

NORRISTOWN MUNICIPALITY
COUNCIL WORK SESSION MINUTES
NOVEMBER 21, 2023

The Council Work Session of November 21, 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
Lauren Hughes
Heather Lewis

Also in attendance were:

Municipal Administrator, Crandall Jones; Patrick Hitchens, Acting Municipal Solicitor; Jayne Musonye, Director of Planning & Development; Thomas Odenigbo, Director of Public Works; Kathy Pfister, Director of Finance; Amanda Ciarlante, Assistant Director of Finance; Kevin Tustin, Public Information Officer; Thomas O'Donnell, Norristown Fire Chief; Amrinder Singh, Codes Manager; Bri'Ana Cropps-Hawkins, Recreation Director.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

There was a **motion by Councilman Queenan, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to approve the Minutes of the November 8, 2023 Council Meeting. **The motion passed 5-0.**

EXECUTIVE SESSION ANNOUNCEMENT

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

PRESENTATIONS

Council to announce Norristown Bee Mascot Contest Winners

Crandall Jones explained that the contest was organized by a third party and that there were 83 entries which was narrowed down to 14 entries and then down to 5 entries to be voted on. The three finalists were present to accept their awards and to show their drawings to be used for a life-size mascot. The top three are: Aria Hallihan, 6th Grader at St. Francis of Assisi School, Stacey Sanchez, a 7th Grader at

Eisenhower Elementary School and Quintin Kennedy, a 6th Grader who was a camper this summer at the Norristown Recreation Center.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Norristown Winter Fair, Saturday, December 9 from 1-7 pm at the Recreation Center. There will be rides and games, photos with Santa, food, drinks and holiday music.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Peggy Dellisanti – Ms. Dellisanti said she is a “Friend of the Prison” and owner of the former Norristown business, “Main Changes.” She said that the prison site represents neglect. She said there needs to be a destination to bring people into town and there needs to be photos of the contents of the prison including the files left behind. She added that proper studies need to be performed to protect and maintain this asset. She said that the money being used to demolish it could be used to renovate it. She said that the spotlight is on Norristown right now and that social media is powerful. She asked to reject the appeal and deny the permit.

Olivia Brady, Stanbridge Street – She asked to deny the appeal. She said the County did not withdraw their application for the HARB or the appeal. She told Council they these actions need to be requested of the County. She said that the architectural heritage is not an impediment to growth. She added to hold the preservation guidelines that safeguard our cities with irreplaceable architectural heritage.

David McMahon – He said the application needs to be rejected and was insulted by the application. He told Council they have veto power and they should start off with a better process. He asked if there was an update about the survey in June regarding homelessness.

Jim Watters – He said he found an Act 1 file regarding the process for Taxpayer Relief Plan but he was looking for the assessed value analysis over a 10 year period and Norristown had a negative analysis. He said that blighted properties cause the decline in value and they should not be boarded up for a period of more than 3 months from the date of the application of the permit. If there are exceptions, he noted that it should be that the Municipal Administrator has a list. Jim said he also has a copy of the Pennsylvania’s Abandoned & Blighted Properties Conservation Best Practices Manual covering things such as recent reports, lost property values, etc. He feels Code has been locked in a corner so he said someone has to come up with more creative ways to do this. He may go through the Attorney General’s office.

APPOINTMENTS

Resolution 23-83: Appointment to the Norristown’s Recreation Masterplan Advisory Committee

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to appoint Heather Lewis to the Norristown’s Recreation Masterplan Advisory Committee. **The motion passed 4-0.** (Council Vice President Lewis did not vote.)

PLANNING & MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT

Public Hearing for (CU2-23) Conditional Use Application: Request for approval for a mural on Roosevelt School at 1161 Markley Street

Solicitor Hitchens provided the details of the Public Hearing saying that an application was filed for a 399 square foot mural in the R-2 District. He noted that the Superintendent of Norristown Area School District is present. Mr. Hitchens asked if anyone wanted to request party status (an objector). There were no objectors.

