

**BENSALEM TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday
April 27th, 2020**

Zoom – Virtual Public Meeting

VIRTUAL COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Edward Kisselback, Council President
Joseph Pilieri, Council Vice President
Joseph Knowles, Council Secretary
Jesse Sloane, Council Member
Ed Tokmajian, Council Member

OTHER VIRTUAL PRESENCE BY:

Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo
Joseph Pizzo, Township Solicitor
Russell Benner, Township Engineer
Debora McBreen, Council Clerk/Recording Secretary

PLEASE NOTE:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and all of the orders and declarations from the Federal, State, and County governments, the Bensalem Township Council held its' regular monthly meeting as a virtual public meeting utilizing the Zoom Meetings platform.

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 microphones.

Council President Kisselback reiterated the mandate for maintaining social distancing, washing hands, using alcohol based hand sanitizer, if gathering not more than 10 people together, and try to go outside only when it is necessary.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Council President Kisselback opened the meeting with a moment of silence or prayer which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT:

publiccomments@bensalempa.gov

3. APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES:

Council Member Sloane asked a logistical question regarding the “tabled items” to dates certain of the Council meetings that were scheduled in March. **Solicitor Pizzo**, indicated we do not based on the Senate Bill 841 that was passed into law by the Governor. All of the pending Land Developments that are currently into the Township that were filed either prior to the outset of the Declaration of Emergency, or since the Declaration was filed, are all subject to a tolling of the applicable statutes of limitations that may be attached to any of those applications. The Township Building and Planning department independent of that action has received written extensions of time from the applicants on all the pending applications. The Township is good through the end of the month of April.

Council Member Tokmajian inquired how Council would handle signing the Resolutions. This would require each individual Councilman to sign the signature page they received in their packets and return it to the Council Clerk, Debbie McBreen, either through email or through the mail.

Council Member Tokmajian asked if in the future there could be more detail supplied in regards to the minute item numbers 11 and 12.

Council Vice President Pilieri motioned to approve the minutes as presented, **Council Member Sloane** seconded and the motion carried 5-0.

4. CONSIDERATION OF THE 2020 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM:

The **Mayor** asked Council to please refer to his memo pertaining to the Grant and indicated the second page showed where the money has been allocated. **Council President Kisselback** asked if the figures are written in stone or can they be changed accordingly to our needs in regards to the Coronavirus. The **Mayor** indicated under this program he did not believe the money distribution could be changed since it has already been approved by HUD. **Solicitor Pizzo** agreed and explained that annually, under the Community Development Block Program funding, the Township is required to adopt a Budget and submit it back to HUD. The budget before Council is consistent with what the Township has done for the last several years for the money ear-marked for the Housing Program, for the Homeless Shelter, for the Handicapped Accessible Ramp Program and for the Township Administrative Fees. In furtherance of **Council President Kisselbacks** question to change that designation in the future, the Township will have to wait and see what HUD does as far as the allowance for the Township to use for the already committed Community Development Block Grant Funds if those can be

reallocated at some point of time in the future in response to the Coronavirus. At this point we do not know if that is going to happen, the Township does know that it is part of a Consortium that will be receiving separate funding from HUD that will be specifically used for the response to the COVID-19 crisis. At such time that HUD makes those monies available the Township is in line to request, and hopefully receive some of those funds. The **Mayor** read the following into the record:

Housing Rehabilitation Program	\$ 80,000
Curb Cut Program	\$ 185,353
Homeless Shelter	\$ 40,000
Program Administration	\$ 40,000

Council Member Tokmajian asked if it is Township residents applying for the Housing Rehab Program funds. Was it through the Township or HUD? **Mayor** indicated the residents would apply through the Township.

Council Member Sloane asked if Council was approving the Five Year Plan and the FY 2020 Annual Plan or is Council only approving the distribution of funds. **Solicitor Pizzo** indicated Council was only approving the distribution of funds. A discussion ensued regarding the posting of those plans on the website.

Council Secretary Knowles motioned to approve as presented, **Council Member Tokmajian** seconded and the motion carried 5-0.

