

**MINUTES
HAZLETON CITY COUNCIL
WORK SESSION
TUESDAY, APRIL 12, 2022**

Council met for a WORK SESSION on Tuesday, April 12, 2022, in Council Chambers and via ZOOM Teleconferencing. The WORK SESSION began at 7:46 p.m.

In attendance were City Council President James Perry, Lauren Sacco, Anthony Colombo, and Mark Ondishin. City Officials present were Mayor Cusat, Atty. Sean Logsdon, Police Chief Brian Schoonmaker, Ralph Sharp and Dan Lynch.

Lauren Sacco commented on her recent Standard Speaker newspaper article.

Perry stated there is a goal to work together to clean-up the City. They have cleaned up over the years, and Earth Day is the start of cleaning-up the City. They want everyone to be involved and make something great for the City. The City is very diverse.

Atty. Logsdon said the Code Department works hard. There are a lot of hearings at Judge Zola's office regarding blight. The International Property Maintenance Code is reviewed by the City officials. The notice requirement process by the IPMC goes in a "snails" pace. There is a certain amount of time a resident needs to respond to a notice of violation. This is what the Quality-of-Life Ordinance is all about. The new version of the Quality-of-Life Ordinance is more streamlined.

Perry said the City is trying to do something quicker. He said they will review all ten Quality-of-Life issues. He stated the Quality-of-Life Ordinance intent was meant to increase the "speed" at which the City could enforce their property maintenance rules.

Mayor Cusat spoke of the ten Quality of Life issues:

1. Storing of Hazardous Materials
2. Accumulation or Disposal of Rubbish and Garbage
3. Animal Maintenance & Waste/Feces Clean up
4. High Weeds, Grass or Plant Growth
5. Motor Vehicles
6. Outside Placement of Indoor Appliances/Furniture
7. Placement or Littering by Private Advertising Matter
8. Snow & Ice Removal from Sidewalks.
9. Storage Containers for Waste or Trash
10. Swimming Pools

All Quality-of-Life issues were discussed in detail by Mayor Cusat. He said they would be happy to take suggestions on these.

Mayor Cusat said the Storing of Hazardous Materials deals with flammable materials. He said if neighbors are storing anything flammable, such as cooking oil, gasoline, or used motor oil near homes could cause damage. He said this needs to be addressed, immediately, before it causes more harm.

Atty. Logsdon commented on Mayor Cusat's description of Storing of Hazardous Materials. It is hard calling the Code Office with any violation, and the Code Office would, then, write a notice of violation.

Mayor Cusat spoke of the Accumulation or Disposal of Rubbish and Garbage. He said this is a place where animals could live. He stated these need to be discarded.

Ondishin commented on the Storing of Hazardous Materials. He said some residents do not know how to dispose of them. He asked if the City could get some numbers to the residents. Ondishin asked how residents would get rid of paint thinner. Perry stated Hazleton Environmental would have to come and take it away. Gary Perna said they come either monthly or quarterly. Ondishin said this is why there is so much dumping of items around, and outside, of the City. Perry stated getting rid of televisions is another problem. He said the garbage collector does not remove them. Mayor Cusat said the City could talk to the garbage collector about setting up recycling. Mayor Cusat said the City will be having another appliance recycling event in October, 2022.

Mayor Cusat commented on the Animal Maintenance & Waste/Feces Clean up. He said these are unsanitary conditions that need to be dealt with immediately.

Mayor Cusat spoke of High Weeds, Grass and Plant Growth. He said some residents have overgrown shrubs that block sidewalks and cannot see around corners, causing accidents. Perry said some even cover stop signs. Atty. Logsdon said if people start cutting neighbors shrubs, it could cause problems. residents could call the City, and they could do something about it.

Mayor Cusat commented on Motor Vehicles. He said it is unlawful to store, place or park a vehicle, or vehicle parts, that is not approved in the zoning process. He stated that residents cannot park in the grass, unless they go to the Zoning Department. He said residents could go the Zoning office. Mayor Cusat said the applications were given, for free, in 2021. He said none of these applications were denied. He stated residents need to do it the right way.

Mayor Cusat spoke of Outside Placement of Indoor Appliances/Furniture. He said when there is a couch, outside, and gets wet, it grows mold if for months. He stated it is, also, dangerous for children to play on them where snakes and mice could hide.

Mayor Cusat commented on Placement or Littering by Private Advertising Matter. He said this deals with flyers placed on telephone poles, and just leaves them there, and people do not take them down. He said it looks unattractive and deters people from coming into the City.

Mayor Cusat spoke of Snow & Ice Removal from Sidewalks. He said this section comes directly from the Snow Removal Ordinance. He said residents have 24 hours, after a snowstorm, to clear their sidewalks. Mayor Cusat said a lot of residents have strollers. Perry said children walk home from school and is dangerous.

Mayor Cusat commented on the Storage of Containers for Waste and Trash. He said the last garbage collector gave residents one container, but the current collector does not. He said the HCA gives the recycling bins out for free, but there is a cost for a garbage can.

Mayor Cusat spoke of Swimming Pools. He said if residents do not take care of their swimming pools, they become breeding grounds for mosquitos and other animals. He said they do not want children injured.

Atty. Logsdon said these issues are not meant to hurt people. He stated he gave a large discretionary fine scale to the district magistrate, \$25.00 to \$1,000.

