

**MINUTES
HAZLETON CITY COUNCIL
WORK SESSION
WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 2019**

Council met for a work session on Wednesday, July 10, 2019 in Council Chambers. The work session began at 7:10 p.m.

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

Dan Lynch spoke of the budget reconciliation process for the year 2019. He stated it will start in July. Lynch said city council will be presented with this when completed. He said he is not sure if this will be needed to be passed as an ordinance. He said this is where the transfers will be discussed, making sure the budget balances, and transferring into this account, making sure it is not over budget. He said, globally, expenses are at 52.3%. Lynch stated there are some grant expenses. He said taking these out of the operating expenses are 49.8%. He said this includes grants for computers and the fire department. He said part of the reconciliation process is recognizing the revenue in the budget. He said, basically, this is “shoring-up” the budget for the remainder of the year. Lynch stated he will send city council members reports “as he goes”.

Lynch said the 2020 early budget development phase will be underway. He wanted to see what city council’s “thoughts were”. Lynch handed out the 2020 Budget Development Early Phase Council feedback pamphlet. Lynch and City administration is asking city council members:

1. Do you wish to bring back and fund a health officer/Vector animal control officer in the 2020 budget?
2. Are you interested in exploring the requirements and costs of opening a walk-up window for the police department on a 24-hour or partial day basis? We anticipate this would likely be accomplished with union civilian work.
3. Are you interested in adding road material funding into the general fund in addition to what already exists in Highway Aid in order to conduct more road paving.
4. For the 2020 budget year, we plan to distinguish in our expenses what is directly related to storm water operations and maintenance as to illustrate the costs the city incurs because of these mandated requirements.
5. Are you interested in adding meter gates or kiosks to our parking lots and other surface lots?
6. Are you interested in funding a capital budget through direct millage for capital expenses?
7. What other ideas, initiatives or goals would you like to see addressed in the 2020 budget?

Lynch said he would like to give the early budget development to city council. He said city council members can also call or come in to see him to discuss anything.

Mope asked what the union civilian work entails. Lynch stated if the City was “going to open the window”, this is considered a union, City Hall job. Mayor Cusat said this always existed. Lynch said administration will take a “hard look” at this and figuring out how much it would cost.

Barletta asked Mayor Cusat if he talked with the “two ladies” that did the dispatching work in the past. Mayor Cusat it was “two guys” that did this work. He stated City Hall cannot use a dispatcher. He said he brought this up four years ago with Barletta bringing this up in 2019.

Barletta said her idea is to open up the police window to handle walk-ins. She said walk-ins can ask an officer where to go in City Hall or where to go if they come in for fingerprints. She said with this window open, an officer can actually answer any questions. Mayor Cusat said, currently, there are two girls that work at the police window to answer any questions. Lynch said this window does not need to be open 24 hours a day, but maybe from 12 midnight to 5 a.m. He said if city council wants to look at this, then the initial budget presentation will include this. Mayor Cusat stated, currently, there is no police officer doing this job. He said it would need to be either a police union or a City Hall union position. He said it would not be a FOP. He said it would not be an administrative job.

Mayor Cusat said the City is “out of money” for paving for 2019. He stated the Community Development money has not been coming in and this funding will not come until December, 2019. He stated there are 140 miles of road in the City of Hazleton. He said a lot of work has been “on hold” due to Alan Wufsus, City Engineering Technician, being out on disability for three months due to a broken hip. Mayor Cusat said a lot of this work got “pushed off”. He said the City has put in zero dollars in the general fund for paving.

Barletta asked about parking meters for parking in the City. Mayor Cusat stated he would like to get a gate for the parking garage. He said the cheapest gate would cost \$25,000. He would, also, like to get a gate for the lot on Chestnut Street by the bank. He said the schools need more spaces and the Dominican House would like to buy spaces. He said it works out better for residents to pay for parking per day. He said the kiosks that he would like to put downtown are between \$60,000- \$80,000 each. Mayor Cusat said he does not know if these are “feasible” at this time. He said he would like to “try” one or two in some of the very dense spots. He said he knows the income derived from the lots in the City’s garages. Mope stated this income is pretty steady. Mayor Cusat stated the HNB Bank Building, on the corner of Wyoming and Broad Streets, needs additional parking due to more tenants.

Lynch said the budget will illustrate storm water specific expenses that are occurring now and will continue to incur for the City. He said this will only be an expense for the City. He asked if the City should look at a fee because there will be a charge “one way or another”. Mayor Cusat said there will be a storm water fee, real estate taxes, or more highway aid money which will diminish the amount of money going towards paving. He said this is all work that needs to be done. Lynch asked if the City would need to explore a direct millage. Mayor Cusat said currently, there is a general fund, debt service, and recreation fund. He asked if there should be a fourth account with this money “not being touched”.

