Easton, Pennsylvania  

October 2, 2014

A regular meeting of the Northampton County Council was held on the above date with the following present: Margaret L. Ferraro, President; Glenn A. Geissinger, Vice-President; Mathew M. Benol; Kenneth M. Kraft; Lamont G. McClure, Jr.; Scott Parsons; Hayden Phillips; Seth Vaughn; Robert F. Werner; Frank E. Flisser, Clerk to Council, and Philip D. Lauer, Solicitor to Council.

Prayer

Rabbi Melody Davis, Temple Covenant of Peace, Easton, led County Council in prayer to open the meeting.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Werner 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 September 18, 2014 meeting shall be approved.

Mr. Kraft seconded the motion.

The minutes were approved by voice acclamation.

Courtesy of the Floor

Justus James, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Union Representative - advised he had not been contacted by anyone regarding the healthcare issue. He further advised they have demanded this Administration be transparent, but the only thing he received with their numbers was a slide presentation. He noted that was not good negotiations and he wanted to know how they could prove the health insurance was going up by $10.5 million.
Mr. James stated the Administration already admitted they would lose grandfather status and the Affordable Healthcare Act came with new challenges such as the Cadillac tax. He further stated if the County stayed on the grandfather plan, it would not have as much of an impact.

Mr. James advised the co-insurance was 10% and was capped at $13,000 for a family. He further advised for a family making $30,000 a year gross, with their deductible, that was $16,000 from their pay. He noted that was not sharing healthcare; that was paying the whole freight.

Mr. James stated since the County Executive was not given anyone a raise, he should raise the healthcare incrementally. He further stated the budget should not be balanced on the back of the workers because they were tired of giving back. He noted this healthcare proposal would hurt not only union employees, but every employee in this County.

Mr. James advised it was stated the County had $30 million in the Fund Balance, then it was $20 million and now $20 million would have to be borrowed. He further advised they talk about transparency in government, but someone just pulled the shade down. He noted no one in this Administration was able to prove any of their numbers and that was not fair to the taxpayers or the workers.

Mr. James stated today County Council would be voting on a resolution to keep the healthcare the same and they not only supported the resolution, but a clear message had to be sent to the County Executive and his Administration that the employees were not a number – the employees matter.

Mr. James advised County Council said they had no power to stop this, but they did have the power to hold up the budget so he was asking them not to pass until this issue was resolved. He further advised the employees have had enough and they would not go silent into the night. He noted they went to work every day, did their job and they did not deserve to get treated like this – they deserved better.

Mr. Paul Breaux, 537 Norman Street, Nazareth, PA – stated he was the Vice President of the Executive Board of AFSCME Local 1265 and a taxpayer of Northampton County. He further stated he was here tonight as a taxpayer to implore the County Executive,
John A. Brown, to stop these potentially devastating changes to the healthcare. He noted the County Executive had said the employees were the face of the County, but these changes would break the nose on that face.

Mr. Breaux asked the County Executive if he knew any of the names of the employees present tonight besides the Administration. He advised it was easy for him to make these changes if they were thought of as numbers in a budget.

Mr. Breaux stated he wished he could think of people who dialed 9-1-1 as numbers instead of people because it would save him the heartache he felt when they called during the most critical moments of their lives. He further stated the County would lose people like him and would not be able to replace them with these healthcare changes because it was already hard enough to get qualified applicants.

Ms. Shirley O’Brien – advised she was donating her time to Mr. Breaux.

Ms. Iris Perez – stated she was donating her time to Mr. James.

Ms. Lynda Sweeney – advised she was donating her time to Mr. James.

Mr. Tom Davis – stated he was President of AFSCME Local 2549 and represented the Correction Officers. He further stated since he started working for the County in 1993, he saw a culture of stability and content shift into one of discontent, fear and uncertainty.

Mr. Davis advised he did not understand why the employees were being blamed for all the County’s fiscal problems. He further advised they were hardworking middle class people who wanted to be treated fairly.

Mr. Davis stated the Prison was currently 30 Correction Officers short. He further stated he implored Mr. Brown on three occasions to hire more officers in order to reduce the overtime that he detested, but was told he would not hire any more.
Mr. Davis advised every year, they were budgeted for 206 officers and currently, they were at 190, which met the minimum standards to operate a safe and secure prison. He further advised it would cost approximately $720,000 to hire 16 officers so he wondered where that money was going. He asked if it was going for overtime that the officers did not ask for or was it going back to the General Fund.

