

The Borough of Somerset Council Meeting

March 24th, 2025 - 5:00 p.m.

1. **Meeting Called to Order** – President Ream.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance**

3. **Roll Call:**

a) **Borough Council Members present:** *Pam Ream, Ruby Miller (via telephone), Lee Hoffman, Sue Opp, Steve Shaulis, Ian Mandichak and Mario Dirienzo.*

b) **Also present:** *Mayor Fred Rosemeyer.*

c) **Also present were the following:** *Borough Manager, Michele Enos; Director of Finance, Brett Peters; Administrative Assistant, Roger Bailey; Municipal Authority Manager, Jessica Sizemore; Solicitor, James Cascio; Consulting Engineer, Tom Reilly and Chief of Police, Rich Appel.*

d) **Public Attendance:** *Cassidy & Dylan Tressler, Melanie Heiple, Alec Bittner, Barbara Lynch.*

4. **Approval of Agenda:** *Consider approving the agenda with change of Executive Session being moved to beginning of meeting.*

Motion

Mrs. Opp moved, Mr. Dirienzo seconded, to approve the agenda with the change of Executive Session being moved to the beginning of the meeting.

Motion Unanimously Carried

5. **Executive Session:** **To discuss matters of collective bargaining, personnel and potential litigation.**

Executive Session began at 5:01 pm

Back in Session

5:38 p.m.

6. Announcements:

a) None

7. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting(s)

a) February 24th, 2024 – Borough Council Meeting Minutes.

Motion

Mrs. Opp moved, Mr. Mandichak seconded, to approve the February 24th, 2024 Borough Council Meeting Minutes.

Motion Unanimously Carried

8. Award of Bids:

a) None

9. General Public Comments:

a) Alec Bittner

Mr. Bittner went before Council to voice his concerns the Borough's lack of notification regarding the stormwater by mail about the \$6.00 total increase. He noted that notices were to be sent out in December 2024. He said that this billing is to go into effect soon. He said the increase was to go into effect on January 1, 2024, and to date, has not gone into effect. He said that his main concerns is that the Borough is in a Corrective Action Plan for the sanitary sewer and stormwater, and feels that the Borough will get fine, which in effect, costs money. He stated that he understands why this fee was assessed to prevent raising taxes for all the tax payers. He said that the Borough is behind on collecting payments for 2 months, per the Resolution and he feels that there will be budget shortcomings as a result. He feels that when the budget will not be balanced so there will be an increase in taxes. He then urged Council to finalize billing for the stormwater so taxes are not raised.

Ms. Enos made clarifications to Mr. Bittner's statements. She explained that the Borough is under a Corrective Action Plan through DEP due to older infrastructure. She said that the Borough has been working with DEP on this for approximately 5-7 years because there is a lot of planning. She said that 3 years of testing was done on the Borough's system.

The \$20 million dollar water project has been completed, which is based on all water user rates. That's why the adjustment was seen on bills, to pay for the \$20 million dollar water project. This was done to comply with the Borough's permit conditions.

She said that the Borough is now embarking on the next phase which is going to be our sewer system. She said it is the same situation, old infrastructure that we have to tackle because we are getting water infiltration into the sewer lines and are treating water we shouldn't have to.

She said the Borough applied for PennVEST funding. This is an Agreement that has been initiated between the Borough and DEP. Because we are complying and getting ahead of it, that is why we are only at a Corrective Action Plan. We could have been in a Consent Order but are not. A consent order eliminates the Council's ability to plan, to budget and do what's best for the residents. DEP would have come in and directly the Borough what to do and the timeframe to do it in. Because our Council was proactive, the Consent Order was eliminated and not necessary.

As far as the stormwater, there was a legal transfer from the General Fund of Stormwater that use to be a General Fund expense and that was taken over responsibility to our Municipal Authority because they can create the rate structure. Had we not had that done and transferred, taxes would have increased. So we are creating a rate structure that is fair for the residents because all tax exempt properties would not be paying the storm rate if it was coming out of the General Fund. Now because it is a rate structure, all properties will be effected and will pay their fair share.

That is the reason the rate structure exists. Another reason the rate structure exists is because when go into these properties, and correcting the sewer lines and removing down spouts that are illegally connected. So the stormwater system has to be built that is not currently there. That goes hand-in-hand with this sewer project. That is the reason why the stormwater was created in the first place. If you put the new sewer lines in, you give the residents an opportunity to put the stormwater into another system that is not flooding their neighbors yard, or the streets, or is turning into an ice problem in the winter. This is the whole reason this funding structure was set up. It took 3 1/2 years of discussions and meetings for Council and the Authority who strategically planned it out to get to this point.

