

**BENSALEM TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday
October 24th, 2023**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ed Kisselback, Council President
Joseph Pilieri, Council Vice President
Joseph Knowles, Council Secretary
Stacey Champion, Council Member

SUPPORTING PERSONNEL:

Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo
Debora McBreen, Council Clerk/Recording Secretary
Quinton Nearon, Senior Municipal Inspection Manager
Ed Rudolph, Township Solicitor
Phil Wursta, Township Engineer

PLEASE NOTE:

The minutes are not verbatim but rather a synopsis of what transpired during the meeting, and while I do my best to attribute remarks and questions to the correct individual, there may be mistakes or omissions because of the “back and forth” dialogue and the lack of the use of the microphone.

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING:

Council President Kisselback opened the meeting with a moment of silence and/or prayer, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. INTRODUCTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS, STAFF AND MAYOR:

Council President Kisselback introduced Supporting Staff, Council Members and Mayor.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Council President Kisselback indicated the Public Comment will be heard at the time the agenda item is heard. Seeing no one come forward the first of two Public Comments was closed.

4. **APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES:**

Council Secretary Knowles motioned to approve the Minutes from the September 18th Council meeting as presented. **Council Vice President Pileri** seconded and the motion carried 4-0.

4A. **RECOGNITION OF BENSLEM POLICE BY INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE (IACP).**

Director McVey indicated the IACP has about 33,000 members across the world and is represented in 170 countries and the Bensalem Township Police Department was recently selected to be featured as a department committed to excellence and a premiere agency. Bensalem was 1 of 25 departments selected across the country for the work the men and women do every single day in Bensalem to keep the community safe.

The production at the IACP TV was produced here in Bensalem. The video was featured at the International Conference for all of the world of law enforcement leaders to see.

Director McVey thanked Council and the Mayor for their unwavering support of the Bensalem Police Department and to the residents of the community because without their support they would not be able to do the fine job that they do every day.

Director McVey presented the video.

Council President Kisselback asked Director McVey how is it that Bensalem was chosen out of the 33,000 members of the association.

Director McVey indicated it was from a lot of analytics from social media posts that they see from different pieces of information such as the arrests they have made, the various programs. Some of it is whenever there is a new initiative launched in Bensalem they are very transparent with it and it is put out to the community. The Camera Program and the School Bus Stop Program, when it gets out in the media they are scanning the Bensalem Police at an international level and that is how the Bensalem Police Department was chosen.

Director McVey indicated the Police Department was contacted by the IACP and asked if the Bensalem Police Department would be willing to be part of the “Best Practices.” So that other departments can model what they see the Bensalem Police Department doing in their community.

Councilwoman Champion indicated she was very thankful for the Bensalem Police Department and her children participate in PAL and it is a wonderful program.

Council Secretary Knowles congratulated Director McVey and indicated he was doing an outstanding job as the Director of Public Safety and is very happy with the performance of the Bensalem Police Department.

5. **CONSIDERATION OF FIREFIGHTERS SAFER GRANT FOR SUBMISSION IN 2024:**

Director McVey indicated the SAFER Grant is a Federal Grant from the United States Government that would provide funding for up to 4 years. Bensalem is looking for 4 full-time paid Career Staff Firefighters where it would include their salary and benefits over those 4 years. After that, it would be the Township's obligation to sustain that funding and that Director McVey would be working on thoroughly and presenting at a later time if these funds are awarded.

Director McVey outlined in a memo to the Mayor, to be shared with Council, that there has been a significant decrease in the number of volunteers. With this decrease in the number of volunteers, and the increase for the calls of service that the paid career staff have been going on a daily basis there now is a need for more staff to keep the residents of Bensalem safe.

Director McVey is confident that through the Mayor's office and his Administration, with the assistance of Council, we would be able to come up with a viable plan. The reason for the priority is that a lot of the municipalities around Bensalem have sought the Safer Grants or were awarded the Safer Grants and are currently competitively seeking them now because they have added more career staff. Bensalem is competing against their neighboring municipalities and the Township does not want to get stuck "behind the eight ball" to get the staff needed.

There were critical levels of staffing due to 2 injuries of firefighters for about 6 months. The Director does not want to see Bensalem get in that position again and this would be the right move for the Township.

Council Secretary Knowles asked Director McVey if he would have more flexibility with four new firefighters sending them to substations.

Director McVey indicated that may come once the Township has a Fire Chief and a consolidation. Hopefully that succeeds, but at this point he doesn't think it is viable as of today.

Council Vice President Pilieri asked Director McVey if he was aware of the NFPA standards for paid firefighters.

Director McVey indicated he believes Council Vice President Pilieri told him he would need to hire 65 paid firefighters.

Council Vice President Pilieri indicated the Township has a paid Fire Department that was not approved by Council, the Administration set it up, Council did not. Once the NFPA gets a hold of that, the Township will not have a choice and will have to hire 65 paid firefighters. When that happens where is the money going to come from to pay for this "Paid Fire Department."

Director McVey indicated he has no intention of hiring 65 paid firemen.

Council Vice President Pilieri indicated he would have to hire them because the NFPA says you have to when you have a paid force. The Director would have to follow their standards for a paid fire staff. The Director has no choice in it because it is a Federal Government thing.

Director McVey indicated the NFPA has not been to the Township in the past 13 years.

Council Vice President Pilieri indicated the NFPA will come to the Township because the Director keeps adding to the staff. The Township is not doing fires at night, they are only doing fires during the day and the Township is depending on the volunteers which was indicated that they are not getting the job done at night. He believes this plan is not well thought out.

