

**MINUTES  
HAZLETON CITY COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024**

**Call to Order:** Council met in a Regular Meeting session on Tuesday, January 9, 2024 in Council Chambers. The meeting was called to order at 6:11 p.m.

**Silent Meditation and Pledge of Allegiance:** A silent moment was taken followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Roll Call:** Bruno-present; Colombo-present; Nilles-present; Ondishin-present; Perry-present

**Minutes of Previous Meetings:** The minutes of the January 2, 2024 Inauguration/Organizational Meeting were approved unanimously.

**Presentations/Proclamations/Communications:** None

**Bid Opening:** None

**Courtesy of the Floor (ON AGENDA ITEMS ONLY):** Dee Deakos, 43 West Mine Street, Hazleton, spoke of Ordinance 2024-1- City Wide Incentive Plan- Ann Ordinance of the City of Hazleton Providing for Tax Relief for New Construction Residential Structures Located Within the City Limits that have Approved Plans and Permits Purchased During the Fiscal Years 2024 Through 2027. She said this ordinance states the whole City is dilapidated.

David Fatula, 105 Mark Road, Hazleton, spoke of Ordinance 2024-1 - City Wide Incentive Plan- An Ordinance of the City of Hazleton Providing for Tax Relief for New Construction Residential Structures Located Within the City Limits that have Approved Plans and Permits Purchased During the Fiscal Years 2024 Through 2027. Fatula asked Atty. Logsdon, regarding Section 4, what vacant is defined as. Atty. Logsdon said the construction would need to be from the “ground up” and does not include an improvement on a property. Fatula said he does not know how certain properties are considered dilapidated in the City.

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**ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:**

**ORDINANCES:**

**(1<sup>ST</sup> READING)**

**Ordinance 2024-1**

City Wide Incentive Plan- Ann Ordinance of the City of Hazleton Providing for Tax Relief for New Construction Residential Structures Located Within the City Limits that have Approved Plans and Permits Purchased During the Fiscal Years 2024 Through 2027 (**1<sup>st</sup> READING**)

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Ondishin.

**On the Question:**

Atty. Logsdon said there have been incantations in previous agendas with the Allen Ridge presentation who proposed tax abatement status for their properties only. He stated the City is trying to expand this for any new construction that will be built in the City. Atty. Logsdon said administration would assign an employee, at City Hall, to review the applications.

Perry stated the same tax exemption would be afforded to the owner or the person renting residential property. He stated the City is trying to build a tax base.

Mayor Cusat said if a resident has a dilapidated property, and “knocks is down”, it is considered vacant property, and the property would be included under this ordinance.

Perry asked why Council would not approve a LERTA for townhomes. Mayor Cusat said the City would, also, get permit and inspection fees. He said this takes effect the day the resident would get their permits. Perry stated this is the most ambitious housing project in the entire area. Perry said it cannot be a modular home. Mayor Cusat stated it needs to be “stick built” on site.

Lynch reviewed numbers for the proposed tax abatement project.

Bruno asked if there is a home value, placed in the ordinance, that would have to qualify for the program. Mayor Cusat said he did not put any minimal house value in the ordinance.

Nilles stated this would be good for the City and is a good plan. Ondishin agreed.

Perry asked what type of land this program would include. Atty. Logsdon said there are a few definitions, in the act, that allows for this program. He stated one definition is a substantial amount of unsightly vacant land exists for five years or more.

Mayor Cusat said there is a four-year limit. If the resident does not apply by December, 2027, the property would not be eligible for the tax abatement.

Ondishin asked Fire Chief Leshko if the City will need more fire apparatus for the new home construction. Leshko said the City will need additional staff members.

**Roll Call:** Bruno=yes; Colombo=no; Nilles=yes; Ondishin=yes; Perry=yes.

**ORDINANCE PASSES 4-1 ON 1<sup>st</sup> READING**

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**ORDINANCE 2024-2** **AMENDED BUDGET** -An Amended Ordinance Providing for the Appropriation of Specific Amounts Estimated as Required for the Various Departments of the Government of the City of Hazleton, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania for and during the Fiscal Year, dating from January 1, 2024 and Ending December 31, 2024 (**1<sup>st</sup> READING**)

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Ondishin.

**On the Question:**

Lynch said this is the original budget at 7.93 mills and is reduced to 7.65 mills by three amendments passed on December 19, 2023.

Lynch reviewed some numbers, on the impact, on the budget. He stated Hazleton, currently, has below average real estate taxes.

Bruno stated the Homestead Act is being reformed. The act, now, reduces the income requirements to qualify. He said some residents will be able to qualify who earn up to \$45,000 and the residents who, were in the program, will get more money back.

Mayor Cusat said the City would need about \$1,200,000 for paving the City streets each year. He said he would like to see the paving budget increased from \$400,000 to \$600,000. Mayor Cusat said the average, to mill and pave a City block, is \$30,000.

Bruno said a lot of residents said they would gladly add more money in their taxes to have the City roads paved.

Bruno made a motion to increase the street paving budget by \$200,000. Nilles seconded the motion.

Mayor Cusat said the City's budget needs to be passed by February 15, 2024.

**Roll Call (TO AMEND):** Bruno=yes; Colombo=no; Nilles=yes; Ondishin=yes; Perry=yes.

**MOTION TO AMEND PASSES 4-1**

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**Roll Call:** Bruno=yes; Colombo=no; Nilles=yes; Ondishin=yes; Perry=yes.

