

November 10, 2016

The Special Meeting of the Lehighon Borough Council was held in the Municipal Building on Thursday, November 10, 2016. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by President Grant Hunsicker. Members in attendance were: Lisa Perry, Jared McEvoy, Helen Torok, Joe Flickinger, Helen Torok, Darryl Arner and Scott Rehrig. Absent: None. Officials in attendance were: Borough Manager Nicole Beckett, Borough Secretary Brenda Koons, Mayor Tom Mase and Police Chief Brian Biechy.

Pledge of Allegiance

New Business

Discussion of Proposed Budget

Nicole said this is not a proposed budget. This is a draft budget. Before we get to a proposed budget she needs a lot of questions answered first. Council has discussed many things over the past year that they would like to see completed. She feels we are going a few different directions making it difficult to prepare a budget. She has a check list to go through. She needs some decisions made, opinions so an actual proposed budget can be prepared.

Nicole started with a 3.3 mill increase in the draft budget presented to council tonight but that will change many times based on council decisions. An executive session is scheduled for tonight and that is why the police chief is here. After that discussion is had we will have a reduction that will bring us to 2.6 mills of this draft budget right now.

She took out the revenue and expense the parking meters. We only have parking meters on South 1<sup>st</sup> Street and needs to know what council wants to do with them at this point. Do we want to remove the meter heads or remove them in whole to see how it goes or look into kiosks for the downtown area? She was looking to LDI for some feedback. She talked to the Chamber, some businesses, etc. and it seems the biggest issue on that street is that it is very residential. So what do we want to do in that small corridor being that is the only place we have meters left?

Councilor Flickinger is concerned that if we remove them the residents will park there and there will be no spaces for the businesses and we ran into that before. All the businesses wanted them out and then as soon as we stopped enforcing it they started to complain that vehicles were parked in spaces for weeks at a time.

Nicole's thought was to consider a business parking spot. The meters are not bringing in a lot of money at this point; they are old and need a lot of work.

Councilor Perry said she like the idea of removing the meters and having business parking. Her thought is to have maybe 20 minutes and a half hour parking on one side of the street only and it can be monitored. Councilor Arner thinks they should be taken out.

Nicole said we took a chance taking them out at the park and we haven't had an issue. However, that area is not residential. President Hunsicker asked, if we sign spots for business parking how we enforce it. The police chief had the same questions. He felt it couldn't be enforced. We also have free parking for the holidays.

Nicole doesn't need an answer right now. She is just looking at numbers only. She can zero it out.

Next on the list is the sale of all borough owned properties. Now that all the land development has died down Bruce has time to work on getting that together. All were in favor.

Nicole increased the transfer of \$911,450 from Light & Power to \$1 million. Which is about 1 mill. Is this acceptable? Should it be more? Should it stay the same?

Councilor Rehrig said he always looked at the transfer as giving something back to the residents instead of saying we are going to add mills on. We want to be profitable so we do have to watch. They are getting something back in return for paying their electric bill in the savings of not paying a mill or two of tax. He sees nothing wrong with that as long as we don't break the bank. Nicole commented that in the public power world these places use their utility to hit everyone not just homeowners. The renters also pay making it more fair because everyone pays an electric bill in some way where raising taxes only hits property owners. Nicole just wants to be sure everyone is ok with that. All agreed.

Next was a transfer from Sewer Revenue. We had \$25,000 budgeted for Public Works wages. We did not put that many hours into sewer however, today Public Works started the I & I program. So it is up and running the flow meter we installed. They will be spending more time on the sewer but she wants to be sure council is ok with her transferring the full \$25,000 from the Sewer Revenue account. It helps with the General Fund but we haven't spent it all yet. President Hunsicker thinks the full amount should be taken because we never know when we will have a problem and need funds available. Council agreed.

There has been discussion and it has been worked into the 2017 budget for 1 additional police officer. The cost is \$110,000 for wages and benefits. Is she to pursue that? That would put our department at 11 officers. Councilor Rehrig thinks we need to prepare for the present and the future. Crimes and drugs are on the rise and the only way we will meet the challenge is if we have police officers on the streets. Council agreed with keeping the funds available.

