

Towanda Borough Regular Council Meeting Minutes July 5, 2022

The Towanda Borough Council Meeting was held on Tuesday, July 5, 2022, at the Borough Municipal Building, 724 Main Street, Towanda, PA. The meeting was called to order at 7:03 PM by President Christini.

Present: Vice President Eberlin, Mrs. Miller, Mr. Roof, Mr. Saring, Mr. Kovalcin, Mr. Schulze, Mr. Christini, Mrs. Hatch & Mr. Parks

Absent: None.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD:

BobbiJo Smiley of 4 William Street was present to follow up on her lack of parking concern in front of her residence. At the meeting she attended on June 7th, she stated that parking in front of her home is difficult due to Allied employees, the eye doctor customers, and people parking on William Street while they walk on the Merrill Parkway. She said that 3 property owners have the same issue as her (they were present and spoke also). Ms. Smiley stated that she does not have a driveway, and the people next to her do not have a driveway either. When she gets home from work some days and nights there are cars parked in front of her home and she has to park up the street leaving her car at that spot and walk to her home.

Fran Walker of 6 William Street stated that she shares Ms. Smiley's concern too. In addition, she stated there is a house behind her that she was offering to buy at one point in time. The owner offered her a price and she agreed but her bank told her it was not worth the asking amount. The property is starting to smell and it is a real eyesore. She said the smell drifts over to her yard (The house at 303 JB Merrill Pkwy is half burned down due to a fire that occurred in October 2019). She said this property would have been good for her and her neighbors with the current parking issues, but she can't afford it now. It smells, there are windows with no coverings and the roof is partially caved in. In addition, Mrs. Walker said on the back side where the fire happened, the kitchen window has a tarp over it that is starting to split and you can smell the fire soot.

President Christini asked Mr. Sluyter if the home was condemned. Mr. Sluyter stated that it was condemned but the owner opened a 6-month building permit that is still open. Mr. Christini stated that they can't have open windows and doors to which Mr. Sluyter said he would check on it tomorrow, but when he talked to the owner a couple of weeks ago for an update of what work was going on, the owner stated that they were currently there doing the windows. Council will have this addressed.

In commenting on Ms. Smiley's parking issue, Mr. Sluyter said there are heavy parking restrictions in any C-2 area, and resident and reserved 9-hour parking in R-2, but there isn't anything in the R-1 district. The majority of Second Street is R-2 and R-3 with parking regulations for tenants and reserves, but there is nothing listed in R-1 that he has found. Mr. Christini stated that maybe we should look into that.

Rachel Stahle of 10 Mix Avenue was the next citizen to speak. She said that if Council was going to do a parking study, the area between Chestnut and Mix Avenue onto William Street is much narrower here than the rest of William Street. She stated that tractor trailers come in this part of William Street, so if there is parking on both sides, it would be tricky. She added that maybe we could prohibit them from coming in on William Street, as usually, they are going to NAPA Auto Parts store. She feels there are alternate ways they could use to get to NAPA. Ms. Stahle also stated that when she moved into her home there was no parking space and she made a parking space on her home's property because she would come home from the grocery store and in front of her home (on Mix Ave) there were parked vehicles. She removed the grass and made a stone parking spot, as she felt it was the only choice she had other than parking illegally. Also, Ms. Stahle was concerned about other businesses that might come into the neighborhood in the future. Mr. Sluyter stated that it is doubtful as the 2 businesses that are near her are grandfathered and would not be a permitted use now.

President Christini stated he was sorry for the troubles they were having with parking and he suggested that Council send it to the Planning Commission to study the possibility of reserve parking space in R-1, as

Mr. Sluyter said it does not exist and this has been something that has been brought up over the years. The Commission would look at ordinances that other municipalities have done and discuss where this type of parking might be needed. As far as changing the traffic flow direction, this may be too drastic and be harder to do with a greater impact.

Mr. Kovalcin made a motion and Mr. Saring seconded to have the Planning Commission investigate reserve parking possibility in the R-1 district.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MONTH'S MINUTES:

Motion to approve June 6, 2022, Regular meeting minutes was made by Mr. Eberlin and seconded by Mr. Kovalcin. Motion passed.

FIRE CHIEF REPORT:

Chief Roof stated that last week Towanda, North Towanda, Wysox, and Athens fire company volunteers cleared some of the trees out of the river where people were getting stuck. The part for the new fire truck recall (D&L sensor) finally came in.

