WILKINSBURG BOROUGH
Council Work Session
April 16, 2014

CALL TO ORDER

President McCarthy-Johnson called the meeting to order at approximately 6:32 PM in Council Chambers, second floor of the Municipal Building, 605 Ross Ave., Wilkinsburg, PA.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called to establish a quorum. Present were Ms. Garrett, Mr. Taiani, Ms. Trice, Ms. Moore, Ms. Grannemann, Mr. Shattuck, Ms. Macklin and President McCarthy-Johnson. Marla P. Marcinko, Borough Manager was also present. Mr. Lefebvre and Mayor John A. Thompson, were absent. A quorum was established.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Following the pledge of allegiance, a moment of silence was observed to remember victims of violent crime.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Kate Luxemburg – 432 Rebecca Ave. – Commented on her attendance at the Wilkinsburg School Board's Planning Session and Delinquent Tax Committee meetings. She stated that the School District would like to know the status of the Borough's efforts to obtain proposals for delinquent tax collection. She also commented on monies which may be owed to Portnoff Law Associates for legal fees and costs and commented on contract obligations. President McCarthy-Johnson informed Ms. Luxemburg that the Borough is in the process of reviewing the information.

FINANCE

1. Discussion – Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR).

Ms. Marcinko placed this item on the agenda following comments received from Council members, via email. Ms. Macklin stated that the last CAFR the Borough had prepared was for the year 2005. Ms. Macklin commented on the importance of being able to review financial analyses of prior years in order to understand trends. Ms. Moore stated that Council stopped having the CAFR prepared, due to the high cost involved with same. Ms. Marcinko stated that the auditors will assist with the preparation of a CAFR, at no cost to the Borough. Mr. Egler clarified that the basic differences between the CAFR and the general financial statements are the statistical sections. He talked about CAFR rules being changed significantly by GASB. Ms. Marcinko will send the communication, regarding the CAFR, to Mr. Egler and he will have a

discussion with Maher Duessel to determine a course of action and the type of information that the auditors can provide for the report.

2. **Discussion – RFP for Delinquent Real Estate Tax and Municipal Service Fees collection.**

Ms. Marcinko commented on her efforts to prepare the RFP. She followed the Southeast Tax Collection Committee's RFP and the Wilkinsburg School District's RFP. She is awaiting a response from the Borough Solicitor on a number of questions relating to information sought in the RFP. For the accounts which Portnoff Law Associates' currently holds, it is the opinion of the Solicitor that PLA would be due their collection fees and costs. She stated it is her understanding that the School District's solicitor is of the same opinion. In the alternative, PLA can keep the accounts it currently has, and continue collection efforts, with a new collector starting with new accounts for 2014 delinquencies, turned over in 2015. The Borough would then have two delinquent real estate tax and municipal service fee collectors. Ideally, the Borough and the School District would have the same collector. Barring this, there could be three delinquent tax collectors. Ms. Macklin questioned the length of time that PLA would continue collection efforts. Ms. Marcinko stated that the Borough can establish a process, with criteria for dollar value or age of the account, to determine when collection efforts should cease. The question can be posed to PLA at the meeting with their representatives. President McCarthy-Johnson questioned whether a cap can be placed on collection of accounts. Mr. Witherel stated the matter is negotiable. Ms. Macklin commented that it seemed like the amount of fees charged, have increased within the last year and questioned whether this constitutes "double dipping". President McCarthy-Johnson stated that the meeting with PLA is scheduled for April 24, 2014 at 9:00 a.m. Ms. Marcinko stated that the fees charged by PLA relate to their costs to pursue collection through the legal process. The legal process requires specific notifications, filings and motions before the court. Mr. Taiani questioned how PLA's collection rate for Wilkinsburg, compares to their collection rates for similarly-situated municipalities in southwestern PA. This question may be posed to PLA on the 24th. Ms. Trice informed Council that she has spoken to someone from the community of Braddock and learned that they no longer utilize PLA, due to the exorbitant fees. Ms. Trice will speak with the Braddock Council President to determine how they made the transition to a new collector. Ms. Trice mentioned that the fees and costs are printed on the back of letters sent out by Portnoff. Ms. Trice stated that she believes PLA receives thirty-five cents on every dollar collected. President McCarthy-Johnson questioned whether PLA is accessible and available to residents of Wilkinsburg. Ms. Marcinko stated that PLA has specific guidelines for the acceptance of payment plans, relative to amount of payment and length of term. PLA will also accept hardship plans. Mr. Taiani questioned how long it takes before a property is turned over for tax sale. He expressed concern over continued deterioration of properties if they are not returned to use within a reasonable amount of time. Ms. Marcinko responded that the amount of time needed for this process relates back to the legal process, and requirements of same. Ms. Marcinko advised Council to be very specific with communicating their expectations to Portnoff in moving forward. Mr. Taiani commented on the legal process and his dissatisfaction with delays. Ms. Macklin stated that Council does not have sufficient input into determining properties to be taken to tax sale. Ms. Macklin questioned whether there has been a comparative analysis of the delinquent real estate tax list and the abandoned structures inventory to determine whether delinquent properties are