The Public Works trucks that were purchased will be paid for in 2017. The lease payments are \$67,000 into next year. Does council want to fund that 100% out of the General Fund or split it with the Sewer Fund? Council agreed to a 50/50 split.

The recreation director submitted 2 projects. The rec center roof and the completion of asphalt and tennis courts which they already started. Tom wants the Grove completed first then the roof but the roof would have to be done in 2018.

President Hunsicker said Tom told him the roof doesn't leak so we can hold off until 2018 on that. Councilor Rehrig said when we get to the point of putting the roof on we should consider a metal roof.

Nicole said with all this agreed upon now it takes us down to 2 mills of tax. There are quite a few projects that were not funded that council was looking at for 2017. This is where she needs council to direct her to where our priorities are.

Item #1 is street paving. There was a discussion on what Palmerton is doing. There will only be \$30,000 in Liquid Fuels for street paving because the Ashtown Bridge will be done this year. To that she added \$15,000 to \$20,000 for alleys. Nicole needs direction. Is she plugging more money, are we looking at doing a street paving program? What is the pleasure of council? President Hunsicker doesn't think we have the money to do that and Councilor Rehrig agreed. Grant doesn't think we can borrow a couple million dollars like Palmerton did to do that. Twenty years ago we borrowed \$10,000 from the Light & Power department to do streets and it took us 10 years to pay it back. He'd like to see it done but feels it's too expensive to do right now. Councilor Rehrig agreed. He feels our streets are just as good or better than neighboring places. We bought a paver and with the money that we have we can continue to do the alleys and small portions of the streets. Scott said we should do the regrooving process to save money. We have done it already and it works great. Council agreed to do what we can with the money we have for streets and alleys.

Nicole said over the last few years the discussion has been to construct a new recreation center. Council agreed to keep that out of the budget.

Next was additional surveillance/security for borough hall, parks, pool, etc. There is a grant application in for cameras for the parks but she didn't plug any more money. We do have a \$50,000 startup invested already. Does council want more put aside for additional cameras?

Councilor Rehrig said when money permits we should put cameras throughout the town to deter crime. It is the best way. Nicole said the point of that system was that it could grow. Brian said they were given an estimate by VistaCom for the park was like \$25,000 as opposed to the pool that will cost more because it will need a transmitter to bring the signal back to his station. Council can look at what money they have available and plan accordingly. Council agreed to hold off on putting any more money aside for other areas of the borough for next year.

Next was the zoning and SALDO ordinance. With grant funding it would cost approximately \$10,000 for each municipality. Without the grant we are looking at around \$30,000. Council wanted \$10,000 put in for 2017.

Demolition of blighted properties was questioned. She has nothing plugged in for this in 2017. Do we want to start a demolition fund and start demolishing some of these properties?

Nicole said there were a lot of questions with the ordinance and it needs to be brought back and looked at if council wants to move forward with this project. She feels until we invest in the downtown no one else will either. Council agreed. Nicole said then if there is a building you want to go after we need to pinpoint it and move. We can get the money in 2017 if necessary. It could take 6 months to a year or more to make it happen.

Councilor Rehrig doesn't want money put in the budget but wants a building pinpointed tonight and get the ball rolling and then we will strike. Nicole said to her that would be the old Bennett building. Council agreed to go after the old Bennett building.

Next, there was a discussion on a brush hog for Public Works to use on Bridge Street, Gypsy Hill and the Trail. The cost is \$60,000. Mahoning Township has been doing it for us but it has to be worked into their schedule. We are going with the theme of being a Trail Town so we want to be sure we can maintain that trail. Council agreed to look into leasing it. President Hunsicker said maybe some of it can come out of the Sewer Fund.