Superintendent Christopher Dormer explained that as part of a literacy program called "One Book, One Norristown," a novel was picked and a mural was commissioned after the novel was read.

Solicitor Hitchens entered exhibits M1 – the application with attachment and M2 – Engineer's Review Letter. He also posed questions to Mr. Dormer regarding his opinion on any negative effects on the community for having the mural such as will the mural impede property values? His answers didn't reflect any negative effects.

Councilwoman Lewis asked why they did not seek a Conditional Use before putting up the mural. Mr. Dormer responded that if there was awareness of the Ordinance that was in place, they would have followed it.

Public Comment

Jim Watters – He spoke about switch boxes at traffic lights.

Mr. Watters was told by the Solicitor that the Public Comment must relate to the mural.

Olivia Brady – She said she gives full support of the mural and commented that it is very pretty.

Mr. Dormer commented that if it is approved, the mural will be maintained.

There was **a motion by Councilman Bates, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to close the Public Hearing. **The motion passed 5-0.**

There was **a motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Hughes**, to approve the Conditional Use request for a mural on Roosevelt School at 1161 Markley Street. **The motion passed 5-0.**

Substantial Amendment: Amending the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) acquisition for Homeownership Project

Director Jayne Musonye provided an explanation of the guidelines for the acquisition of blighted properties suitable for the development of stormwater facilities. She explained the process to amend the CDBG which includes coming to Council with any recommendations and advertisement to the public regarding the blighted properties that are being considered for stormwater facilities. After 30 days, any comments will be forwarded to the HUD and if there are no objections, the program will continue.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to approve the advertisement of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) acquisition for Homeownership Project amendment. **The motion passed 5-0.**

Resolution 23-80: Award of a Three-Year Contract in the amount of \$182,891 to Community Grants, Planning and Housing (CGP&H) for Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation Professional Services

Director Musonye said there are 400 properties that need technical assistance by a consultant regarding industry standards. The award for year one is \$58,000, year two is \$60,000 and year three is \$63,000. They monitor and manage the construction review and approve the invoices sent to the Municipality and handle the directions through the Building and Code Department and the HARB.

There was a **motion by Councilman Queenan, seconded by Councilwoman Hughes**, to approve the award of a three-year contract in the amount of \$182,891 to Community Grants, Planning and Housing (CGP&H) for Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation Professional Services. **The motion passed 5-0.**

Rejection of a Bid for restaurant facility improvements at 14 West Main Street (Simply Divine Catering)

Director Musonye said that it has been difficult getting a good bid so they are working with HUD to consider other remedies. She said she will bring back the feedback she receives to Council.

There was a **motion by Councilman Bates, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to reject the bid for restaurant facility improvements at 14 West Main Street. **The motion passed 5-0.**

BUILDING & CODE COMPLIANCE

HARB Appeal for demolition of 35 East Airy Street

Code Manager, Amrinder Singh, explained that this is an appeal on the HARB decision for the 35 East Airy Street application for demolition. He noted that the application was heard by HARB on August 23, September 27 and October 25 of 2023. The HARB provided a report to Council for their appeal. Doug Seiler, Architect, HARB Board Member, was present as well as applicant, Jesse King, Assets & Infrastructure. He said there was a letter sent from the County on November 6, 2023 to request continuance for Council to hear the County's appeal.

Council Vice President Lewis asked if the continuance is indefinite. Mr. King responded that there is no set time and that they need to get information from the public. He said it could be within six months.

Doug Seiler provided a presentation using the prison property drawings that highlighted what the County proposed. He commented that the County proposal is cheap with no consideration for aesthetics. He asked Council to deny per HARB so the County can come back with a better application.

Council Vice President Lewis asked Mr. Lewis if any studies have been done. Mr. King said the latest one was on February 11, 2020 and he said there have been no significant changes since. She also asked Mr. Singh at what point was the application deemed incomplete. Mr. Singh said the application was complete and that the Solicitor's opinion at that time was that the application met the Ordinance regulations.

