

**BOROUGH OF NORTHAMPTON  
PUBLIC WORKSHOP MEETING  
OCTOBER 6, 2022**

**CALL TO ORDER:** A Public Workshop Meeting of the Northampton Borough Council was called to order by President Anthony Lopsonzski, Jr. at 7:00 PM on Thursday, October 6, 2022. The meeting was held in Borough Council Chambers and began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL:** Council Members present at roll call were: President Anthony Lopsonzski, Jr., Vice President Julia Kutzler, Anthony Lopsonzski, Sr., Kenneth Hall, Judith Haldeman, Bonnie Almond, Trevor Stone, Ronald Glassic and junior councilperson Ryleigh Tillotson. Also present were Solicitor Brian Panella, Mayor Anthony Pristash, Borough Manager LeRoy Brobst, Assistant to the Borough Manager Brian Welsko, Police Chief Bryan Kadingo and Recording Secretary, Meaghan Case

**HEARING OF PERSONS PRESENT:**

**Robert James, 1960 Northampton Avenue, Northampton,** was present because he heard about the possibility of a new tax for the fire department. He suggested that the money from this proposed fire tax be put into a separate account, separate from the general fund. He also stated that any borough or municipality's first concern should be public safety. He realizes it may have to be used for something else, such as an emergency. He also suggested that the millage rate be checked regularly at least every two years.

Mr. Brobst explained that the money would be separately accounted for. He stated that the fire tax money can only be used for fire department apparatus and major equipment. The state law regulating uses are extremely strict.

**Paul Pugielli, Brown & Brown Insurance Company,** was in attendance to present the borough with a dividend check in the amount of \$47,732 for our worker's compensation insurance. He's been handling the borough's insurance for over 20 years and is always happy to give money back.

**Keith Knoblach, Fire Chief for Northampton Borough**, was present to talk about the fire tax being presented on the agenda. He wanted to explain the reason for it and also the vision for the future of the fire department. The tax money would be used only for fire apparatus. The cost for a fire truck is very expensive and the costs are continuing to rise. He is proposing a one mill tax which would generate approximately \$200,000 per year. The apparatus they currently have are good, however, they will need to eventually be replaced to be in compliance with NFPA requirements. This tax would allow them to prepare for future needs. The money would be in a borough account and monitored by the borough manager and treasurer. Any plans of purchasing new apparatus would be a request as an agenda item or a budget item request. Any purchase made would have to be done with a borough purchase order.

Councilman Lopsonski, Sr. asked if this would require a special committee.

Keith said he does not think this would require a special committee. The borough manager, the assistant to the borough manager and the borough treasurer would have full access to see the account and monitor all transactions. Within the fire department, they have an apparatus committee that would discuss and decide the best possible option for the department when purchasing a new apparatus.

Councilman Glassic asked Keith to please explain why the one mill tax would be sufficient for future needs.

Keith explained that with a one mill tax it would generate approximately \$200,000 per year. The cost for a new fire truck is approximately \$900,000, with a build time of 25 months. By the time a truck would be ready for purchase, they would already have roughly \$400,000 to put towards the purchase of a truck. If they would finance the remaining \$500,000, they could pay back \$200,000 per year on the loan, paying the truck off in less than three years as opposed to paying off a 15-year loan.

Councilman Glassic added that a financial institution would give that loan without hesitation knowing that tax money is there to quickly pay it off.

Councilwoman Haldeman asked Keith to explain the standards set by NFPA (National Fire Protection Association).

Keith explained that NFPA sets the standard at about 20 years, which means that is what they set as the “shelf life” of a fire apparatus. After 20 years, they would have to be replaced. ISO rate evaluates the quality of public fire protection, specifically fire hydrants and pumps. In our borough we have to maintain a three-fire pump minimum. The next truck they are looking at will replace the rescue truck and the engine truck, with one truck which reduces the fleet by one vehicle and will also save on insurance costs.

Councilwoman Almond stressed the importance of funding our emergency services and fire department. She said within the next 8-10 years they could possibly be regional and we want

to keep them right here in our borough. She added that if she had a fire at her home, she is happy to know that our local fire department would be there within minutes as opposed to waiting how long for a response if these departments were moved outside of the borough.

Councilwoman Kutzler thanked Keith and the members of the fire department for creating a 30-minute slideshow explaining the need for a fire tax. She is in favor of implementing a fire tax. She said she recently read in the paper that the Borough of Bath is including a .5 mill fire tax in their 2023 budget and East Allen Township also has a fire hydrant tax. She said other boroughs and municipalities already have this tax in place and it's working for them. We are one of the slower boroughs to implement this. She said Keith did a great job.

