

NEW BERLIN BOROUGH COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

A special meeting of New Berlin Borough Council was held on Monday, November 9, 2020, at 1:00pm at the New Berlin Social Hall, 416 Liberty Street, New Berlin, PA 17855. The special meeting was held for the purpose of discussing police coverage options in connection with the budget. Those in attendance were Councilwoman Meghan Shambach, Councilwoman Betty Kratzer, Councilman Barry Kuhns, President Julianne Finkbiner, Councilwoman Barbara Stamm, and Councilwoman Lynda Frederick. Wendy Cole, Solicitor and Rebecca Witmer, Secretary/Treasurer were also present. Vice-President Lisa Decker and Mayor Bonnie Hamilton were absent from the meeting. Visitors and property owners present were Daniel Brouse, Eugene Smith, Michael Diehl, Lloyd Swanger, David Wentz, Mim Keister, Gene Keister, Mary Spangler, Julia Fetter, Shirley Hartzell, Joseph Hartzell, Bonnie Solomon, David Farmer, Shary M. Zimmerman, Anjel Baket, Rex Solomon, Sharnel Pilko, and Edward Pilko.

The meeting was brought to order by President Julianne Finkbiner with the Pledge of Allegiance.

President Julianne Finkbiner explained that there has been a consistent visitor presence at the regular council meetings complaining that ordinances are not being enforced. A letter was sent to all borough property owners outlining police coverage options and the corresponding tax implications for each option. Property owners were encouraged to fill out the available online survey, write a letter or email to council, or attend one of the two special meetings. This meeting is one of two special meetings available for property owners to attend and express their thoughts and opinions regarding the police coverage options available for the borough. Council does not have the opinion that the current part-time police coverage needs to be changed or that the police department is not doing its job.

VISITOR BUSINESS – Daniel Brouse spoke expressing satisfaction with the current police coverage and does not see a need to change the part-time police coverage.

Eugene Smith spoke expressing satisfaction with the current part-time police coverage.

Michael Diehl spoke stating he does not see a need for increased police coverage. The two crashes in the borough within the last year were not speed related and he does not think it would be wise for the borough to enter into an agreement with the regional police force due to the current legal issues between Lewisburg and East Buffalo Township regarding police coverage.

Bonnie Solomon believes the current police coverage is adequate and she does not feel the police will be able to do anything about the traffic noise.

David Farmer spoke giving statistics about the underspending in police budget over the last few years. Mr. Farmer stated that information was omitted from the letter. President Finkbiner stated it was not relevant and explained that the budget accounts for the maximum amount of police hours the borough can afford within the budget.

President Finkbiner explained it is sometimes difficult for the police to work all the budgeted hours due to their full-time job commitments. The common challenges of all part-time municipal police departments were explained. President Finkbiner detailed several changes council has made over the past few years in hopes to attract more officers and get more police hours.

David Farmer did not feel it was responsible for council to omit the budget information from the letter because there is money for the ordinances to be enforced with the money not being used under the police budget. President Finkbiner stated the police are enforcing the ordinances.

Anjel Baket inquired how many budgeted hours there are for the police department, how many people are complaining about the ordinance issues, the population of New Berlin, and how many accidents there have been over the past 10 years. It was answered that there are 125 hours per month which equals approximately 30 to 32 hours per week, there are less than 10 people complaining, the population of New Berlin is 873, and the number of accidents over the last 10 years is not known. Anjel Baket stated that less than 1% of the New Berlin population have been consistently coming to council to complain.

There was discussion about the current police wage rate and that New Berlin raised the hourly rate for officers last year to be competitive with the hourly rate of other part-time departments in the area.

Anjel Baket does not feel New Berlin has a need for anything other than the current part-time police coverage and that raising taxes for more police coverage is unwarranted because less than 1% of the population is complaining. Further, it would be foolish to give up New Berlin's own local police department and give up its assets to join a regional police force.

Rex Solomon stated he has lived in the borough his entire life. For some of that time he lived on Market Street and Vine Street. Since then, traffic has increased. To put that in perspective, he explained that there used to be a time kids could play ball in the streets without a car coming through town for 5 minutes. Traffic has increased everywhere, not just in New Berlin. The crime rate is exceptionally low in New Berlin and council would not be doing right by its constituents if they increased taxes for more police coverage when it is not needed and just because a few people are complaining. Ordinances are already on the books and they can simply be addressed with people who are in violation. Mr. Solomon wanted it on the record that he has no complaints and is not one of the people complaining.

Lloyd Swanger spoke and stated that there is increased traffic everywhere and there is no need to increase police coverage in New Berlin. The police should be driving around doing other things rather than sitting at the stop sign looking for speeders. There are a few properties in town that look like a dump. It was explained that the police can only fine people who are in violation of ordinances but cannot physically make them clean up their property. It was also explained that what some people classify as junk may not be what others or the district magistrate classifies as junk. There was discussion about the pull behind trailers sitting on Plum Street and a property on Green Street which has broken down vehicles in its yard.

Edward Pilko spoke and stated his trailers were not illegally parked and are registered and insured. The police have been at his home due to several complaints from people about the parking and items sitting outside his home. The police determined the complaints were unfounded. Mr. Pilko

spoke about his house being under construction and that the items sitting outside on his property are for construction purposes. If Mr. Pilko is breaking any ordinance, he will remedy the infraction immediately. If people are uncomfortable with something on his own property, there is nothing he can do about that.

Anjel Baket addressed the crowd stating that New Berlin is a community and asked how many of them are perfect. She asked the visitors how many of them attempted to speak to their neighbors before going to the police or council about them and stated there is no reason for people to make trouble for their neighbor by having them fined or arrested before even talking to them.

Someone unidentified commended council for not overspending their budget year after year. Further, in a time when defunding police departments is a trend, this council is not cutting the police budget just because they are not spending it.

Julia Fetter stated she spoke with her neighbor about burning something he was not supposed to be burning. The individual is a renter in town. His landlord did not tell him about the substances he was permitted to burn, only the days of the week he was permitted to burn. Mrs. Fetter then blamed the borough secretary for her neighbor breaking the ordinance saying the borough secretary told her she no longer has the time to inform people of the ordinance. The secretary does not remember that conversation. The borough only recently passed an ordinance which requires landlords to register their renters with the borough office. Until that ordinance was passed, there was no way for the borough to know who was renting properties in the borough.

Councilwoman Frederick stated the secretary has had a lot of right-to-know requests to fulfill this past year and they take up quite a bit of her time. The right-to-know requests have cost the borough thousands of dollars to fulfill. Councilwoman Shambach stated the right to know requests take priority because they are required to be fulfilled within 5 days.

November 9, 2020
1:00pm

The various ways in which to put in a complaint were explained.

ADJOURNMENT – The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rebecca A. Witmer,
Secretary/Treasurer

MAYOR