FIRE BOARD REPORT:

Mr. Parks stated there was no meeting last month.

MAYOR'S REPORT:

Mayor Miller stated that he is working on coordinating the "Mayor for a Day" schedule.

POLICE CHIEF REPORT:

Chief Epler gave his report.

- The TraCS citation system is being used and is working nicely. I have called and emailed the company about where our equipment is and they finally reported that they are waiting on computer chips. The rep gave me a workaround for getting demo's in and they will be replaced when the new ones arrive. So, at this time we are waiting on the Demo units.
- The drug task force arrested several defendants for drug charges incurred from the illegal sale of narcotics.
- Officer Hennessy is out of school and is back in the rotation for the summer. Vacation hours are being used by the Officers.
- Officer Hennessy put on a demonstration for K through 6th grades for the Christian Camp held at Sheshequin / Ulster Rec Center.

JUNE 2022 – Monthly Report

262	COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	0	JUVENILE PETITIONS
14	TRAFFIC CITATIONS	0	K-9 SERVICE (BORO)
11	NON-TRAFFIC CITATIONS	7	THEFT REPORTS
0	DUI ARRESTS	1	ANIMAL COMPLAINTS
76	DISTURBANCE CALLS	7	VEHICLE DOORS OPENED
4	VEHICLE ACCIDENTS	5	WARNINGS ISSUED
2	OUT-OF-TOWN ASSISTS	0	K-9 SERVICES
7	CRIMINAL ARRESTS		

POLICE COMMITTEE REPORT:

Mrs. Hatch gave a summary of the meeting tonight.

- The new shotguns have been built and we are waiting on new adapters for the guns.
- Staffing concerns were discussed, and with Patrolman Roberts leaving the part-time position here and going to Sayre PD full-time they had to move some officers' shifts around. Sargent Lantz, (who took time out of his vacation this week to attend the meeting) came to the meeting to help the committee understand the staffing needs. The Committee is asking that the Civil Service Committee be activated and get a testing date scheduled for Fall 2022, so there is an active candidate list for any future openings. The force is in a position where the officers are out in the

field in a position where they are by themselves. Mr. Eberlin said that he is on the Civil Service Committee (with Alec Garden & Mark Henry) and they will set up a meeting to discuss getting a testing date set.

CODE ENFORCEMENT / PUBLIC WORKS REPORT:

Mr. Sluyter, Code Enforcement Officer reviewed the report.

JUNE 2022 SUMMARY – CODE ENFORCEMENT STATS

PERMITS & CONTRACTORS		MONTH	YTD
Permits Issued		27	104
Permit Fees Paid	\$	3,115	12,803.30
Code Inspections Fees	\$	575	3,973.30
Borough Total after Code Inspections Fees	\$	2,540	8,830
Permit Work Value	\$	191,825	778,017.34
Contractors Registered		28	78
Contractors Registrations Amount	\$	2,800	7,800

UCC Reportable Permits

	Month	YTD	\$ Fees	\$ Fees YTD
#1 Residential – New		1		4.50
#2 Residential – Other	3	15	13.50	67.50
#3 Commercial – New		3		13.50
#4 Commercial – Other	2	6	9.00	27.00
TOTALS	5	25	22.50	112.50

COMPLAINTS

	Received		Investigated		Resolved	
	Month	YTD	Month	YTD	Month	YTD
Single Family Non-Rental	9	93	8	82		24
1 & 2 Family Rentals	15	95	12	79		26
Commercial Rental Units	12	55	10	51		11
Commercial Non-Rental	5	29	5	25		8
TOTALS	41	272	35	237		69

Rental Dwelling Unit Inspections

	Month	YTD
1st Inspection	16	61
2nd Inspection	2	2

3rd Inspection	0	0
FEES PAID \$	0.00	200.00

PARKING:
Tickets by Status

	Month	Year-to-Date
Issued	45	96
Paid	14	216
Dismissed	12	72
Warning	20	67
Abandoned	6	15
Citation		121

Tickets by Street Location

	Month	Year-to-Date
Main Street	21	234
Court Street	15	103
Bridge Street	16	101
Park Street	4	57
Pine Street	22	86
Washington Street	6	22
State Street	2	20
Parking Garage	3	53
John B. Merrill Pkwy	2	8
Second Street		7
Mix Avenue		
C&N Lot		
Poplar Street		
Other (Towanda)		