**Mark Laub, President and driver for Northampton Fire Department**, was present to give his point of view from a driver's standpoint. He wants to know that what he driving is reliable, safe and state of the art. He is happy to know that we would have a replacement plan in place and the funds to purchase apparatus when necessary. He thanked borough council for their time and consideration of a fire tax that will greatly benefit the fire department and borough residents.

Councilman Hall asked Mark to share with council the recent grants he has applied for, for the fire department. Mark Laub explained that he applied for the LSA grant (Local Share Account), the AFG (Assistance to Firefighters Grant) which is a federal grant they apply for every year. He reminded everyone that grants are not guaranteed money. The LSA grant has a \$100 application fee and the AFG grant requires a 5% match. They received \$100,000 but will have to pay about \$4,900. He also applied for a County grant to replace the digital sign in front of the fire department. They also received a grant for about \$104,000 to replace the garage doors.

Councilman Glassic asked if this fire tax would affect him in applying for grants. The fire tax would not hurt the fire department in applying for future grants.

Vice President Kutzler thanked Mark Laub and his entire family for their service to the borough. She thanked and commended him for his grant writing efforts.

Councilman Lopsonzski, Sr. asked if the fire department had a standing list of every apparatus with their acquired dates and expected replacements dates. Keith Knoblach said that there is an apparatus report in their annual report. He could create a spreadsheet with the specifics on each apparatus with a 40-year projection so they can clearly see what to expect short and long term.

Councilman Hall mentioned that there was only one piece that he remembers that fell extremely short of it's expected life. Keith said yes, the 2009 KME ladder truck. He said unfortunately the truck was a lemon from the beginning and they eventually had to replace it well before they expected.

**OPENING OF BIDS FOR FIRE STATION GARAGE DOORS:**

The fire department had applied for a grant to replace the bay doors at the fire station and was successful. We have advertised for sealed bids for this project and they will be opened at this time.

**Motion:** A motion was made by Councilman Lopsonzski, duly seconded by Councilman Hall and unanimously carried to close the bids for fire station garage doors.

**Motion:** A motion was made by Councilman Lopsonzski, duly seconded by Councilman Glassic and unanimously carried to accept the bid by Hendershot Door Systems, Inc. in the amount of \$129,970, pending Solicitor review and approval.

The fire department received a grant for \$101,400. Mr. Brobst added that these garage doors are necessary and need to be replaced. The borough would be responsible to pay \$28,570 for a \$130,000 project. That is a pretty good deal.

**CONSIDER REQUEST OF NORTHAMPTON EXCHANGE CLUB:**

The Northampton Exchange Club is proposing the construction of a building to be used as a food stand in the municipal park. This would be done in coordination with the Borough. They are asking Council's permission to explore the possibility.

**Motion:** A motion was made by Councilman Glassic, duly seconded by Councilman Hall and unanimously carried to allow the Northampton Exchange Club to explore the possibility of constructing a building to be used as a food stand in the municipal park.

Councilwoman Almond and Councilman Stone asked what their plan is, what is their vision? Do they have days, time of year, seasonal?

President Anthony Lopsonzski, Jr. said they are just looking for the nod to explore the possibility. They do not have anything definitive as of yet and they are looking for council approval to accept the idea. There will be a later meeting to discuss the specifics of the project.

Councilwoman Haldeman asked if they are looking into possibly contributing something to the borough, would they consider contributing to the parks that need help. She would rather see something that could be used by our residents year round as opposed to something for a short period of time.

Councilman Glassic said that he wishes more organizations would step up and offer more of these donation type projects to the borough.

Mr. Brobst said that they are just looking for an opportunity to speak with council about ideas and are looking for council's cooperation to do so. He said we should hear what they have to say.

**CONSIDER RESIGNATION OF PART-TIME POLICE OFFICER:**

Chief Bryan Kadingo has received a letter informing him of the resignation of part-time officer Michelle Pagan. She has been offered and accepted a full-time position with Palmer Township Police Department. Council needs to accept her resignation.

**Motion:** A motion was made by Councilman Glassic, duly seconded by Councilman Stone and unanimously carried to accept the resignation of part-time police officer Michelle Pagan.

Councilwoman Kutzler asked how long she was employed with the borough. Chief Kadingo said her employment was under one year. Councilwoman Kutzler said we lost her to a good department, Palmer Township.

**CONSIDER REQUEST FOR HANDICAPPED PARKING ZONE:**

We have received a request to prepare a handicapped parking space in the area of 1615 Newport Avenue. Chief Kadingo has reviewed the request and has recommended approval.

