

BOROUGH OF LEHIGHTON

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December 1, 2025

RE: Lehigh Borough Council Budget Meeting Minutes – November 17, 2025

CALL TO ORDER – 5:00 PM

Pledge of Allegiance

Invocation

ROLL CALL

The Special Budget Meeting of Lehigh Borough Council was held in the municipal building on Monday November 17, 2025. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM by President Grant Hunsicker. Council Members in attendance were: Dave Arndt, Autumn Abelovsky, Dave Zimmerman, and Steve Hawk. Council Members absent were Jordyn Miller and Rebecca Worthy. Officials in attendance were: Mayor Ryan Saunders, Borough Manager Dane DeWire, Assistant Borough Manager Brooke Lichtenwalter, Police Chief Troy Abelovsky, and Public Works Superintendent Kris Kunkle.

HEARING OF PERSONS PRESENT

Councilman-elect Joe Flickinger of 154 South Fifth Street addressed the room regarding the proposed \$1.6M transfer from the Light & Power Fund. Borough Manager Dane DeWire stated that the Borough has been maintaining an annual transfer of 16% to 18% although some municipalities regularly transfer 30% to 50%. DeWire went on to mention that the \$100,000 increase from last year's transfer aligns with the rising costs of services and that the alternative would be a larger deficit in General Fund revenues. Flickinger agreed that a 3 mil to 4 mil increase in property taxes would be necessary to eliminate the recent-years' increase in the transfer.

Flickinger went on to ask about the proposed \$125,000 major equipment purchase from the 2026 Liquid Fuels Budget. DeWire stated that it was for the downpayment of a new Public Works dump truck needed to replace the 1995 Ford which is nearing end-of-life. Flickinger mentioned that the money could instead be used to repair the culvert on Bridge Street to prevent future flooding along the Mahoning Creek.

NEW BUSINESS

DeWire went over his proposed 2026 Budget and mentioned that it was presented to Council both in whole and in part, less the Capital Project and Liquid Fuels Budgets which do not necessarily balance from year to year.

DeWire stated that we are hopeful to receive a \$1M LSA Statewide grant for a new \$1.04M Firetruck, but the General Fund will be responsible for the remaining \$40,000. He also mentioned that the \$1.04M sticker was reflective of 2024 pricing, which is subject to change.

DeWire mentioned allocating yearly funding for sanitary sewer Inflow and Infiltration (I&I) repairs. Mayor Ryan Saunders questioned the funding exhausted to date on I&I, and there was discussion on past and future project scopes. Councilman Steve Hawk talked about the possibility of increasing sewer fees to pay for yearly repairs to the sewer system. DeWire added that the Borough can expect roughly \$33,000 of additional sewer revenue for every \$1.00 added to monthly sewer bills.

Saunders asked about Façade Grant revenues and expenses. DeWire stated that the \$250,000 grant shows up as revenue in the 2024 Budget, but most expenses related to the program will be included with the 2025 Budget. DeWire reiterated that this confusion is the main reason for also providing the Total Budget less the Capital Project and Liquid Fuels Budgets.

DeWire spoke briefly on requests from the Light & Power Department, including the possible replacement of our oldest bucket truck and going under contract with Cintas to outfit our linemen with fire-resistant clothing.

DeWire stated that the Light & Power budget was balanced assuming a 2.6% increase to electric rates beginning in January. He reminded Council of the Borough's December 2024 contract extension with NextEra Energy. In that contract, the Borough elected for a 24% drop in 2025 wholesale rates in exchange for a 2.6% increase wholesale rate increase every year from 2027 to 2035. As planned, the one-year 24% rate decrease provided the Borough with roughly \$1M of additional net revenue. The idea was for this reserve to help defer the cost of known future rate increases. Councilwoman Abelovesky mentioned that the reserve can be used to pay for the second substation transformer. DeWire stated that new wholesale rates go into effect in 2027, so we do not need to make any decisions on the reserve immediately.

