

April 8, 2020

The Work Session of Lansdale Borough Council was held on Wednesday, April 8, 2020 online via Zoom Meeting and called to order at 7:05pm by President, Denton Burnell.

ROLL CALL:

- (X) Councilman Angelichio
- (X) Councilman Breish
- (X) President Burnell
- (X) Councilwoman Hawkins Charlton
- (X) Councilman DiGregorio
- (X) Vice President Fuller
- (X) Councilman Henning
- (X) Councilwoman Currie Teoh
- (X) Mayor Herbert

Borough Representatives:

Borough Manager, John Ernst  
Finance Director, John Ramey  
Police Chief, Mike Trail  
Parks & Rec., Karl Lukens  
Electric Superintendent, Andy Krauss  
Public Works, Rick DeLong  
Fire Marshal, Rick Lesniak

Borough Solicitor, Patrick Hitchens  
Borough Engineer, not present  
Library Director, Tom Meyer  
IT/GIS Coordinator, Kevin Kissinger  
Code Enforcement, Jason Van Dame  
WWTP Superintendent, Dan Shinskie  
Traffic Engineer, Mark Bickerton

Residents

**Jack Hansen** – 850 Knapp Road

**President's Comments** - Good evening everyone and thank you all for joining us on our inaugural virtual meeting. This is obviously a first for us as a Council and I'm very hopeful we don't have to do too many of these! There are bound to be hiccups and challenges this evening and I ask your patience as we work through things as they arise.

Before I get into some of the logistics for the evening, I just wanted to take a second to recognize what extraordinary times we're living in and say a special thank you to all those folks who are on the front lines of this pandemic -- the nurses, doctors and other public health professionals who are risking their own health every day. Thank you also to our First responders like our own police department and fire department; to our other essential departments such as electric, waste water treatment and public work, and to SO many unsung folks in food pantries and grocery stores and pharmacies and the like -- all out there ensuring that we can get the things we need to maintain our own health and welfare during this unprecedented crisis. I'm heartened to see so many positive stories in our community of people helping people, in so many different and creative ways. This is how we will come through this together, even stronger, as a community.

I also want to take a moment to recognize our Borough staff and Emergency Operations personnel that have been ahead of the curve on this issue, meeting

daily since before the closings and stay-at-home orders became the norm. Residents should feel extremely confident that the Borough is prepared to ensure critical services remain intact and that your safety, health and welfare are our primary concern.

So... to the logistics. Tonight will be a variation on our typical Work Session meetings. The difference is that everyone will get the benefit of hearing each committee discuss and review its own situation and any critical business items. I want to stress that point -- as you will note from our agenda, we have pared it way back to focus only on items that either relate directly to the COVID-19 pandemic or are critical for us to ensure continued normal operation of the Borough. We're certainly all hopeful to return to business as usual as soon as possible. I should note here that other Council members not on the specific committees will also have the opportunity to ask questions during this time.

That said, as many of you know, we typically allow for resident questions and comments in the flow of our separate committee sessions, but under these special circumstances that would likely ensure this meeting would take significantly longer and be much harder to manage virtually. As such, since we did not receive any questions in advance, I would ask all public comments/questions to be held until the conclusion of the committee reports -- specifically for item #8 on our agenda. At that time I will open the floor to questions from residents for any of the committees. If you have multiple questions or comments for multiple committees, we'll take them all at that time and answer them in-kind. As I noted earlier, this is new for all of us, and we'll play this a bit by ear to see what works best.

I believe all residents dialing in received some instructions related to participation via phone, but I wanted to reiterate those very quickly. During the public comment section, if you have a question, you can press \*9 to virtually "raise your hand". I will see this on my screen and will ensure that I call on you. We ask that you stay on mute otherwise. If your phone doesn't have a traditional mute button, you can press \*6 to mute yourself, and then \*6 again to unmute. To recap -- \*9 to raise your hand, \*6 to mute/unmute.

Two other quick items: First, I want to remind everyone that we are being recorded, and this recording will ultimately be posted on our Borough website. Second, Council met in executive session on Monday evening (April 6) to discuss a personnel matter. There will be no action this evening in relation to that session.

#### Agenda Item #4 – Committee Reports

##### **Administration and Finance Committee – John Ramey**

1. Department Operations during COVID-19
  - a. Mr. Ernst commented that each department head is prepared to discuss how each department is operating and looking at the 2020 budget to find savings for now until the end of the year. We have instituted a spending freeze for unnecessary expenses such as travel and training, etc.
  - b. Finance operations are running normally at this time. In Customer Service we have two groups working and switching on/off each week at first but now one person per day comes in to process bills and do

other items. Two people will be working from home all the time. The main phone number is going to voicemail and the calls are returned the next day. Deposits are being made on a weekly basis.