**Motion:** A motion was made by Councilman Glassic, duly seconded by Councilman Lopsonzski, Sr. and unanimously carried to approve a handicapped parking space in the area of 1615 Newport Avenue.

**CONSIDER IMPLEMENTATION OF A FIRE TAX:**

At the last Council meeting, discussion arose regarding creation of a fire tax. In the meantime, the solicitor has prepared and offered his opinion to Council. However, the final decision rests with Council.

**Motion:** A motion was made by Councilwoman Almond, duly seconded by Councilwoman Kutzler to implement a one mill fire tax effective January 2023.

Councilman Lopsonzski, Sr. questioned calling it a fire tax, but instead referring to it as a fire service fee. He said when it's labeled as a tax that it can't be raised or lowered.

Solicitor Panella corrected him and said it can be raised or lowered by ordinance.

President Lopsonzski, Jr. said he did not have the opportunity to have Mr. Ed Pany as a teacher in school but he worked beside him for many years on council and learned some things from him. He said this is no disrespect for the fire department or what they do but just principle. He said we are creating a tax that does currently exist. If you look at the news, you hear things such as historic inflation which is over 9.2% in the last year. He understands the concept of what the fire department is trying to accomplish, but is completely against it because it is something that we are adding that is not currently in place. He said of the ten thousand residents in the borough, approximately 28% of them are over 65 and on a fixed income. He said it could open a can of worms such as the police department, recreation center and public works department all asking for a potential tax. He said once a tax is in place, it's stays there. He asked Mr. Brobst to the best of his knowledge, when the last time was that we lowered a tax. Mr. Brobst answered, never. He said we have a general fund that is used for the needs of the entire borough. If things are needed, it should come out of the general fund.

Councilman Glassic said that he appreciated President Lopsonzski's transparency but there are some items that need to be earmarked such as fire apparatus. He thinks this is a good thing moving forward in the right direction, being prepared if and when they need it. He believes there are other things that should also be earmarked as well for bigger ticket items. There may be a possibility that in a few years from now we may review this and may be able to lower the tax to .5 mill.

Vice President Kutzler stated that when the donation mailers went out for the fire department, of our almost 12,000 residents, only 30% made a donation to the fire department. She is guessing that those 30% are like herself who have been longtime residents of the borough. She has been here over 50 years, yet she was told by Mr. Pany that she's not from here. She wants to know at what point does she get to come "from here".

She said there are 520 rental properties in the borough, not total units, that are owned by multiple corporations. When the property owners/tenants receive the mailers, they trash it. They don't contribute to our borough. Only 21% of borough residents contributed to NREMS. She said we need to keep our fire department and emergency services here in the borough. She said we are stuck in the 80's and we need to move

forward. She referenced on the agenda, the proposal for 15 efficiency apartments going in at 1204 Main Street, the old VFW building. She asked if those people were going to contribute to our fire department, police department and emergency services. She said they will not. She added that for her household it would cost her about \$45 per year. She is extremely passionate about all of the emergency service departments in the borough.

Mayor Pristash stated that his number one priority as Mayor is public safety. He has a great amount of respect for the fire department and what they do. He said they have the best and brightest equipment around and maintaining this equipment has never warranted a fire tax. He said there are so many people struggling right now and not the time to create a tax. He was on council for 10 years and has always been an advocate for them to get what they wanted, needed and deserved. He doesn't see that changing. They will continue to get what they need. He said people seem to think that if this tax isn't passed, the fire department will not be funded or will be in financial trouble and that is not the case. He commented on the Pierce fire truck the fire department purchased a few years ago and were able to get a loan with a great interest rate from a bank in Kansas. The fire department hasn't gone without what they need. There are so many people struggling and \$45 means a lot to some. He doesn't want it to look like our council and fire department is tone deaf and heartless to people in this town. He hopes this will not change any friendships. He would have liked to talk about this with all of the members of the fire department. He knows this tax is going to pass but would like to see it put on hold because the fire department can and will still get what they need. They have the full support of council. He added that the fire department provides exemplary services in this borough, no one is disputing that. He believes the tax has merit but can still be put on hold, especially during these times, at the brink of a recession.

President Lopsonzski, Jr. voted against this motion. The motion passed.

### **REPORT FROM COMMITTEES:**

**Administration and Finance:** Councilman Hall reported that we have received the 2021 Financial Compilation Report from the Northampton Regional Emergency Medical Services. Only one detailed financial report was received and it was addressed to Council President Anthony Lopsonzski, Jr.

--A monetary contribution in memory of Lester Reimer was received on behalf of the Atlas Cement Company Memorial Museum. The Mid-Atlantic Region Vintage Motor

Car Club toured the museum and then proceeded to be included in the pictures that were being taken along the D&L Trail in the Canal Park.

