

NORRISTOWN MUNICIPALITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION MAY 18, 2022

The Council Work Session of May 18, 2022 was called to order by Council President Thomas Lepera at 6:30 PM in the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit 23, 2 West Lafayette Street, 1st Floor, Norristown, PA.

There was a **Moment of Silence** followed by the **Pledge of Allegiance**. The following Council members were present:

Rebecca Smith
Rashaad Bates

Tiffani Hendley
Heather Lewis

Dustin Queenan
Thomas Lepera

Also present were: Crandall Jones, Municipal Administrator, Sean Kilkenny, Municipal Solicitor; Lieutenant Mike Bishop, Norristown Police Department; Jayne Musonye, Director of Planning and Development; Kathy Pfister, Director of Finance; Amrinder Singh, Code Manager; Thomas Odenigbo, Director of Public Works; Deputy Chief Richard Lockhart, Norristown Fire Department.

Motion to approve Minutes

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Hendley, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to approve the Minutes from May 3, 2022. **The motion passed 6-0.**

Executive Session

Council President Lepera announced that Council met in Executive Session prior to tonight's meeting to discuss litigation matters.

Presentations

Proclamation recognizing May 2022 as Building Safety Month

Amrinder Singh, Code Manager, recognized the importance of building safety by requesting that Council declare May 2022 as Building Safety Month in the Municipality of Norristown. He stated that the theme is "Building Safety for all Building Codes and Action" and that this is the 5th annual celebration of Building Safety Month.

Update to Municipal Council on Juneteenth and July 4th activities

Tracie Henry, Special Events Coordinator, provided Council, via telephone, an update on Juneteenth and July 4th activities. She provided a handout with the details. She noted that there are 3 major events: June 19th will be the Tudman Re-Enactment with an African drum procession. She said that the start of the Festival will be at Lafayette and Dekalb Streets with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. She said that they need Press and vendors and the information was posted on the Municipal website; "Make Music Day" on June 21st at three different locations which was suggested by the Pastor at Ascension Church; "Party in the Park" on July 4th with a parade and party. There will be t-shirts, activities, food trucks and fireworks.

Announcements

The Reuniting Family Bail Fund presents "Pre-Game for Father's Day – Smoke and Whiskey." June 13th from 6 pm to 10 pm at von C Brewing. There will be an outdoor cigar bar.

Public Comment

Ali Sherbiny: First and foremost, I'd like to thank Jesue for this opportunity. Some of you may know me from previous Council, but there are newly elected members who may not be familiar with the effort to develop and revitalize Norristown.

In the beginning, we tried to bring in market-rate apartments. My thinking, there's incredible value living within town; history, character, accessibility, capital presence, etc. It is a much better place to live over other markets able to charge high rents.

The approach was to create expensive apartments that drew in residents with outside spending power. We wanted to capture the value of living in Norristown and sell it to wealthy folks, so their money would be spent here, supporting local business.

I'm glad this didn't work out. Private capital saw better opportunities in other markets. Thankfully, because it would have priced out a significant portion of Norristown from the neighborhood.

People do not choose to be in high concentrations of poverty. They are delegated to it based on their financial circumstances.

Living in challenged environments creates perpetual cycles of poverty – very little hope. Due to (relative) high cost of living, many people work their entire life without getting ahead. As a child, if you grow up seeing that, it's difficult to imagine anything better. It creates hopeless states of mind, leading some folks down dark paths.

How are people expected to become homeowners with an inability to save for even the 3% down required for an FHA mortgage?

The existing public approach for this problem is not sustainable. Our governments are running severe budget deficits. As a nation, we borrow money, spend it, but can not repay it. We are robbing Peter to pay Paul. The problem continues to worsen as more money is being borrowed to cover other borrowed money. At some point, we will lose access to capital markets, or they will simply cease to exist.

The Municipality of Norristown is currently running an annual \$1.2 M deficit. Administration is considering ways to offset the problem. We have a solution.

We are seeking funding from Montgomery County to build workforce housing where rent is entirely based on income. If folks are willing to work a 40-hour week at \$12 or more per hour, they'd have access to a high quality place of living.

The asset(s) would be advertised as market-rate, but when a prospective tenant applies, a custom rate is determined. Everyone pays the same amount, but on a percentage basis.

The approach would lower cost of living, reducing public spending (on subsidy), create higher spending power (support local commerce), ease pressure to raise minimum wages, improving quality of life, allow people the opportunity to save for home ownership, increase public revenue, etc. etc.

It's a highly integrated environment where the high offset the low to generate a modest public return. The excellent quality/accessibility/location draws and meets the expectations of those earning more dollars, but be within reach of hardworking folks. Quality not based on wealth.

My intention is to use a portion of the revenue to offset Norristown's annual budget deficit. In future, this

model could be used to help offset larger government budgets.

Over the years, the county's Seat presence has resulted in many non-rate-able assets. This has caused the municipality to lose significant potential revenue. It has forced our leaders to raise property taxes, making it more expensive to live here. The County now has an opportunity to support the remediation of the challenges facing Norristown.

There are two approaches to consider: replace the existing population with higher earning folks or lift up the existing population by putting them in a better position.

