A regular meeting of the Northampton County Council was held on the above date with the following present: John Cusick, President; Margaret L. Ferraro, Vice President; Thomas H. Dietrich; Bruce A. Gilbert; Kenneth M. Kraft; Lamont G. McClure, Jr.; Scott Parsons; Barbara A. Thierry, Robert F. Werner; Frank E. Flisser, Clerk to Council, and Philip D. Lauer, Solicitor to Council.

Prayer

Mr. Cusick led County Council in prayer to open the meeting.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Cusick led County Council in the pledge of allegiance.

Approval of the Minutes

Mr. McClure made the following motion:

Be It Moved By the Northampton County Council that the minutes of the April 18, 2013 meeting shall be approved.

Mrs. Thierry seconded the motion.

The minutes were approved by voice acclamation.

Courtesy of the Floor

As no one signed in under Courtesy of the Floor, Mr. Cusick asked if there was anyone from the public that wished to address County Council.

There were no respondents.

County Executive’s Report

Mr. John Stoffa, County Executive, stated they were very close to a final agreement with regard to the Wolf Building and the Bechtel Building had been placed on the market. He further stated the groundbreaking ceremony for the Human Services Building was scheduled for 1:00 p.m. on Friday, May 17, 2013.
Mr. Stoffa advised in February 2009, the retirement fund was $161 million and last Friday, the asset value had reached $302 million. He further stated the first quarter investment gains were $16.4 million and the one year investment gains were $27 million. He further advised the County ranked in the top 23% in this quarter among other public funds, noting it was in the top 22% in the past year and in the top 19% the last five years. He noted at the end of March, it was more than 80% funded on a market value basis.

Mr. Stoffa stated the use of the Wayne Grube Memorial Park now exceeded that of the Louise Moore Park.

Mr. Stoffa advised they were still working on the 2013 Bond Issue, noting they were having difficulty coming up with final numbers for Gracedale, but he hoped to have it to County Council by the scheduled date.

Mr. Werner stated he and Mr. Stoffa attended the Northampton County Area Agency on Aging program this afternoon that honored 14 older adults who volunteered in the communities.

In response to Mr. Cusick’s question as to what he intended to do with regard to the prison maintenance contract, Mr. Stoffa advised they were going to continue using the existing engineer.

In answer to Mr. Cusick’s question as to whether the Sheriff’s personnel requests would be submitted to County Council for consideration this month, Mr. Stoffa stated they would be, but they were trying to determine if positions should be added to handle gun permit reference checks.

In response to Mr. Werner’s question as to whether the front doors had been repaired, Mr. Steve DeSalva, Director of Public Works, advised they were and they now had an extra set.

In response to Mr. Dietrich’s question as to whether staff would be added to the Sheriff’s Department to assist in the collection process at Gracedale, Mr. Stoffa stated he did not believe Sheriff Deputies would be necessary.

Mr. Ross Marcus, Director of Human Services, advised the outside legal counsel would work with the Department of Public Welfare to get the money from the State and then the State would go after the family’s assets because once the State approved a person for Medicaid then the family members were basically committing Medicaid fraud.
In answer to Mr. Cusick’s question as to the current status with regard to the marketing of the excess beds at Gracedale, Mr. Marcus stated Premier Healthcare Resources was in the process of preparing a letter for Mr. Stoffa’s signature, which was the first step in the process.

In response to Mr. Cusick’s question as to what was being considered for the bond issue at Gracedale, Mr. Marcus advised the most important item to him was the improvement of the emergency generator system.

In response to Mr. Cusick’s question as to whether the parking lot would be part of the bond, Mr. Marcus stated consideration would be given to it along with the other priorities items and the amount of money involved. He further stated they would not be able to do all the capital improvements they would like to have done.

In response to Mr. Cusick’s question as to the status of the sewer bypass line, Mr. DeSalva advised the process had begun.

Public Hearing on the Ordinance Providing for Hotel Room Rental Tax Rules and Regulations

Mr. Cusick stated the following ordinance was introduced by Mrs. Ferraro and Mr. Kraft at the April 18, 2013 meeting:

AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE NORTHAMPTON COUNTY HOTEL ROOM RENTAL TAX

WHEREAS, at the meeting held September 1, 2005, the Northampton County Council adopted Ordinance #440-2005, titled “AN ORDINANCE IMPOSING A HOTEL ROOM RENTAL TAX AND PROVIDING FOR THE COLLECTION AND ENFORCEMENT OF THE PAYMENT OF SAID TAX” (a copy of which is attached hereto and labeled as Exhibit “A”).