2. Budget – Revenues will be the first place we lose money. He has this explained in a memo that he will send to all of Council. We expect a 50% decrease in transfer tax and a 75% drop in EIT. About 90% of real estate taxes are paid by escrow so we do expect to receive at least 90% of those funds. We build reserves for a reason and this is a reason we have them. We can run for 1 ½ months with no income due to reserves but we do get income coming in. Department Heads were able to go through their budgets by line item and we can really skim back and cut \$841,000 through all departments. Operations have decreased because we are not working as normal.

**Councilman Angelichio** – We are seeing an operational savings because of what is going on right now.

**Mr. Ramey** – It will take some time see the impact.

**President Burnell** – Are we focusing on just operating expenses?

**Mr. Ramey** – Operational purchases such as vehicles, not infrastructure projects, are being held for now.

**Councilman Angelichio** – Limiting some capital expense items for now can offer some cushion. We have to look at what we have to spend and may need to slow down or cut regarding capital expenses.

**Mr. Ramey** – We can wait until the end of the year to cut future capital funds and see how this all pans out.

**Councilwoman Hawkins Charlton** – Is each committee going through each line item?

**Mayor Herbert** – Can this be on a single document outlining all the changes.

**Councilman DiGregorio** – Can we get a list of the major cuts per department.

**Mr. Ernst** – We can create a document by department with individual cuts.

3. Extend Declaration of Disaster

- a. **Councilman Angelichio** - Extend the declaration of disaster resolution. What do we have to do to get this done?

**Mr. Ernst** – We can extend the original that was signed and it is open ended to move forward.

**Councilman Angelichio** – Do we have to date it?

**Mr. Hitchens** – It is his opinion that we leave it open ended due to the kind of disaster that we are in. Per Borough Code after the initial ratification we can leave it open ended.

4. Capital Projects – Will the shutdowns affect grants, contracts, etc.?

- a. **Mr. Ernst** – most grants have already been granted extensions from the respective agencies. State money that is given in grants stays with that project and for us no matter what the State's economic position is. For the NPWA water tower project and the Norway Drive work, contractors have received waivers from the State to continue their work. It is a good time to get some roadwork done with less traffic on the roads as long as they follow proper social distancing and wear their PPE.

**Councilman Angelichio** – If a contractor didn't get a waiver are we bound by the contract for deadline dates?

**Mr. Ernst** – Not sure there is an easy answer on that one. Everyone in PA has the same question.

**Mr. Hitchens** – The emergency management code can delay timelines and they can be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

5. Motions to appear before Council at the next business meeting:
  - Extend the discount period of real estate taxes to May 31, 2020.
  - Resolution to extend the declaration of disaster

**Councilman Angelichio** – This could be a logistical nightmare should we extend when most taxes are paid through escrow accounts? This would benefit those who don't use escrow. There may be a cost associated with this change.

**President Burnell** – There may be some legislation about this.

**Mr. Ernst** – The request was to move from the end of April to the end of May.

**President Burnell** – The impact to the Borough will be minimal if we extend so he supports this.

**Councilwoman Hawkins Charlton** – This would be in line with what the County is doing. The Tax Collector said it is about a \$60 to \$100 savings per household. They still get a good amount of time to pay. Will it be made clear how to pay with the tax office closed?

**Mr. Ramey** – people have been dropping off in the utility payment Dropbox.

#### **Code Enforcement Committee – Jason Van Dame**

1. Department Operations during COVID-19
  - a. Temporarily suspended apartment inspections for new and re-inspections.
  - b. Staff working remotely as much as possible.
  - c. Usually one inspector in the office with Jason at a time.
  - d. Addressing code issues as they come up.
  - e. Permits still come in and handling electronically and will hold construction permits until work is allowed to begin again except for emergencies.
  - f. Land planning projects are being worked on as well as construction projects.
2. Budget
  - a. Is mostly staffing right now. We cut out training for the rest of the year.

**Councilman DiGregorio** – Can permits be done online since there has been an issue in the past to do them online?

**Mr. Van Dame** – Not through Energov. At this time permits can be mailed, dropped off in the vestibule dropbox or emailed.

**Councilman Breish** – Has the fire department been told apartment inspections have been put on hold?

**Mr. Van Dame** – He hasn't reached out. Inspections are done bi-annually and we only stopped doing them for a month but he will reach out.