The delay has been a software delay. The software company has been in and working with the seasonal person that was brought in to set up the accounts. That was not something that was in our control at the time. The rate structure has finally been set up into individual accounts. So all of those accounts that already existed had to be recreated with the stormwater to be added to it. This has been completed. There is also a Press Release going out into the newspaper for the stormwater structure and how it works. It has been listed on the Water & Sewer cards. It has been on the Facebook post and on the Borough's website for at least 3-4 months now. Letters are also at the window in the building. It should be on the April billing.

Mr. Bittner commented that every month that has passed, there has been uncollected Revenue.

Ms. Enos added that from a budgetary standpoint, one of the expenditures that we did not put in there was for any debt service payment. We have a balanced budget, and currently will be in 2025. She said that no interest or loan payments do not have to be paid until we get a funding offer, which is not going to even start until August. So we won't see that debt service

payment until approximately 1 ½ - 3 years down the road, because we pay 3 years of interest before the actually principal is even started.

As far as, this will not affect our budget and our budget will stay balanced.

It was mentioned that the Borough always has a surplus.

Mrs. Ream added that 7-8 years ago, DEP gave the Borough 2 choices....to have the plan of correction. There was years of discussion before the Council decided on a plan of action. She said today, there are sitting well.

10. Administrative Business:

a) Communications – (none)

b) Payment of Bills – Month of March 2025.

Motion:

Mrs. Opp moved, Mr. Hoffman seconded, to approve the payment of bills for the month March 2025 numbered 42964 - 43099 totaling \$573,972.34.

Motion Unanimously Carried

c) Department Reports – Consider approving the Departmental Reports for the month of February 2025.

Motion

Mr. Shaulis moved, Mrs. Opp seconded, to approve the Departmental Reports for the month of February 2025.

Motion Unanimously Carried

11. Policy Agenda:

Old Business:

a) None

New Business:

a) Department of the Army – Requesting us to participate in a program to allow the cannon across from Patriot Manor to remain in its location.

Ms. Enos said that

Motion

Mrs. Opp moved, Mr. Mandichak seconded, to approve the cannon across from Patriot Manor to remain in its location.

Motion Unanimously Carried

b) *Resolution 2025-01 – Authorization to dispose of certain municipal records in accordance with the Commonwealth’s Record Retention and Disposition Schedule.*

Ms. Enos explained that

Motion

Mrs. Opp moved, Mr. Hoffman seconded, to authorize the disposal of certain municipal records in accordance with the Commonwealth’s Record Retention and Disposition Schedule.

Motion Unanimously Carried

c) *Somerset Borough Tax Collector – Discussion concerning the request of Althea Brown to review the salary for the position of Somerset Borough Tax Collector.*

Ms. Enos noted that this is something that is done routinely every four years. The deadline to set the salary for the position of Tax Collector is on February 15th, 2024. She is asking for Council to increase this, if they desire, for the next 4-year term.

Previously, for the years 2022-2025, Council approved an increase of 3%, 2.5 %, 2% and 1%. This is what she collects on the taxes that she receives, and that is what her salary equates to, because everything she collects is based on a percentage. If Council would agree to do something similar, the cost would be \$13,592.85 for just collecting the Borough taxes.

Borough Council agreed to give Ms. Brown an increase of 3%, 2.5 %, 2% and 1% for the next 4-year term.

Motion

Mr. Shaulis moved, Mr. Dirienzo seconded, to increase the salary of the position of Tax Collector as follows: 3%, 2.5 %, 2% and 1% over the next 4-year term.

Motion Unanimously Carried

d) *Rules & Regulations – Consider adopting the Municipal Authority’s Rules and Regulations as it pertains to Water, Waste Water and Storm Water.*

Ms. Enos mentioned that Mrs. Sizemore has been working with the Staff on the Rules & Regulations and changes that will be made in light of the Sewer Project that lies ahead. This

is something that the Municipal Authority will be acting upon during their Authority meeting following the Council Meeting.

Mrs. Sizemore said that the Municipal Authority approved the Rules & Regulations in December 2024, effective January 1, 2025. She added that at the Authority meeting to follow, the Rules & Regulations will be official adopted by Resolution.

Ms. Enos explained that the Municipal Authority sets the Rules & Regulations. Since the Borough manages the system for the Authority, Council is being asked to adopt the Municipal Authorities Rules & Regulations, as well.

Motion

Mrs. Ream moved, Mrs. Miller seconded, to adopt the Municipal Authority's Rules and Regulations for the Water, Waste Water and Storm Water.

Motion Unanimously Carried

- e) *Act 172 Tax Credit for Firefighters – Consider approving the list of eligibles that were submitted by the Somerset Volunteer Fire Department who qualified for a tax credit under the Act 172.*

Motion

Mrs. Opp moved, Mr. Mandichak seconded, to approve the list of eligibles that were submitted by the Somerset Volunteer Fire Department who qualified for a tax credit under the Act 172.

