

BOROUGH OF CONSHOHOCKEN BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

PUBLIC MEETING held via GoToMeeting video/teleconference

PRESENT: Colleen Leonard, Council President
Tina Sokolowski, Council Vice-President
Robert Stokley, Senior Council Member
Anita Barton, Council Member
James Griffin, Council Member
Jane Flanagan, Council Member
Karen Tutino, Council Member
Yaniv Aronson, Mayor

ALSO PRESENT: Stephanie Cecco, Borough Manager
Michael E. Peters, Borough Solicitor

CALL TO ORDER

The Public Meeting of the Conshohocken Borough Council duly advertised, was held remotely using the GoToMeeting platform. Colleen Leonard, Council President, called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Leonard thanked everyone for attending the virtual Council meeting. She reviewed the meeting logistics and participation instructions. She announced that Council held Executive Session prior to the regularly scheduled meeting on legal and property matters.

LAND USE, PUBLIC HEARINGS AND ORDINANCES

a.) Public Hearing on SP-4 District Sign Standards Ordinance Amendment

Mr. Peters opened the public hearing on an ordinance amending the Conshohocken Zoning Ordinance by amending the sign regulations in the SP-4 Specially Planned District Four. Mr. Peters reviewed the proposed ordinance amendment which would create a new set of regulations applicable to buildings of 180 feet or more in height where 95% of the building is allocated to a single principal user. He explained that proposed regulations would permit for buildings with wall signs more than 150 feet, one wall sign to be a maximum of 500 square feet in size provided that no component of the sign is greater than 75 inches in height of width. Mr. Peters reviewed regulations related to wall signs for buildings on a corner lot.

There was no public comment.

a. Consider adopting Ordinance 03-2021 amending the sign standards for the SP-4 District

Ms. Barton made a motion to adopt Ordinance 03-2021 amending the sign standards for the SP-4 District, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion carried 7-0.

b.) Consider authorizing advertisement of an amendment to the Accessory Structure section of the Zoning Ordinance

Ms. Cecco shared that the proposed ordinance amendment would increase the permitted size of garages to 450 square feet to provide additional off-street parking in the Borough and reduce the need for residents to seek zoning relief for two-car garages.

Mr. Stokley made a motion to authorize advertisement of an amendment to the Accessory Structure section of the Zoning Ordinance, seconded by Ms. Flanagan. The motion carried 7-0.

PRESENTATIONS

a.) Sewer Authority Sale Exploratory Process – Presentation on Bid Results: Scott Shearer, PFM

Scott Shearer, PFM, was present to provide an overview of the Sewer Authority sale exploratory process and present the results of the bids for the Sewer Authority. Mr. Shearer discussed the Borough's goals for engaging in the exploratory sale process of the Sewer Authority. He provided a timeline of events outlining how the exploration process has progressed. Mr. Shearer reviewed highlights of the Request for Bids (RFB). He presented the three (3) bids received for the Sewer Authority. Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority (BCWSA) submitted a purchase price of \$52 million with no rate freeze and \$55 million with a three-year rate freeze. Aqua submitted a bid for \$42.25 million with no rate freeze and Pennsylvania American Water Company (PAWC) submitted a bid for \$30 million with no rate freeze. Mr. Shearer provided estimated sources and uses of proceeds resulting from a transaction assuming the \$52 million from BCWSA. He provided additional information on BCWSA.

a. Discussion and consideration on responses to the Sewer Authority Request for Bids

Ms. Sokolowski made a motion to remove Aqua and PAWC from the sale process, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion carried 7-0.

Ms. Cecco stated that BCWSA is non-profit governmental entity like the Conshohocken Sewer Authority. She explained that if Borough Council sold the sewer system to BCWSA, Borough residents would pay an additional \$1,596.00 in sewer rates over a ten-year period. She explained that if the Borough were to fund the \$28 million infrastructure program strictly through a tax increase, it would result over 10 years in a \$4,000 cost for a home assessed at \$100,000, \$8,000 for a home assessed at \$200,000, and \$12,000 for a home assessed at \$300,000. Ms. Cecco discussed that a tax increase alone would have a significant financial impact on Borough residents. Therefore, Borough Council engaged in the sale exploration process to explore all potential alternate funding options. Ms. Cecco provided an overview of the Borough's borrowing capabilities. She shared that the Sewer Authority Board of Directors has requested that Borough Council consider a counter proposal from the Authority to the sale of the municipal sewer system. She explained that the proposal offers revenue-generating alternatives over the long-term as a counter to the one-time profits generated from a sale. Mr. Stokley asked if this option would still result in out-of-pocket costs to a Borough resident. Ms. Cecco responded that in order to fund the program being proposed by the Authority, it is anticipated that sewer rates would increase over time. Ms. Leonard asked how the Borough would fund the infrastructure plan under the Sewer Authority's proposal. Ms. Cecco responded Borough would utilize a combination of smaller, incremental tax increases, government loans, liquid fuels dollars and revenue generated from the stormwater management fee and rent revenue introduced by the Sewer Authority. She added that the project would take longer to complete.

