

Towanda Borough Council
November 4, 2024
Regular Meeting Minutes

The Towanda Borough Council held its regular meeting at the Towanda Borough Municipal Building on Monday, November 4, 2024. The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM.

Council Members Present: President Ryan Eberlin, Vice President Marc Christini, Jean Miller, Philip Roof, Joseph Saring, William Kovalcin, Jonathan Schulze, Michelle Hatch, and Gary Parks.

Others: Mayor Garrett Miller, Fred Smith (Borough Solicitor); Borough Officers Randy Epler, Anthony Carpenter, and Brian Bellows; Borough Manager Stacy Schoonover, Secretary Diane Kulick, Judy Poulsen, Code Enforcement Officer Barry Thrush, Administrative Staff Angie Oliver

Public Comments/Concerns

- Tom Bradford, 103 Means Street, commended the Borough officers for providing assistance and testimony during the criminal mischief case that was recently settled in his favor. He gave special thanks to Corporal Bellows for his aid during the investigation.
- Copies of two notes with parking concerns were included in the meeting packet. The anonymous notes provided some feedback about the positioning of the provided signs and reverting back to meters instead of Park Mobile. Also, concern was expressed regarding the amount of money charged for a parking violation.

Approval Of Minutes

A motion to approve the October 7, 2024 minutes was made by Michelle Hatch, seconded by Joe Saring. The motion carried unanimously.

Fire Chief Report

The detailed monthly report was included in the November packet.

Chief Roof reported;

- October was a busy month in regards to calls, but most were in the township.
- Reminding everyone that the Towanda Fire Dept would be hosting their breakfasts on the third Sunday of each month beginning on November 17, 2024.
- Chief Roof will be stepping down as fire chief after 17 years in January 2025. The new chief will be Billy Sheets with Jarrett Sheets acting as first assistant chief and Chief Roof acting as second assistant chief.

Mr. Saring made a motion to accept the changing of the fire chiefs, Mr. Parks seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Fire Board Report

Mr. Parks stated there was nothing new to report.

Mayor Report

- Mayor Miller wanted to extend thanks to the community and the Borough police and employees for another successful annual Halloween parade. The children had a great time and the festivities were well attended.
- Mayor Miller, Manager Schoonover, and Secretary Oliver introduced themselves to the Main Street businesses on October 18.
- The Red Rose Café will be open for business beginning December 1, 2024. Mayor Miller encourages everyone to stop in and support them.
- One Well Health will be opening their café which will be managed and operated by those they serve. Mayor Miller also encourages the community to support this café, as well.
- Staff Sgt. Curt Brown returned home after his second deployment. He was presented with a key to the city of Towanda in recognition of his service.

Police Chief Report

Chief Epler reported:

- A DUI Rove operation was conducted in the Borough this month.
- We are continuing with meetings via Zoom for the Central Square project for our operating system.
- Officers Hades and Hennessy did K-9 training in Luzerne County for Narcotics, article searching, and tracking. They also held a presentation for 5th graders at the Bradford County Rural Health Days.

- Officers Wills and Carpenter went to ARIDE training at Mansfield.
- Corporal Bellows and Officer Vermilya went to drug interdiction training at the Communications Center.
- Officer Lake attended a 5-day Firearms Instructor School in Bloomsburg PA.
- Corporal Bellows, Officer Hennessy, Officer Carpenter, and K-9 Moro did a vehicle stop that resulted in the seizure of 31.4 grams of methamphetamine. The suspect was arrested on multiple charges.
- All went well with the Halloween Parade and Trick-or-Treat night. Chief Epler thanked the officers for being down at the trunk or treat and handing out candy. Also, on Trick or Treat night Officer Wills handed candy out the police car window. There was a great police presence that night and he noted that we have a very good police department.
- Chief introduced Officer Anthony Carpenter, as he is the part-time officer and he wanted to come to the meeting and say hello. Chief Epler stated that Officer Carpenter has made a great impact and you can tell by looking at his stats. He is also in the military reserves and is a new dad as well.
- Chief Epler asked for approval to roll over vacation time for the Police Department this year. Mr. Kovalcin made the motion, seconded by Mrs. Miller. Motion carried unanimously.

**TOWANDA POLICE DEPARTMENT
MONTHLY REPORT - NOVEMBER, 2024**

335	COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	3	JUVENILE PETITIONS
47	TRAFFIC CITATIONS	2	K-9 SERVICE (BORO)
4	NON-TRAFFIC CITATIONS	10	THEFT REPORTS
1	DUI ARRESTS	3	ANIMAL COMPLAINTS
41	DISTURBANCE CALLS	8	VEHICLE DOORS OPENED
3	VEHICLE ACCIDENTS	8	WARNINGS ISSUED
1	OUT-OF-TOWN ASSISTS	7	MENTAL HEALTH CALLS
8	CRIMINAL ARRESTS		

POLICE COMMITTEE:

Mr. Saring stated that Chief Epler covered everything and the numbers in the police report reflect the officers are out there covering very well, especially the traffic.

CODE ENFORCEMENT REPORT:

The Code Enforcement Report is included.

