

**MINUTES  
HAZLETON CITY COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
TUESDAY, JULY 9, 2024**

**Call to Order:** Council met in a Regular Meeting session on Tuesday, July 9, 2024 in Council Chambers. The meeting was called to order at 6:12 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-present

**Minutes of Previous Meetings:** The minutes of the June 11, 2024 Regular Meeting were approved unanimously.

**Presentations/Proclamations/Communications:** Ryan Hottenstein, Senior Vice-President of Financial Solutions, discussed the City of Hazleton's request for a bond for general purposes.

Hottenstein stated he works for FSL Public Finance, and they are engaged as the City's financial advisor on issuance of debt and monitoring their existing debt portfolio.

Hottenstein reviewed the FSL Public Finance City of Hazleton's Outstanding Debt Portfolio. He said they provide financial advice to the City for any budget or capital needs related to debt service. It may be a bank loan or bond issue and works with City Administration and City Council.

**The City's Debt Portfolio-** Currently, the City has three pieces of outstanding debt:

- 1.** 2017 DCED Loan with current outstanding balance of \$255,000
- 2.** General Obligation Note with current outstanding balance of \$689,00
- 3.** General Obligation Note with current outstanding balance of \$1,904,000

The average interest rate is 3.95%. He stated the City's portfolio is very well managed and reasonable for the City's size.

Hottenstein reviewed the MMD (tax-exempt rate) 10-year interest rate for the past two years. He said the current rate is 2.85%.

Perry asked how the City's current audits "meet" the borrowing issue. Hottenstein said his company needs the City's financial audits to show the banks.

Lynch stated the City's new auditor, HFA, out of Red Bank, New Jersey, are working at a quicker pace. He said HFA is working on the 2023 audit and should be completed by December, 2024. He said HFA should be "caught up" by the end of the year. S&B, the City's previous auditor, was working off an 8-year-old bid.

Perry asked why the City is behind in the City's audit. Lynch said, according to the City Code, City Council is responsible for hiring the City auditor. He said when Lynch started working for the City, the City was already behind in their audits. He, also, stated there were "honest" issues discovered in the Community Development office and an outside auditor was brought in to help. Lynch said the City is now

on the “right path”. Lynch said Atty. Logsdon will be working with City Council, on an RFP for the City’s auditor, at the end of the year.

Hottenstein said the bond market is cheaper than a bank loan. He stated the City would be able to access the bond market and “go” to a rating agency. He said the need for capital investments never ends for cities.

Mayor Cusat said the City was looking to borrow \$10,000,000. He stated he received an estimate for paving the entire Northside of the City to be \$8,000,000. Mayor Cusat said he would like to replace some 1990’s trucks in the DPW Department. He said this would cost about \$2,000,000. Perry asked how many miles of paving would be done. Mayor Cusat said the entire section from Diamond Ave. to 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, from Boundary to Thompson Street. He said this includes milling and paving. Mayor Cusat said the one City loan is coming from the Liquid Fuels account.

Hottenstein reviewed the FSL Public Finance Projected Outstanding Net Debt Service breakdown. He said this would be a 20-year loan. He said, in 2025, the City would start paying back the loan. Hottenstein stated the City could borrow \$10,000,000 with no budgetary impact from a cash perspective. He said the total debt service would be \$15,200,000.

Nilles asked Hottenstein what the City’s current bond rating is. Hottenstein without the City’s audit, he cannot do a rating.

Mayor Cusat said he would like to put out the City’s paving project bid. He said the City has the paving estimates, with the roads measured and calculated.

Perry asked if City Council needs to give approval for the loan. Atty. Logsdon said this issue is not on the City Council’s agenda for tonight.

Bruno asked what the life span would be for the City’s paved roads. Mayor Cusat said it depends on the traffic on certain City roads. Nilles said it depends on the weather.

**Bid Opening:** None

**Courtesy of the Floor (ON AGENDA ITEMS ONLY):** Ken Zipovsky, 3 El Camino Road, Hazleton, spoke of **Resolution 2024-30**-Approving the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement between the City of Hazleton and Banks Township for Hazleton City Police Assistance in Ordinance and Vehicle Code Enforcement. He said he spoke of this resolution at the last meeting.

Zipovsky stated the June 11, 2024 issue of the Standard Speaker quoted Mayor Cusat as saying, “if approved, the City of Hazleton Police Department would respond on an “as needed” basis. They will call us to scan the area for vehicles that are abandon”. He said there are liability issues and is, still, in opposition to this. He said Banks Township has the capability to apply for an ORI number to run their own registrations.

