

**MINUTES
HAZLETON CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2021**

Call to Order: Council met in Regular session on Wednesday, November 10, 2021 in Council Chambers and via ZOOM Teleconferencing. 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: Barletta-present; Colombo-present; Mundie-present; Sacco-present; Perry-present

Minutes of Previous Meetings: The minutes of the October 26, 2021 Regular Meeting were approved unanimously.

Presentations/Proclamations/Communications:

1. Oath of Office for One Incoming Junior Council Member- Bryce Greco.
2. Daniel Lynch, City Administrator, City of Hazleton's 2021 budget presentation.

Mr. Lynch stated, on behalf of the mayor, he would like to give a short presentation on the 2022 budget, as submitted to city council on November 10, 2021. He said city council did have an opportunity to review the budget, a bit, in advance, and should be familiar with some things.

Lynch said the City would use a fund balance that is available, to the City, to retire deficits the City has from its debt service and allow the movement of millage from debt service to General Fund to make up for expected lost revenue. Lynch stated the City would be looking at moving approximately 1.2 mills with .1 mills going from the Recreation Fund budget to the General Fund. He said this would increase revenues and close expected deficits, that where in the budget, when the City was starting the process of looking through it and putting it together.

Lynch said the 2022 budget removes some nuisance taxes from special taxes, i.e.- resident and per capita taxes. He said these have been discussed ten years ago, and was stated these are nuisance taxes. He said these will be eliminated and replaced with other forms of revenue. Lynch said the City is replacing the mercantile tax with a payroll preparation tax. He said under EIT, the City will not get any more ACT 47 related to this. He said this was a \$682,000 revenue gap the City was looking to close. He said the moving of millage was fundamental for this. Lynch stated on Licenses and Permits, the City expects an increase in revenue from building inspection activities due to the City's building inspector with \$800,000 in fees in 2021. Lynch said they do not anticipate in the next year but an increase of what has come in in previous years. Lynch stated there has been added a revenue line for interest earnings and, in 2022, the City should be able to maintain a minimal level balance of \$1,000,000 in its General Fund. He said the City would like to have a restricted fund that would allow for an internal borrowing of a TAN Note to eliminate the expense of the interest. He said this is about \$30,000-\$40,000

“swing” to the good for the City. Lynch said there is still CARES funding for a Health Officer, but this person was not hired. He stated this would be grant-funded. Lynch said Federal Cops funding level is the same as the 2021 budget because the City has not gotten to the number of personnel needed. He said this is why there is a \$400,000 revenue. Lynch stated the City anticipates lower Miscellaneous Revenue. He said one of these is Benecon Surplus for the City’s healthcare. He said they may see a substantially lower range, in the \$300,000-\$400,000 range. Lynch said they were talking it could be nothing or a much lower rate. Lynch said OPEB Revenue and OPEB Expenses, for retirees, are in the General Fund budget. He said this was not this way before. Lynch said it was in a different fund, but the City is showing this in more of a transparent way.

Lynch said most of the expense items were an analysis of what was spending trends and adjusting as necessary. He said some lines have been conservatively budgeted. He said, as an example, police healthcare could stay the same for 2022. He said the City has added to the wage lines for police and fire departments for retirement buyouts. Lynch said they added wages to the Engineering Department with a plan to have personnel, on hand, to train in advance of retirement. Lynch said another change, in expenses, is the City’s insurance package and is separate in showing the vehicles, liability and crime. He said the City increased the Recreation budget by putting .1 mill into it. Lynch said the Airport budget has an increase in airport activity and fuel sales. He said, currently, the Hazleton Airport Manager has submitted a budget.

Lynch said this shows the City is moving forward, fiscally, and will be able to retire some debts and eliminate things because of bad financial situations in the past.

Perry asked Lynch what the millage changes are in the General Fund. Lynch said he gave all city council members a breakdown of the millage changes. He said in the 2021 budget, the millage was 6.78 and 5.28 mills for the General Fund, 0.09 for Recreation, and 1.41 for Debt Service. Lynch stated, for 2022, the millage would be 6.38 to the General Fund, 0.19 to Recreation, 0.21 to Debt Service. He said the collection rate would be at 90% with the value of one mill being about \$858,681. The median assessed value, of a home in the City, is \$76,400 and the median tax bill, in the City, is \$520.00.