Tickets by Violation

	Month	Year-to-Date
Expired Meter	44	166
3 Hour Limit	36	421
3 Hour Free Parking, Moved Locations	2	28
Permit Required		6
Parking Outside of Lines, Direction of Travel	1	16
Snow Emergency-Second- ary Roads		7
Handicap/Disabled	2	17
Non-Space	1	24
Loading Zone	5	7

Mr. Sluyter informed Council that Allied Services may be applying for a variance (Planning & Zoning issue) on property they purchased at 712-714 Second Street in the R-1 District. The property is a 2 unit (home & garage apartment), and Mr. Sluyter thought that Allied wanted to house 3 clients with 1 to 2 staff employees. He talked to Mr. Ames, Vice-President of Community Services about it and Mr. Ames stated that if it doesn't get approved then they will probably sell it, as this would be their oversight.

President Christini asked Mr. Sluyter how he handles "Text My Gov" complaints. Mr. Sluyter stated that they come in as an e-mail notification to him, and there is a separate module on iWorq system where he imports it into the Property Maintenance section. He then writes a letter for the case if one hasn't already been mailed. In some cases that were on the report, there was a letter sent previously. President Christini asked if a letter is sent every time a complaint comes in. Mr. Sluyter gave an example: Say for 1 Main Street, if he writes a letter on Monday, then someone sends him a "Text My Gov" complaint on Wednesday, he would not send another letter for the same complaint because he just sent it on Monday. President Christini asked if there was a letter in the property files for every case in his report to which Mr. Sluyter stated "yes". Along those lines President Christini asked for every maintenance issue in his case report is there a letter corresponding to the case date in the property file? Mr. Sluyter stated that if there were three cases for the same address, he would do one letter on the initial date.

President Christini asked Mr. Sluyter about the older cases and if there was a letter in the file for all the old maintenance issues. Mr. Sluyter stated "Yes", so they would not be on the report unless there was a letter sent out. He said even the ones that are not on "Text My Gov" don't show on the report unless a letter goes out. President Christini asked Mr. Sluyter how he handled ones that repeat, for example where the grass is piling up and there is not necessarily a citation. Mr. Sluyter gave an example that was on the report where high grass was cited 2 times. Mr. Sluyter stated in one of the cases pointed out, there was no letter written. President Christini stated that a point he wants to make is that for every issue in the maintenance report there should be a letter in the property file.

President Christini asked Mr. Sluyter about 105 Second Street, the apartment house with the broken windows, and the open front door if there was a letter in the file for that. Mr. Sluyter stated there was a letter for that address and the owner did go down and boarded the window. President Christini said that the door was currently open to which Mr. Sluyter stated that it sounds like it's open & close as there is another property on North Main that is owned by the same people that keeps getting broken into just about every day. Mr. Sluyter said he addresses the problem with the property owner but he does not know if the owner just shuts the door and locks it or not. Mr. Kovalcin asked Mr. Sluyter when the last time was that he was at the 105 Second Street property. Mr. Sluyter stated that he did not go there last week. President Christini suggested that any letters that go out on these condemned properties should state that the doors are to be screwed shut with a type of screw that they cannot get open. He said that Chief Epler knows that things are happening on those properties and President Christini hopes there are letters in their property files.

In addition, President Christini asked Mr. Sluyter how the Red Rose Diner on Main Street is being handled. Mr. Sluyter stated that he called the owner and the owner stated that he had already paid a local contractor to start the job. Mr. Sluyter called the contractor for a start date and the contractor said he would get to it next week. Mr. Sluyter told him he needed to rope it off because it is a hazard and the contractor did the yellow tape, and it has been longer than a week and the contractor hasn't done any work yet. Mr. Christini stated that this is a good example of Quality of Life Ticketing because it would be a one-hour fix-it job with a dollar's worth of wood. These guys are not taking action on many unsafe things. President Christini asked Mr. Sluyter if he sent a letter to the owner (is there a letter in the file)? Mr. Sluyter stated that he would follow up on that as he was not sure if there is or not. President Christini stated that there should be a letter in every file for every case that is on the Code Report and it should show a date given that says how long they have to fix it.