Charles Schalles, 3 Maple Street, Tresckow, said the original contract was, originally, “blown out of proportion”. He said all Banks Township wants is for the Hazleton Police Department to “run” VIN numbers, and nothing else. He said Banks Township does not want the Hazleton police officers to patrol. He said Banks Township met with Trooper Petroski at the PA State Police barracks, to register for an ORI number but got nowhere. Schalles stated Banks Township needs help.

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**ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:**

**ORDINANCES:**

**(1<sup>ST</sup> READING)**

None

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**(2<sup>ND</sup> AND 3<sup>RD</sup> READINGS)**

**Ordinance 2024-11**

An Ordinance Establishing a Parking by Permit Only Zone on East Diamond Avenue and Cleveland Street **(2<sup>nd</sup> READING)**

**NO MOTION TO REMOVE FROM TABLE- ORDINANCE FAILS**

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**Ordinance 2024-12**

An Ordinance Establishing a Parking by Permit Only Zone on West 6<sup>th</sup> Street **(2<sup>nd</sup> READING)**

**NO MOTION TO REMOVE FROM TABLE- ORDINANCE FAILS**

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**Ordinance 2024-13**

An Ordinance Amending the Code of Ordinances of the City of Hazleton, Part II, Chapter 350, Property Maintenance, Article I, Adoption of Standards **(2<sup>nd</sup> READING)**

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Nilles.

**On the Question:**

Atty. Logsdon requested City Council table this ordinance. He said he has more work to do with the Code Department. He said all the information has to go into the TRACER system. He said it is a "timing "issue.

**MOTION TO TABLE:**

Presented by Nilles. Seconded by Perry.

**Roll Call:** Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

**ORDINANCE TABLED**

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**RESOLUTIONS:**

**Resolution 2024-29**

Resolution Approving the Submission of a Highway Occupancy Permit for the Northpoint Land Development for a Connection to the Hazleton City Stormwater System

Presented by Ondishin. Seconded by Colombo.

**On the Question:**

Atty. Logsdon said Northpoint did their supplemental application with PENN DOT because Northpoint is running a pipe from the basin of the eastern side of a driveway. The Highway Occupancy Permit requires the municipality to be part of this process for inserting anything on a state road. He said the City is just authorizing the application.

**Roll Call:** Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

**RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY**

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**Resolution 2024-30**

Approving the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement between the City of Hazleton and Banks Township for Hazleton City Police Assistance in Ordinance and Vehicle Code Enforcement

**MOTION TO REMOVE FROM TABLE:**

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Ondishin.

**Roll Call:** Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

**MOTION TO REMOVE FROM TABLE PASSES UNANIMOUSLY**

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**On the Question:**

Nilles asked Police Chief Schoonmaker who will run the plates. Schoonmaker stated this will be for parking enforcement for abandoned vehicles. He said the City's parking authority could handle this. He said the Hazleton Police Department will not be enforcing any vehicle code or any DUI's. Colombo asked if the Hazleton police officers go to Banks Township, and there are more calls, as a domestic incident, what would happen. Schoonmaker stated then the PA State Police would handle the situation.

Charles Schalles, Banks Township Supervisor, said all Banks Township wants is for the Hazleton Police Department to help them get abandoned vehicles off their streets. He said Banks Township is willing to pay for any overtime for police officers or a City worker.

Schoonmaker said he has no issue with helping Banks Township.

**Roll Call:** Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

**RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY**

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**Resolution 2024-31**

Resolution Certifying the Local Match for State  
Operating Financial Assistance for Fiscal Year 2024/2025

Presented by Nilles. Seconded by Ondishin.

**Roll Call:** Bruno-yes; Colombo-yes; Nilles-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

**RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY**

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**New Business:** None

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**Old Business:** None

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**Comments from the Audience:** Carmen Longo, 200 West Kiefer Ave., Hazleton, spoke of West Court Playground. He asked why the playground still is not closed with presenting City Council the marijuana and alcohol used there. Schoonmaker stated Lieutenant Gallagher will discuss this, ongoing, issue with Longo.

Manuel Nieves, 554 South Cedar Street, Hazleton, lives next to the West Court Playground. He said he has no parking, in front of his house, for his visitors. Nieves said kids are urinating on the road. He said the kids take over the "entire area" of the playground and use all the parking spots. Schoonmaker said the Hazleton Police Department needs to figure out the parking situation. Atty. Logsdon said the City needs to talk with Frank Stish. Perry stated he spoke with Frank. Stish stated he is trying to do something.

Nieves stated his windshield was broken. He asked who is going to fix his windshield. Mayor Cusat said he needs to find out who hit the ball, and they would be responsible.