**Mr. Lesniak** – The fire department does receive the Situation Reports each night and that information is in there.

## **Electric Committee – Andy Krauss**

1. Department operations during COVID-19
  - a. Keeping a close eye on the budget and reducing operating supplies. Contract work is still on schedule. Repair/maintenance duties for tree trimming is will now be done in-house instead of contracting it out. Overtime has been removed from the budget except for emergencies. Trainings/meetings have been cut too.
  - b. Staggering staff/crews. Teams can operate on bare bones approach for now. Mutual aid is scarce so it is important to keep our crews/staff healthy.  
**Councilman DiGregorio** – You can contact Local IBEW26 if aid is needed.
2. PMEA memo – We are already following the memo, but we want to formalize it. So far no PMEA electric crews have had any positive cases to date. They are separating their crews as well.
  - a. We can't keep deferring maintenance items though. We will have to work on them.  
**Councilman DiGregorio** – Are the guys on call when they are not working?  
**Mr. Krauss** – Yes. We do have protocol in place when they all have to work together. We are also screening calls for those who may need assistance with their electric bill. So far not many people have needed help. It is anticipated that we will see a decrease in load and we are already about 13% down from last year, most likely due to the mild winter.
3. Motion to appear before Council at the next business meeting:
  - Resolution to enact the PMEA memo. This means no late fees, turn offs, limiters or online payment fees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Library Committee – Tom Meyer**

1. Department operations during COVID-19:
  - a. Has been closed since March 13.
  - b. One staff member goes to the library and collects the newspapers and empties the book drop. He follows safety procedures and has PPE.
  - c. Tom goes in once a week to get the mail and check the building.
  - d. Staff are working from home with the policy and procedure manual and are also taking online training classes. They are also answering phone calls and checking emails.
  - e. They are hosting some online meetings for user groups.  
**Vice President Fuller** – Has there been an increase in electronic materials?  
**Mr. Meyer** – Yes, there has been an increase and they are promoting it on the website and social media.  
**Councilman Breish** – How can people renew their books if they can't go in, online?  
**Mr. Meyer** – Yes, online. For those without an online account we are assisting them to get it set up. We are also issuing new memberships online. We will continue to advertise on social media.  
**Councilman Breish** – Are late fees being waived?  
**Mr. Meyer** – Yes.

## **Parks and Recreation Committee – Karl Lukens**

1. Department operations during COVID-19
  - a. As of March 16 Joanne started working from home and the maintenance crews are each taking a turn to come in, one per day, to empty trash and check on the parks. This past week there were two guys in per day and the aquatic specialist has been in. They all report to different locations and have no contact with each other.
  - b. All of his crews will start next week to start park maintenance. They will all report to different locations each morning to stay apart. All equipment/vehicles are disinfected after each use.

**Vice President Fuller** – Are the porta toilets in the parks being cleaned regularly?

**Mr. Lukens** – Yes, they are being cleaned on a regular basis.

**Councilman Angelichio** – Are rentals of buildings and gazebos closed?

**Mr. Lukens** – Everything is closed through May 31 at this time. Revenues are down by half.

**Councilman DiGregorio** – Is someone monitoring the parks and playgrounds for crowds?

**Mr. Lukens** – Only the trails are open. All courts, playgrounds, picnic areas, etc. are closed and secured.

### **2. Budget**

- a. We are seeing a \$67,000 reduction in revenue because we don't know if pools will open and, if so, when. The same with summer programs; they are all on hold. We can cut about \$110,000 if we have no to, but it is not ideal. We don't know if we can still have our concerts, plays or movies in the park yet. We still have to open the pools to perform routine maintenance whether they are open to the public or not.

**Vice President Fuller** – If the concert series doesn't start on time are we responsible for paying those acts?

**Mr. Lukens** – We are assuming that the high school band will be cancelled and we can push back the first few concerts to August.

**Councilman Angelichio** – Have any other municipalities mentioned opening their pools?

**Mr. Lukens** – No one has decided yet. We do have to decide what we are going to do about the swim teams.

**Councilwoman Hawkins Charlton** – Will the pool discount period extend longer?

**Mr. Lukens** – We will keep the discount for the entire season at this point.

### **3. Skatepark Payment request**

- a. A request came in for a payment to Marino Corporation for work done on the skatepark for site work. They were close to handing the site over to 5<sup>th</sup> Pocket until COVID-19 hit.

**Mr. Fazio** – Marino did a great job and were ready to move on. When things get back to normal they will need to do a little clean up work before 5<sup>th</sup> Pocket can come in.

**Vice President Fuller** – Can the construction continue?

**Mr. Fazio** – No, because 5<sup>th</sup> Pocket didn't request a waiver from the State.

**Mayor Herbert** – Has the grant money been received for this project?

**Mr. Ramey** – Yes, we received it a long time ago.

**Councilman Angelichio** – What if the grant money was revoked due to funding restrictions?

**Mr. Ramey** – Once a grant is committed that money is set aside and can't be used for anything else.

### **Public Safety Committee – Chief Trail**

1. Department operations during COVID-19
  - a. Business as usual with normal operations. We are doing business checks and online training. We do have mutual aid with other departments and are patrolling the parks a lot. We did request the schools to take down their basketball rims to prevent groups gathering. They are practicing social distancing much as possible.
2. Budget – We can reduce about \$200,000 in overtime costs if all special events are cancelled.