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY ORDAINED AND ENACTED By the Northampton County Council that the County of Northampton, Hotel Room Rental Tax Rules and Regulations (a copy of which is attached hereto and labeled as Exhibit “B”) are hereby approved.

Section I. Short Title

This Ordinance shall be known as, and may be cited as, “AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE NORTHAMPTON COUNTY HOTEL ROOM RENTAL TAX”.

Section II. Repealer

Any Ordinance or any part of any other ordinance conflicting with the provisions of this Ordinance is hereby repealed.

Section III. Effective Date

This Ordinance shall become effective thirty (30) days after the date of enactment.

Public Hearing

Mr. Cusick asked if there were any questions or comments regarding this ordinance from the public.

There were no respondents.

Ms. Lori Sywensky, Community Development Administrator, advised this ordinance provided an update to the existing rules and regulations, but would not change the collection or penalty rates.

Ms. Sywensky stated the two largest changes were related to exemptions and the definition of a permanent resident. She further stated one of the current exemptions was for individuals who stayed in a lodging facility for more than 30 days and this ordinance would provide an allowance for other than an individual, i.e., a company that used a room for more than 30 days that involved several different individuals. She noted another change was to simplify the number of exemptions that were allowed. She further noted these changes would make Northampton County more competitive with other Counties in the Commonwealth.

As there were no further questions or comments, Mr. Cusick called for the vote.


The ordinance was adopted by a vote of 9-0.
Mr. Werner advised he contacted Mr. Marcus regarding the issues that were brought up by Mr. James Gregory at the last meeting and some e-mails that were received by County Council and was referred to a website that outlined a model that was used for recovery.

Mr. Marcus stated the recovery model was something the Department of Public Welfare State Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services adopted in 2005.

In answer to Mr. Werner’s question as to whether the County was using that model, Mr. Marcus replied it was.

In response to Mr. Werner’s question as to whether removing transportation so an individual could not go to a doctor’s appointment went against that model, Mr. Marcus advised it depended on the consumer and where they were in their recovery process, which would be determined by the caseworker and the caseworker’s supervisor.

In answer to Mr. Werner’s question as to whether any services were eliminated, Mr. Marcus stated he had mentioned at some of the Human Services Committee meetings that some services had to be eliminated or reduced because the County received $1.3 million less this current fiscal year.

In response to Mr. Cusick’s question as to his department’s budget status during the last several cycles, Mr. Marcus advised even before the 10% cut, Mental Health was suffering from the Cost of Living Allowance increases as compared to the adjustments in the budget. He further advised this was a 10 year old issue that resulted in them being several million dollars behind where they should be. He noted the State made promises for when they closed the Allentown State Hospital, but those promises have not been kept.

Mr. Cusick commented when State and Federal funding was reduced, the County was left with the decision to either make cuts or fund it from local revenue, which routinely put the County in a predicament during budget time.
Human Services Building

Mr. McClure stated now with the sale of the Wolf Building being imminent and the Bechtel Building being listed for sale, he would like to insure that the proceeds from their sales be set aside for the outfitting of the Human Services Building as originally indicated. Therefore, even though he did not think County Council could pass an ordinance to insure those funds were used for the Human Services Building because it would bind future officials to do that, he would like Mr. Lauer to look into the matter and provide an opinion.

Mr. Lauer advised he did not think they could either, but he would review the matter and report back.

Open Space Advisory Board Liaison Report

Mr. Parsons stated the Open Space Advisory Board would be meeting at 4:15 p.m., on May 9, 2013, at the Northampton Community College, to discuss some park grants and open space projects. He further stated in an effort to streamline County Council’s procedure, he suggested the members attend this meeting to listen to their presentations.

South Bethlehem Cops Greeter Festival

Mr. Dietrich advised he attended this festival which included the police and firefighters, the Sheriff Deputies and the Emergency Management Services staff. He further advised it was great to see all these agencies come together for a good cause.

Mr. Gilbert stated he also attended this event and Northampton County looked ready to handle anything that came its way. He further stated it was nice to see the different agencies interacting with the children.
Adjournment

Mrs. Thierry made a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Werner seconded the motion.

The motion to adjourn passed unanimously by acclamation.

_____________________________
Frank E. Flisser
Clerk to Council