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Lewis**, to approve a Memorandum of Understanding between the Municipality of Norristown and the Norristown Experience Commission. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Request for Council to authorize a Lease Agreement for proposed office space at 1700 Markley Street,

Logan Commerce Center

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper**, to approve the Municipal Administrator to complete negotiations and execute a lease agreement with Avison Young for Municipal Swing Space at 1700 Markley Street, Logan Commerce Center, during the renovation of Municipal Hall. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Fire

Approve Municipal Resolution with Montgomery County for a regional assistance to Firefighters Grant – COVID-19 supplemental with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper, seconded by Councilman Jones**, to approve a Municipal Resolution to comply with the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) from FEMA which specifies that regional host applications and participating partner agencies must execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). **The motion passed unanimously.**

Parks and Recreation

Resolution 20-58: Amending the Capital Improvements Plan

Erica Genuardi, Parks and Recreation Director, provided details.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Lewis, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to approve Resolution 20-58 amending the Parks and Recreation section of the 2020-2024 Capital Improvements Plan adopted by Council on December 17, 2019. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Awarding a contract for \$195,387 to Lyons Recreation to update Cherry Street, Guardino & Bartash Parks

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper, seconded by Councilman Jones**, to award a contract for \$195,387 to Lyons Recreation to update Cherry Street, Guardino and Bartash Parks. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Building & Codes Enforcement

611 Swede Street Project Review (HARB appeal)

Mr. Singh stated that the application was denied because the applicant wants aluminum siding, where brick is required, due to visual and cost concerns.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Lewis**, to open Public Comment for this issue. **The motion passed unanimously.**

There were no comments from the Public.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Lewis, seconded by Councilwoman Sanders**, to close Public Comment for this issue. **The motion passed unanimously.**

There was a **motion by Councilman Jones, seconded by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper**, to grant an appeal based on the Municipal Engineer's approval with regard to the use of aluminum siding. **The motion passed unanimously.**

213 Pearl Street Project Review (HARB appeal)

Mr. Singh explained that the application was denied because of non-compliance to sections G2, G3 and G10 of the HARB. The applicant, Mr. Rutledge, asked for a Certificate of Appropriateness and he stated he feels his project adds to the restoration of Norristown.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Lewis**, to open Public Comment regarding this issue. **The motion passed unanimously.**

There were no comments from the Public.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper, seconded by Councilwoman Lewis**, to close Public Comment regarding this issue. **The motion passed unanimously.**

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper, seconded by Councilwoman Sanders**, to grant an appeal based on the Municipal Engineer's approval. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Crandall Jones, Municipal Administrator, suggested to Council to have Staff modify the HARB and offer some alternatives. Councilman Jones suggested that it be clear. There was a **motion by Councilwoman Lewis, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to authorize Staff to offer some alternatives to some of the HARB regulations. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Police

Resolution 20-62: Motion to approve or deny the purchase of Axon Enterprise, Inc. Body Worn Cameras

Chief Talbot noted that the Police Department received grant money and Rotary Club funds for this purchase. There was a **motion by Councilman Jones, seconded by Councilwoman Lewis**, to approve the purchase of AXON Body Worn Cameras (BWC) and related software and service plans for the Police Department. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Resolution 20-63: Motion to approve or deny the purchase of Lexipol Law Enforcement Policy Manual Software

Chief Talbot explained that the policies are current and he would like to make them available to the public. There was a **motion by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper, seconded by Councilwoman Lewis**, to approve the purchase of the full implementation of Lexipol's Law Enforcement Policy Manual Services. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Ratification of BJA FY 20 Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program

There was a **motion by Councilman Lepera, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to ratify the acceptance of a \$58,160 award of the BJA FY 20 Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Request for authorization to advertise the amendment of Ordinance – Chapter 305, Article II, Section 305-12 relating to one-way streets

Chief Talbot provided an explanation for this amendment request.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Lewis**, to authorize the

advertisement of the amendment to add a portion of Green Street, Wayne Avenue, Rex Alley and Scott Alley to Chapter 305, Article II, Section 305-12 titled, "One Way Streets" and remove portions of Ford Street, Moore Street and East Penn Street. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Public Works

Resolution 20-65: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania DOT Winter Traffic Services

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilman Lepera**, to approve Resolution 20-65 for the Municipality to enter into an agreement with PennDOT for snow and ice control on the State-owned routes in Norristown for the 2019-2020 winter season. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Planning & Municipal Development

Resolution 20-66: Grant application for blighted properties

Director Jayne Musonye provided details.

There was a **motion by Councilman Jones, seconded by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper**, to approve Resolution 20-66 to apply for grant money for blighted properties in Norristown. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Award \$180,000 to CGP&H for the Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation Program professional technical support for 3 years (\$60,000 per year).

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper, seconded by Councilman Jones**, to approve professional technical support in order to continue the Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation Program. **The motion passed unanimously.**

200-204 West Marshall Street Special Exception for an At-Risk Youth Group Home

Council had questions such as are those not at risk questioned?, has the sale closed?, how long ago did applicant apply?.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Lewis, seconded by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper**, to send the Solicitor to represent Council at the Zoning Hearing Board meeting on July 28, 2020 to verify the procedures. **The motion passed unanimously.**

ADJOURNMENT

There was a **motion to adjourn the virtual Council Meeting by Councilwoman Scott-Cooper, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**. **The motion passed unanimously.** There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Roseann M. Santangelo, Clerk of Council