WILKINSBURG BOROUGH
Council Work Session
March 19, 2014

CALL TO ORDER

Vice-President Moore called the meeting to order at approximately 6:42 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. Moore, Mr. Shattuck, Ms. Macklin, Ms. Garrett, Mr. Lefebvre, Mr. Taiani, and Ms. Grannemann. Mayor John A. Thompson, Ms. McCarthy-Johnson, and Ms. Trice were absent. Marla P. Marcinko, Borough Manager, was also 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 that the agenda was not posted on the website and the meeting minutes are missing. Ms. Moore thanked Ms. Luxemburg for bringing this to the attention of Council. Ms. Luxemburg commented on accessible on-street parking for residents and that it is limited. She also commented on faded street sweeping signs. Ms. Moore advised that street signs will be replaced this spring.

Denise Edwards – 118 Peebles St. – Inquired as to the status of resolving the residential parking issues on Hill Avenue, North Avenue, and Holmes Street. Ms. Moore stated that Ms. Marcinko has received a response from the Borough Engineer and suggested Ms. Edwards contact Ms. Marcinko. Ms. Edwards expressed concern that a public hearing was not held prior to eliminating the residential parking restriction. Ms. Edwards questioned whether Council will be in a position to resolve the issue within the next two weeks. Ms. Moore stated that she did not have an answer at this time and Council is not in a position to vote on the matter until additional information is received.

FINANCE

1. Monthly Financial Reports

Vice-President Moore turned the meeting over to Mr. Lefebvre, Chairperson of the Finance Committee. Mr. Lefebvre referred Council to the monthly financial reports. Mr. Lefebvre requested that Mr. Egler, Finance Director, comment on the information contained in the reports.

- Real Estate Tax – Real estate tax billings have been mailed, but were sent out late. Ms. Macklin commented on receiving her tax bill and a missing line at the bottom of the page. Mr. Egler stated that the mailing date is listed at the top of the page and the 2% discount period is 60 days from the date of the mailing. After July 16, 2014, a 10% penalty is applied. Mr. Taiani stated that he had two experiences with Berkheimer wherein he stated that his payments were held and he almost had to pay the penalty. He does not believe that Berkheimer is honoring the tax bill mailing date. Mr. Egler stated that he will speak with Berkheimer about this, as others have experienced similar issues.
- Delinquent tax collection is up quite a bit due to the Tax Amnesty Program.
- Real Estate Transfer Tax is up slightly and Earned Income Tax collection is similar to last year's receipts. Other taxes appear to be in line with trends. Ms. Macklin requested a copy of the Business Privilege Tax report and inquired as to why the report does not contain the address of the business. Mr. Egler will follow up with Berkheimer. Mr. Taiani requested clarification on the differences between the tax compromise fees and payments in lieu of taxes. Mr. Egler explained that letters are sent to the owners of tax-exempt properties, requesting that they pay their fair share, which represents a voluntary payment in lieu of taxes. Letters have been sent for the past two years. Mr. Egler stated that he is not familiar with the tax compromise fees. Ms. Macklin stated that Hosanna House should be making a monthly payment in lieu of taxes. Mr. Egler will follow up. Ms. Macklin believes this was instituted approximately ten years ago. Ms. Macklin explained that the tax compromise fees are the application fees paid for the Borough's willing seller and buyer program. Mr. Taiani suggested contacting the solicitor for the information as their offices should have a record.
- With regard to Departmental Earnings, Mr. Egler stated that a change is being made to the software program for the recording of Code Enforcement permit receipts so the numbers in the report are not accurate. The issue is being addressed by the Borough's software vendor. Ms. Macklin inquired about tenant registration fees and whether those will be charged this year. Mr. Egler will check with Code Enforcement. Municipal Service Fee collections are up. Ms. Macklin inquired as to the figure listed for Sewer Compliance Dye Test and Mr. Egler stated that the number is not accurate and should be ignored. Mr. Taiani asked about parking meters being calibrated and certified by the State, as required. Mr. Egler stated that the County Bureau of Weights and Measures comes in once every three years for certification. Mr. Egler stated that the person who is primarily responsible for repairing meters and collecting parking meter money, will be retiring soon and Mr. Egler suggested that someone else be trained soon. The Borough also has a contract with a company to perform maintenance on the parking meters. Mr. Taiani questioned whether meter upgrades have been considered. New parking pay stations are being considered by the Borough.