Nicole did provide council with the Light & Power and Sewer, Capital Projects, and Highway Aid budget tonight. The only item she wanted to touch on was the LED lighting project and the investment grade audit we previously discussed with NextEra. Lonny came to her and said he could change out all our street lights through the course of a year at a cost of \$300,000. She asked Next Era is it was worth doing the audit and was told if we do that on our own we would not have a Next Era project. Council agreed to not do the project through NextEra.

The last item Nicole wanted to discuss was the expansion of the police station or building a new police station. She put no money in for either option. She needs to know if she should plug money for one, the other or nothing.

Councilor Rehrig said he and Councilor McEvoy did meet with the fire and assistant fire chiefs, one member of the fire department, police chief, mayor and President Hunsicker were also present. In order to save money he does not see building a building or buying land and starting over and adding a mill or two of tax. It is the recommendation of the police, fire and safety committee that the police department receive the bay and the fire truck stored in the back be stored with permission in a bay at the Light & Power department's garage until they find out if they were awarded the grant or not. Then they can take two pieces of equipment out of the bay and store it in the back or in their fire station somewhere. Every square inch of space must be used sensibly and that is what we

are trying to accomplish. That is the committee's recommendation. In order to save the taxpayers money and use what we have and slowly bring the police station up to where it needs to be; not overnight or in 6 months or 12 months but a period of time and then we will have 2 excellent facilities with moderate space and modern equipment and ready to meet the challenges to come over the next 20 – 30 years. So that is our recommendation.

Councilor Flickinger disagreed as the chairman of the building committee. As of September 24, 2014 the police chief, when he filled out Joe's questionnaire has in here that they are operating sufficiently in the space and with patrol operations. At full operation is with 10 full time officers. Since then we have 1 more officer added. Now all of a sudden there is a huge we need, need, need when it says right here they are operating sufficiently. But yet no we want to move into the bay and excuse the phrase but do things half-assed when we should be doing things correctly.

Councilor Rehrig said he will let the mayor and the chief tell Councilor Flickinger what their needs are. Councilor Flickinger said that was brought up in executive at the last meeting. So going in that half bay and then in 2 years then what? Want more construction? Or do you want to plan it and do it correctly to last for the next 30 plus years saving residents money and moving forward with the community that we say we want to move forward with? Scott that is what we are talking about. Joe said he still thinks we should be looking to the north.

President Hunsicker said he has been a fireman all his life and you have more building right now than you have ever had. Joe said that doesn't matter and Grant said it does because all the equipment they have now was in the block building that was there. Grant said he knows where all of the stuff was because he has been in that building all of his life. He joined the fire company at the age of 16.

Councilor Rehrig said it isn't the mission to get into arguments over this. If you want the chief of police to tell you what his needs are he will tell you right now. We are not hiding behind coat tails. We are coming right out and looking people in the face. All we want of the people at this table is to have respect. No one has a mission. The fire company and police are of equal value. However, the police function 365 days, 24 hours a day and the needs are getting greater. Joe said that is why we should be planning effectively for those needs. Scott said the chief has a plan. Joe said taking half the bay is not a plan.

Councilor Flickinger said it was discussed in executive last month. President Hunsicker said that is not what was discussed at a meeting held afterwards though. Councilor Flickinger's recommendation as chair of the building committee is to go north. Scott said Joe is entitled to his opinion but Scott's committee's recommendation is to take the bay. Then we will make the necessary improvements to the police station over a period of time coming before council for a vote before it happens. Joe still recommends that we allocate money for a new building with expansion to the north. President Hunsicker said we can't do that. We can't afford street projects. How are we going to afford another building? Joe said we are already taking about two-thirds of what the police budget is out of Power & Light.

Councilor Rehrig asked Councilor Flickinger if he is saying that he is in favor of building a new police station and adding millage to the residents and taxpayers. Joe said we are pretty much already transferring funds from the Power & Light department to pretty much cover the police department's annual budget. If you want to go that route why not take money out the Power & Light Reserves to construct an appropriate police station as is needed for the long term not the short term. That's all this is doing – fixing a need in the short term. We need to look 30 years down the road and half a bay is not going to do that.

