

November 8, 2021

A special meeting of Lehighton Borough Council was held in the municipal building on Monday, November 8, 2021. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by President Grant Hunsicker. Members in attendance were: Councilors Ryan Saunders, Autumn Abelovsky, Donnie Rehrig and Joe Flickinger. Absent: Councilors Lisa Perry and Darryl Arner.

Officials in attendance were: Borough Manager Nicole Beckett, Borough Secretary Brenda Kreitz, Solicitor James Nanovic.

Pledge of Allegiance

Motion to go into Executive Session for FOP Negotiations and Chief of Police Position

Councilors Flickinger/Abelovsky made the motions to go into executive session at 6:32pm and all were in favor with no questions or objections.

Motion to go back into Regular Session

Councilors Rehrig/Flickinger made the motion to go back in at 7:06pm and all were in favor with no questions or objections.

NEW BUSINESS

Presentation of the 2022 General Fund Budget

Nicole said the fund balance is a little lower than last year. Our millage rate dropped by about \$577. Everything else is typically what you have been given in past years.

Nicole went over revenues saying she is expecting a 92% collection rate on Real Estate taxes. The mill has increased by \$577. Occupational Assessment has gone up some resulting in a slight adjustment in the fees. Delinquent Occupation Tax Collection increased in 2021 being they were not collected in 2020. The Real Estate Transfer Tax has increased based on the current market. Nicole included an increase in 2022 thinking this trend will continue.

Magistrate fines continue to decrease while Local fines for Code Enforcement and parking continues to increase.

Rec Center income is down due to COVID. The Finance and Admin Committee is recommending using some of the ARPA Funds to claim the loss of revenue on the pool and rec center in an attempt to recoup some of that.

Nixcole said there has been no money coming in for bulletproof vests in a couple years. She went to the Chief and Treasurer to find out why. She is waiting on an answer.

Nicole went over the rest of the line items. She did tell council that as per the rate study finding the transfer amount should be reduced to \$1.1 million, she put in the \$1.3 but council will have to give her guidance tonight on this item so she knows how to proceed in budgeting the rest of the General Fund.

Nicole went over the major expense items one being the Administration building in need of great repair. As we are not planning on a new building this building needs to be corrected and funds from all departments can be allocated to fund these repairs.

Councilor Flickinger suggested eliminating Car 4 entirely as he feels there is no need based on the utilization of the officers.

Nicole said the Police Department is projected to come in \$63,000 under budget. In the 2022 budget there is an increase of \$166,000 for just the police alone. It makes it difficult to budget not knowing where negotiations will lead.

Nicole said the building that Lehigh Fire Company #1 is leased at \$1 per year with the Borough basically responsible for everything doesn't make a whole lot of sense to her. If the roof needs to be replaced on #1, yes, we are in there but how do we pay for that? Are we going to start asking the Social Quarters for funds? They will pick up the tab on things that directly impacts them but for the building as a whole it is very unique. A boiler needs to be replaced in there for many years and who is funding that?

Councilor Flickinger said he knows he is going to tick off a lot of guys but it is stuff like this where both the department and the Borough want to have it both ways. They want to have authority over some things but not over others. They are doing fundraisers for the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and they want the Borough to pay for the small tools when probably the fundraiser money should be going to pay for the tools. When people die and people ask for donation to be made to the department instead of the donations going for equipment it goes for parade uniforms and that makes no sense to him. In the same token the Social Quarters is the same way. If you ask them to start paying, they will probably come back with – then we aren't contributing towards other things. And then you are out apparatus money like they did when the new station was built and

the Social Quarters had to start paying for electric after 70 some years.

Nicole said that is why she is bringing this up now because we will have to replace the roof and boiler and know how we are going to pay for them.

Zoning Code and Building will see an increase in fees from BIA. They have not raised their fees since coming on board in 2013. She is also seeing the need for more than 20 hours a week. She is looking at more hours for BIA to be here per week to 30 or 32 hours a week. If you don't feel they need to be here more then the extra hours can be cut.