Also, President Christini stated that the Code report has about 34 issues dating from 2021 and older that are still on the report, and some are for rubbish. He asked Mr. Sluyter to explain why there are "rubbish" violations still on the report from the year 2021, as there were several listed from April, May, June, and September 2021. President Christini stated that either they are resolved and they should come off the list, or where the owners were cited, there should be a citation number. Mr. Sluyter stated that it could be an oversight on his part and he just did not close it out, as he was not disagreeing with President Christini if there are some cases on there.

Mr. Christini stated again there were 34 on the report and asked Mr. Sluyter to go through the report and clean it up. He stated if there's anything that is open, cite them, if there's anything that is closed, remove it. President Christini stated that we want the borough to get cleaned up and if there are items on this report that have been on there for over a year to three years they should be dealt with. He asked if anyone disagrees with him to say so. Again, President Christini does not see any reason why these things are still on the report and stated it's a clerical issue.

Mr. Eberlin stated that the report itself should make us all think about a Quality of Life ordinance. Mrs. Hatch asked Mr. Sluyter if it was weeks to get through the steps in the code violation process. Mr. Sluyter stated that there are 10 days from the time the letter is mailed out for the violation to be taken care of, but with the mail being how it is, he makes sure to give them a couple of extra days. Sometimes things get taken care of in 12 days, sometimes not. Mrs. Hatch stated that the Quality of Life Ticketing ordinance seems like would make things happen much quicker. She also stated that there is a level of care that some property owners have and some don't. This may help get people to care and will make it happen quicker. President Christini stated that there are lots of ways we can get communication to landlords. If they don't get the ticket that is put on the door, it could be sent via registered letter and if they get maybe three tickets, it adds up, and then it goes into a citation. Consensus is that the Quality of Life Ticketing ordinance would streamline Mr. Sluyter's job and save him from writing letter after letter with unresolved issues going on for months (from grass to snow).

Mrs. Hatch made the motion and Mr. Kovalcin seconded it to request the Planning Commission to investigate a Quality of Life Ticketing Ordinance. Motion Passed.

BOROUGH MANAGER EGLESTON REPORT:

1. Parking

Manager Egleston stated that ParkMobile is up and running in our Parking Garage and side streets. We've added signs to the metered parking streets (Court, Pine, and Washington) clarifying the rules. In the Parking Garage, guests will need to enter the parking stall number (110-132) and then select the amount of time they wish to park and proceed to checkout. For the other zones (street parking) they will need to enter their license plate number, and then proceed to checkout. She also met with the Presbyterian Church on Court Street to help try to resolve their issues with day visitors and groups concerning options to pay through ParkMobile. The church secretary has a computer and Manager Egleston told her that she could use ParkMobile online to reserve and pay for parking for these visitors and group meetings.

Erica Locke, our Summer Intern has been tracking our parking trends and shared her findings. She presented a very informative report that covered May through June 2022. She did a parking duration review which showed parking that was extended by people who may have been in a spot longer than originally paid for. She also stated for daily trends, 11 o'clock seems to be the most popular hour people are downtown. She also summarized the last 6 weeks' transactions, parking amount, and the specific zone (there are 9) usage. She tracked the average payment amount per zone, average time spent per zone, the most common payment amounts by zone, and the most common time usage per zone. She found that the average time a vehicle parks is about 4 hours. In addition, over the past 6 weeks, Ms. Locke tracked the ParkMobile transactions versus the parking tickets. The parking tickets are getting lower and the transactions to pay for parking are rising which means people are using ParkMobile. (Her charts are included). Council praised Ms. Locke for her assistance with the parking program as well as for charting the Bradford County Veterans Memorial Park. She has done a phenomenal job.

2. Paving Projects and Street Prep

Manager Egleston stated that Bishops Brothers Construction, Inc is hoping to begin paving in late July. We have been working on stormwater work that we need to complete before paving. We've also been busy addressing potholes and will begin painting parking lines, and crosswalks soon.

3. Towanda Lions Club & Merrill Parkway

Manager Egleston stated that the Towanda Lions Club will provide \$2,000 towards filling and sealing the cracks on Merrill Parkway. They will donate \$1,000 for 2022 and \$1,000 for 2023 towards the project. She said she appreciates the Lions Club for stepping up to help us out with this. We did receive one estimate for \$2,400. Manager Egleston will look into the cost of seal-coating the entire walkway and will be meeting with the Towanda Rotary Board to see if they would also be interested in assisting with the project.