vacant, demolished, have code violations, etc. Mr. Taiani questioned how properties are selected for sheriff's sale. He questioned whether Council should establish a policy for the selection of properties. Ms. Marcinko indicated this would be advisable. Ms. Marcinko will forward PLA's criteria to Council. Ms. Macklin suggested that responders to the RFP should suggest such a process. Ms. Marcinko stated that the Borough must communicate its intent to terminate the agreement with PLA, no later than May 16, 2014. Ms. Marcinko stated that the Wilkinsburg School District is under the same requirement for notification. President McCarthy-Johnson commented that the scope of work for both RFP's should be nearly identical, with the exception of the collection of the municipal service fees. Ms. Grannemann questioned whether there is coordination between the Borough and the School District in relationship to sheriff's sales.

President McCarthy-Johnson asked Council members to prepare their questions for PLA, in advance of that meeting. She also asked Council to review the RFP for additions, suggestions, or questions and to forward same to Ms. Marcinko. Ms. Macklin questioned when the opinion will be available from the Solicitor on the amounts owed to PLA upon termination of the contract.

President McCarthy-Johnson suggested Council consider a joint Tax Amnesty Program with the Wilkinsburg School District.

GENERAL MATTERS

1. **Adopting Ordinance No. 2925 – Establishing Residential Parking Restrictions.**

Moved: Ms. Trice **Second:** Ms. Grannemann

All voted in favor of the motion. Motion carried.

2. **Approving Resolution No. 14-033 – Awarding Traffic Circulation Study.**

Moved: Ms. Moore **Second:** Ms. Trice

Ms. Macklin commented that she had not received a copy of the specifications and proposal. She called the proposer and had an in-depth conversation on the scope of work for the project and is comfortable with the recommendation for award.

All voted in favor of the motion. Motion carried.

3. **Approving Resolution No. 14-034 – Awarding Ferguson Park Playground Project.**

Moved: Mr. Shattuck **Second:** Ms. Macklin

Mr. Shattuck commented that the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board have been working on this project for three years. He explained that the KABOOM Project was the first phase and provided for the bulk of playground equipment. This project will address infrastructure and recreational needs. Repair of the retaining wall is part of the project scope. There are plans to

green the corridors which will reduce the playing field by roughly 50% and rotate the play area ninety degrees, to make the area more welcoming. New equipment is planned for the basketball court. Fencing will be reduced and storm water facilities will be improved. Construction will begin between June 7th and June 9th, 2014.

All voted in favor of the motion. Motion carried.

4. **Approving Resolution No. 14-035 – Approving street closure for Wilkinsburg Baseball Association Opening Day Parade.**

Moved: Ms. Macklin **Second:** Mr. Shattuck

All voted in favor of the motion. Motion carried.

5. **Approving a Banner to be sponsored across Penn Avenue - Advertising the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Concert scheduled Friday, May 16, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.**

Moved: Ms. Macklin **Second:** Ms. Trice

All voted in favor of the motion. Motion carried.

Ms. McCarthy-Johnson stated that ticket prices are $5 for children and $10 for adults.

Ms. Trice questioned whether a date had been set for the Borough clean-up. President McCarthy-Johnson stated that Pittsburgh Urban Christian School is holding their annual Trash-a-Thon on May 9, 2014. Council set a date of May 31, 2014 for the Borough clean-up. Advertisements will be sent to block clubs and business district store owners will be asked to display flyers in their windows.

Ms. Macklin commented that the ALOM conference was a very positive experience. She spoke with other elected officials regarding legislation to limit property assessment increases to 6% per year or 25% over five years, similar to what is employed in New York City.

Mr. Shattuck met with PCRG and learned that a grant has been received from The Heinz Endowments for the East Busway Revitalization Project. Mr. Shattuck will serve on the advisory committee and wants to ensure Wilkinsburg is well-represented. The kick-off meeting will be held on May 8.

Ms. Moore commented on a curb needing to be painted for a handicap parking space at 1218 Hill Avenue. President McCarthy-Johnson commented on curbs needing to be painted on Lamar Avenue, to restrict parking. She commented on the need for parking tickets to be issued at night.

Ms. Macklin commented on the lighting on Wood Street which was not working. She was advised that it has since been fixed. She also commented on concerns being raised by the

residents of Wood Street Towers and the red bricks which are heaving on the sidewalks and the possibility that they could be used as weapons.

Mr. Taiani commented on parking on both sides of Kelly Street, in the area of Kelly Elementary. He commented that enforcement by the Police Department is needed.

Ms. Grannemann commented on the robberies in the 600 block of Whitney Avenue, as well as Lamar Avenue and Rebecca Avenue. A block watch meeting is scheduled for Tuesday.

ADJOURNMENT

Being no further business, on motion by Ms. Moore, second by Ms. Grannemann, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:02 P.M.

_____

Vanessa McCarthy-Johnson, Council President