- Mr. Thrush covered the October permit, property maintenance, and rental report. The numbers on the permit report are consistent with last year's numbers.
- Council member Mrs. Hatch asked about the parking report. Mr. Thrush stated that he is trying to get into the managerial part of the account and it's quite difficult but he is trying to figure it out. He will try to get the stats by the next meeting.

PUBLIC WORKS/CODE ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT:

Mr. Parks stated that they only meet as needed.

BOROUGH REPORT from Borough Manager Schoonover

1. DOWNTOWN CHRISTMAS

Chamber of Commerce Hometown Christmas will be held December 6 and 7th.

On Saturday, December 7th, the Chamber requested traffic to be shut down to have the 5k during the day and parade at night. Borough Manager Schoonover asked for approval to close the Merrill Parkway on December 7th, once in the AM to hold the 5K, and in the PM to hold the Parade. Mr. Kovalcin made the motion, seconded by Mr. Christini to approve both closures. The motion carried unanimously.

2. MERRILL PARKWAY

Courtney Oley will be wrapping up the paintings on the parkway. The paintings will be sealed up with a finished coat by next week. We thank Courtney for her beautiful work. President Eberlin stated that maybe in the Spring we should celebrate the "murals on the parkway."

3. LOCAL SHARE ACCOUNT – LSA GRANT

Tina Picket & Gene Yaw announced awards on October 22nd.

Towanda Borough was awarded:

Borough Equipment (Police K9, Dump truck, & Backhoe) \$400,000.

Third Ward Playground Improvements \$586,350.

This funding will provide much-needed upgrades to maintenance equipment, repair critical infrastructure, and improve recreational facilities, all of which will enhance the quality of life for Towanda’s residents

4. VISIT

Mayor Garrett Miller, Angela Oliver (new Administrative Assistant) & Manager Schoonover made a trip downtown to meet business owners. They asked for some feedback, and parking and signage was one of the biggest complaints. She wants to visit downtown business owners quarterly. Some of the new owners they met were: One Well Healthcare, the Laurel Health – doctor, & the Variety Shop.

President Eberlin suggested that we have the impromptu parking committee address these parking concerns and get some of Judy Pousen’s (Parking Attendant) thoughts on it too. We need to make sure we are continuing to understand the concerns.

5. MEETINGS

Friday, October 18th, Manager Schoonover attended the 2024 NTPRDC Annual Meeting and she took Angela Oliver with her. They met a lot of people that we deal with at that meeting.

6. LESGP Grant (Police)

Submitted remaining balance for reimbursement totaling \$16,161.20, Axon Fleet.

MISC.

Manager Schoonover mentioned the old Mulberry School, as the owner Avery Snell called her and wanted her to let Council know that he is trying to do his best. He has boarded up everything, but when he boards a window, another window gets broken into. He has no plans yet on what to do with the building or even tearing it down.

Angela Oliver, a new Administrative Assistant, was introduced to Council. She will be doing half of Secretary Kulick’s and half of Manager Schoonover’s job duties.

Manager Schoonover took some pictures of the Third Ward Playground, as there are dead trees on the opposite side of the fence. She looked at the County map, and that showed that the trees were not the Borough’s. Mr. Parks stated that the neighbor came to him last month and was concerned with the dead trees. There is a bench there and families do sit there. He’s afraid that when the wind blows hard, a branch or a limb will come down and someone will get injured or killed. There are four that are really bad. They are on the Cherry Street side, and if they are his trees, he needs to take them down. He stated that he was advised by the previous Borough Manager to not take them down. President Eberlin stated that if he is willing to cut them down, let him do it. Manager Schoonover and Mr. Thrush will continue the conversation with Mr. Parks' help, as this needs to be taken care of. Mr. Parks will follow up on it.

BOROUGH SOLICITOR SMITH –

ORDINANCE 2024-6

Adopt Ordinance Amending Chapter 325, Article XI, Section 325-81, Definition in the Towanda Borough Code pertaining to Code Definition of “GUEST.”

The motion to adopt Ordinance 2024-6 was made by Mr. Saring and seconded by Mr. Christini.

The roll was called and recorded as follows:

AYE/YES: President Eberlin, Mr. Roof, Mrs. Miller, Mr. Saring, Mr. Kovalcin, Mr. Shulze, Vice-President Christini, Mrs. Hatch & Mr. Parks

NAY/NO:

ABSTAIN:

ABSENT:

ORDINANCE 2024-6 – Carried unanimously

ORDINANCE 2024-7

Adopt Ordinance Amending Chapter 217, Article XI, Section 217-3, Definition in the Towanda Borough Code pertaining to Vacant & Abandoned Property & Redefine the term “VACANT BUILDING.”

The motion to adopt Ordinance 2024-7 was made by Mr. Christini and seconded by Mrs. Hatch.