Mr. Davis stated they were officers working a day shift after working a night shift two to four times a week. He further stated they were tired, they had no quality of life and they were going to get hurt because that was no way to work in that type of environment. He noted Mr. Brown's response was that he was evaluating the operation, but he had been on the job long enough to draw some conclusions.

Mr. Davis advised he was here on behalf of all the employees of the County no matter what their affiliation. He further advised at a meeting where Mr. Brown gave his power point presentation regarding the proposed healthcare changes, he prefaced it by saying the five reasons it was beneficial to work for the County were salary, benefits, pension, job security and work environment.

Mr. Davis stated Mr. Brown also commented that if there was anything on that list the employees did not like, they were free to shop around. He further stated he interpreted that to mean if you did not like it here then quit. He noted Mr. Brown did not have to lay anyone off, he just had to create a culture so bad that it would drive the employees out.

Mr. Davis advised the only good that came from the County Executive's plan was it galvanized the workforce. He further advised the County Executive had repeatedly stated the employees were the most valued asset so now was the time for him to treat them as such.

Ms. Wanda Heitzman, 1222 Lehigh Street, Easton, PA - stated she began working for the County in 1992 and was currently employed at the Prison. She further stated the County used to be a nice place to work, but not anymore. She suggested the Administration observe some of the offices to see how bad morale was, noting many offices were short staffed and that was a recipe for disaster.
Ms. Heitzman advised the employees could not afford these co-pays and were going to be forced out of their jobs and homes. She further advised she had a meeting with Mrs. Ferraro, whom seemed to understand the situation, but she expected more from her. She added she did not believe the Administration was seeing the real picture and perhaps they should take some pay cuts.

Ben Hedrick, Bethlehem Township, PA - stated he listened intently at the last meeting to many union workers and their representatives and although he sympathized with their position because he had been where they were now, consideration had to be given to seniors on fixed incomes.

Mr. Hedrick advised he was retired and living on Social Security, 401K contributions and savings. He further advised his Social Security income went up 1.3% in 2013 and 1.5% in 2014, however, his taxes went up 2% in 2013 and 4% in 2014 leaving him on the very short end of that exchange.

Mr. Hedrick stated he was on Medicare, but his wife was not yet eligible and her deductible was $2,600 and the premium on her policy went up 9.3% in 2012, 4% in 2013 and 10% in 2014. He further stated she was allowed to retain her policy this year, but would be forced to go on the exchange next year at what appeared to be a 50% increase in premium, a doubling of the deductible, 20% co-insurance and the loss of her familiar doctor.

Mr. Hedrick advised seniors have done their part, paid their share and some, like himself, were veterans so he asked County Council to consider them as they discussed the budget.

Ms. Nancy Kutz - stated she was donating her time to Mr. James.

Ms. Stacie Biechy, 397 Old Allentown Road, Wind Gap, PA - provided a picture of her dashboard that reflected her check engine light was still on in her truck that had 165,000 miles on it, but she did not have the money to fix it. She advised AFSCME Local 1435 gave $3 million back to the County in 2012 and she estimated with all the cuts that were made to her pay, she personally gave back more than $4,000 a year.
Ms. Biechy stated she was paying twice as much for her insurance than she was in 2012 and her pay was now less than it was in 2009. She further stated she was trying to pay 2014 and 2015 size utility bills with a 2008/2009 paycheck.

Ms. Biechy advised Mr. Brown stated employees should see how they could cut back in their personal life. She further advised she had been shopping in thrift stores for clothes for the past 15 years, went to low price supermarkets and frequented food banks.

Ms. Biechy stated her house was falling apart because she could not keep up with it and her furniture was all second hand. She further stated she tried to save by giving up internet, but found she could not because with the schools all being internet interactive, it was a necessity she had to have for her children.

Ms. Biechy advised County Council they could not let Mr. Brown do what he wanted to do. He further advised the County kept hiring these outside groups to determine how to save money at Gracedale, but Premier was spending money like it was water. She noted they spent $30,000 on acoustic ceiling tiles for the Chapel.

Ms. Biechy stated when Mr. Brown spoke at a union meeting, she asked him not to forget about the employees and it seemed like we were already forgotten. She further stated she was asking County Council not to pass the budget with this healthcare change.

Ms. Kelly Higgins, 255 West 26th Street, Northampton, PA advised she was a five and half year employee of Gracedale who put herself through school and was a recent graduate Licensed Practical Nurse. She further advised she wanted to thank Mr. Brown because she was now going to be one step closer to foreclosure.