Mayor Cusat stated this is not a "money-maker" for the City. He stated they need to make it safe for all in the City and a safe community.

Diane Panzarella, Code Enforcement Director, commented on the ten Quality-of-Life issues. She said this is for the "good" of the City. She said this will be a big change, in the City, when this ordinance is passed.

Perry said the City is trying to help people, and not hurting the people who cannot fix the problem.

Atty. Logsdon said someone who is a senior citizen or a disabled resident, they will not get a citation, but the City will help they find a way to get their grass cut.

Perry asked what if the City would have to cut a residents grass. Mayor Cusat said the City has the right to go on the property, due to a health issue, and they will be billed. He said the current homeowner is responsible for any house that is for sale. Anyone who has rental properties should have a maintenance company, within 10 miles of the City, to do these chores.

Atty. Sean Logsdon said the snow still needs to be shoveled even though they live in Florida for a few months. He stated the Quality-of-Life Ordinance intent was meant to increase the “speed” at which the City could enforce their property maintenance rules.

Sacco commented on a home that is zoned as a single-family home. This ordinance will help for someone who is an “absentee” landlord, not cutting grass, and renting rooms “out”. He said the City could “crack” the Code on this.

Panzarella said residents need to talk with neighbors, get along, and abide by the rules.

Hazleton resident’s comments (2) two (*inaudible*).

Mayor Cusat said some residents just pay the fine or citation and do not fix the real problem. He said the City, then, needs to start the process over again.

Nicarol Soto, 206 Berner Ave., Hazleton, commented on the penalty system. She said she does not agree with the system, but to bring out more awareness. She said some communities have residents come to watch a video tutorial to educate them with their City rules.

Evalise Efraseo Childs, 860 Seybert Street, Hazleton, commented on the first and second readings of the Quality-of-Life Ordinance. Perry said city council will not vote on this ordinance, tonight, it is only for discussion. She asked Atty. Logsdon about the first warning to residents and 20 days to respond. Atty. Logsdon stated, under the Property Maintenance Code, the resident will get a notice of violation and will have 20 days to comply. She said it is good to keep the City clean. Childs said the City needs to do some education with the people. She said they all need to find a solution to the problems.

Ricky DeLucca, Hazleton, asked what the City will do with vehicles on private property. Mayor Cusat said they will “cite them”. He asked if they will be towed. Mayor Cusat no, just a citation. DeLucca asked what would happen if the vehicle is not registered. Atty. Logsdon said they will receive a citation.

Vianney Castro, 1363 S. Church Street, Hazleton, commented on the citation process. He asked what would happen if a resident missed a court date. Atty. Logsdon said a resident could continue the case. He said they could, also, submit a Summary Appeal at the Luzerne County Courthouse. Castro said it is a complicated process when these people live out of town. He said it is impossible for them to go to the magistrate. He said they could come together to find a better way. Castro spoke of the vehicles parked on the grass. He said there is no space, in the City, to park the cars. He suggested residents park in a small driveway in the back of their house. Mayor Cusat said DEP sets rules. Ondishin said people cannot park cars in the grass, and then, have the cars leaking oil into the ground. Mayor Cusat said about 36 people were approved for parking in their yard, in 2021, for off-street parking. He said a resident needs to get approval from the zoning office.

Dasemeni Rodriquez, 160 South Church Street, Hazleton, owner of Tika’s Bakery, said there is a City crossing/walk sign in her front yard since last year. She said this happened after a traffic accident. Mayor Cusat said to bring it down to the DPW Department next week (joking).

Norcese Rodriguez, 845 North James Street, spoke of the Quality-of-Life Ordinance. She said she is not worried because she is "on top" of her yard. She said, years ago, she got a warning, from the Code Department, due to putting a refrigerator out for about three hours. She said she agrees because she does not want a dirty town.

Mayor Cusat stated all complaints are called to City Hall by the neighbors.

Victor Perez, 32 E. Broad Street, Hazleton, President of Dominican House, said he was impressed with the pictures of the unkept properties. He said no one, from the Hispanic population, would have these unclean properties. Perez said they need to follow the process and the Constitution. He said there needs to be a warning, first, to fix the problem. The next step is to bring it to the court. He stated everyone needs to follow the law and due process. Mayor Cusat said Perez is trying to divide the community and is wrong. Sacco said three weeks ago, the Dominican House has had garbage around it. She said, out of respect, she did not post these pictures. Perez stated the fines need to be more detailed and specific. Perry stated the fine is \$25.00 minimum, and the judge will decide if the fine will be more.

Bob Yevak, 1011 North Locust Street, said he was a landlord since the age of 17. He said he had rooming houses. Yevak said he had every nationality in his buildings. He said there are good and bad in every nationality. He said he walks 10 miles in the City every day. He said walking through the alleys, in the City, it looks like a ghetto.

Daniel Lynch, City Administrator, said everyone, in the room, tonight, is a "rational" actor. He said there are "scumbag" landlords. He said these rules move up the "timetable" in the City. Lynch said they are taking advantage of the current due process.

Hazleton resident (*inaudible*).

Perry stated all these people are here, tonight, because they care. He thanked everyone for speaking their mind. He said this is where the solution will take place.

Perry adjourned the WORK SESSION meeting at 9:23 p.m.