--Mr. Brobst is going to begin scheduling budget meetings with the department head and the chairman of the appropriate committee. These will take place beginning the week of October 17, 2022.

--Just a reminder: the next Council meeting will be at 7 PM on Wednesday, October 19, 2022.

**Building, Land and Recreation:** Councilwoman Haldeman reported that the recreation center will sponsor a cheerleading demonstration showcasing the various cheering squads of the NAA. This will begin at 6 PM on Saturday, October 15, 2022.

--Mr. Brobst has scheduled two bands for the Jack Frost Parade and is still waiting for Council's response to participate as a group and ride in the parade. Remember: no is a response.

--On Monday, September 26, 2022, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held in North Catasauqua to memorialize the opening of the D&L Trail between North Catasauqua and Northampton. Mayor Pristash offered appropriate remarks. The event was well attended by local dignitaries.

**Code and Police:** Councilman Stone reported that the Planning Commission will meet on Wednesday, October 12, 2022, at 7 PM, to hear the presentation of First Northampton LLC for preliminary and possible final plan review. First Northampton LLC would like to redevelop 1204 Main Street (the old VFW building) into 15 efficiency apartments.

--The Zoning Hearing Board will meet on Thursday, October 13, 2022, at 7 PM, to consider the appeal of Brandon Cenchitz for property located at 44 West 4th Street. Mr. Cenchitz is seeking a variance from the section of the ordinance regarding nonconforming uses and buildings.

--It should be noted that Mr. Brobst will be on vacation from October 11, 2022, through October 14, 2022. However, he has made arrangements with Brian Welsko to attend both meetings.

**Fire and Health:** Councilwoman Kutzler reported that we have been notified by the PA Auditor General that the Firemen's Relief allocation was deposited on September 21, 2022. This amount was \$58,967.96. This will be transferred to the fire department's Firemen's Relief account and will be available for use.

--The fire department applied for and received a grant for \$100,000 from Assistance to Fire Fighters' Grant Program to install a vehicle exhaust system in the fire station. A big thanks to Mark Laub for his efforts in securing grants for the fire department.

--The fire department hosted a contingent of members of the Hyde Park Fire Department in New York. They are applying for a grant to obtain a Tom Car and came to see ours and confer on the application process.

--On Friday, September 30, 2022, the fire department responded to a call at the police station. Apparently, there was an issue with wiring that may have caused slight damage to a wooden rafter. The situation was quickly addressed, the firemen taped the wire and all returned to normal. Special thanks to our fire department and surrounding community fire departments.

**Public Works and Sewer:** Councilman Glassic reported that we are in receipt of a letter dated September 20, 2022, from the Department of Environmental Protection updating Allen Township and the Borough on the progress of their review of the Act 537 Plan. They have allowed themselves an extension of 60 days because they were unable to complete the review according to their own timeline.

--The water company experienced a major water leak on Hollow Lane. Borough crews have been assisting them. However, they discovered that the soil in the area was corrosive and caused the valve bolts to fail. While in the area, they decided to replace two other valves, one of which had already developed a slow leak.

### **REPORT FROM COUNCIL MEMBERS:**

**Kenneth Hall** said that he received another complaint from Dennis Haas that 26<sup>th</sup> Street is being used as a major cut through and vehicles are flying up and down the street.

Chief Kadingo said he had Officer Torres in that area but needs a more specific time during the day Mr. Haas is seeing this happen.

--He asked everyone to spread the word not to blow leaves into the street. He said we do not have trucks that pick up leaves in the street.

**Trevor Stone** said that he agrees with Councilwoman Kutzler in respect to only a small amount of residents contributing to the fire department and EMS. That is a big problem.

--He said it's laughable that DEP gave themselves a 60-day extension for review of our Act 537 Plan.

**Judith Haldeman** said that she would be attending the Northampton County Festival on

October 8<sup>th</sup> and both Mr. Brobst and myself received an “outstanding municipality award”.

--She said that the 60-day extension that DEP gave themselves for review of our Act 537 Plan is shameful. She said it is very important and we need it done.

--She hopes to be able to hand out candy while walking in the parade.

--She asked about the Verizon pole at 22<sup>nd</sup> and West Alley that needs to be removed. Both Verizon and PP&L have been notified. PP&L’s lines must be removed before Verizon can take the pole down.

--She was happy to hear budget meetings are being scheduled with department heads. She still would like to have a meeting about the pool with Andrew Laub in attendance.

**Mayor Pristash** congratulated the fire department on the passing of the fire tax. He appreciates what the fire department does for the borough.