Perry asked how much more is going to the Recreation Fund. Lynch said about \$86,000. Perry asked if this is for expanding the Recreation Department. Lynch said Mayor Cusat is proposing there is a Recreation Director and some additional personnel. He said if there are other personnel, and some “good things” and could generate some other revenue. Lynch said they could see this budget growing over time without changing the taxation. He said giving the size of the City and amount of recreation facilities, there are, this is appropriate. He said he has seen an “uptick” in activity in some of the recreation facilities in the City. Perry asked if this has no effect in ARP money the City received. Perry asked if they could put this in the budget. Lynch said correct. Perry asked if there will be a budget surplus with the ARP money. Lynch stated this ARP money is not affecting this budget. He said there would be a sizable Fund Balance. Lynch said paying down the debt, early, would save the City interest payment of \$200,000. Perry said the City paying off debt and not raising taxes is a positive outlook.

Bid Opening: None

Courtesy of the Floor (ON AGENDA ITEMS ONLY): None

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:

ORDINANCES:

(1ST READING)

None

(2ND AND 3RD READINGS)

None

RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution 2021-81 Appointment to the Land Bank Board of Directors -
Robert Hoegg

Presented by Colombo. Seconded by Barletta.

Roll Call: Barletta-yes; Colombo-yes; Mundie-yes; Sacco-yes; Perry-yes.

RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY

Resolution 2021-82 Appointment to the Land Bank Board of Directors
Peter DeMarco

Presented by Sacco. Seconded by Perry.

On the Question:

Perry asked if there are a total of seven members on the board. Atty. Logsdon said yes. Perry stated Mr. DeMarco is a realtor.

Roll Call: Barletta-yes; Colombo-yes; Mundie-yes; Sacco-yes; Perry-yes.

RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY

Resolution 2021-83

A Resolution Authorizing the City of Hazleton to Apply for Local Share Account Funds available for Luzerne County

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Sacco.

On the Question:

Atty. Logsdon stated this application was already submitted. He stated this is the resolution they need in support of it.

Roll Call: Barletta-yes; Colombo-yes; Mundie-yes; Sacco-yes; Perry-yes.

RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY

Resolution 2021-84

Approving Contract Between the City of Hazleton and Fraternal Order of Police, Power City Lodge #18

Presented by Sacco. Seconded by Barletta.

On the Question:

Mayor Cusat said he put this, on the agenda, in hopes that they would have, formally, gotten a vote and passed amongst their members. He said he did not receive that, and this needs to be tabled.

Motion to Table:

Presented by Barletta. Seconded by Colombo.

Roll Call (To TABLE): Barletta-yes; Colombo-yes; Mundie-yes; Sacco-yes; Perry-yes.

RESOLUTION TABLED UNANIMOUSLY

Resolution 2021-85

Approving the Contract Between the City of Hazleton and the Hazleton City Hall Employees Union

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Sacco.

On the Question:

Perry asked Mayor Cusat “the same thing here”. Mayor Cusat said “again, yes”.

Motion to Table:

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Colombo.

Roll Call (TO TABLE): Barletta-yes; Colombo-yes; Mundie-yes; Sacco-yes; Perry-yes.

RESOLUTION TABLED UNANIMOUSLY

Resolution 2021-86

Transferring Property to the City of Hazleton Land Bank

Presented by Barletta. Seconded by Colombo.

On the Question:

Barletta said she did not know the City owned this property. She asked, “since when”? Mayor Cusat said this was a property the City received after the Broad Street Corridor project was completed. He stated PENN DOT acquired several properties, during this project, and when the project, was completed, they had no use for the properties. Barletta asked if this is a small property. Mayor Cusat said yes. He said the person who owns 242 would like to acquire it and purchase through the Land Bank. Perry asked if this would be a quicker process. Mayor Cusat said “much easier and much cleaner”. Barletta asked if this money stays in the Land Bank. Mayor Cusat said yes. Barletta asked if the City would get refunded \$5,000 “from this one”. Mayor Cusat said yes. He stated this property will take care of everything, the Land Bank will be “on its own”, with the board in place. Perry said then they will be self-sufficient with full board meetings. Mayor Cusat said yes, with the permanent board. He said the next meeting will be an organizational meeting with the temporary board turning everything over to the permanent board. Perry asked if they will have a vice-president and president. Mayor Cusat said yes.