Ms. Sokolowski made a motion to conclude the sale exploration process and not sell the Sewer Authority, seconded by Ms. Barton. The motion carried 7-0.

Ms. Cecco confirmed that the Sewer Authority Board has agreed to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Borough to formalize a new business relationship between the two (2) entities, which would include new operating procedures and revenue generating activities.

Ms. Tutino made a motion to instruct Borough administration to finalize a Memorandum of Understanding with the Sewer Authority Board that includes working directly with the Board to assess the options offered for consideration as an alternative to a potential sale of the Sewer System, seconded by Ms. Barton. The motion carried 7-0.

Ms. Leonard made a motion to authorize advertisement of the repeal of Ordinance 02-2021 requiring the Borough of Conshohocken Authority to convey the Sewer Authority to the Borough of Conshohocken, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion carried 7-0.

CONSENT AGENDA

Ms. Leonard read and reviewed the items included on the consent agenda.

- a.) **Approve and adopt the February 3 and February 17 Regular Meeting Minutes**
- b.) **Approve the February-ending Treasurer's Report and Accounts Payable**

Mr. Barton made a motion to approve and adopt the February 3 and February 17 Regular Meeting Minutes, second by Mr. Griffin. The motion carried 7-0.

Ms. Sokolowski made a motion to approve the February-ending Treasurer's Report and Accounts Payable in the amount of \$837,490.84, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion carried 7-0.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business.

COUNCIL AND MAYOR MATTERS

Mayor Aronson shared that the Conshohocken Italian Bakery celebrated its 48th anniversary and that St. Mark's is hosting its Easter Egg Candy Sale. He reminded everyone that the EAC Spring Community Cleanup is on Saturday, April 10, 2021.

Ms. Barton thanked Borough Administration for their due diligence during the sale exploration process.

Ms. Flanagan thanked members of Council, Borough Administration and the Sewer Authority Board for engaging in a successful sale exploratory process of the Sewer Authority.

Mr. Griffin encouraged all residents to attend Borough Council meetings.

Ms. Leonard shared Borough Council's meeting schedule and the process by which Council makes decisions. She explained that Council holds Work Sessions to discuss and review potential action items prior to the Voting Meetings. She encouraged all residents to attend and participate in Council meetings.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Brittany Rogers, Executive Assistant to the Borough Manager, stated that five (5) individual submitted written public comment via email submission.

Michael Makoid, 112 West 9th Avenue, expressed his opposition to the sale of the sewer system. He urged Council to explore alternative solutions to infrastructure financing.

Claire Wolper, 130 West 9th Avenue, stated that she is opposed to the potential sale and privatization of the non-profit sewer facility. Ms. Wolper discussed her concerns about privatization leading to higher rates and lower service.

Lisa Lilick, 804 Forrest Street, shared a petition with 250 signatures from Conshohocken and West Conshohocken residents who strongly oppose the sale of Conshohocken's sewer system.

Jennifer Nelson, 202 West 4th Avenue, expressed her opposition to the sale of the Sewer Authority. She discussed how corporate rate increases would affect the low-income residents. She urged Council to consider the concerns of the residents when voting on the sale of the sewer system.

Carrie Baynard, 441 West Elm Street, asked if notices will be mailed to residents should Borough Council decide to sell the Sewer Authority in the future.

Amanda Lilick, 109 Forrest Street, asked Council to consider implementing practices to improve government transparency and make information more readily available to residents.

Felix Raimondo, 232 West 9th Avenue, thanked Borough Council for their hard work with the sale exploration process. He voiced his appreciation for serving as a member of the Sewer Authority Board. He recognized the capabilities of the Conshohocken Sewer Authority, specifically its compliance with environmental regulations, dedicated staff and proactive maintenance and investment of operating assets.

Trina Delaware, 209 East 7th Avenue, acknowledged Council for their hard work with the sale exploration process.

Matt Winarski, 356 East 6th Avenue, thanked Council for listening to the concerns of the residents and voting against the sale of the Sewer Authority. Mr. Winarski agreed that government transparency could not be achieved without the citizens' participation.

Jim McCuster, 131 Moir Avenue in West Conshohocken, thanked Council for voting against the sale of the Sewer Authority. He suggested that Council be more up-front about new changes that are occurring and make it easier for residents to access documents and information.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:47 PM.

Stephanie Cecco,
Borough Secretary