**ORDINANCE PASSES 4-1 ON 1<sup>ST</sup> READING**

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**ORDINANCE 2024-3**

**TAX RATE OF REAL ESTATE -** An Ordinance of the City of Hazleton Amending the Tax Rate of Real Estate Located in the City of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, to Reflect the 2024 Amended Budget for All City Purposes for the Fiscal Year 2024, Beginning January 1, 2024 and Ending December 31, 2024 (**1<sup>ST</sup> READING**)

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Ondishin.

**On the Question:**

Lynch stated this ordinance needs to be amended. He said the new total would be 8.149 mills. The new General Revenue mill number would be 7.669.

**Roll Call:** Bruno-yes; Colombo-no; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

**ORDINANCE PASSES 4-1 AS AMENDED ON 1<sup>st</sup> READING**

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**ORDINANCE 2024-4**

**Real Estate Tax Payments** -An Ordinance Amending the Code of Ordinances of the City of Hazleton, Part II, Chapter 490, Taxation, adding Article XVII, Dates of Real Estate Tax Payments (**1<sup>st</sup> READING**)

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Colombo.

**On the Question:**

Atty. Logsdon said the City has defined a discount period, face period and late amount period. He said there would be six equal payment installments a resident could "opt" into. He stated a resident cannot miss a payment.

Mayor Cusat stated if a resident would follow this program, they would receive an extra 60 days without being penalized.

**Roll Call:** Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

**ORDINANCE PASSES UNANIMOUSLY ON 1<sup>st</sup> READING**

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**ORDINANCE 2024-5**

An Ordinance Amending the City of Hazleton Zoning Ordinance/Map (**1<sup>st</sup> READING**)

**On the Question:**

Mayor Cusat stated the City Engineer did not get the amended Zoning map to City administration in time.

**MOTION TO TABLE:**

Presented by Nilles. Seconded by Ondishin.

**Roll Call (TO TABLE):** Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

**ORDINANCE TABLED**

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**ORDINANCE 2024-6**

An Ordinance Amending the Code of Ordinances of the City of Hazleton, Part II, Chapter 440, Streets and Sidewalks, Article II, Utility Cuts (**1<sup>st</sup> READING**)

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Colombo.

**On the Question:**

Mayor Cusat said this ordinance puts the responsibility of a resident who cuts up a City street. He said when the resident does a home project, they need to get bonded. He said this ordinance exempts Hazleton City Water, Sewer, UGI, Service Electric and PP&L from this. There is, also, a time frame included in the ordinance.



**MOTION TO TABLE:**

Presented by Ondishin. Seconded by Nilles.

**Roll Call (TO TABLE):** Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

**RESOLUTION TABLED**

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**RESOLUTION 2024-5** Appointment to the Zoning Hearing Board

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Colombo.

**On the Question:**

Perry said the nomination is Franklin Nunez, and Mayor Cusat's appointment.

**Roll Call:** Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

**RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY**

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**New Business:** None.

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**Old Business:** None.

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**Comments from the Audience:** Dee Deakos, 43 Mine Street, Hazleton, asked if City Council decided to no longer perform ZOOM meetings. Atty. Logsdon said the City started the ZOOM meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic. He stated the technology is no longer required to have remote participation. He said the City is discussing performing either a live-stream or You Tube Channel participation.

Deakos spoke of Ordinance 2024-1. She said Section 4- Improvements Defined- vacant and/or undeveloped property states a resident could keep a property vacant for one year, sell the property to someone else, and develop it into a multi-unit apartment building. She said this is not a proper definition. Deakos said the ordinance states a modular home cannot be built on the property. Mayor Cusat said the ordinance states, "on site" construction.

Deakos, also, referred to Section 6- Exemption Schedule, eligibility requirements and the limitation of the commercial applications. She said there still could be mixed-use housing.

David Fatula, 105 Mark Road, Hazleton, asked Atty. Logsdon to read back the definition of dilapidated properties. Atty. Logsdon read back the definition. Fatula read ACT 61 with the definition of dilapidated properties. Fatula said Hilltop and Mark Road are woods and not unsightly and dilapidated. Atty. Logsdon said the definition means a significant percentage of the buildings used for residential purposes of more than 20 years of age. He said a portion of the municipality which the City determined a qualifying area, and it covers the whole City. He said a resident still needs to meet the qualifications in the ordinance. Perry stated the intent of state law is to stimulate growth in the municipality.

**Comments from Mayor:** None

**Comments from City Administrator:** Lynch reviewed some numbers he presented with some changes that were made in the budget.

**Comments from Council:** Perry congratulated the two new City Council members for their first meeting.

Bruno said he is acting on the general opinions of the City residents. He said the major concern, of the City residents, are paving the streets.

Perry stated Frank Vito and DPW workers do a great job, especially after the winter.

Nilles said driving on the City roads is difficult, especially the emergency vehicles. He said the City is building a lot of warehouses. Nilles said this is a positive step in improving, and maintaining, the roads for everyone.

Colombo thanked the police and DPW departments for their work. He said the City streets are better than the state roads.

Ondishin said he wanted to become a council member to make a difference. He said the City needs more money because it is growing.

Ondishin congratulated John and Tom as new council members.

Perry stated the City Council members are here, for the citizens, to make the City a better place. He stated the City offers great services.

**Comments from Junior Council:** None

**Adjournment:** Perry motioned to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 7:29 p.m.