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Hughes, seconded by Councilman Bates**, to approve the six-month continuance to the County. **The motion passed 5-0.**

Historical Architectural Review Board – November 2023

Amrinder Singh, Code Manager, noted the following properties are confirmed to be in compliance with the HARB Ordinance:

333 Dekalb Street
512 Chain Street

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to approve the HARB applications received, reviewed and recommended. **The motion passed 5-0.**

FINANCE

Resolution 23-79: Proposed 2024-2028 Capital Improvement Plan

Director Kathy Pfister provided a Power Point Presentation regarding the Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan which included the 2024 Detailed Projects and the estimated cost for each. Some of the projects include the Saw Mill Run, Fire Station, Flood Control Gates, Street Sweepers, Speed Bumps. She noted that the Liquid Fuels Fund is dedicated to street maintenance which includes dump trucks and a paving program.

Kathy Pfister said this is not to be voted on. It's for information purposes only but Council can provide comments to her or Crandall Jones.

Resolution 23-77: Proposed 2024 Consolidated Fee Schedule

Kathy Pfister stated the first fee is for Expedited Real Estate Tax Replication which is \$35 and they want to change it to \$50. She asked Alecia Fields from the Norristown Real Estate Tax Office what the surrounding areas charge and most were higher.

Ms. Pfister reviewed the fees for Trash Collection, Land Development Fees and Escrows which Jayne Musonye said haven't been reviewed in over ten years. Ms. Musonye said that a survey was done regarding what is being charged in surrounding areas. Ms. Musonye said she will come back with list. Fees for Recreation include registrations, park permits, gym rentals, program fees and field fees. Ms. Pfister said the details are in the packets provided to Council.

Authorizing to advertise and First Reading of Ordinance 23-08 adopting the FY 2024 Budget and establishing the Real Estate Tax Rate for 2024

The Power Point included: 2023 budget status and 2024 budget considerations. Projects that were started but not yet completed include Benjamin Court which Ms. Musonye said she will report on at the December 5, 2023 Council Meeting. Budget Options, Revenues and Expenditures were also covered as

well as the 2024 Budget Summary, Fund Balance and Balancing Recommendations. The projected Budget Gap is \$801,626 and Income Taxes generate \$222,669.

There was a **motion by Councilman Bates, seconded by Councilman Queenan**, to advertise the First Reading of Ordinance 23-08 adopting the FY 2024 Budget and establishing the Real Estate Tax Rate for 2024, increasing the millage rate from 17.00 to 17.25. **The motion passed 5-0.**

MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATOR

Stipulations authorizing amended conditions for a Code Blue Shelter to be operated in the Haws Avenue United Methodist Church located at 800 West Marshall Street

Crandall Jones noted that the stipulations were previously agreed upon by Council.

Solicitor Hitchens said that the Church agreed to Code and Fire inspections. He said that the shelter would run from 7 pm to 7 am when the temperature is 32 degrees or below. It would be re-visited every three years. It was also approved by the Zoning Hearing Board.

There was a **motion by Councilman Queenan, seconded by Councilman Bates**, to approve the stipulations. **The motion passed 5-0.**

Resolution 23-81: Requesting Municipal Council to approve purchase and installation of security equipment totaling \$120,819 from Valley Forge Security for Municipal Hall Renovations

There was a **motion by Councilwoman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Hughes**, to approve the security equipment purchase. **The motion passed 5-0.**

Resolution 23-82: Request Municipal Council to approve a Final Award Letter for Poley Skate Park to Spohn Ranch Skate Parks with the low bid amount of \$1,000,000.

There was a **motion by Councilman Queenan, seconded by Councilman Bates**, to approve the Final Award Letter to Spohn Ranch Skate Parks. **The motion passed 5-0.**

ADJOURNMENT

There was a **motion by Councilman Queenan, seconded by Councilwoman Smith**, to adjourn the Council Work Session. **The motion passed 5-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Roseann M. Santangelo