5. **CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF A COOPERATION AGREEMENT WITH BUCKS COUNTY UNDER THE CRANSTON-GONZALEZ NATIONAL AFFORDABILITY ACT.**

The **Mayor** indicated this is a program that goes year to year without renewing it and now they are requiring to renew it and it is a Consortium with a county in Bristol Township. **Solicitor Pizzo** agreed with the Mayor and indicated what is referred to commonly as the Home Investment Partnership Program that is administered by the County using Housing and Urban Development Funds. The Township has been a participant in that program since 2002. Periodically, the Township is called on to update or renew the Township's Cooperation Agreement with the County. In order to participate in that program, the time has come for the Township to renew. The Resolution in front of Council, this evening, will continue the Township's participation in that program with the County for the foreseeable future. **Council President Kisselback** asked what funds are determined and when is it made available. **Solicitor Pizzo** indicated those funds are administered through the County so all the information regarding the same would be obtained through the County. Most recently the Township participated in this Consortium using HOME monies for the Veterans Housing Project that is currently under construction and in other affordable housing for senior citizens in the Township. **Council Member Sloane** asked if the County and Bristol Township still need

to pass their Resolution. **Solicitor Pizzo** indicated he could not speak for Bristol Township but at least for the County it is the Townships understanding they either have or they are going to submit the Resolution. **Council Secretary Knowles** asked who approves the Townships projects for this Resolution. **Solicitor Pizzo stated** he believed those decisions ultimately made their way to the County Commissioners, the other various County agencies are involved in Housing Development throughout the County would first be involved whether it is the County Housing Authority or other agencies of the County and ultimately the funding has to be approved by the Commissioners before it makes its way to Bensalem, Bristol or any other of the communities that are involved with the Consortium. **Council Vice President Pilieri** motioned to approve as presented, **Council Member Sloane** seconded and the motion carried 5-0.

6. **CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION WAIVING THE ASSESSMENT OF A PENALTY ON TOWNSHIP REAL PROPERTY TAXES LEVIED IN 2020 THAT ARE PAID TO THE BENSALEM TOWNSHIP TAX COLLECTOR ON OR BEFORE THE THIRTIETH DAY OF JULY, 2020:**

Council President Kisselback read a paragraph of the proposed Resolution then turned it over to the Solicitor to explain. **Solicitor Pizzo** indicated it was a long Resolution and had to be because the ability for the Township to change the dates associated with the payment of property taxes has to be approved by the State. Those dates are set by State law and the only other way the Township can alter them is by a change in State law. In this case, last Monday, the Governor signed into law a temporary measure that would allow the Township to submit the Resolution which is effectively moving the deadline for the payment of Township property taxes from June 30th to July 30th. The July 30th date was chosen because the County Commissioners earlier in the month chose that same date as the new deadline for the payment of County property taxes and so that County and Township property taxes will remain due on the same day the Administration is recommending to the Council that we extend the payment date from June 30th to July 30th. The Township Tax Office is open and processing tax bills and as most Government offices, the Tax Office is not open to the public but you can still mail the payments or drop them off in a drop box which is positioned out in front of the Tax Office. **Council Member Tokmajian** asked if the County was going to make another change, will the Township follow in making those same changes. It was discussed that Council would prepare an addendum to this Resolution and vote on the change. **Council Member Tokmajian** motioned to accept the Resolution as proposed, **Council Secretary Knowles** seconded and the motion carried 5-0.

7. **CONSIDERATION OF A REDUCTION OF FIRE INSPECTION FEES FOR THE BENSALEM TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT:**

Solicitor Pizzo indicated the School District was asking to have the fee from the Armstrong building be waived on the basis the building is vacant and they contend no longer require inspection. **Council Member Sloane** asked the Solicitor if there would be insurance implications if the Fire Inspectors were not conducting fire inspections on that property and technically the School District still owns the property. **Solicitor Pizzo** explained he expected the School District was carrying insurance on those buildings until such time they no longer owned them; and the School District's Fire Insurer would want to see proof of Fire Inspections,

but again, the Solicitor explained it was not his call but the School Districts. A conversation ensued regarding the Armstrong building fee. **Council Member Sloane** revised his motion to approve after verification was received via email from the Fire Marshal through **Fred Harran**, Director of Public Safety, who relayed his response of approving the waiver at 100%, **Council Member Tokmajian** seconded and the motioned carried 5-0.

8. PUBLIC COMMENT EMAILS:

Council President Kisselback asked **Solicitor Pizzo** if there were any Public Comment Emails that needed to be addressed. **Solicitor Pizzo** explained the record should reflect that the Township did not receive any Public Comment either by mail or email during the virtual council meeting.

9. OTHER BUSINESS:

Council Vice President Pilieri asked everyone to stay as safe as possible, protect your young ones and anyone with an underlying health issue and our senior citizens to keep them all safe and also ourselves safe. Thank you to all the businesses that are chipping in taking care of the essential workers.