The roll was called and recorded as follows:

AYE/YES: President Eberlin, Mr. Roof, Mrs. Miller, Mr. Saring, Mr. Kovalcin, Mr. Shulze, Vice-President Christini, Mrs. Hatch & Mr. Parks

NAY/NO:

ABSTAIN:

ABSENT:

ORDINANCE 2024-7 – Carried unanimously

Solicitor Smith stated that the Flood Plain Management Ordinance (Chapter 153) passed recently had a gap in one section under “N. Tanks, Number 2. **{Community Ordinance No.}** shall:” He does not think that it’s anything significant that we need to worry about at this point. If he does ask to amend it, he’ll probably just take out that tiny section because we don’t have anything to write in it. So, we may just delete that part.

BOROUGH SECRETARY –

Mrs. Kulick announced the annual leaf pickup starts on Tuesday, November 12th. The borough crews will start at the south end and work their way to the north. This has been advertised in the paper several times. Residents can also take their bagged leaves behind the YMCA on North Fourth Street, and over on Elm Street (on Borough property).

FINANCIAL & ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT:

- A motion was made by Mr. Parks and seconded by Mrs. Hatch to pay the bills. The motion passed unanimously.
- **The Budget Workshop meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 20th at 5:30 PM. It will be advertised in the legal ads.**
- The Finance and Admin might meet on Wednesday, November 27th at 7 PM.

UNION SUB-COMMITTEE:

President Eberlin stated that they had 2 meetings and the committee will be meeting a 3rd time. He appreciated Jean Miller being on the committee along with Fred Johnson, Stacy, and Matt Aikey. He also appreciates what the union brings to the table. He thinks it’s important to have a good, healthy conversation, as it is our employees. He wants to make sure that we’re protecting ourselves, budgetarily and financially. Unfortunately, we got assessed lower last year than the previous year, so that just means less tax revenue for the Borough. We’re not looking to increase taxes or increase rates if we don’t have to. Therefore, there is this fiscal responsibility we have in these negotiations. At the same time, we have a responsibility to make sure we’re providing our employees with what they deserve and continue to make the position attractive. It is hard for us to continue to make these positions attractive, so we can compete locally, and the biggest thing is CDL’s (Commercial Drivers Licenses). These labor positions are the most important ones that we need to continue to be competitive, so we have got to spend some money, but at the same time, we have to be mindful of what we spend and make sure everybody agrees with that. It’s very difficult, but we are getting there.

PLANNING COMMISSION REPORT:

Mr. Christini stated that two things came out of the meeting on October 15th. There was a motion and a letter that was drafted to send to the PENNVEST office for funding to upgrade the Authority’s Wastewater Treatment Plant which was originally built in the 1950s. The letter states that the Planning Commission supports the plans for the wastewater treatment plant (renovating an existing use). Mr. Christini stated that he has never seen such a letter in all his years on the Planning Commission, which is, and it has to do with a grant. It’s kind of a checked-box thing. They wanted us to say that the plans that are being proposed for the wastewater treatment plant are consistent with the planning goals we set that have been part of any comprehensive plan that we recognize for the borough. It’s a sewer plant, and it’s going to continue to be a sewer plant, therefore it was kind of a no-brainer, but they wanted it in writing. The letter was written and then signed by the Planning Commission Chairperson, Shane Mize.

Solicitor Smith is still working on the change to non-conforming use, to change the language, to tighten it up.

RECREATION REPORT:

Mr. Kovalcin stated that they were working on Riverfest, and they got some feelers out to four different ride companies. They are waiting to hear from them. Also, Mr. Kovalcin stated that they would like to have more volunteers to help out with this event next year.

TMA/WTMA/CBPA REPORTS:

The September TMA and WTMA meeting minutes are in the packet.

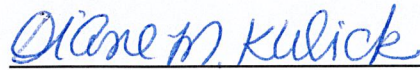
Also, Mr. Christini stated that under WTMA (Wysox Township Municipal Authority), the WTMA and TMA have started an investigation to consider merging. It is just preliminary, but the Wysox board approached TMA, which consists of Towanda Borough, North Towanda Township, Towanda Township, Monroe, and Monroe Township. WTMA is kind of over there on their own, and our crews do all the work which includes Lake Wesauking, and the sewer & water extensions up there. Therefore, they have decided that they'd like to consider being absorbed. He stated that this will be a year-long or longer process if it goes forward, and there is a meeting on Thursday at the Wysox Fire Hall at five o'clock, which is an open public meeting. It will be complicated and will involve a lot of steps in the process. Mr. Christini feels there's even a grant to try to help municipalities go through the process of doing this. But the good news is that the municipal authority is very healthy, and the infrastructure is great. Also, the water supply is probably the most important asset of this town, and we have to protect that. Also, we have to protect our sewer system. And that goes back to the motion that was made by the Planning Commission to support the DCED grant for the Wastewater Treatment plant expansion and renovation. Because, of course, sewage is one part of it, but the water is maybe even more vital. And we have water from the New Albany, Eilenberger Springs, which is still good. We also have wells that were just drilled up in North Towanda, so we have a great water supply. We also have a great sewer system, and we need to protect our interests there.

LIBRARY REPORT:

The board will meet again on November 14th.

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Kovalcin and seconded by Mr. Schultz. The meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM.



Diane M. Kulick
Towanda Borough Secretary