Public Works for part-timers is paying \$10.90. We advertised and received 2 responses with one asking for \$17/hr. The rate is not competitive and we will not find anyone if we do not raise the rate. This will mostly impact us this winter as the part timers shovel all our properties.

Public Works is requesting a new street sweeper be considered as the current one is 20 years old and needs about \$20,000 in repairs.

Councilor Rehrig said perhaps we should not loan this piece of equipment out under the circumstances. Nicole said the other part of the street sweeping is – we will have to be doing more than just First Street if we are replacing it. Public Works and the Police Department are going to have to get on the same page because of the enforcement side of it. She has residents asking why other streets are not being done and it is because of the big issue between the Police Department and Public Works with this stuff. If we are getting a new street sweeper that relationship needs to be mended to have cooperation on both sides.

Nicole asked for direction on how to proceed with the department requests and funding for projects. Councilor Flickinger said he would like to see drastic cuts made and does not feel we should start going back down the rabbit hole with taking from Power & Light. We need to keep tightening the belt until it is realistic.

Nicole said the last tax increase was 2019 with 1 mill for the General Fund and ½ mill for apparatus. Once the L&P budget is done, she will have a better idea of the fund balance going forward.

Councilor Abelovsky said she noticed Tom requested an increase for lifeguards and she feels we should increase the wages

for crossing guards. In her opinion children are mandated to go to school and we should be keeping them safe. We can't keep crossing guards because of the crappy pay. She would hate to lose the veteran crossing guards we have over wages.

Nicole again asked for direction. Councilor Rehrig said he agrees with Joe that all departments all the way around need to start tightening their belts and the wish lists need to go away for a while. We have been giving all departments what they have wanted be it equipment or personnel. Joe said he knows items are needed and they will come down the road. Nicole said Public Works always comes in under budget and it is appreciated but every time there is an increase it is because of the police department. Again, another substantial hike in that line item is no longer covered by the transfer amount as in the past. We are \$600,000 over that. Councilor Saunders brought up the Corporals position. He knows we have it budgeted for but is there a need for another administrator position. Councilor Rehrig said originally it was to have someone in charge on all 3 shifts but that went away and the two we have been working the same shift and it should not be and it should be corrected. We need people on the street not another one in the office. Councilor Abelovsky said the rewriting of the job descriptions needs to be a priority.

The amount of calls our police department respond to was discussed and with the two hospitals going opening soon it will get worse along with the over time. Other items were discussed and will be looked at again after the next meeting.

Approval of additional bills totaling \$\$187,337.10

Councilors Flickinger/Saunders made the motions to approve the additional bills and all were in favor with no questions or objections.

Amendment to agenda by request of Councilor Saunders for Discussion on Expired Temporary Occupancy Permit for Elementary Center to be added to the agenda

There was a request from the LASD Superintendent for an extension to the Temporary Certificate of Occupancy. Council discussed the request and had questions as to why it would be requested three years later after the expiration. There were only two outstanding items.

Councilors Saunders/Abelovsky made the motions to amend the agenda but all were not in favor. Roll call: yes – Councilors Abelovsky, Saunders, Hunsicker; No – Councilors Flickinger and Rehrig. Motion carried.

Councilor Abelovsky asked what is Tim and Tyler's feelings on this. Nicole said they have been under the direction of Borough Council since 2018 and remain under direction of Borough Council since that point in time and will do as Borough Council directs them. The Temporary C.O. was issued in 2018 and is tied to Land Development. A C.O. would have been issued at that time had we not conditioned it on completion of Land Development.

Motion to Adjourn the Meeting

Councilors Saunders/Flickinger made the motions to adjourn the meeting at 8:15pm and all were in favor with no questions or objections. Meeting adjourned.

Brenda L. Kreitz  
Borough Secretary