**Councilman Angelichio** – Are you seeing some calls drop off but others increasing?

**Chief Trail** – Not too much so far. If the stay at home order goes longer than May 1 then we may see increases.

**Councilwoman Hawkins Charlton** – Husband saw a group of 12 kids hanging out in the Pets Plus parking lot. Should the police be called when people see this kind of gathering?

**Chief Trail** – We do address kids on bikes with our bike patrol. No one is being arrested for those not following the orders. We do call parents when they are minors. Cars and equipment are also being sanitized between shifts.

3. Emergency Management Coordinator report – Rick Lesniak
  - a. On February 28 all departments starting planning for COVID-19.
  - b. He will maintain situational awareness through conference calls.
  - c. As of March 25, the Borough had one positive case of COVID-19. We now have 26 positive cases.
  - d. When needed information will be sent through ReadyMontco.
  - e. Daily situation awareness reports will be sent each evening.
  - f. Department Heads will provide a list each day of those who are working every day.
  - g. A regional sanitation tent will be located on Medical Campus Drive to decontaminate emergency vehicles after each transport. Both the PD and FD can use if needed.

**Mayor Herbert** – How do we acquire PPE?

**Mr. Lesniak** – Sergeant Bubnis is ordering for all departments and he will purchase as much as he can when it is available.

**Councilman Angelichio** – Was the closing of the testing site in Ambler because of loss of funding?

**Mr. Lesniak** – Each hospital now has testing materials. The County is working with FEMA to keep the site open.

### **Public Works Committee – Rick DeLong & Dan Shinskie**

1. Department Operations during COVID-19

- a. The past three weeks no one has been in but they are on standby. On Monday April 6, 5 guys will be in for 2 days and the other will come in for 2 days. They will rotate every 2 days and work on infrastructure such as filling potholes, inlets, etc. They will follow proper social distancing protocol.  
**Councilman Breish** – What about budget cuts, can we cut the budget?  
**Mr. DeLong** – Overtime will be cut which includes special events and that will save \$60,000.  
**Councilman Angelichio** – He fears we will get overloaded with request for events when we go back to normal.
  - b. WWTP is working with a reduced staff. They have 2 operators in each day and have reduced the lab staff. Maintenance staff comes in every other day on a rotating basis. The budget was reviewed and they can reduce their budget by delaying hiring a new hire for now. When there is less rain they save on electric and chemicals too.
2. Motions to appear before Council at the next business meeting:
    - a. 2020 CDBG Grant application for N. Richardson Avenue between W. Main Street and W. Third Street
    - b. Bid award for the 2020 Mill and Overlay project to Harris Blacktop.  
**Councilman Angelichio** – there was a 30% difference between the low and high bidder.  
**Mr. Fazio** – They have worked with Harris Blacktop before and they are a good company.
    - c. Bid award for the flashing beacon at the Whites Road pedestrian crossing to Carr & Duff.
    - d. Payment #3 for work completed on the WWTP fire and security alarm project.
  3. Knapp pedestrian bridge update
    - a. The bridge will be secured and built by Borough staff per the recommendation of Remington & Vernick Engineers. DCED did give their approval for the timber bridge. NPSD will be informed that work will be starting on the bridge.  
**Councilman DiGregorio** – Did NPSD get waivers for their school project?  
**Mr. Ernst** – The Governor is allowing all school construction projects to start/continue.  
**President Burnell** – In March there were motions for Council to approve that needed to be paid. We did pay those invoices and Council will approve those motions retroactively.  
**Councilman Breish** – It appears that there is damage to the seam on Hancock Street. Can the contractor fix that?  
**Mr. DeLong** – JP Morrissey has been notified and they will look at it.

Agenda Item #6 – Public Comment

**Mr. Jack Hansen** of 850 Knapp Road – Are the Borough employees being paid their full wages while they are home?

**Mr. Ernst** – Yes, they are being paid. They are all working on a rotating basis or at home if they can.

**Mr. Hansen** – There is a \$3.50 charge when you pay your electric bill online. Can that be paid for by the Borough instead of the resident? We already pay a service charge fee.

**Mr. Ramey** – At this time the Borough will pay that fee to Paymentus who charges that fee for the credit card companies. This cost the Borough \$120,000 per year to pay those charges.

Agenda Item #5 – Announcements

**Councilman Angelichio** – Tonight was a successful online meeting and we had two guests from other municipalities who dialed in to hear how we conduct our meeting for research purposes.

**Mayor Herbert** – He would like to acknowledge all the hard work from John, Chief, Denton, Rick and Mary through all this the last few weeks.

*The meeting was adjourned at 10:13pm*