

NORRISTOWN MUNICIPALITY
COUNCIL WORK SESSION MINUTES
AUGUST 15, 2023

The Council Work Session of August 15, 2023 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 19401.

There was a **Moment of Silence** followed by the **Pledge of Allegiance**.

The following Council members were in attendance:

Rebecca Smith
Rashaad Bates
Dustin Queenan
Tiffany Hendley
Lauren Hughes
Heather Lewis
Thomas Lepera

Also in attendance were:

Patrick Hitchens, Acting Municipal Solicitor; Acting Police Chief Michael Bishop, Norristown Police Department; Sean Turner, Assistant Director of Planning & Development; David Babbitt, AICP; Thomas Odenigbo, Director of Public Works; Richard Lockhart, Deputy Fire Chief; Kathy Pfister, Director of Finance; Amrinder Singh, Codes Manager; Erica Genuardi, Director of Parks and Recreation.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to approve the Minutes of the August 1, 2023 Council Meeting. **The motion passed unanimously.**

EXECUTIVE SESSION ANNOUNCEMENT

Council President Lepera announced that Council did not meet in Executive Session prior to the meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

“Taste of Norristown” Street Food Festival at von C Brewing Company has been postponed. There will still be food trucks and entertainment.

“Help a Single Parent” Family & Community Day at Oak Street Park on August 20th with games and vendors. There will be a Book Bag Giveaway at 4 pm.

Oak Street Youth Basketball Association 1st Annual Trophy and Reward Banquet on August 21st from 6 to 8 pm at the George Washington Carver Center. Players free, attendees \$5.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Olivia Brady – She read from a handwritten transcript saying that the Airy Street Prison building is a structure being left to rot. She said it’s an “iconic presence.” She suggested to “honor our agent” and to save the façade. She told Council to impress upon the Commissioners the importance of this.

Peggy Dellisanti, former Norristown business owner – Ms. Dellisanti read from her handwritten comments which provided a history of some of the landmarks on Main Street in Norristown such as the Valley Forge Hotel and the Norris Theatre. She commented that other areas have created destinations from some of their historical buildings. She said to consider preserving the former Prison building to make a tour center which would create jobs. She said, “Don’t let them destroy the “Queen on the Hill.”

Jim Watters, Hamilton Street – He said there will be a 349 Chapter Veterans meeting on September 17th at the Jefferson Firehouse. He provided a sign-up sheet for email contact. He said that he rephrased his RTK request about the abandoned properties’ tax records. He also commented that the old Prison

building could become a revenue-producing entity. He said that the School Board has a fiduciary responsibility to go after the blighted properties.

Ricardo Crutchfield, 731 Cedar Lane – Mr. Crutchfield said there are high weeds between his property and Curren Terrace. He was asked to speak with the Code Manager after the meeting.

David McMahon – Regarding the prison, he said it is important to confront history. He said a new facility could be put in its place such as a community center. He said it could be an important public space.

Bill Collins – He said that the old Prison building has a dated engineering and architectural study. He said it needs a new study and enough expertise to do it. He said to appeal to the County not to rush into its demolition. He advised trying to work with the County to get independent funding. He said that he and Doug Seiler would help in the study.

Michael Board – He suggested a Church or a Coffee place where the old Prison stands. He also shared that his Church is holding a Street Festival on August 19th from 11 am to 3 pm at the Cherry Street Park. It's a free event. He added that his Church would be willing to help with any community needs.

Council President Lepera commented that the County meets on Thursday, August 17th at 10 am for those interested. He asked, "So, you want to use taxpayer money to save at least a façade while we have people on the street?" He suggested raising the money.

PLANNING & MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT

Ordinance 23-06: request authorization to advertise Ordinance 23-06 for an amendment to Chapter 320, Zoning, of the Municipal Code to include Section 320-271 "Amusement devices", to include definitions for "AMUSEMENT DEVICE" and "ARCADE", to amend the Use Regulations subsection of all applicable Zoning Districts and to amend the off-street parking and loading requirements for Arcades.

Sean Turner, Assistant Director of Planning & Development, noted there are a large proliferation of these machines of which many have been cited for violations. He said that the current Zoning Ordinance Chapter 320 does not address what is current. He added that an update is needed for the language, definition of arcades and the permitted uses.

Mr. David Babbitt, AICP, provided an explanation of the bulk of the requirements. He said there are now 2 categories: Accessory or Primary Use, with Accessory being up to 3 machines. He added that the requirements include adequate space, licenses, no one under 21 if liquor is served. He continued with some of the definition changes and Permitted Uses. He said that 1 parking space should be added for each Device. The question was posed regarding the Amusement Tax and if it will be implemented for the Amusement Devices.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to advertise Ordinance 23-06. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Resolution 23-56: authorizing the submission of a Grant application to the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) requesting \$500,000 in HOME Investment Partnership Program funding.

Sean Turner explained that this Grant was recently opened for the HOME program and will be submitted. The funding will be used to complete 10-12 homes in Norristown that need to have Building Code violations corrected.

There was a **motion by Councilman Bates, seconded by Councilwoman Hendley**, to approve Resolution 23-56. **The motion passed unanimously.**

FIRE

Ordinance 23-05: request of Municipal Council to authorize Advertisement of the 2021 Edition of the International Fire Code

Deputy Fire Chief, Richard Lockhart, explained that the Fire Department currently uses the 2015 Edition of the International Fire Code and they would like to upgrade to the 2021 Edition. The new Edition addresses things such as regulations regarding lithium ion batteries, wood & plastic pallets, sprinklers for

buildings with more than 300 patrons. He said that Section 308.1.4 of the 2015 Edition excluded porches with charcoal grills.

There was **a motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Council Vice President Lewis**, to approve the advertisement of Ordinance 23-05. **The motion passed unanimously.**

MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATOR

Resolution 23-55: requesting Municipal Council approve listing surplus office furnishings for auction on GovDeals.com.

There was **a motion by Councilwoman Hughes, seconded by Councilman Bates**, to approve Resolution 23-55 in order to maximize the value of Municipal surplus office furnishings remaining at Logan Commerce Center, 1700 Markley Street, the location of the temporary offices. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Resolution 23-57: request of Municipal Council to authorize destruction of eligible Planning & Zoning and Human Resources records per Commonwealth and Municipal Records Retention policies.

Council was provided with a list of the records that will be destroyed.

There was **a motion by Councilwoman Hendley, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to approve Resolution 23-57. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Discussion on the Poley Park Skate Park

Khal Hassan, Pennoni Engineer, provided Council with an update on the use of the Commonwealth Keystone process to design build the skatepark and a recommendation on how to move forward.

Mr. Hassan shared that 3 bids were received but all were disqualified. He provided details on the discussions with the contractors involved. He said it is not coming together as smoothly as expected. Some of the proposals were very costly for the design and fees.

Mr. Hassan suggested going back to the traditional bidding process.

There was **a motion by Council President Lepera, seconded by Council Vice President Lewis**, to go back to the traditional bidding process. **The motion passed unanimously.**

ADJOURNMENT

There was **a motion by Council President Lepera, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to adjourn the Council Meeting. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Roseann Santangelo
Clerk of Council