

**MINUTES
HAZLETON CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
TUESDAY, SEPTMBER 26, 2023**

Call to Order: Council met in a Regular Meeting session on Tuesday, September 26, 2023 in Council Chambers and via ZOOM Teleconferencing. The meeting was called to order at 6:20 p.m.

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

Roll Call: Barletta- present; Colombo-present; Mundie-present; Ondishin-present; Perry-present

Minutes of Previous Meetings: The minutes of the September 12, 2023 Regular Meeting were approved unanimously.

Presentations/Proclamations/Communications: Council President Perry announced the dollar amounts of the 2024 Minimum Municipal Obligation (MMO) for each of the four pension plans, as follows:

- ***Police Pension Plan - \$ 2,546,861***
- ***Firemen Pension Plan - \$1,661,832***
- ***Non-Uniformed Pension Plan - \$817,953***
- ***Public Transit-\$0***

Dan Lynch stated this is a marginal increase from the City's 2023 MMO's, about 2-3%. He said the City's Transit Department's MMO is included with the Non-Uniformed Pension Plan. He said this is, probably, due to a "hold over" when this department was separated.

Bid Opening: None

Courtesy of the Floor (ON AGENDA ITEMS ONLY): Kevin Schadder, Assistant President of Heights-Terrace Elementary School and Betsy Durso, Heights Terrace PTA President, spoke of Resolution 2023-61- A Resolution Authorizing the City of Hazleton to apply for a Luzerne County Local Share Account Grant on behalf of the Heights-Terrace Elementary Middle School Parent-Teacher Association.

Mr. Schadder said they did receive funding and continue to fund raise for this project. He stated they raised over \$100,000 and received a LSA grant in 2022. He said they were able to "tone-it down a little", and re-evaluate this project with removing some equipment to come closer to their goal to get their playground started. Schadder said their goal is to start the playground by 2024. He stated, currently, they are \$35,000 short of the funds. Schadder said this second phase of this project would increase more social interaction with the students and include a "pour-in-place" surface which would increase the longevity of their playground. Schadder said their current playground is over 20 years old. Schadder said they, humbly, ask for their support.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:

ORDINANCES:

(1ST READING)

None

(2ND AND 3RD READINGS)

None

RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution 2023-59

A Resolution Requesting Local Share Account Funds for the Dominican House “La Casa Dominicana De Hazleton”

Presented by Perry. Seconded by Barletta.

On the Question:

Perry stated he received information from Dominic Yannuzzi, City Engineer.

Victor Perez, President of the Dominican House, recognized all City Council Members. He said they are working hard for this grant in the community. He thanked all for this opportunity. Perez said they are celebrating their 18-year anniversary. He said the Dominican House received recognition from Washington, D.C.- Senator Casey and Senator Fetterman, Senator Argall, Congressman Matt Cartwright, State Representative Dane Watro, Governor Shapiro and recognition from the council of the Dominican Republic and from the states of PA and New York.

Perez said this grant is an opportunity for the Hispanic population working hard in this City. He said they provide food, for free, for all citizens of the community. He said this is an important food bank in this area. Perez stated they not just provide food to Hispanics, but to all, regardless of skin color. He said they also provide citizenship classes, tax preparation classes, domestic violence classes, document translation, music and culture, community service, Dominican passport translations, immigration services, and training. He said the Dominican Festival is very important in the community. He said they have not received any grants from the state. Perez stated there are many people who support the Dominican House in the City.

Perez said they are not here to fool anyone. He said this is “one nation, one City and one community”.

Perry stated the grant is financing the purchase of property including closing costs, associated building improvements including HVAC upgrades, electrical efficiency, ADA compliant restrooms, floor coverings, and other related building items.

Barletta asked if this is the building on Cedar Street. Perez said yes.

Perry stated the Dominican House received \$100,000, in 2022, but this was not enough to cover all the improvements.

Roll Call: Barletta-yes; Colombo-yes; Mundie-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY

Resolution 2023-60

A Resolution Authorizing the Application for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) and for the Mayor to enter into the appropriate agreement

Presented by Colombo. Seconded by Ondishin.

On the Question:

Police Chief Schoonmaker said the City does this every other year for traffic enforcement grants. Perry said, also, for saturation patrols. He stated he has seen more police officers in the City recently.

Roll Call: Barletta-yes; Colombo-yes; Mundie-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY

Resolution 2023-61

A Resolution Authorizing the City of Hazleton to apply for a Luzerne County Local Share Account Grant on behalf of the Heights-Terrace Elementary Middle School Parent-Teacher Association

Presented by Colombo. Seconded by Barletta.

On the Question:

Perry stated City Council members ask all groups to come to present their information. He stated Heights Terrace Elementary School is only asking for \$35,000.

Roll Call: Barletta-yes; Colombo-yes; Mundie-yes; Ondishin-yes; Perry-yes.

RESOLUTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY

New Business: City Council members recognized Sam Galski- Hazleton Standard-Speaker reporter. Perry read the letter which was given to Sam. Barletta stated he will be greatly missed and is part of their family.

Sam thanked all City Council members for this recognition.

Old Business: None.

Comments from the Audience: Dee Deakos, 43 West Mine Street, Hazleton, said at the last City Council Meeting, there was discussion on purchasing the Gottstein building. She said City Council was not aware of this purchase. Deakos said City Council needs to vote on this. She asked how this got “out of the hands” of City Council.

Atty. Logsdon said the City will be using ARP (American Rescue Plan) funds to purchase this building. He stated the reason it does not go through, the normal “channels”, is because it acts as a grant the City does not apply for. He said this is why City administration decides where the money is spent, under the guidelines of the program. Mundie asked what other communities handle these issues. He stated the City of Allentown votes on these issues. Also, the Hazleton School District, Luzerne County Council, and Wilkes-Barre City Council votes on these issues. Atty. Logsdon said it is much different where he has not seen another City operate the way the City of Hazleton does, as the administration is set apart from City Council. He said it is due to the City’s form of government. Lynch said it is due to the Executive form of government, in the City of Hazleton, and the executive authority is vested in the mayor. Mundie stated he disagrees that Mayor Cusat could spend \$17,000,000 without City Council’s approval. He stated City Council members are elected officials and should be able to decide on this matter. Perry stated it is a good thing that the police department has their own building. Mundie said there will be major costs for upkeep and making renovations, which will cost “millions of dollars”. Barletta asked Lynch if he has a budget he could share, with City Council members, on this building. Lynch said he has a “general” idea of the costs. He said he only saw the numbers and they are manageable with the current Buildings and Grounds budget. He said the IT costs will not increase because the same company will be doing their services at this building.

Perry stated this information is all “out in the open” and has been budgeted. He said the City needs to keep up with information to the federal government. Lynch said the Community Development Office has reporting requirements. Perry asked if there is a time period to use the ARP money. Lynch stated the money needs to be spent within 3-4 years. Atty. Logsdon said the reporting requirements and auditing has been “built-in” into spending the money. Deakos said City Council always votes on the City’s capital budget, and they are always responsible for the spending of the money. She said this is a lot of money one man is allowed to spend. She said the mayor is an administrator and there are five City Council members. She said this information was not made public.

Mundie said City Council learned about the purchase, of this building, at the last City Council meeting. Schoonmaker said there was a presentation given to City Council, in 2022, at the South Side Firehouse. He said, also, this issue was in the newspaper when the City filed for ARP funds. Mundie stated Mayor Cusat said this was on hold due to the City not receiving the grants.

Colombo asked if the purchase price, of the building, was \$1,700,000. Lynch said he needs to contact the mayor's office or the Community Development Office. He said the City needs to make upgrades and install jail cells for the police department. Lynch said he does not know the internal plans, but this would be good to bring up at the WORK SESSION meeting. Colombo stated City Council needs to know what is going on.

Barletta asked Lynch if the City would be moving the Diamond Ave. Firehouse into this building. Lynch said the plan is for the City to get funding for an annex, and the Hazleton Fire Department would be, centrally, located out of there. She asked if the budget, for 2024, would be affected. Lynch said he does not anticipate this building purchase affecting the budget in any way.

Atty. Logsdon said there are a few ordinances he is working on with Mayor Cusat. These will be in front of council at the next meeting.

Perry said City Council will be having a WORK SESSION on October 17th on the City's budget.

Comments from Mayor: None- absent.

Comments from City Administrator: None

Comments from Council: Perry said City Council is planning on a WORK SESSION meeting to be held on October 17th at 6:00 p.m. to discuss the City's budget for 2024. He stated, also, City department managers may come to discuss their needs. Perry stated the meeting will be open to the public. He said their October 10th meeting conflicts with "Coffee with a Cop" get together at the Altmiller Playground. Schoonmaker said this event will be in the entire playground, with other police agencies present. The hours will be from 5-8 p.m.

Colombo thanked DPW, Fire, Police and Code Departments for doing a great job in the City.

Colombo said he and Barletta have received a lot of calls regarding high grass and weed issues in the City. He stated the garbage tax increased, in the City, but the garbage hauler will not take yard waste. He said it is not fair, to the City residents, to get a private hauler for this pick-up.

Colombo wished Sam Galski luck and success in the future.

Ondishin reminded all of the City Electronics Recycling Event on September 30th at the HCA. He said he noticed a lot more police activity on the streets.

Ondishin wished Sam Galski well in his future endeavors.

Perry stated City Council Members get a lot of complaints regarding high grass issues. He stated the City cannot just go on somebody's property and cut the grass. He said if the City does this, then a lien needs to be placed on the property, and it is a long process. Atty. Logsdon said if a notice of violation (NOV) is issued, then the resident has 30 days to respond. He said there is a process to this. Colombo reminded all residents to maintain their properties.

Adjournment: Perry motioned to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.