Ms. Higgins stated most of the employees in this room barely lived paycheck to paycheck. She further stated this plan would be more acceptable if it was provided in small steps. She added they were not going away and they were not going away quietly.
Mr. Peter Krywczuk - advised he was a 21 year employee at Gracedale. He further advised in their last contract, they took a half hour pay cut and at that time, he was making $869 every two weeks.

Mr. Krywczuk stated with that pay cut, he was making $809 and having trouble paying his bills. He further stated after his next raise, he was making $820, but he was still in the hole while they were wasting money at Gracedale.

Mr. Krywczuk advised his wife also worked at Gracedale and received that half hour pay cut so his family suffered a loss of $225 a month, which could pay his taxes for a month. He further advised Mr. Brown wanted to take more from them, but they did not have any more to give.

Mr. Jerry Green - stated he was President of the United Steelworkers and represented the nurses and social workers at Gracedale. He further stated for five years, these nurses and social workers have been working under an old contract, but despite that they have been faithful and loyal to the County.

Mr. Green advised they have not been able to get to the bargaining table with this Administration despite the fact they have requested it. He further advised the only time they have been contacted was when they were looking for concessions.

Mr. Green stated they felt the contract was status quo, but the Administration felt they could shove this new healthcare plan down their throats. He further stated there was no way the members of the Steelworkers and ASFME could afford this new plan.

Mr. Green advised four years ago, the residents of Northampton County voted to save Gracedale. He further advised the Administration should not fix the budget on the back of the laborers.

Mr. Green stated they stood by County Council and asked them to stay strong and leave this healthcare plan alone.

Mr. David Kaesler - advised he was one of three Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Technicians and had been with the County for more than 20 years. He further advised his shop at Gracedale was the only pathway to the contaminated crawl
spaces that had tested positive for asbestos leading to abatement and cleanup.

Mr. Kaesler stated he was exposed to asbestos areas due to the lack of former Administrations not taking a proactive and protective approach. He further stated they learned a lot over the years and due to their safety team and the former Administration, great strides were made to improve their knowledge and initiate a proactive approach.

Mr. Kaesler advised he was concerned about his health so he urged County Council to have the Administration include medical surveillance for those that have been exposed to asbestos because with rising healthcare costs, they would not be able to afford co-pays to monitor their health.

Mr. Kaesler stated this plan would cause more individuals to be apprehensive about going to doctor when they were ill or injured and causing more employees to work while they were sick and/or injured exposing their illness to Gracedale residents and the public and possibly resulting in further injuries that would end up costing the County more money in healthcare in the long run not to mention the lost time it would experience with an already depleted workforce.

Mr. Kaesler advised the employees were all taxpayers that stimulated the County’s economy. He further advised they have been perceived to make large salaries and have lavish benefits, which was far from the truth.

Mr. Kaesler stated they were underpaid in comparison to the private sector and while they did have a good benefit package, it was far from a Cadillac plan. He further stated this may hold true for the Administration as those salaries have increased significantly and additional jobs have been created at the top, but it did hold true to the backbone of the County, which Mr. Brown had called the employees.

Mr. Kaesler advised they have received small raises over the past years, but by contributing more to their healthcare benefits, it offset those increases. He further advised the unions have given back and hardworking dedicated employees were making less than they did in the past.
Mr. KAESLER stated the County was not a business for profit, however, it seemed that was what they were aiming for. He further stated even successful businesses kept essential employees with annual increases and good benefits. He further stated the employees could not afford any more increases with talks of wage freezes for the next four years.

Mr. KAESLER advised he needed a hip replacement, but he would not be able to afford it next year with these changes. He further advised he knew there were others who were going to be far worse off with more serious health concerns and he could not imagine the stress this was causing them.

Mr. KAESLER stated this change would cause employees to make hasty decisions regarding their healthcare. He further stated these decisions were scary enough, but now they would have to deal with the stress of the financial burden afterwards.

Mr. KAESLER advised this was not the kind of benefit dedicated and hardworking employees should have to look forward to. He further advised the County faced hard times in the past, but with the resilience and dedication of the employees, they have been worked through.

Mr. KAESLER stated he did not believe this Administration had been around long enough to have the power to burden the strength of this County with overwhelming changes. He further stated there was no reason they could not continue to work together and take smaller steps annually to achieve their financial expectations.

Mr. KAESLER advised future employees would have the choice to accept positions with the benefit changes, but the current employees should be able to continue to work for what was agreed and offered to them. He further advised it was selfish and unfair to change the rules in the middle of the game.

