

NORRISTOWN MUNICIPALITY
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 5, 2023

The Council Meeting of September 5, 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
Tiffani Hendley
Dustin Queenan
Lauren Hughes
Heather Lewis
Thomas Lepera

Also in attendance were:

Municipal Administrator, Crandall Jones; Patrick Hitchens, Acting Municipal Solicitor; Acting Police Chief, Michael Bishop; Jayne Musonye, Director of Planning & Development; Thomas Odenigbo, Director of Public Works; Kathy Pfister, Director of Finance; Thomas O'Donnell, Norristown Fire Chief; Assistant Fire Chief, Richard Lockart; Amrinder Singh, Codes Manager; Erica Genuardi, Director of Parks and Recreation, Ted Dymtryk, Pennoni Engineering.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to approve the Minutes of the August 15, 2023 Council Meeting. **The motion passed 6-0.**

EXECUTIVE SESSION ANNOUNCEMENT

Council President Lepera announced that Council met in Executive Session to discuss litigation issues.

PRESENTATIONS

Presentation by Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board

A Power Point was conducted by Rachel Riley, Associate VP of Communications. She shared her congratulations to the newly hired Firefighters.

Ms. Riley noted there are 62 towns in Montgomery County that need to be supported and promoted. She provided information for such items as “Who We Are,” “Mission & Vision,” “Marketing,” “Publications,” “Arts Walls,” “Annual Events.”

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

“Truck or Treat” 10-year Anniversary. October 31, 2023 from 4 pm to 7 pm at the Norristown Recreation Center. Contact Council Vice President Lewis or Tracie Henry, Special Events Coordinator.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Guiseppe Craney-Monticelli, Springfield Twp. – He said that he attended the HARB Meeting where the application for the demolition of the prison was determined to be incomplete. Mr. Monticelli said we need to save the old men’s prison since the old women’s prison was saved which is Building 50 on the State Hospital grounds. He said that the destruction of the old men’s prison should be denied.

Pauline Braccio, Towamencin – She noted that the County spent \$95 million for a new Coroner’s office, the new Courthouse building costs \$622 million so far, as opposed to the cost of demolishing the old prison. She noted that some residents have a concern about the injustices that have occurred in the old prison and she commented that there are current injustices.

Peggy Dellisanti, Norristown – She referred to the old prison as the “Queen on the Hill” and said she spoke with some residents about its possible demolition. Some of the responses she received were “OMG, why?” and “Why can’t it be repurposed?” She said that a destination should be created like the State Penitentiary and she said that Fairmount has blossomed.

Olivia Brady, Norristown – She said that Norristown’s history is slowly being torn down. She said the plan to demolish the old prison is unimaginative and short-sighted. She said there’s an online petition against the demolition which contains about 1700 plus signatures. She said to pause and consider an adaptive re-use.

Liz Ferry, Upper Dublin Township Commissioner – She said that historical preservation is a love of hers. She encouraged a “stay of execution.” She said this is an opportunity to preserve it.

David McMahon – He said he takes seriously the view of oppression related to the prison. He said that past underfunding in the Public Defender’s offices is still with us and that keeping the site would overlook practices still going on.

Jim Watters, Norristown – He commented on the power grid outages. He said there’s an issue on the 700 block of Buttonwood Street with hanging cables. He said that information about the blighted property at 404 Airy Street was submitted to Public Works. He explained that he was involved with saving the prison back in 2000.

Gretchen S., 249 East Main Street – She said that the prison is a great place of solace for her.

Sandra Morabito, 200 E. Fornance Street – She is part of Neighborhood Watch. She said that no one was offered an opportunity to buy the prison building. She said the building should be made into a multi-purpose building.

PLANNING & MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT

(CU1-23) Request for Conditional Use Approval for “The Grand at Main & Dekalb”

Solicitor Hitchens explained that it is on the record that the Conditional Use application was heard on August 2, 2023 for DAJ Main & Dekalb LLC, an affiliate of MM Partners. He said it’s also on the record that the hearing was closed for deliberation by Council to return on September 5, 2023 in order to render a decision on the application.

Mr. Hitchens stated that Council only needs to vote to approve or disapprove tonight. He said there is no need for further comments from the applicant or the public since the hearing is closed.

