

## AMBLER BOROUGH COUNCIL MINUTES

July 14, 2020

Ambler Borough Council held their scheduled monthly meeting on Tuesday, July 14, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. via ZOOM Software Program. Consistent with Council President's and the Mayor's Declaration of Disaster Emergency, this action was taken to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our community and to promote our commitment to maintain social distancing in our community. As such, the meeting was not held at Borough Hall. A public copy of the meeting agenda was posted on the Borough website on Monday, July 13, 2020. The public was invited to access the ZOOM Meeting and offer questions or comments.

**Roll Call – Present:** Ms. Hertz, Mrs. Deininger, Ms. DiPietro, Mrs. Siskind, Ms. Endicott, Ms. Welch, Ms. Henderson and Ms. Marshall. Mayor Sorg, Chief Hoffman, Solicitor Eric Frey of Dischell, Bartle & Dooley and Borough Manager Aversa also were in attendance. Finance Manager Gail Gordon, Code Enforcement Officer Glenn Kucher and Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Russell also were in attendance. Borough Engineer Jim Dougherty was a guest panelist. Mr. DeRuosi was absent.

**Approval of Minutes:** Ms. Hertz made a motion to approve the Minutes of the June 16, 2020 Council Meeting. A brief discussion was held relative to the AFSCME contract negotiations committee. Motion to Approve. Seconded. All Aye. Carried.

### COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Committees of Ambler Borough Council held no meetings in July. At the Council Meeting this evening, the Committees conducted business as follows:

**Public Safety Committee – Ms. Erin Endicott, Chairperson**  
Committee members: Ms. Hertz, Mrs. Deininger, Mrs. Siskind

The Public Safety Committee report was given this evening by Ms. Endicott.

#### **The Committee will consider the following actions this evening:**

1. Consider adoption of the Emergency Declaration for COVID-19 for the month of July.
2. Consider whether to allow issuance of block party and/or park rental permits.

Discussion ensued. Chief Hoffman asked Council to determine which way the Borough is leaning as to limiting permits or not allowing permits at all. Ms. Deininger stated that given the COVID-19 situation she did not want the Borough to sanction any of these events this year. Mrs. Siskind concurred. Ms. Hertz stated it would be difficult for the Borough to

limit and verify attendance at these events and added that ‘green light’ does not mean ‘go.’ Ms. Endicott stated she felt that outdoor events are safer than house parties and suggested that the Borough not sanction large events. Chief Hoffman noted that three-quarters of a block’s residents are needed to approve of an event before a permit is requested. Solicitor Frey stated the Borough cannot eliminate certain requests and must therefore either allow these events or not. He cautioned that the Borough might be subject to lawsuits that cost time and money if a definitive determination was not made. Ms. Endicott ascertained that small groups such as yoga could show up at parks for activities held at their own risk, maintaining social distancing, without requiring a permit. The Committee stated they would recommend suspending the issuance of block party and park rental permits until further notice.

**In other business the following was reviewed:**

1. The Police, Community Ambulance Association and Fire Department reports were received.
2. The Public Works and Code Enforcement reports were received.
3. The next Red Cross Blood Drive will be held Friday, August 28<sup>th</sup> from 2-7 p.m. in the Borough Hall Gym.

Ms. Endicott asked if there were comments or questions from Council. There being nothing further, it was moved the Committee’s report be accepted as filed. Seconded. Carried.

**Public Utilities Committee – Mrs. Glynnis Siskind, Chairperson**

Committee members: Ms. Welch, Ms. Henderson, Ms. Marshall

The Public Utilities Committee report was given this evening by Mrs. Siskind.

**The Committee will consider no actions this evening**

**In other business the following was reviewed:**

1. The WWTP engineer’s report will be provided.
2. The State PUC is active again and the Committee anticipates action on the Water Authority status.

Mrs. Siskind asked if there were comments or questions from Council. There being nothing further, it was moved the Committee’s report be accepted as filed. Seconded. Carried.