DeWire went on to mention that Light & Power Superintendent Barry Fisher has been asking Council to hire additional linemen. Assistant Manager Brooke Lichtenwalter added that we just received a letter of retirement from Dennis Rodgers, one of our seasoned electric employees. DeWire said that our best plan to help Fisher with the growing lineman shortage would be to advertise for two positions. One would inevitably be taken by an untrained transfer from the Public Works Department. The other would hopefully be able to go out for public bid, where we can screen for a qualified lineman.

DeWire reminded Council of a previously discussed employee may no longer qualify for employment with the Light & Power Department. He mentioned that an additional spot on the Public Works team would be required to ensure continued employment with the Borough for this employee. There was discussion amongst Council whether a direct swap of employees could occur. DeWire stated that the preliminary Budget reflects one additional employee in each of the Public Works and Light & Power Departments. Councilwoman Abelovsky brought up the budgeted expense for a part-time Public Works employee, and there was discussion about eliminating the part-time position in lieu of a newly-created full time role.

DeWire apologized for not preparing anything concrete for the Buildings & Code Committee but touched on a few specific items in the preliminary budget. He mentioned that General Code is almost completed with our Zoning/SALDO ordinance codification and discussed how that will affect the Budget. He also mentioned that Barry Isett's code officer will be paid \$65 per hour for the entirety of 2026. Council discussed the hours per week this afforded the Borough.

There was discussion amongst those present regarding the Riverfront Property Acquisition and the \$8500 required to acquire two parcels that are owned by Blue Ridge Real Estate. DeWire agreed to budget for the acquisition and would report on this December 1.

DeWire stated that the Mayor and Chief of Police requested a budget line for the startup of a K-9 Unit. DeWire said that he budgeted \$20,000 for the program creation and \$10,000 of offset revenue from possible funding sources. Chief Abelovsky discussed some of the benefits and drawbacks of the program. There was discussion amongst Council, and DeWire agreed to see how this fit in with the budget being proposed on December 1.

While discussing the Police Department Budget, DeWire said that he raised the patrolmen overtime (OT) budget from \$100,000 to \$150,000. Until now, the Corporal's OT was being coded to his salary line. While the money was budgeted, it was difficult for the Chief to keep an accurate eye on the OT budget if one employee's time was not included therein. DeWire stated that \$17,000 of the \$50,000 jump accounts for Corporal Broyles' OT, and the additional \$33,000 was to put more officers on the road. DeWire noted that our patrolmen are more amenable to OT than other benefits, and our PD has been posed with additional patrol concerns over the last few months.

DeWire noted that an additional \$10,000 was added to the Recreation Center maintenance and repairs line to account for any issues that arise from the County Agency on Aging. An additional \$45,000 was added for Annex Building maintenance and repairs now that utilities are fully in the tenant's name. There was some discussion on utility revenue and whether an additional \$10,000 will be necessary for repairs at the Rec Center.

DeWire noted that concession stand rates at the pool have not been raised recently, and they may be a way to lower the deficit in the General Fund.

DeWire noted that he does not believe garbage collection charges should be touched while under the current contract and there was agreement from members of Council.

- Part-time recreation employee
- \$125,000 down payment on a dump truck
- Drop of LF roadway budget but raise G/F roadway budget
- LF money for ADA ramps?
- Vehicle maintenance up
- AA wants transfer at 1.3M, okay with sewer increase, doesn't want to raise taxes.
- PD up 4% in wages and Chief's Contract
- Union employees to receive contracted rates
- Inflation up 3% September to September
- 3.5% increase to non-union employees
- Chief and my contract up in December
- Cost of administrative raises in total
- Merit-based raises?
- Payroll and Accounting softwares
- Real Estate Taxes – 1 mil for a fire truck fund

- Discussion on millage rates of neighboring towns
- LASD discount on taxes
- Special Meeting tentatively planned for week of December 15.

ADJOURNMENT

DZ/SH motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:26 pm and all were in favor with no questions or objections. 5-0

Respectfully Submitted,

Dane DeWire, Borough Manager