Councilor McEvoy said the bay is part of a 5 step process. We are trying to figure out the best way of approaching it. We will be knocking out a wall upstairs and fixing up some of the other rooms upstairs. This is why we felt the bay was the best place to start to protect their vehicles. There are other things we need to protect like the new camera equipment. It's not just the bay. It is a much bigger plan and the bay is only part of it. Scott said we don't want to put more mills on the taxpayers of the borough. If we vacate the building and move the police then what are going to do with the building? Joe said that is why going north makes sense because you would still be utilizing their current building. President Hunsicker said by taking that property we are then taking away tax money.

Councilor Flickinger asked we are not paying back that million dollars we are transferring every year for the police budget then. Scott was confused. Joe said that from Power & Light into the General Fund. Why couldn't you transfer it into the General Fund for a building? Scott said we pay 2.5 mills for fire. Joe said he understands that and asked if that wasn't the first time taxes were raised since 2000. Scott and Grant were not sure. Joe said so the whole town is deteriorating for 10 to 12 years of nothing and now suddenly everything needs to be changed. Where was the worry for the 10 to 12 years? Grant said because now everything is escalating. Joe is standing by his recommendation. Scott said he is standing by his recommendation to this council. No one wants to put more taxes on the residents of the borough. Jared said especially not when you have a perfectly good building capable of housing how many officers. Brian agreed that if the building was properly redesigned it could house about 17 officers.

Scott said the police station was in the treasurer's office, it was in the electric department then lastly in Mrs. Beckett's office. So when they moved into their new building it was an improvement but during that time period it isn't big enough. We are back to square one. Everything doesn't have to be new in this community. You can use what you have.

Councilor Rehrig went on to say that we have the most modern fire company in the state of Pennsylvania. Scott stated that he treat the fire department and the police equally and said that he feels and Grant have proven that over the last 10 years. They would not have sat through everything to get all the money they did for the two departments. They got \$375,000 to do the police station and over \$3 million to do the fire company. That's a big difference. Joe said it still goes back to lack of planning. Grant disagreed. Scott said that no one in this community can say the fire department didn't get what they wanted and then some. The fire department is a borough entity, which thank goodness when the fire whistle blows we have volunteers to go put the fire out.

Councilor Torok said then this all goes back to insufficient planning and foresight we are in the situation we are now and could be in again in the near future as the crime and everything expands. Scott said Joe is the one saying that. Joe said that is exactly what he is saying especially if we go to contracted services and everything else by taking on two other large townships. You then have all that other increase. Jared commented on what Councilor Torok said. He doesn't think it was because of insufficient planning and foresight. He feels that it's more of a need that's been created. Five years ago we didn't have the same types of problems we have now. Helen said we did have the same problems then we just had blinders on.

The mayor said he has been listening to this for a few years now and he asked Councilor Flickinger why this is so important. Joe said that you have to understand the patio in-between the two buildings was supposed to be – the gap between the infill and station #2 – that was a bay. Station #2 was a maintenance bay. Grant said no and Joe said he can bring the drawings in showing it. Grant said we didn't put that bay there

because if we attached it to #2 we would have had to put a sprinkler system in costing a fortune which was eliminated in #2. Joe said the underpinning was part of that. Grant said you were to put the aerial in that bay all the time and what's in there? Joe said he can show the diagram that show a ladder truck in each bay. The reason that was in there was to show that it would have the exact length to make sure that the largest piece of apparatus fit in. Grant asked why we changed the width of the doors. So you could drive in the back and out the front? Joe said yes. Joe asked to finish answering the mayor's question. Joe said the gap was supposed to be for where the hazmat trailer and pick up could have fit in so that space could have been where that apparatus is. With that not being done that is where that got shifted over to the bay of station #2. That was supposed to be an additional bay that the fire department lost in the process to which everything got shifted over into what was to be the maintenance bay which was station #2. At that time it would have been more feasible to do what you are proposing to do if that other additional bay had been there. The mayor again asked why the fire department needs that little piece of.... Joe said to house apparatus in. The mayor said but if we give you a place for it what's the problem. Joe said there is still stuff in the back. That is where the fire police store their equipment and the physical fitness equipment.

