

**MINUTES
HAZLETON CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2024**

Call to Order: Council met in a Regular Meeting session on Tuesday, December 3, 2024 in Council Chambers. The meeting was called to order at 6:09 p.m.

Silent Meditation and Pledge of Allegiance: A silent moment was taken followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: Bruno-present; Colombo-present; Nilles-present; Ondishin-present; Perry-absent

Minutes of Previous Meetings: The minutes of the November 12, 2024 Regular Meeting were approved unanimously.

Presentations/Proclamations/Communications: None

Bid Opening: None

Courtesy of the Floor (ON AGENDA ITEMS ONLY): Dee Deakos, 43 Mine Street, Hazleton, spoke of the City budget. She said Mayor Cusat receives a longevity payment, but City Council members do not receive this. Also, Deakos said there was a “massive” increase for Mayor Cusat’s health insurance for 2025.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:

ORDINANCES:

(1ST READING)

BUDGET ORDINANCE 2024-22

An Ordinance Providing for the Appropriation of Specific Amounts Estimated as Required for the Various Departments of the Government of the City of Hazleton, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania for and during the Fiscal Year, dating from January 1, 2025 and Ending December 31, 2025 **(1st READING)**

Presented by Ondishin. Seconded by Nilles.

On the Question:

Lynch stated the “nature” of what City residents are paying in taxes and what they are paying it for has changed over the past several years. He stated the City EIT 205 tax was reduced, in 2023, by half, at .625% for working City residents. Lynch said the total EIT tax a household would pay, in 2024, is \$562.50. The total in taxes, in EIT and real estate a City household would pay, in 2024, if the tax increase is passed in this budget, is \$1,302.05, about \$19.00 less than a household paid in 2018. He said real estate tax is the only “reliable” revenue source City Council could “tap” into to increase revenues.

Lynch stated the City took a Cop’s grant several years ago which has ended, and needs to fund four City of Hazleton Police Officers. Also, the City took an early HCA payment agreement of \$470,000 in 2018. He said the City throughout the ACT 47 Plan has brought in the lower tax increases.

Ondishin said he is “all” for progress in the City. He said Luzerne County and the Hazleton Area School District has increased their tax rates, also. He said City Council members have more to discuss in the City budget.

Roll Call: Bruno-yes; Colombo-no; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-absent

ORDINANCE PASSES 3-1-0 ON 1st READING

Ordinance 2024-23

An Ordinance of the City of Hazleton Fixing the Tax Rate of Real Estate Located in the City of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, for All City Purposes for the Fiscal Year 2025, Beginning January 1, 2025 and Ending December 31, 2025 (**1st READING**)

Presented by Nilles. Seconded by Ondishin.

On the Question:

Ondishin asked Lynch to explain to the City residents the value of one mill. Lynch said one mill is equal to 1/1000 of the value of a home.

Roll Call: Bruno-yes; Colombo-no; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-absent

ORDINANCE PASSES 3-1-0 ON 1st READING

Ordinance 2024-24

Reenacting the Code of Ordinances of the City of Hazleton, Part II, Chapter 490, Taxation, Article IV Earned Income and New Profits Tax (**1st READING**)

Presented by Colombo. Seconded by Nilles.

Roll Call: Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-absent

ORDINANCE PASSES 4-0 ON 1st READING

Ordinance 2024-25

Re-Enacting Ordinance 2021-24 which Continues in Force and Effect for the Period January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025, Imposing the Payroll Preparation Tax for the City of Hazleton (**1st READING**)

Presented by Ondishin. Seconded by Colombo.

Roll Call: Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-absent

ORDINANCE PASSES 4-0 ON 1st READING

Ordinance 2024-26

Re-Enacting Ordinance 1931 which Continues in Force and Effect for the Period January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025, Imposing the Real Estate Transfer Tax (**1st READING**)

Presented by Nilles. Seconded by Bruno.

Roll Call: Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-absent

ORDINANCE PASSES 4-0 ON 1st READING

(2ND READINGS)

Ordinance 2024-17

An Ordinance Authorizing the Vacation of a Portion of an Unnamed "Paper Street" Between Branch Court and Lincoln Street in the City of Hazleton (**2nd READING**)

NO MOTION TO REMOVE FROM TABLE- ORDINANCE DIES

Ordinance 2024-19

An Ordinance Authorizing the Vacation of a Portion of an Unnamed "Paper Street" located to the north and to the rear of the Properties on Lahm Avenue and off of Mill Street in the City of Hazleton (**2nd READING**)

NO MOTION TO REMOVE FROM TABLE- ORDINANCE DIES

Ordinance 2024-21

An Ordinance Amending the Code of the City of Hazleton to Reconcile and Incorporate the Pensions (**FIRE, POLICE AND NON-UNIFORM**) Pursuant to Ordinance NO. 2022-3, SECTION 1-10) (**1st READING**)

PRESENTED BY NILLES. SECONDED BY BRUNO.

MOTION TO TABLE:

Roll Call: Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-absent

ORDINANCE TABLED 4-0

RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution 2024-56

A Resolution Awarding the SR 0924 (15th Street) and Alter Street Traffic Signal Upgrade Project

Presented by Nilles. Seconded by Colombo.

Roll Call: Bruno=yes; Colombo=yes; Nilles=yes; Ondishin=yes; Perry-absent

RESOLUTION PASSES 4-0

Resolution 2024- 57

Modifying Consolidated Plan for CDBG Program Fiscal Year 2021-2022-2023-2024

Presented by Nilles. Seconded by Ondishin.

