

MINUTES

HAZLETON CITY COUNCIL

WORK SESSION

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2018

Council met for a work session on Wednesday, January 10, 2018 in Council Chambers. The work session began at 6:15 p.m.

In attendance were Council President Bob Gavio, and Council Members Allison Barletta, Jean Mope, Anthony Colombo and James Perry.

A silent moment was taken followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Gavio called the work session to order. Gavio stated the work session is to discuss the 2018 City of Hazleton's budget. Barletta asked what is included, in the budget, for the parking fines. Mayor Cusat said it includes parking, snow ban parking fines, and anything collected in the Parking Office. Barletta stated the admin. fee collected for towing was \$17,435 with a \$50.00 fee. She said the revenue collected from the parking tickets was \$11,035. Perry asked, currently, how many new employees were hired. Mayor Cusat said there are no new employees. Charles Pedri, Code Enforcement Officer, said his department has 2 full-time employees & 3 part-time employees. Pedri said his department is currently using the GIS system and will be upgraded. He said this is used for finding location of property owners. Pedri said the rental registrations increased from 1,672 in 2016 to 1,802 in 2017. He said the fees collected were \$45,046 in 2017. He said this was an increase of approximately 8%. He said the rental inspections were increased by 48% in 2017. He said the inspection fees collected were \$37,290 in 2017. Pedri said he currently has 3 part-time employees in the Code Enforcement Department. He said there was an increase in code complaints and are behind with the current staffing issues. Barletta asked about hiring a full time employee with the increasing health insurance fees. Mayor Cusat said three full-time employees left. He said the current 2-part time employees would like to be full-time employees. Gavio stated the employees left for better wages. Mope said there should be a "time frame" for the employees to receive training for their position.

Perry asked about the increase in the health insurance payment. Mayor Cusat said the health insurance increased in 2017 & 2018. He said the rise from 2016 to 2017 did not match the actual increase in cost. He said there was a "double increase" calculated into the budget. He said the insurance quotes were received on December 27, 2017. He said the general liability insurances increased \$165,000 and not included in the budget. He said workers compensation also increased \$165,000 from 2017. He said the "others" are relatively the same. Barletta asked if the non-contractual employees will be receiving a raise. Mayor Cusat said yes. He said the total of non-contractuals are \$3,100 per 1% with a total of \$6,000. Mayor Cusat said the non-contractuals received, in 2015- 0%, 2016- 0%, & 2017- 1% payroll increases. Mope suggested

putting a hold on any pay increases. Barletta said DCED suggested that administration “hold” any increases.

Mayor Cusat said there is one fire fighter leaving this week with a buyout of \$40,000. He said there are possibly six police officers leaving before June with a salary of \$40,000. He said the total buyout is \$280,000 and is not built into the budget. Chief Speziale said the Hazleton Police Department needs to maintain 42 police officers. He said he currently has 38 police officers on the force. Gavio said two police officers were hired with a grant. Barletta asked Speziale if he started the process in hiring new police officers. Speziale said he has started the evaluations. Mayor Cusat said it should be completed by February with the new police officers presented before council. Speziale said there will be four new police officers hired. Mayor Cusat said the 42 police officers’ salaries are “built” into the budget. Mope asked about the salaries of police officers who are leaving and the starting salaries of the new police. Mayor Cusat said the difference would be \$17,000. Mayor Cusat said the only other thing not built into the budget is the police arbitration. He said 3% is already built in with possibly a 3-10% addition. He said it is calculated as a \$247,000 salary per percent. Gavio said the police officers are willing to work 12-hour shifts if the department is adequately staffed. He said he would rather pay police officers and fire fighters than lawyers and arbitrators. He said he was for the police officers offer in 2016.

Donald Leshko, Hazleton Fire Chief, said by 2021, there will be 12 fire fighters retiring. He said, currently, there are 4 fire fighters eligible for retirement.

Perry asked what is received for services of extractions for false alarms. Leshko said that is in the Hazmat recovery. He said he receives a check once a month. He said last year he received about \$12,000. Leshko said the city uses a billing company. Leshko said the fire department needs to update the false alarm ordinance. Mope asked administration about ideas for bringing in new revenue.

Barletta stated the administration needs to control spending. Mayor Cusat said with the actuals received, in 2017, the city would have been under budget. He said the spending is not “out-of-control”. Mope asked Mayor Cusat about the parking garage. Mayor Cusat said the city is looking for a long-term lease for the parking garage. He said the garage cannot be sold. Mope asked if anyone is interested. Mayor Cusat he is currently in negotiations with a downtown company. Mayor Cusat said he would look to monetize the parking meters. Mope asked if PANGO is paid. He said PANGO only receives a percentage. He said PANGO was bought-out.

Mope said there currently is no health officer. Mayor Cusat said the city should have a health officer. He said the salary is not built-into the budget. He said if the city does not have a health officer, the city cannot receive the money for this position. He said administration will look into hiring and training for this position. Mayor Cusat said to get new employees, the city needs to offer advanced training. Speziale said other cities have police officers sign an agreement, through civil service, to reimburse the police department, for uniforms, if they do not stay in their position for a certain amount of years. Mayor Cusat said the VECTOR employee took 1 year off. Mayor Cusat stated he came back on light duty. He said by then the contracts were

cancelled with the municipalities. He said the city received \$20,000. He said the VECTOR employee was paid his salary with benefits. He said VECTOR service is not offered by the city. Mayor Cusat said only in an emergency the city can handle a situation. He said the VECTOR employee and health officer's positions are not built-into the budget.

Mayor Cusat said a lot of costs are not included when re-opening the budget in January. He said 80% of the budget are "fixed costs". Mope said 20% is questionable. Frank Vito, Highway Department supervisor, asked about the storm water compliance (MS4 plan). Vito said by 2019, the city needs to be in compliance. Mope said the only necessity required by state law is to have a plan in place. Mayor Cusat said the city has been fined once. Mope said the sewer transmission fee "hurt" the city. Mayor Cusat said the question is whether a third class city could bill for taxation. Gavio asked if the city is capable for billing in city hall. Mayor Cusat said it is cheaper to have an outside company bill instead of paying 1 full-time employee. He said it is not part of the general fund budget.

Vito said if a capital project was put in place in 2017, the highway department would have saved \$50,000- \$75,000 in repairs. Leshko said due to antiquated equipment with break downs, he said this is "costly". Mope said the highway department had a lot of vehicles that were broken. Mope said the highway department did not apply for an LSA grant for new vehicles. Leshko said a leasing plan works better for the city. He said the money will be paid from the liquid fuels account.

Leshko said one fire department building needs to be converted over to natural gas. He said the fire department has money left over from a previous LSA grant. He said he will ask Mayor Cusat if this money could be used for this. Barletta said everything needs to be "transparent". She said if there are any transfers, council needs to be made aware.

Gavio said it has been difficult to obtain information, from any department, with the installation of the new boiler system in city hall.

Gavio adjourned the work session at 7:15 pm.