Mayor Cusat stated the borough of Freeland has a \$1.00/month per property fee that goes toward redevelopment. He said this is used for projects and demolition. He said this was talked about in 2018. He said the City has 10,000 properties. He said this gives the City the ability to buy a property and “take it down”. He said the money “funds itself”.

Lynch stated he will be comparing “numbers” from 2017 & 2018 to 2019. He said some things are looking low. Lynch said the City had to start taking their coins to FNB Bank and these are accruing in an account. He said when the City withdraws from this account then this will raise the City’s parking revenue. Mayor Cusat stated meter money should be up, and parking fines should be down. He said the City did not have a bad winter this year. Lynch stated meters are at \$47,000 but there is \$50,000 in the bank right now that will be “drawn out” and be put in the general fund. He stated he will have more comprehensive reports as he is going through this process. Lynch said he will send these reports to city council.

Barletta asked Mayor Cusat how many employees are in the Code Department. Mayor Cusat stated there are, currently, two full-time code officers. Lynch said administration is going through the bargaining process with City Hall to try to repair the contract. Barletta asked Mayor Cusat where the problem is in the Code Department. Mayor Cusat said the City has been advertising for code officers but did not get any replies. Lynch said the problem is, currently, hiring a code officer's starting salary is \$20,000/yr. Mope said this is every municipalities starting salary. Lynch said this is not right, and the City needs to have job classifications with starting salaries. He said the City of Hazleton should have at least four code officers. Mayor Cusat said there are three full-time parking employees, and four part-time employees earning \$9.00/hr. Mayor Cusat said the Code Department goes to the same properties over and over. He said the quality of life tickets get "thrown" out of court. Lynch said there needs to be an appropriate starting salary for the Code Department.

Mayor Cusat stated administration needs to look at the Health Officer position and Vector Animal Control positions. He said the Vector "guy" is out on a health issue (heart attack). He said he is not acting as the Vector Control employee but still has all his licenses. On an emergency, he can go out. He is on light duty. Currently, he is cleaning parks, playgrounds, parking garages, and empties garbage cans. Barletta asked why Mayor Cusat thinks the City needs a Vector Control officer. She asked what the pros and cons are of this position. He said the City gets a "ton" of calls for cats, rats, skunks, and opossums. He stated the City receives \$50,000 from the Hazleton City Authority for his position each year. Mayor Cusat said the City should not be taking this money, off the HCA, if there is no health officer. Mope stated Mark Thompson, former employee, took a "big load" off of the code department. She states he did it all. Mayor Cusat said some ordinances state that the law is enforced by the health officer, such as garbage complaints. He said, technically, the City cannot cite a resident for this. Lynch stated he would like to train all code officers to be a health officer. Mayor Cusat said this is listed as a dual function. He said the health officer is responsible for tracking vaccinations and any outbreaks in the City. A health officer signs death certificates. He stated Mahanoy City has one employee which does code enforcement and is a health officer. Mope stated Mark Thompson's secretary, Trudy, did a lot. She said without a health officer, there is a big problem, in the City, with bed bugs. She said mattresses were being put out on the streets, not being covered by plastic, and people picking them up and selling them from their garages. Mope said this would spread the bed bug epidemic. She stated Thompson covered a lot of this problem. Barletta asked where the \$50,000 is in the budget. Mayor Cusat stated this money goes into the general fund each year. Lynch stated there can be one employee that can "just do" property maintenance in the City.

Mope stated, on the City of Hazleton's website, two council members salaries are misprinted. Mayor Cusat stated he had to update this issue. He said elected officials were not on the page.

Mayor Cusat said the City is going back to court with the on-going City Hall union contract. He said he has been trying to reach an agreement since 2016 with the union. He said the contract gives an employee six-months to learn their position. He said there needs to be cooperation with the union. Mayor Cusat said he lost in court because he was paying more money to employees. He stated the plan gives the City a specific amount of money to spend on each employee. Mayor Cusat said there are some internal problems, within the union, with their representation. He said the City was given \$600,000 for 21 employees. He said this also includes their health care benefits.

Barletta asked Atty. Logsdon regarding the request for proposals for qualified towing operators to provide exclusive emergency towing services to the City. He said he will prepare this item and will be presented at the next work session meeting on August 14, 2019.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.