We believe in the latter, lift all boats higher. People are not free if there is financial dependence on government. This effort will promote independence and prosperity, without crippling the public finance system.

Lord willing, this will be a highly integrated environment where people are working hard and getting ahead. As a result, the town will stabilize, new wealth will be created, generations will be inspired and a more fruitful population will exist.

Would you please allow me to present this model/proposal?

I'd like to have a public discussion. If we find ourselves in agreement, then I'd ask you to recommend the approval of funding from Montgomery County's allocation of American Rescue Plan Act.

Thank you for your consideration.

Municipal Administrator

Request for Council approval of a two-year Health Insurance Plan renewal with Delaware Valley Health Trust

Crandall Jones, Municipal Administrator, provided background information including incentives for employees and he noted that Delaware Valley Health Trust pulled out a fund for members of the trust to be subsidized for a two-year renewal. He added that if subsidized, the credit (\$152,650) would be used to lower monthly costs. He noted that Aetna would be the provider. He recommended to Council to take the offer.

There was a **motion by Council Vice President Lewis, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to approve a two-year renewal of the Municipality's Delaware Valley Health Trust health insurance plan for the 7/1/2022-6/30/2024 plan years. **The motion passed 6-0.**

Finance

Discussion and request of Council to pursue Master Lease equipment and Capital Improvement financing for fiscal year 2022

Kathy Phister, Director of Finance, explained that they will go forward with Bond issuance.

There was a Power Point presentation by Jennifer Dierksen, Financial Advisor, Davenport & Company, regarding Debt Financing and Capacity Overview. Ms. Dickerson noted that a Master Lease program would be established with a bank through an RFP process to secure funding for vehicle and equipment needs as one loan. There would be an annual appropriation for Fire, Police and Public Works. She further provided details on items such as "Public Bond Sale," "Overview of Outstanding Debt," "Projected Debt Ratio" and "Additional Debt – Post-Issuance."

There was a **motion by Council Vice President Lewis, seconded by Councilwoman Hendley**, to pursue the Master Lease equipment and Capital Improvement financing for fiscal year 2022 and the proposal to finance the first three years of the approved 2022-2026 Capital Improvement Project Plan (CIP), the Stormwater Authority's CIP and the Municipal Hall renovation. **The motion passed 6-0.**

Building and Code Department

Approval of Historical Architectural Review Board Certificates of Appropriateness – April 2022 for the following properties:

18 East Chestnut Street
1221 West Airy Street

There was a **motion by Council Vice President Lewis, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to approve the Certificates of Appropriateness which were received, reviewed and recommended for approval by the HARB. **The motion passed 6-0.**

Fire

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Hendley, seconded by Councilman Bates**, to table this item. **The motion passed 6-0.**

Police

Resolution 22-30: Motion to approve the Civil Service Entry Level Police Officer list and granting permission for the Chief of Police to identify and have offers of conditional employment sent to identified candidates on the entry-level eligibility list.

Lieutenant Bishop provided details of the status of openings in the Police Department due to current resignations, retirements and other vacancies. He stated that the Eligibility List is down to 13.

There was a **motion by Councilman Bates, seconded by Councilwoman Hendley**, to approve the Civil Service Entry Level Police Officer list and grant permission for the Chief of Police to identify and have offers of conditional employment sent to identified candidates on the entry-level eligibility list in order to maintain the current budgeted Police Department manpower of 69 Police Officers. **The motion passed 6-0.**

Resolution 22-31: Motion to approve the purchase of a new Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) for \$23,000 from Leonardo Company for a Police vehicle

Lieutenant Bishop explained that this would alert the Officer of such things as stolen vehicles and provide snapshots. He noted that currently two units are inoperable and in repair.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to approve the purchase of a new Automated License Plate Reader. **The motion passed 6-0.**

Planning & Municipal Development

Resolution 22-29: Award of a contract to the Fair Housing Rights Center (FHRC) in the amount of \$30,000 to provide professional services in the implementation of the Fair Housing Program

Director Musonye provided information about the RFP process and said that one proposal was received which will be submitted in order to keep within the CDBG grant for Fair Housing activities.

There was a **motion by Councilman Bates, seconded by Council Vice President Lewis**, to approve the contract for the Fair Housing Rights Center (FHRC) in the amount of \$30,000 to provide professional services in the implementation of the Fair Housing Program. This is in compliance with Section 7-713 of the Home Rule Charter and Section 4-35(A)(6) of the Administrative Code which states, “All contracts in excess of \$21,000 shall be in writing and shall be awarded by Municipal Council, and the contract shall be executed by the Municipal Administrator.” **The motion passed 6-0.**

Resolution 22-32: Authorizing the submission of a grant application to the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) requesting \$80,000 for a study of traffic and pedestrian patterns within the Norristown Redevelopment area

Director Musonye stated that current numbers are needed regarding traffic pattern statistics.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Hendley, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to approve the submission of a grant application. **The motion passed 6-0.**

Adjournment

There was a **motion by Councilman Bates, seconded by Council Vice President Lewis**, to adjourn the Council Meeting. **The motion passed 6-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Roseann M. Santangelo, Clerk of Council