Motion Carried (5 (Yes) 0 (no) 1 abstention)
(Mr. Shaulis abstained)

Committee Business/Reports:

- f) *Borough Manager's Report – Given by Michele Enos.*

Ms. Enos noted that the Playground Committee's information will be given to Borough Council for their review.

There will also be a special meeting scheduled where Council can have further discussion regarding the Committee's request for the Borough's annual CDBG monies to fund their proposed Playground Project.

- g) *Finance Report – Given by Brett Peters.*

Mr. Peters provided Borough Council with the Financial Report through December 2024.

He mentioned that we are 12/12ths of the way through the year or 100%.

General Fund:

Revenues – 112.03%

Expenses - 117.94%

Water Fund:

Revenues – 86.13%

Expenses – 84.28%

Sewer Fund:

Revenues – 104.11 %

Expenses – 105.81%

h) Municipal Authority Manager's Report – Given by Jess Sizemore.

Mrs. Sizemore mentioned that the stormwater billing software, where new accounts will be added, is still being worked on. The goal is to start billing for stormwater in the March 2025 cycle. Notification will be sent out to the public prior to the stormwater fee being added to their bill.

Sewer lateral testing inspection will start to be enforced April 1, 2025. It was approved effective January 1, 2025. Information regarding testing requirements, and why we are testing, can be viewed on our website.

Letters were sent out to local plumbers and contractors to let them know about the testing requirements. This information will also be sent out to local realtors.

An addendum, that includes stormwater, will also be added to the Management Agreement between Somerset Borough and its Municipal Authority. Presently, it only includes sewer and water.

i) President's Report – Given by Pam Ream.

Mrs. Ream mentioned that the "Fire & Ice" Festival was very nice and well attended.

She thanked the Borough employees for their hard work in removing snow, clearing the roads, and for their efforts in getting everything cleaned up.

j) Somerset Inc. Report – Given by Lee Hoffman.

Mr. Hoffman was not in attendance. No report given.

k) PSAB Report – Given by Fred Rosemeyer.

Mayor Rosemeyer had nothing new to report for the PSAB or the County Borough's Association.

l) Somerset Volunteer Fire Dept. Report – Given by Steve Shaulis.

Mr. Shaulis said that the Fire Department is approximately a month into the merger and everything is going well.

He said that since January 1, 2025, there have been 42 fire calls for the Somerset Fire Department. Friedens Fire Department had 18 fire calls.

m) Engineer's Report – Given by Jake Bolby.

Mr. Bolby presented the Updates to the Engineer's Report.

WATER:

1) Water System Capital Improvement Projects:

Mr. Bolby said that there is warranty work happening on the waterline portion.

On the treatment side, the Contractor is working on resolving a few items that are still open, and working to close those contracts out.

SEWER:

1) Assessment, Repair, and Abatement Plan (Hydraulic Overload):

Mr. Bolby said we received the last permit that was needed before being able to make the application. The application for PennVEST is due February 5th, 2025. The funding application will formerly be considered at their next meeting on April 23rd, 2025.

The Interest Rates for PennVEST are still the same, and haven't changed since the Borough's Water Project was considered.

GENERAL:

1) Center Ave. Sidewalk Project:

Mr. Bolby said that this project has been completely closed out. All money has been paid, and all contract documents have been submitted. There are some warranty items on that contract that will be handled whenever the weather is more favorable.

n) Mayor's Report – Given by Mayor Rosemeyer.

Mayor Rosemeyer again mentioned that Officer Kevin Huzsek is receiving the "Carnegie Hero Award." 20 of these prestigious awards are given out throughout the whole country.

Mayor Rosemeyer noted that Officer Huzsek's medals will be presented to him and his family by the Police Department.

Mayor Rosemeyer requested Council's approval for the Police Department to work toward getting Public Safety Grant funding for a Canine Officer. The approximate cost will be \$40,000.00, and fully funded only through grant award monies.

Mayor Rosemeyer mentioned the many personnel changes within the Somerset Borough Police Department due to retirement. He also noted that there is interest in the five Police Officer positions that are available. He said that a cadet was recently interviewed for one of the Police Officer positions. More interviews are being conducted, and there are Officers who worked in the Borough in the past who want to come back.

Mayor Rosemeyer also mentioned the drone at the Police Department. One Officer is certified to use it. Two other Officers will also be receiving training.

Mayor Rosemeyer also mentioned a man who is posing as a Humane Society Officer. He noted that he has no affiliation with the Human Society.

Mayor Rosemeyer also pointed out that the Police Department was under budget with the close of 2024. He added that the Police Department returned \$55,586.00 back to the Borough.

12. ADJOURNMENT

Motion

Mr. Dirienzo moved to adjourn; motion seconded by Mr. Shaulis.

Motion Unanimously Carried

7: p.m.

Michele A. Enos, Borough Manager/ Secretary