**Finance and Planning Committee – Ms. Nellie DiPietro, Chairperson**

Committee Members: Ms. Endicott, Ms. Welch, Ms. Marshall

The Finance and Planning Committee report was given this evening by Ms. DiPietro:

**The Committee will consider the following actions this evening:**

1. Consider that **June 2020 (first run)** invoices in the amount of **\$357,968.96** be paid as follows: General (**\$54,365.08**); Street Lights (**\$2,661.39**); Fire (**\$0.00**); Refuse (**\$5,489.11**); Parks & Rec. (**\$100.17**); Water (**\$35,315.65.**); Sewer (**\$124,524.73**); WWTP (**\$47,498.28**); Debt Fund (**\$0.00**); Water Capital (**\$0.00**); Liquid Fuels (**\$88,014.55**).
2. Consider, in light of the expected impact on Borough finances this year due to COVID-19, an adjusted budget for the balance of 2020 with a possible moratorium on spending. Approved projects will continue as directed and Borough staff will make every attempt to monitor spending for additional savings wherever possible. The Committee also would like to discuss whether to collect the BPT tax this year.

Discussion ensued. Ms. DiPietro suggested a motion looking for savings within the budget when possible. Ms. Welch stated she would support either a spending moratorium or consideration of expenditures on a case-by-case basis. Ms. Marshall noted that costs for Ambler Square were over budget and stated she was against a moratorium but would want to consider expenditures on a case-by-case basis. Ms. Hertz stated a moratorium was the most prudent action Council could take, noting that Borough staff could maintain approved spending projects. Manager Aversa stated staff would review their budgets and would work to take smaller projects out of the budget for this year. Finance Manager Gordon stated that certain operating expenses are necessary. She noted that Council would need to consider Ambler Square expenditures, she recommended that parking meter fees and ticketing for parking be reinstated, adding that the kiosks are costing the Borough \$244 per month even when not in use, and finally she stated staff would look to possibly defer budgeted items. She noted that Ambler Whitpain Trojans should make their request during the 2021 Budget Meetings to be held this fall, and not at this time.

Regarding the Business Privilege Tax, discussion was held on whether to consider a one-time reduction of this flat tax for this year or whether to eliminate the tax for 2020. Finance Manager Gordon noted that the Borough should anticipate a loss of \$37,000 per quarter for the second to fourth quarters from the Earned Income Tax. She advised that cutting the BPT in half for this year was reasonable, adding that the Borough could not administer collection of the tax on a case-by-case basis as was being discussed by Council. It was stated \$162,000 is collected from the BPT. Ms. Endicott stated the BPT should not be collected this year because small businesses have been impacted. Ms. Marshall stated businesses are not operating at full steam and should be given a break. Ms. Deininger agreed. Ms. Hertz noted revenue shortfalls occurring this year. Ms. Welch recommended a discount option. The Committee agreed to recommend authorizing the advertisement of an Ordinance to be written by the Solicitor reducing the BPT rate by one-half in 2020.

**In other business the following was reviewed:**

1. The Borough Engineer's report was received.
2. The Trash & Recycle contract bid opening is scheduled for July 20<sup>th</sup>.

3. The Borough Planning Commission is working to create a preliminary energy transition plan in line with the Ambler Borough Ready for 100 Renewable Energy Resolution adopted by Borough Council March 2019.
4. The Planning Commission recommends a Zoning Map change for 24 N. Ridge Avenue from Institutional to R-3 Residential.
5. DEVO Associates should be installing the street meters this week.

Ms. DiPietro asked if there were comments or questions from Council. There being nothing further, it was moved the Committee's report be accepted as filed. Seconded. Carried.

**Parks and Recreation Committee – Ms. Sara Hertz, Chairperson**

Committee members: Mrs. Deininger, Ms. Endicott, Ms. DiPietro

The Parks and Recreation Committee report was given this evening by Mrs. Deininger.

**The Committee will consider the following action this evening:**

1. Consider awarding the contract for the Ambler Square project to GoreCon, Inc. for the items included in the base bid in the amount of \$245,964.41.