With permission from Council President Lepera, Mr. Hitchens proposed a motion for a member of council to make “to approve the application of DAJ Main & Dekalb LLC for Conditional Use Approval under Section 320–129.d3 to develop a residential mixed-use development containing a mix of studio, 1 to 2 bedroom units with ground floor commercial space with the following condition: The applicant shall comply with all applicable decisions of the Norristown Zoning Hearing Board, applicable conditions contained in public approval and agreements with Norristown Council and the Redevelopment Authority of Montgomery County and all applicable representations made by the applicant or their agents during the public meetings of Norristown Council.”

There was a **motion by Council President Lepera, seconded by Council Vice President Lewis**, to approve the Conditional Use Application for DAJ Main & Dekalb LLC, an affiliate of MM Partners under Section 320-129.d3. **The motion passed 6-0.**

FIRE

Hiring of (2) Career Firefighters (This item was covered at the start of the Council meeting)

Chief O’Donnell explained that these 2 new Career Firefighters are replacing 2 Firefighters that are retiring.

There was a swearing-in ceremony by Council President Lepera for Brian Drennen and Samuel Ford who were joined by family members.

Crandall Jones thanked the retired Firefighters for their service.

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

Chief O’Donnell explained that this edition addresses things such as lithium batteries use and storage of spirits and wines.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to approve Resolution 23-05 in an effort to protect the citizens and visitors of the Municipality of Norristown from the ravages of fires and assist in the mitigation of other hazards. **The motion passed 6-0.**

BUILDING & CODES ENFORCEMENT

Historical Architectural Review Board – August 2023

Amrinder Singh, Code Manager, provided the addresses for the HARB applications received, reviewed and recommended for approval:

625 Dekalb Street
501 George Street
503 George Street
722 Stanbridge Street
713 Swede Street
1028 West Marshall Street

Solicitor Hitchens explained that the 35 East Airy Street (former prison) application should not have been deemed incomplete by the HARB at their last meeting for their review purposes. He noted that the discretion lies with the Municipal Building Code official. He said that a letter has been sent to HARB notifying them of this. He said that the 45-day window of review has not yet expired so this will be listed on the HARB's next meeting agenda on September 27, 2023.

There was **a motion by Councilman Queenan, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to approve the applications for the above-mentioned addresses recommended for approval by the HARB. **The motion passed 6-0.**

POLICE

Request for Council approval to apply for the 2023 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG)

Acting Police Chief Bishop noted that this Grant is split with Pottstown. He said that the amount applied for this year was for ShotSpotter which was not implemented so now it has to be re-purposed. He asked for approval for the \$15,694 for next year's JAG funds to be earmarked for overtime for community engagements, especially in crime hot spots.

There was **a motion by Councilwoman Hughes, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to approve the request for the JAG to cover overtime costs associated with crime prevention and neighborhood outreach programs in identified high-risk areas. **The motion passed 6-0.**

Resolution 23-59: motion to approve requests for Disabled Parking Spaces

There was **a motion by Councilman Queenan, seconded by Councilwoman Hendley**, to approve Resolution 23-59 to establish Handicapped Parking Spaces at the following addresses:

633 Noble Street
321 E. Marshall Street

The motion passed 6-0.

MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATOR

Request for Municipal Council approval of Assessment Appeal Stipulations agreed upon by the Norristown Area School District

Crandall Jones explained that this assessment appeal is for Montgomery County Court Docket #22-14510 through 14516 for six properties which were formerly law offices on Swede Street. The new owners received a lower assessment resulting in a refund to the owner in the amount of \$8,262.51. Mr. Jones recommended that Council approve.

There was a **motion by Council Vice President Lewis, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to approve the Assessment Appeal Stipulations. **The motion passed 6-0.**

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Monthly updates to Council on the August 2023 activities within the presenting department: Public Works

Director Thomas Odenigbo reported that 60% of the alleys have been cleared. He said there continues to be a dumping problem so he is working with the Municipal Information Officer about checking into this. He said they continue to clean inlets and street sweeping is on schedule. He continued there is an increase in right-of-way applications. He said there's been some conversation about private alleys and that most residents don't agree with it. He noted there have been trees cut down in the right-of-way, parks are being maintained and the department is getting ready for the winter snow.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,

Roseann M. Santangelo