- The reimbursement from the school district for crossing guards was behind last year. There is always a timing issue with receipt of these monies, to budget.
- "Damage to Property" reflects the amount received from the insurance company of the individual that damaged the Wilkinsburg welcome sign. Mr. Taiani inquired as to whether the amount of the reimbursement would cover the replacement and believes the Borough should seek restitution from the responsible parties.
- Ms. Macklin questioned the expense for Contracted Services in Department 402. Mr. Egler stated that this is an escrow account and reversing entries are made.
- Real Estate Taxes Prior Year will continue to be an issue as assessment appeals are still being processed by the County. Ms. Macklin questioned whether a tabulation is being kept. Mr. Taiani questioned whether it is known how many outstanding appeals are yet to be processed and the extent of the backlog. Mr. Egler will check with the County. Mr. Egler reported that, in most cases, the refund is going back to the mortgage company. Mr. Egler suggested contacting Berkheimer to determine those refunds which are being paid directly to the property owner.
- Legal costs are down compared to last year.
- Mr. Egler reported problems with the new server and stated that an additional 20 workstations are scheduled for replacement this year. Ms. Macklin questioned whether the problems are with the software and who is responsible. Mr. Egler stated that the problems are with the recently installed hardware. The responsibility is shared between the Borough's IT person and Freedom Systems. Mr. Egler stated that a change was made by Third Generation, the phone system vendor, which affected the email server.
- Ms. Macklin commented on the water and heating bills. In early 2013, the water meter at 716 Ross Ave froze and a leak occurred. WPJWA reduced the bill by nearly 50%. The increased heating costs were attributed to the severe winter.
- Salary costs in the Police Department are down from prior year as no payments were made for retroactive salary increases. Ms. Macklin questioned the $28,000 cost for special details and was told that this related to traffic control performed on Penn Ave. These costs are reimbursed to the Borough. Overtime FBI is a separate detail which is also reimbursed to the Borough. Mr. Egler will perform a journal entry to account for these amounts, until the software is working.
- Ms. Macklin questioned the increase in worker's compensation costs. Mr. Egler stated that the variance from prior year relates to the timing of payments.
- Ms. Grannemann questioned the charge for ammunition this year and noted that no costs were incurred last year. Mr. Egler stated that the expense in 2014 was actually incurred in 2013.
- Ms. Macklin questioned the expense for minor equipment in the Police Department. Mr. Egler stated that this represented the new computer purchases.
- Fire Services first quarter payment is down a slightly from the prior year. There will be four payments made this year and this is the fourth year of a five year agreement.
- Planning/Codes costs are down with the resignation of the Director. Staff salary is where it should be for the Code Enforcement Department.

Mr. Taiani questioned 410.182, Special Details, which is three times over budget. Mr. Egler reiterated that this cost was related to contracted traffic control services and the Borough is reimbursed by the contractor.

- Refuse City of Pittsburgh is a little off due to timing of payments.
- Retiree health benefits are distributed back to the appropriate departments at year end through journal entries.

Mr. Taiani questioned the costs for insurance and whether the rates had increased. Mr. Egler stated that the rates had increased over prior year.

Ms. Macklin questioned the costs for Shade Tree Contracted Services and requested more detail on the invoices for actual work performed. Mr. Egler requested additional information from the arborist and he will be including more detail on the invoices. The charges incurred in 2014 to date will be charged to year 2013, through a journal entry, as the work was performed in 2013.

Ms. Moore inquired about the costs for the umbrella policy, under insurance. Mr. Egler will request a breakdown of each of the coverages from Ms. Bahn.

2. Review of Residential Parking Permits Issued – 2013-2014.

Mr. Lefebvre referred Council to an email regarding the issuance of 4 parking permits in 2014, which were issued in error for Hill Ave. Mr. Egler advised that he instructed his staff to see if any permits were issued in error since June, 2013. A summary of residential parking permits issued in 2013 has been prepared by the Finance Department and will be forwarded to Council.

Mr. Taiani asked about scanning lost permits, as opposed searching manually. Mr. Egler stated that the summary is in an Excel worksheet. Ms. Edwards questioned whether a street sort had been performed and Mr. Egler stated that would be the next step.

Ms. Macklin questioned how Portnoff Law Associates selects properties for Sheriff's Sale. Ms. Macklin commented that the Comprehensive Plan process had identified restrictions for development in certain areas, such as the Mulberry Church and Black Vietnam Veterans. Mr. Shattuck commented that priority will be given to vacant property on strategic corner lots. Ms. Macklin stated that nearly $150,000 is owed in delinquent real estate taxes on the properties on Wood Street, between Penn Ave and Wallace Ave. She suggested working with the school district on reuse for these properties. She stated that the free and clear sale of Mulberry Church did not go through and it will be listed again for free and clear tax sale.

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Garrett, CONNECT (Congress of Neighboring Communities) representative, attended last Thursday's meeting. The discussion focused on sewer regionalization and ALCOSAN.

Ms. Garrett stated she will be sponsoring a voter registration drive, at the Wilkinsburg Public Library Eastridge Branch, on Saturday, March 29, 2014 from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. She asked that Council members help spread the word.

Vice-President Moore announced that James John, former Wilkinsburg part-time firefighter, is helping to feed the hungry by collecting items such as paper products, and canned items. More information is available on the Pittsburgh Helpers website. She also announced that volunteers are needed at St. James Church Food Bank.

ADJOURNMENT

Being no further business, on motion by Mr. Lefebvre, second by Ms. Grannemann, the meeting was adjourned at approximately7:55 P.M.

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Eugenia Moore, Council Vice-President