Director McVey indicated he did not say that the volunteers were not doing their job, they are trying to do their job but during the day they have proven they are not getting out the way they used to. It has been seen time and time again where the career staff is first on scene, knocking the fire down 2 to 3 minutes before a volunteer fire company would get there. At night it is relied very heavily on the volunteers to do the job. The Director said he would have to investigate the number of 65 paid firefighters that Council Vice President Pilieri was quoting.

The Township has had a career staff for 14 years and no one has come to the Township to say we cannot have that staff without hiring 65 paid firefighters. The Township has an excellent career staff and they are recognized firefighters.

Council Vice President Pilieri asked the Director where he was going to get the money when he has to hire the 65 paid firefighters. The Director will not have a choice and the NFPA will make the Director hire the 65 paid firefighters. The department was created without Councils input from the beginning.

Director McVey indicated his intentions will be what he does with the Police Department. When he sees the need they sit down with the Administration and go over ways that can be cut to increase the funding with the police and believes it is the same situation with the fire company. The Township has the opportunity to get full funding for 4 years and that gives the Township ample time, with the brains we have in the Township, to come up with a very viable solution to sustain that for the future.

Council Vice President Pilieri indicated the Administration will be held accountable from the NFPA to hit these standards. Bensalem is not a city, it is a 2nd Class Township.

Director McVey indicated that the Fire Rescue's function is within the Department of Public Safety. Their function and mission are part of the Department of Public Safety function and mission. They operate under the umbrella of Public Safety. Experts have looked into their current process, evaluated it, and no one has brought that up but Council Vice President Pilieri. The Director will follow-up with an investigation regarding those remarks.

Council Vice President Pilieri indicated Council should have been involved in this since day one. It should not have been done without the approval of the Council. There is Administration and then there is Council. Each has its own function. The Fire Department was set up without Council's approval. You can't start a department without Councils approval.

The Mayor indicated that was not true. That is a false statement. The Mayor advised Council Vice President Pilieri that if he had accusations, to bring them directly to him.

Council Vice President Pilieri motioned to continue this item to a later date and have a Work Session to discuss this in the future going forward.

There was no second motion, the motion died on the floor.

A discussion ensued regarding the consolidation of the Township Fire Companies.

Council President Kisselback asked if there was anyone in the audience who would like to comment. Seeing no one come forward the Public Comment portion was closed.

Council Secretary Knowles motioned to approve the SAFER Grant for 2024 as presented by the Director of Public Safety. **Councilwoman Champion** seconded and the motion carried 4-0.

6. **PUBLIC HEARING ON AN ENACTED RESOLUTION REGARDING THE MUNICIPAL GRANT PROGRAM FOR FUNDING OF INTEGRATION OF POLICE RECORD MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (RMS) THROUGHOUT BUCKS COUNTY:**

Deputy Director Race indicated this was to follow up on the Resolution and that the supporting documentation was presented to the Redevelopment Authority for funding of two of the projects through the Bucks County Chiefs of Police, specifically, in reference to Cody Cobra. Bensalem acts as the Advocate for the other Municipalities in this program and represents the Bucks County Chiefs of Police in applying for the funding.

Councilwoman Champion motioned to enact Resolution 2023-12 for applying for the Municipal Grant Program for funding of Integration of Police Record Management System (RMS) on behalf of the 39 Police Departments in Bucks County. Council Secretary Knowles seconded and the motion carried 4-0.

8. **CONSIDERATION OF A LOT LINE CHANGE FOR:**

Applicant:	Milin & Mital Brahmhatt
Location:	1247 Bridgewater Road
Proposed Use:	Residential
Zoning Classification:	R-2 Residential
Tax Parcel:	02-073-001-001 & 02-073-001

Council Secretary Knowles inquired if they were residential and had one owner and if the consolidated lots were for one family dwelling.

The applicant answered yes, the consolidation of the lot is for one family dwelling.

Council President Kisselback asked if there was anyone in the audience who would like to comment. Seeing no one come forward the Public Comment portion was closed.

Councilwoman Champion motioned for TMP 02-073-001-001 & 02-073-001 for a lot line change from 2 lots to 1 lot. Solicitor Rudolph indicated that one requirement would be that the Deed consolidation of the 2 parcels should be presented to the Township first before the recording of the document. **Council Secretary Knowles** seconded and the motion carried 4-0.

8. **CONSIDERATION OF A REDUCTION OF PERMIT FEES FOR HOLY GHOST PREP SCHOOL MOTHER'S GUILD CRAFT SHOW LOCATED AT 2429 BRISTOL PIKE, BENSALEM, PA:**

Council Secretary Knowles motioned to approve the request of the reduced permit fee to \$2,800 as presented. **Councilwoman Champion** seconded and the motion carried 4-0.

9. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Council President Kisselback asked if there was anyone in the audience who would like to come forward. Seeing no one come forward, the second Public Comment portion was closed.

10. **OTHER BUSINESS**

The Mayor ***GO PHILLIES!!!!***

Council Vice President Pilieri, ditto.

Council Secretary Knowles indicated the Phillies were playing tonight. Willie Montinez was a great American and a great first baseman and ***GO PHILLIES!!!***

Councilwoman Champion congratulated the Bensalem Township Police on their wonderful accolades. ***GO PHILLIES!!!*** And don't forget to vote.

Council President Kisselback reiterated everyone's sentiments.

11. **ADJOURNMENT:**

With no other business to conduct, the meeting was adjourned.

The Bensalem Township Council Meeting of October 24th, 2023 can be viewed in its entirety at the following websites:

www.bensalempa.gov

or

www.youtube.com

Respectfully Submitted,

Debra F. McBreen
Recording Secretary/Clerk of Council