Discussion ensued. Ms. Marshall stated she was conflicted, questioning whether the Borough could afford the project given the fact that the bid results demonstrated a \$65,000 shortfall. Mrs. Siskind stated the Borough had dedicated time toward the project and she would like to get it done. Engineer Dougherty stated the costs seemed to be reasonable. If the project were rebid the Borough would probably not realize a better result and would be veering away from the concept plan. He noted the grant request was submitted in 2017 and the bid was bid out with quite a few alternates. When asked by Ms. Hertz about the cost of value engineering, Mr. Dougherty stated that with the elimination of the alternates (such as accent lighting for the wall, no sight lighting, no kiosk, construction of a pre-cast wall) the Borough could not pull out much more to have a reasonable project. Manager Aversa stated she was contacting the County to ascertain whether there was any additional grant money available. Ms. Hertz stated she had been in the process of contacting several businesses to underwrite some of the additional costs. Finance Manager Gordon stated she would work with Ms. Hertz to identify MusicFest sponsors which may want to contribute.

**In other business the following was reviewed:**

1. The Committee has received an extension until July 5, 2021 of the 20117 PECO Green Region Open Space Grant Award.
2. A grant extension will be requested for the EAC Growing Greener Grant.

3. The Committee was asked to consider a donation from Ambler Borough of the Ambler-Whitpain Trojans. Discussion ensued. Council stated its concern about available Borough funding for 2020. Finance Manager Gordon stated the Trojans should make a request in the fall during preparation of the 2021 budget.
4. Consider creation of a Community Garden. Discussion ensued. Ms. Henderson, who had proposed the concept, stated she would scout out a spot for possible installation of raised beds gardens. She intended to poll the residents regarding their interests in the project and go from there with a budget request for 2021. Ms. Endicott offered contact information from respondents to the 'Friends of the Park' survey completed last year.

Mrs. Deininger asked if there were comments or questions from Council. There being nothing further, it was moved the Committee's report be accepted as filed. Seconded. Carried.

**Salary and Personnel Committee – Mrs. Nancy Deininger, Chairperson**

Committee members: Mrs. Siskind, Ms. DiPietro, Ms. Henderson

The Salary and Personnel Committee report was given this evening by Mrs. Deininger.

**The Committee will consider no actions this evening.**

**In other business the following was reviewed:**

1. Committees were selected for the AFSCME and Police Contact negotiations and meetings are being scheduled.

Mrs. Deininger asked if there were comments or questions from Council. There being nothing further, it was moved the Committee's report be accepted as filed. Seconded. Carried.

**NEW BUSINESS / PUBLIC COMMENT**

Council had received no emails regarding this evening's meeting. No 'raise your hand' notifications were noted by the Zoom Meeting Administrator. Council proceeded to Recommendations.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Public Safety Committee** – The Committee recommends and Ms. Endicott moves:

Recommend adoption of the Emergency Declaration for COVID-19 for the month of July. Seconded. All Aye. Carried.

Recommend suspending issuance of block party and parks rental permits until further notice. Seconded. All Aye. Carried.

**Public Utilities Committee** – The Committee will make no recommendations this evening.

**Finance & Planning Committee** – The Committee recommends and Ms. DiPietro moves:

Recommend that **June 2020 (first run)** invoices in the amount of **\$357,968.96** be paid. Seconded. All Aye. Carried.

Recommend advertising for adoption an Ordinance to reduce the Business Privilege Tax rate to \$120 for this year. Seconded. All Aye. Carried.

Recommend issuing a moratorium on spending this year in light of COVID-19 wherein approved projects will continue as directed and Borough staff will make every attempt to monitor spending for additional savings wherever possible. Seconded. 7-Aye; 1-Nay [Ms. Marshall]. Carried.

**Parks & Recreation Committee** – The Committee recommends and Mrs. Deininger moves:

Recommend awarding the contract for the Ambler Square project to GoreCon, Inc. for the items included in the base bid in the amount of \$245,964.41. Seconded. All Aye. Carried.

**Salary & Personnel Committee** – The Committee will make no recommendations this evening.

**There being no further public comment or other business**, Ms. Hertz moved the meeting be adjourned. Seconded, motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Russell  
Assistant Secretary  
Borough of Ambler