Roll Call: Barletta-yes; Colombo-yes; Mundie-yes; Sacco-yes; Perry-yes.

RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY

New Business: None.

Old Business: None.

Comments from the Audience: Dee Deakos, 43 West Mine Street, Hazleton, said at the other meeting, she mentioned there are streetlights that were out in the City. She said there are, currently, more lights out due to it getting darker earlier. Deakos said there is one between Chestnut and Mine Streets, going up Wyoming Street to Juniper Street, and all the lights on Chestnut Street between Laurel and Wyoming Streets. She said this is an excessive number of lights to be out. Deakos does not understand why no one has noticed this. She said the police officers should have noticed these lights out.

Comments from Mayor: Mayor Cusat wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Mayor Cusat said the annual Christmas Tree lighting ceremony will be on December 5th, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. with a nice, young lady “flipping” the switch this year.

He said the Winter Fest will be on Small Business Saturday on November 27th, 2021 at City View Park from 11:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. He said there are a lot of vendors coming already.

Mayor Cusat said the Halloween candy giveaway was very successful. He said there were almost 800 children visiting all day. He stated everyone ran out of candy except the church and St. Paul’s.

He said Santa is coming to town, twice this year, December 6th & 7th, 2021. He said it was a successful event, in 2020, that there are two dates this year. He said the City fire trucks will be there.

Mayor Cusat said there is also Wassail Fest on Friday, December 3, 2021 in the downtown.

Mayor Cusat said about 10 miles of City roads were paved in 2021. He said looking at the PEL report, from 2009-2015, there was a total of approximately one mile of paving being done. He said they made some good investments in the City. Mayor Cusat said they “touched” just about every section of town in the last three years. He said Center City was done in 2020, the southwest section was done in 2021, and, currently, working on the Heights Terrace section and far southeast sections with Hilltop and Stacy. He stated they are moving west with plans to finish within the next three years. He said Seybert Street will be done in about one day. Perry said UGI is paying the City to repave anything in the City. Mayor Cusat said the City made the agreement with the utilities where they pay the City for repairs and are utilizing the money in the City to eliminate “checkerboards”. He stated the new ordinance passed, two years ago, the roads they are cutting will be re-surfaced “curb-to-curb” 25 feet in each direction, “cut-to-cut”. He said the City will be in better shape. Mayor Cusat said there are a total of 114 miles, in the City, and are responsible for 99 miles. He said they did a lot, but there is still a “way to go”.

Comments from City Administrator: None.

Comments from Council: Mundie wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Colombo said there is a brief program at the Hazleton Elks Lodge, on Veteran’s Day, at 11:00 a.m. He said if anyone sees a veteran, wish them a Happy Veteran’s Day. He said it is a very important day.

Colombo welcomed our new Junior Council member.

Perry wished the Hazleton Area High School football team good luck in their quest for the District Championship. He also said the HASD Soccer team won their district title, the first time ever. Perry also commended the HASD Soccer Team and Field Hockey in districts along with the Hazleton Water Polo team. He said J.J. Leonard was Coach of the Year for the Water Polo team.

Colombo wished Harry from Bonanza good luck in his retirement. He said he will be missed. He said Bonanza was supposed to close before Thanksgiving, but there has been amazing support. He said anything the community needed; Harry was always there.

Perry said council has noticed a lot of illegal rentals in the City. Sacco said the City has been “cracking-down” on this along with Diane Panzarella in the Code Department. She said a lot of people are taking single-family homes, “breaking them up, and renting out rooms. She said if a resident rents, technically, they are breaking the law, as the owner, and to sign the lease, this also breaks the law. Perry said illegally renting spaces is, currently, being done. He said the public could help in this issue, too. Perry said Sam Galski of the Standard Speaker could place this concern in the paper. He said the Code Department is going after this.

Sacco said the “last rounds” of Hometown Heroes veterans banners deadline is Monday, November 29, 2021. She said there are about 12 poles open and, hopefully, they will fill it.

Sacco also welcomed back Perry and Colombo in winning the city council elections. She also congratulated Mark Ondishin in winning the third open seat.

Perry thanked all the voters who voted and the candidates who ran. He said it is not about the money. He said they care about the community. Perry said he and Colombo are “humbled”. He said there is the Comprehensive Plan coming up.

Comments from Junior Council: None.

Adjournment: Perry motioned to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 6:43 p.m.