

NEW BERLIN BOROUGH COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

A special meeting of New Berlin Borough Council was held on Monday, November 9, 2020, at 7:00pm 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, Vice-President Lisa Decker, 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. Mayor Bonnie Hamilton were absent from the meeting. Visitors and property owners present were Doug Diehl, Colin Devanney, Barry Fetter, Mark Fetter, Martha Hockenberry, William Hockenberry, Mary Palermo, Michael Palermo, Kelly Roush, Wayne Resseguie, Barb Resseguie, Heather Resseguie, Phil Resseguie, David Farmer, Rodney Kline, Wendy Warren, Kevin Warren, Penny Stamm, Darlene Snook, Curt Keister, Anjel Baket, Joe Hartwell, Stephanie Yasick, Larry Harder, Ernest Maurer, and David Benjo.

Before the meeting, 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.

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 about the noise and traffic in the borough and that ordinances are not being enforced. The purpose of the special meeting was for council to hear from its other constituents regarding the police coverage options available. 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 - Doug Diehl spoke about the different code enforcement options available to the borough and the process for code enforcement. If council does not have a full-time police department then people cannot expect to receive immediate service for certain issues in the borough. If an emergency happens, the state police and/or surrounding municipalities will provide service to the borough.

Barry Fetter stated he thought the part-time police were doing a good job and did not see a reason to deviate from the current part-time coverage. The police officers should regularly be sitting at the stop sign looking for speeders and patrolling the streets and alleys. He feels that it's not only the responsibility of the police to enforce ordinances but also for council to do so because the police are not always present when the incident is happening and it cannot wait until the next day.

Mark Fetter spoke about how council used to walk the town twice a year to make note of violations. Grass, weeds, abandoned vehicles, etc. can be taken care of by council and not the police. Council should send a letter out and if nothing is done then council should have the district magistrate send out a letter, that will usually get results.

Martha Hockenberry stated she does not see justification for more police coverage.

William Hockenberry stated that if people were a little more considerate of each other, some of these things wouldn't be an issue. He does not see justification for spending more money on police coverage because of burning issues. He could see justification if there were more crimes such as burglaries. The noise of some of the vehicles is irritating but wondered where the complaining ends because there are also church bells and other loud noises in the borough that are not vehicles.

Mary Palermo said the noise in the borough is ridiculously loud and the speeding is out of hand. She has been coming to council meetings the last few months but has not heard anyone request

24/7 police coverage. It would be better if the police would vary where they sit rather than only at the stop sign. She also feels there needs to be more of a police presence.

Edward Pilko spoke regarding the state of his property which is located on Market and Plum Street. He has done four improvement projects at his property over the past few months. Some of the projects involved excavating which is messy. If anyone feels he is breaking an ordinance, he welcomes them to report it. The police have been at his home due to several complaints from people about the parking and about the items sitting outside his home. The police found that the complaints were unfounded. If people are uncomfortable with something about his property, they are welcome to knock on his door and discuss it with him. He will do everything he can to fix problems with his property, but it takes time to complete projects and do improvements. New Berlin is a low crime borough but there are some people speeding through town. He thinks one full-time officer and one part-time officer is the best police option for the borough. He wants people to understand that the deck is stacked against the borough in that local law enforcement are not legally permitted to use radar for speed enforcement and the state police are only able to do speed enforcement in certain areas of a municipality.

Michael Palermo stated most of the issues revolve around speeding and noise in town. Some of the people who are not concerned about those issues do not live in the center of town. Speed enforcement in different areas of the borough would be beneficial.

Kelly Roush stated she does not live in the center of town and the noise is not bad where she lives. As American's, people are entitled to drive whatever vehicle they choose as long as it is legal. She inquired about placing cameras on the main street to catch people speeding. Council explained that the main streets in town are state routes and are in control the control of PennDOT.

Phil Resseguie spoke regarding local law enforcement and the support New Berlin has from other agencies. He also spoke regarding the difficulties all law enforcement has with enforcement. Police need to be in the right place at the right time to enforce certain matters. He does not feel there is a need for more police coverage within the borough.

David Farmer addressed the letter council sent to residents regarding police coverage stating council should have included the following:

- Statistics about the amount of money underspent in police budget over the last few years;
- The information council gave in the afternoon session of the special meeting regarding hiring new officers to fulfill the police hours;
- Information regarding the recent pay raise for officers.

Further, the letter gives a misleading impression in that it references several individuals who have been coming to regular council meetings to complain. It takes stamina to continue going to the council meetings and there are other people who have complaints but are not willing to voice them. The people going to the meetings to complain are being the voice of others who will not do so. The complaints can be addressed with the funds available in the current police budget.