Council Member Tokmajian thanked all of the first responders, police and fire and especially the healthcare workers who have been doing a tremendous job through these trying times and misses the normalcy of life and heartbroken for those kids missing the spring sports. Also, the challenges the high school seniors are facing and certainly for those suffering this horrible virus. Let us remain Bensalem united and get through this historic pandemic, please stay safe and stay healthy.

Council Member Sloane reiterated what everyone else was saying and looked at the numbers today in Pennsylvania and Bucks County alone and there is over 2,500 confirmed cases and nearly 150 deaths related to the virus so it is very important that we take these precautions very seriously with respects to social distancing and staying home and would urge everyone to stay home and stay safe. If you are struggling go to the Bensalem Township website or the website for the State of Pennsylvania where you will find resources for medical aide and mental health aide. You are not alone and we are all going through this together. There are avenues of help if needed, and please do not hesitate to ask.

Council Secretary Knowles emphasized the first responders and the police and how they are doing a job for us during this difficult time. And thanked all the doctors and nurses and the business who contributed to some of the things we needed. **Council Secretary Knowles** read a statement from the B3T, Focus Bensalem and the Rotary and the Township who are partnering with Feed the Kids Plus and thanked the Mayor for securing these funds to make this possible. The telephone hotline is 215-633-3709 or visit Facebook at Feed the Kids Plus.

Solicitor Pizzo explained how the Township is continuing to operate and how there is a lot of work behind the scenes. **Solicitor Pizzo** acknowledged all the individuals involved in putting

this meeting together tonight. As the public is aware it has been some time since there was a Council meeting and the Township was waiting for direction from the State because of the format that is being used to conduct tonight's meeting differs a little bit from what is normally required under the Sunshine Law. It took a fair amount of planning, a fair amount of work in the execution. Council has been involved in weekly briefings, from the Mayor, the Director of Administration, and the Director of Public Safety. Those weekly telephone conferences have been informational in the sense that the Mayor and his Directors have been providing updates to the Council as to the goings on within the Township in terms of staffing and in terms of what's happening out there on a daily basis and the record will reflect the those have been occurring weekly sense the outset of the Declaration of Emergency. **Solicitor Pizzo** echoed everyone's sentiments please stay safe and be well if you encounter a Park Ranger or a Police Officer in your travels and they ask you to do something in compliance with the Covid mitigation protocols, please listen to what they ask you to do.

Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo indicated there are no words he can say in relation to what has happened and continues to give us the problem we have, The **Mayor** echoes all of Council and if anybody has a problem please call the Township. The Bensalem Township Golf Course will re-open on Friday, May 1st abiding by all the rules and regulations set forth from this pandemic. The **Mayor** couldn't be prouder of this community and all of the men and women, Police, EMS, Fire, Doctors, and Nurses. The **Mayor** indicated that every department here in the Township has someone coming in on a daily basis. As soon as the Governor lifts the ban, all employees will be in the building and ready to go to meet all of the qualifications they are talking about. The **Mayor** thanked all of Council for their cooperation and how they all took the same pledge to guard the health and safety of this community. The **Mayor** mentioned the Homeowners Grant that will be mailed out by the end of the week and hopefully help those during this time.

Township Engineer Russell Benner acknowledged everything that Council and the Mayor said recognizing the first responders and all of the hospital workers. Within the last few weeks **Mr. Benner** has seen some land development applications for projects which he was happy to see as we move forward from this process.

Council President Kisselback indicated there is a protocol for the Bensalem Township Golf Course relative to just showing up. **Solicitor Pizzo** indicated, as the Mayor mentioned, the plan is the Governor announced this afternoon the Townships ability to reopen the Golf Course. The Mayor has his Golf Course staff gearing up to do so, and please do not just show up on Friday without checking the Township website or calling the Golf Course. **Council President Kisselback** thanked the people who made the virtual meeting happen, Kurt Stolzenberger, IT Specialist, Deron Miller, Production/Electronic Media, Debbie McBreen, Council Clerk and Joe Pizzo the Township Solicitor. Council President Kisselback thanked the first responders, EMS, the firefighters, volunteers and full-time firefighters, nurses, doctors and the truck drivers, the trash haulers and all those who are supplying us with the necessities of life.

10. ADJOURNMENT:

There being no other business to discuss, Council Member Tokmajian motioned to adjourn, Council Secretary Knowles seconded, and the motion carried 5-0.

The Bensalem Township Council Meeting of April 27th, 2020 can be viewed in its entirety at the following websites:

www.bensalempa.gov or www.youtube.com

Respectfully Submitted,

**Debora F. McBreen
Recording Secretary**