Nieves said the park needs to be closed. Lynch said it is a public park and cannot be closed. He said it is public land. Nieves asked for the usage to be changed. Lynch said the rules need to be enforced. Perry stated the police officers will try to enforce the rules at the playground, and work on the parking issue.

Atty. Logsdon said no one is dismissing these concerns. He stated the police department, parking authority and the City's Athletic Director will review this.

Ann Organist, 15 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Hazleton, asked if anyone lives near a playground. She said residents are there "24/7" and deal with these issues on a daily basis. She said most of the kids are very considerate. Perry stated the City is working on remedying the actions at the Altmiller Playground.

Allison Leonard, 107 Franklin Street, Hazleton, said she is here to express her displeasure of 18-year-old children being taken off their parent's health insurance, from the City's retired employees, with less than one month notice. She said the contract that her husband, John, and other affected retirees, retired under, was written in 1996. Leonard said a major issue is when this was communicated to them. She said they were given two weeks' notice. Leonard contacted ETA about their benefits. She stated ETA did not have much information as they found out, at the same time, from the City. She said there was no consideration for the family's current situation. She said her 20-year-old son needs to wait for six months to have his dental oral surgery done.

**Comments from Mayor:** Mayor Cusat said there were five events, at City View Park, in the last 22 days, with no issues. He said about 10,000 people enjoyed the activities there. He said there were no costs, except for any overtime for DPW workers.

Mayor Cusat said any City playground cannot be closed due to any issues at the parks. Perry stated, at West Court Playground, there are too many people there with not enough space. He stated every single

City park has its own complaints. Ondishin suggested getting rid of baseball and replacing it with tennis. Mayor Cusat said everyone wants to play baseball in the City. He said there are not 75 parking spaces at any park in the City, except for City View Park. Perry stated the City cannot put speed bumps around Altmiller Playground.

Mayor Cusat said the City already has performers “lined-up” for 2025’s Rockin’ the Mountain Event.

Mayor Cusat spoke of the Poplar Street parking issue. He said the City reviewed police reports from January 21, 2020 until when the lines were painted on Poplar Street. He said there were 170 reported accidents on Poplar Street. He said since then, there are “0” reported accidents.

Ondishin asked Mayor Cusat if there could be crosswalks painted by Sherrock’s and by St. Mary’s Church. He said it is dangerous for children to cross in these areas. Mayor Cusat said people were parking, illegally, before the lines were painted. He said there is a petition, by City residents, to have parking go back to the way it was. He stated this will never happen.

**Comments from City Administrator:** Lynch stated there are people who use all the City parks in “good faith”. He said this is why the City needs to work within the “framework” to make it work for all.

Lynch stated the new City auditors are “moving along”. He said they are making good progress.

**Comments from Council:** Perry thanked Paul Neyhart for all his loyalty and work as a Junior Council member.

Ondishin congratulated Mayor Cusat on the birth of his baby. He told Organist, “I am still fighting for you”.

Perry asked about the Altamont opening. Mayor Cusat said the owner is waiting for an electrical part for over one year.

Nilles asked about old St. Joseph’s Medical Center. Schoonmaker (*inaudible*).

Colombo stated Dane Watro’s office said the state wants to sell the old White Haven Center. He said this would be a good home for the veteran’s

Colombo said he called 911 regarding fireworks. He said he was put on hold. Nilles said Luzerne County 911 center has only five call takers.

Colombo said behind the bus terminal, on Mine Street, there has been garbage in the alley for months.

Colombo requested a sign to be put up at Sherman Court, between 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> Streets. He said since the alley has been paved, people are speeding in this area.

Colombo said the City is being “overrun” by skunks.

Colombo asked if the City could “re-visit” Resolution 2024-30 - Approving the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement between the City of Hazleton and Banks Township for Hazleton City Police Assistance in Ordinance and Vehicle Code Enforcement in six months to see if this is working out.

Colombo thanked the City Recreation Committee and DPW Department for Rockin’ the Mountain events and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks display.

Colombo reminded all to stay safe, and hydrated, in this heat wave.

Nilles spoke of Pathways to Everyday Life Human Services, Inc., located at 563-565 North Laurel

Street. He asked about their revocation of their license, and asked if all children were moved out of the house. Atty. Logsdon said he needs to get confirmation from the Zoning Department. Bruno lives near the house, and stated, "It is quiet". Mayor Cusat stated the agency will not appeal the decision.

**Perry stated City Council will be having an Executive Session to discuss personnel issues.**

**Adjournment:** Perry motioned to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.