David Farmer stated the police department hours can be kept as is, but the issues should be addressed with those budgeted hours.

Councilwoman Shambach stated she wanted to make it clear that just because the budgeted hours were not used, does not mean council did not want them to be used. The borough has a part-time police department. Council did not purposely omit the information to which Mr. Farmer is referring for the purpose of misleading people or manipulating them. The purpose of the letter was to find out if there are other voices in town not being heard and if people want different police coverage.

Mr. Farmer stated council has had several years to figure out how to make the New Berlin Police Department a more enticing place to work. Councilwoman Shambach stated council has done several things including a recent large pay increase. Mr. Farmer stated that should have been included in the letter, so things were put into context. President Finkbiner stated that Mr. Farmer has known that information for months as well and has known that one of the officers worked over 100 hours in a month enforcing ordinances and enforcing speeding but that did not stop Mr. Farmer from coming to the council meetings to badger council and complain about the police. It did not stop Mr. Farmer and others from repeatedly coming to council meetings and saying what

council was doing to try to help the situation was not working. When the visitors were continually badgering council while knowing the circumstances, they were saying that what council was doing was not good enough and they wanted something different. Council does not know what that is and will not speculate. David Farmer stated there's nothing he can do if his words are not believed and addressed the visitors stating that if any of them complained that council will do the same with their complaints as they have with his complaints, which is nothing.

It was stated that council is not in charge of the police department and council cannot enforce ordinances. The solicitor spoke to the legalities of ordinance enforcement and the duties of a borough council. The police department investigates every complaint given to them. Residents have power to submit complaints to the police department. Council cannot be a witness to an ordinance violation for another person because the person who witnesses the violation needs to be the person who tells the police what they witnessed. Council makes laws but does not enforce the laws; the police enforce the laws.

Larry Harder stated he thinks the police force should remain part-time as it is currently. It takes time for the police to do some investigations but that is normal. Council is doing a good job.

David Benjo does not think taxes should be raised for unnecessary police coverage. He inquired where ordinances can be found and suggested placing them at the post office. He also agrees that it would be good if the community got back to communicating with each other rather than reporting it to the police. It's sad that the community is at the place where it is reporting each other for ordinance violations.

Edward Pilko again spoke about the improvements to his property and stated there is a difference between doing something illegal and doing something that makes people uncomfortable.

President Finkbiner explained that the budget allows for 125 police hours per month. The police using all of those hours is the best possible scenario. President Finkbiner spoke more regarding the budget, how part-time police departments are staffed, and the challenges council faces regarding

staffing a part-time police department. President Finkbiner further explained expenditures regarding municipal budgets. As is true with most part-time police departments, the borough is typically a training ground for new officers. Once a new officer receives experience and training, it makes him attractive to full-time departments. Once an officer gets a full-time job, the hours that officer works at New Berlin will decrease because that officer now has a full-time job elsewhere. The borough would like to see all of the 125 police hours used each month, but it is not always possible. Council recently substantially increased the police department pay rate to be competitive with other part-time police departments.

At the present time, the New Berlin Police Department has three part-time officers. One of those officers was just recently hired. The other two officers have been restricted from working at New Berlin by their full-time employers due to COVID restrictions. There have also been restrictions in place regarding traffic enforcement due to COVID. That is why New Berlin has seen a significant decrease in coverage over the past few months.

Each councilperson receives \$25.00 per month for their service as an elected official. They have received a lot of abuse over the past year despite trying to do their best for the community and they have remained in their positions; they haven't resigned. Council is willing to listen to any of its constituents if they have problems or issues.

Anjel Baket stated she attended the earlier special meeting on this topic and gave statistics about what she knows from that meeting. There are less than 10 people complaining in New Berlin about this topic. The population of New Berlin is 873. To put that in perspective, that is only around 1% of the total population complaining. There have been 2 accidents in New Berlin in the past year and New Berlin is historically low in crime. COVID has been a large factor with regards to police coverage this year.

Anjel Baket continued stating New Berlin is a small community and people should be talking to their neighbors. New Berlin will continue to be a peaceful, good, and safe place to live if people would just talk to their neighbors about issues. Calling the police on your neighbor and having

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them arrested or fined for an ordinance violation does not create unity in New Berlin nor are people are not creating unity by constantly giving council grief and stress over things that they have no or little control over.

Wendy Warren proposed council send a list of ordinances out to all the residents because not everyone has internet access. She thanked council for their time and service.

ADJOURNMENT – The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rebecca A. Witmer,
Secretary/Treasurer

MAYOR