--He said that the ribbon cutting for the D&L trail was well attended. He hopes to do a Mayor’s bike run in the future.

--He said the first round of the Hometown Heroes banners will be up and ready for Veteran’s Day.

**Solicitor Panella** stated that an ordinance for the fire tax will be prepared for the next meeting agenda.

**Ryleigh Tillotson** said that she worked with Reverend Mraz at the street fair. He had a monarch butterfly waystation set up and information on monarch butterflies. She had students join her from the National Honor Society to hand out fliers about monarch butterfly endangerment. She enjoyed it and had a great time. She was also able to get almost four pages of contact information for individuals who would like to help with the beautification of our parks and garden/flower areas throughout the borough.

**Bonnie Almond** said asked if there was any update about a resident in the 30<sup>th</sup> Street area parking commercial vehicles on the street.

**Julia Kutzler** reviewed the fire police reports for September. She said the fire police is losing three valuable volunteers and will be hard to replace.

--She mentioned an upcoming Planning Commission meeting on October 12<sup>th</sup> to give preliminary approval for 15 efficiency apartments in the old VFW building.

--She is thankful for meetings with the fire department members and is looking forward to the meeting on November 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:00PM.

--She knows there is never a good time for a tax but unfortunately sometimes it’s necessary.

**Ronald Glassic** gave kudos to the fire department, thanked them for their service and for attending the meeting about the fire tax.

--He appreciates the transparency of President Lopsonzski, Jr., Mayor Pristash and all council members about the fire tax. He said it's not easy sitting up in their seats. There is never a good time for a tax but sometimes things are needed.

--He had a chance to meet with Assistant to the Borough Manager, Brian Welsko. He appreciates his thoughts about the farmer's market, parks and the possibility of disc golf at Canal Street. He asked Brian for an update about livestreaming. Brian has received one quote and a second company is expected to give another quote within the next week.

--He thanked Chief Kadingo and gave him kudos for an outstanding budget report and asked if he could have a copy of their 5-year plan report.

--He asked Mr. Brobst for an update on the Community Center roof. Mr. Brobst has arranged for a company to take care of the immediate problems and they will have to evaluate further repairs in the near future. Mr. Glassic said he attended a yard sale at the Community Center and said it was embarrassing to see water coming in at certain areas in the building. He thanked Mr. Brobst for scheduling a meeting with community center board members and getting the repair work scheduled.

--He gave kudos to the Mayor for his work on the Hometown Heroes banners. He would like Brian Welsko to get the word out promoting the banners so we can honor all of the veterans.

--He thanked Mark Laub for his dedication and work on writing grants for the fire department.

--He will be out of town for the parade.

--He mentioned the open house at the fire department on October 12<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> and encouraged all to attend.

--He asked about the update on upgrading to LED lights. Mr. Brobst said he has not received any further information from Christa at PP&L. Mr. Glassic offered his assistance to reach out to PP&L to get this project done.

**Anthony Lopsonzski, Sr.** said that he has very black thoughts about 15 apartments going into the old VFW building. He does not like the idea at all.

--He mentioned people blowing their grass into the street. He said DEP has banned that because of the damage it causes and problems it creates in the sewer system.

--He said he was proud of DEP for giving themselves a 60-day extension to review our Act 537 Plan. He said when we were working on our MS4 project, we weren't given any extensions and were expected to meet the deadline.

--He will be riding along in the parade.

--He offered his assistance with cutting down the pole at 22<sup>nd</sup> Street and West Alley.

--He said there were two number 8's on the agenda. Mr. Brobst will pass it on to Barbara and let her know.

Vice President Kutzler said she can't ride in the parade because she is going to be the Sweet Potato Queen on a float. Mr. Brobst said, bless your heart.

Councilman Hall mentioned that North Catasauqua will need our fire police assistance for their parade.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

He received a press release from the D&L National Heritage Corridor about the trail connection between the borough and North Catasauqua.

--He said that he and myself were nominated to receive awards at the Northampton County Festival on October 8<sup>th</sup>. He thanked everyone for our nominations and said we will do our best to represent the borough.

**APPROVAL OF BILLS:**

**Motion:** Councilman Lopsonzski, Sr. moved, seconded by Councilwoman Stone and unanimously carried to pay the bills listed on A/P Journal #9B dated September 29, 2022 totaling \$152,445.27 and A/P Journal #10 dated October 6, 2022 totaling \$288,189.52.

**ADJOURNMENT:** A motion was made by Councilman Hall, duly seconded by Councilwoman Almond and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:41 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Meaghan Case  
Recording Secretary