On the Question:

Atty. Logsdon stated Joe Zeller had “sent” this over to get on the agenda. He said this is for the Community Block Grant program. Mayor Cusat said there was some demolition money moved for a façade and street scape for Wyoming Street. Atty. Logsdon said the street hockey and public façade improvements money would be taken from 2021. He stated the clearance and administration was closed, and moved to the public façade and street hockey rink improvements for a total of \$14,882.68. He said the clearance scatter spot site is under “Demolition” and being moved to façade improvements and street scape for Wyoming Street. Nilles asked what demolition will be done with the money. Mayor Cusat stated when the City did the budgets, several years ago, the City was looking to knock down some buildings and do the work the City Land Bank, currently, does now. The City will try to do some projects themselves, hopefully, getting funding from PENN DOT and the two intermodal grants in the future.

Roll Call: Bruno=yes; Colombo=yes; Nilles=yes; Ondishin=yes; Perry-absent

RESOLUTION PASSES 4-0

Resolution 2024-58

Approval of Settlement Agreement and Release of Claims
Regarding Litigation Involving DeLuca's Auto Repair, Inc., Docket
Number 2019-05907

Presented by Nilles. Seconded by Bruno.

On the Question:

Atty. Logsdon stated there was litigation instituted back in 2019 by DeLuca's Auto Repair. He said this is being handled with the City's insurance company and the insurance company wishes to settle the matter with DeLuca's Auto Repair.

Roll Call: Bruno=yes; Colombo=yes; Nilles=yes; Ondishin=yes; Perry-absent

RESOLUTION PASSES 4-0

New Business: None.

Old Business: Nilles asked why there are parking sticks at the corner of 5th Street by the crosswalk, by the school. Mayor Cusat said the City is using the parking sticks, basically, for safety. He said the locations chosen, by the City, are to protect the students and fire hydrants. Bruno and Nilles stated there needs to be a parking stick near the Hazleton Post Office.

Nilles stated Kuharchik Construction has not cleaned up their debris on the old St. Joseph Hospital site. He said they need to remove their concrete and wood from the property.

Nilles stated there is a new street light pole being installed on 15th & Alter Streets.

Comments from the Audience: Dee Deakos, 43 Mine Street, Hazleton, stated the City did not open another City contract before City Council members. She said City Council is supposed to be opening these contracts.

Deakos said not all intersection buttons are working on Broad Street. She said a City worker should check these every couple months. She said at the intersection of Broad Street and Cedar Street, drivers are turning on the red light, and the green light is placed a small intersection at Poplar Street. Deakos said PENN DOT needs to address this issue.

Atty. Logsdon said the City has been using an on-line service, Municibid, and contracts get awarded, and are publicly advertised. He said the engineers are opening the bids during the day to save some money.

Comments from Mayor: Mayor Cusat said with the new Junior Council Members, he explained what “on the table” means. He state items that cannot be discussed, at a City Council Meeting, are personnel issues, contracts that are not signed, and lawsuits.

Mayor Cusat stated no one wants to see taxes raised. He said, in 2015, there were several items “kicked” down the street, but now, in 2025, are “hitting the wall”. There was a pre-payment the City took from HCA and the City was able not to raise taxes. He said, currently, there is a “hole” in the budget. He said the 2018 loan came to “fruition”, now, with a balloon payment at the end. He said after 2025, the City will be free of any debt-free of interest-bearing loans. He stated the Cops grant, for \$4000,000, has, also, left a “hole” in the budget. Nilles asked Mayor Cusat how many cops were included in this grant. Mayor Cusat said four police officers. Ondishin asked how many police officers there are, currently, on the force. Police Chief stated there are 49 police officers, with 2 officers retiring in January, 2025.

Mayor Cusat said the City Hall Christmas Tree lighting event will be held on December 5th, 2024. He said Santa Claus is flying into Hazleton Municipal Airport. Also, there is a Christmas Event on December 6th, 2024 at CAN DO Park.

Mayor Cusat said the City received a donation to have New Year’s Eve fireworks at City View Park.

Mayor Cusat said the Muppet Movie will be shown on December 8th at City View Park. Also, on December 15th is the Live Nativity Event, and on the 22nd, the City will host Clydesdale carriage rides on Wyoming and Laurel Streets.

Mayor Cusat said “Hazleton for the Holidays.com” has all upcoming holiday events listed.

Mayor Cusat said Wassail Fest will be held on December 6th. He said there will be 30 vendors at the event.

Comments from City Administrator: Lynch said he likes talking to people regarding the City budget. He reminded all to file their local tax returns.

Comments from Junior Council: None

Comments from Council: Colombo stated there were meals served to 1,500 families by City Council and St. Gabriel’s Church for Thanksgiving. He said they will have another food distribution for Christmas.

Bruno asked why the City DPW Department plows the snow onto the sidewalks.

Ondishin stated the City needs fire police to direct traffic at accidents. Fire Chief Leshko said there is a training program offered. He said if there are enough people interested, he could hold the class at City Hall. He said EMS, also, need people. Ondishin said they need volunteer firefighters.

Ondishin congratulated Mayor Cusat for all the events at City View Park in 2024. Mayor Cusat said the park is almost booked for 2025.

Adjournment: Ondishin motioned to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 7:06 p.m.