Brian said he is done talking about this. He feels bad for the fire department. He and Joe still get along. Brian's reasons have been stated. The way the architectural design inside the building was done is the problem because of the amount of money they had to spend.

Nicole asked what she was supposed to do. Something or nothing? Councilor Perry said if going through the wall for the security system is needed. How much will that cost? Maybe start there. Council didn't think that would cost much. Put that amount in the budget. Nicole asked for a number.

Councilor Flickinger made a motion for proper planning and expansion to the north where capable assets for our police for future expansion down the road. Councilor Perry seconded the motion but all were not in favor. Roll call vote: YES – Councilors Perry, Flickinger, Torok; NO – Councilors McEvoy, Arner, Rehrig, Hunsicker. Motion failed.

Councilor Rehrig made a motion that the current police station, the entire building plus the bay become the police station and that the study be done gradually. Councilor McEvoy seconded the motion but all were not in favor. Roll call vote: YES – Councilors McEvoy, Arner, Rehrig, Hunsicker; NO – Councilors Perry, Flickinger, Torok. Motion carried.

Nicole asked what number she should plug for a visual. Councilor McEvoy suggested \$50,000. Nicole said with that we are at 2.7 mills.

Councilor Torok said the chief brought up a good point in that an evaluation was never done to come up with a number and that was never resolved. That is why she voted the way she did. This whole thing has gotten out of control. Nicole asked if she want to have a study done and Helen said yes. Nicole said a motion should then be made.

Councilor Torok made the motion to have a feasibility study done to see which option is better for the building. Councilor Flickinger seconded the motion. The mayor was confused by this motion because a vote was just passed on what was going to be done. Nicole said Helen wants the study done so she can make the right decision.

She feels we still need to have a study done and instead just went for a vote. We never addressed what the chief said he needed. Just because you voted on it doesn't make it right. We never responded to what he suggested that we needed to see what we were looking at. We never ever addressed that. Chief Biechy said he has spent no money on design because he wasn't sure what was going to happen to his station. He has a hard

time spending money when he isn't sure of what council will decide to do. Now that a vote has been made on what his department is going to do he will now move forward with getting cost and spending the money because he now knows the directions council wants for his station. Councilor Torok said she will stand by her vote now and rescind her motion. Nicole asked for clarification of that statement. Helen said she is still in favor of expanding to the north. Councilor Flickinger then rescinded his second to that motion.

Nicole then asked for any other questions or concerns. There were none. She told them they are now at 2.7 mills. She asked what their bottom line was. You need about \$220,000 to balance the budget. There is also an option for a second budget meeting. Council said take the \$50,000 for the police station down to \$25,000. Nicole said that takes us to 2.4 mills. She will have to cut things from the budget to get to council's bottom line but needs to know what that is. We can change the splits on our insurances so less is coming out of the General Fund and more is coming out of the other funds. So she needs to go over her notes and things to see what else she can cut. She asked if council's bottom line is 1.5 to 2 mills. Her hope was to adopt the proposed budget November 21<sup>st</sup> but if not the latest to adopt is December 7.

Councilors Flickinger/Perry made the motions to go into executive session at 8:20 p.m. and all were in favor with no questions or objections.

Motion to go out of Executive Session

Councilors Rehrig/Flickinger made the motions to go out at 8:43 p.m. and all were in favor.

Action on items from Executive Session

Rescind Motion to hire Dane O'Brien

Councilors Rehrig/McEvoy made the motions to rescind a previously made motion from the October 24, 2016 council meeting to hire Dane O'Brien and all were in favor with no questions or objections.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting

Councilors Rehrig/Flickinger made the motions to adjourn at 8:47 p.m. and all were in favor.

Brenda L. Koons  
Borough Secretary