4. **724 Main Street Façade Renovations**

Manager Egleston gave an update on the painting and staining of the municipal building. We were having an issue with salt bleeding through the stain and need to apply a primer to block it on the brick exterior. So far, we have received LOTS of compliments on the improvements and we are all eager to see it done! We have been seeking quotes for a larger garage door out back to widen and lengthen the door to fit some of our larger equipment, and pricing for installation/construction. Once the door goes up, we will side that wall with the same material installed out front. Things are moving along as the borough crew becomes available to work on it, and she is hoping to have the 3 sides done in August.

5. **PennDOT Meeting**

Manager Egleston said they met with PennDOT to look at SR 1039 North Main Street, Locust, Williams, and a portion of Packer as a possible Turnback Project. They did come back with a quote where they would completely redo the storm drains, pave and add new street curbing. John Miller, Chad Strickland our Engineer, and a PennDOT official walked it and they had some additional concerns from the initial estimate, so it's back to the drawing board for now. We may have to use our ARPA funds to tie in to include some of William Street's storm drainage issues with this project.

6. **Riverfest**

August 25th-27th will be the dates for this year's Riverfest, which is a week later than normal. This was due to scheduling a new carnival company. Sponsorships are coming in and have covered the fireworks display on Saturday. Other events through the festival include; Bingo, Axe Throwing, Mechanical Bull, 5K run/walk, possibly kayaking, and STEM activities. Entertainment includes; the Towanda K-Dettes, Twisted Years, Diana & the Crew, Karaoke Contest with Ben'Jamin DJ Service, Kevin Doupe, Jeremy the Illusionist, Devin Sherman, Prairie Dogma, and The Tonight Band.

Manager Egleston stated that the Borough received the 2021 reporting year Act 13 allocation funding in the amount of \$120,387.32, which was much higher than the 2020 reporting year, which was \$69,653.84. In the 2022 budget Manager Egleston and former Manager Lane projected it at \$65,000. Probably the increase was due to skyrocketing fuel prices and more gas activity going on. As always, we deposit this money in our Special Capital Reserve fund.

BOROUGH SOLICITOR

Borough Solicitor Smith stated that he met with the Planning Commission, and looked into getting the Vacant Property Ordinance going. He is currently in the process of revising it.

BOROUGH SECRETARY

Borough Secretary Kulick suggested a date for the Borough Picnic this year of August 12, 2022. This was agreed by Chief "Chili" Roof and the fire company volunteers.

FINANCIAL & ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT:

The motion to pay the June 2022 bills was made by Mrs. Hatch and seconded by Mr. Saring. Motion passed.

Mr. Eberlin mentioned the per-capita & occupational taxing (nuisance tax), and the difficulty in keeping it up to date. We no longer know who lives where and we probably are only taxing about 20 percent of our borough. We will be looking at doing away with this tax, but we need to look at the impact it will have on the budget. We may have to increase taxes to make up for the lack of per-capita and occupational tax. It is a huge liability for the borough to not know who lives where and the tax collection is taxing a small portion of the borough because we don't know who lives where. It is a mess that needs to be cleaned up and his thoughts were to get rid of it to clean it up unless we come up with a way to track people. However, he said that 60 percent of the borough are tenants, so how do you keep track of that? It's impossible. Therefore, this will be discussed when we start the budget talks. Mr. Eberlin also stated that if we taxed everyone that is living in the borough it would probably amount to \$15,000 to \$20,000. This is not a big sum but it is significant enough that we should take a look at and discuss it.

UNION SUB-COMMITTEE:

Mrs. Miller stated there was nothing to report at this time.

PLANNING COMMISSION REPORT:

There was a meeting in June and a draft of the meeting minutes was included in the packet. President Christini stated that we welcomed Roger Hatch as a new member of the Planning Commission. Manager Egleston reviewed the Regional Comprehensive Plan and in the near future, an RFP (Request for Proposal) will be drafted. Also, Manager Egleston, discussed the Site Master Plan that will be readvertised. She will be meeting with a DCNR official that will help her with the RFP for this project.

RECREATION REPORT:

Mr. Kovalcin stated they had the Magician last week. He was very well received and did a good job.

TMA/WMA/CBPA REPORTS:

Included in the packet.

LIBRARY REPORT:

Included in Packet. There will be no meeting in July and August.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Kovalcin and seconded by Mrs. Miller. Meeting adjourned at 8:13 PM.



Diane M. Kulick
Towanda Borough Secretary