Mr. KAESLER stated he agreed with Mr. McClure's statement from the last meeting that to speak of changes in healthcare may be appropriate, but to speak of such changes and a wage freeze in the same sentence was absolutely not. He then asked County Council, in the interest of the employees, not to approve any budget proposal with such drastic changes and potentially crippling wage freezes.
Mr. Kaesler advised Mr. Brown spoke of morale being one of his priorities when he took his office and he believed he was set to increase the morale, but now it appeared he was looking to destroy it. He further advised anyone in favor of these changes should be ashamed of themselves for what this would do to the County’s backbone and the Administration should earn their high salaries and keep exploring new ways to balance the budget.

Mr. Kaesler stated it was the Administrations and not the employees that caused this mess, but they were willing to help the Administration and County Council to find alternative ways. He reminded them that the employees were taxpayers and registered voters.

Mr. Stephen Barron, Jr. - advised after hearing some of the comments, he would like Mr. Brown to look at an audit he did a few years ago that talked about overtime in the Prison. He further advised one of his auditors got a lot of flak from that audit because she mentioned that hiring full time employees would cut back on the overtime. He noted he was not sure if his figures were still accurate because the audit was done a few years ago, but his office would be happy to do another one.

Mr. Barron stated Judge John Braxton struck down the Scranton commuter tax, which was the same tax several employees were being subjected to by working in the City of Easton. He further stated when the commuter tax was proposed, 998 employees were affected, but since the employees from the Wolf Building and Archives have moved out that number was probably around the 900 mark.

Mr. Barron advised based on a salary of between $30,000 and $40,000 a year, the City of Easton collected $224,900 - $299,000 for the past two years and they were proposing an increase. He advised Judge Braxton said Act 205 did not give a city the ability to exclusively levy a tax on commuters, but to levy a tax on residents and non-resident.

Mr. Barron stated he supported the resolution being presented tonight and even sent an e-mail to Mr. Victor Scomillo, County Solicitor and Mr. Brown indicating he would join in as a plaintiff if the County considered suing to get a Declaratory Judgment Action to nullify the tax as it was taxation without representation. He further stated starting
with the next paychecks, the County should stop taking out the commuter tax and let the City sue them.

Mr. Barron advised he believed everything should be done to take this issue to the Commonwealth Court to make it binding because other Counties were facing similar issues.

Mr. Breaux - stated Mr. Brown knew the financial situation the County was in before January 1st so he asked if saving money was so important to him, why did he spend $100,000 on Sahl Communications, a public relations firm, and give a $20,000 pay raise to someone in the Administration.

Mr. Breaux advised he could have taken the ideas that were presented to Mr. Brown and his Administration by the very employees he was going to hurt to save money to balance the budget. He further advised he was not interested in saving real money, but more worried about his future political aspirations. He added they, the employees and taxpaying residents of the County, would be heard.

Mr. James - stated he had a conversation last year with former County Executive John Stoffa about this same issue who indicated he did not want to hurt the employees and took action so they did not have to pay more for healthcare so he told Mr. Brown they needed to have a conversation because this was going on the back of the employees and enough was enough. He further stated Mr. Brown needed to stop the co-insurance, but if Mr. Brown wanted to hold that hard line, he could expect them to continue to show up at these meetings.

Mr. Mike Myers, Lehigh Township, PA - advised for most of his life his work attire consisted of a hard hat, safety glasses, steel tipped shoes and earplugs and he carried a union card, but that image of a union worker was long gone. He further advised in 1962, unions were comprised mostly of blue collar workers in the private sector, but in 1990, white collar workers in the public sector employees grabbed that majority. He further noted many people belonged to unions purely as a condition for employment through force unionism.

Mr. Myers stated average government employee healthcare plans cost taxpayers more than private sector plans. He further stated through unions, the employees contributed less to their premiums making the overall value of that benefit package even
Mr. Myers advised he paid $265 a month for his family's contribution and that did not include anything but the health care benefits. He further advised he did not get a pension or overtime, but he was fine with that because he learned how to budget.

Mr. Myers stated the taxpayers were hurting too and most Americans have been forced to pay higher contributions. He further stated the Bureau of Labor statistics showed huge differences between public and private employee health care costs.

Mr. Myers asked if the people who made the decisions for the County were going to coward to the extortionist ways of collective bargaining and if mob rule was going to be the way things were done in the County.

Mr. Myers advised he spoke for the taxpayers. He further advised if County Council did not have the backbone to stand up to the unions they should get down off the podium.

Unknown Gracedale Employee - stated Mr. Brown did not know her because she was just a little guy that cleaned toilets at Gracedale. She further stated she had been at Gracedale for 28 years and there were a lot of good employees there that cared about the residents. She noted for 26 years she was a Nurse Aide, but she had to take a job as a maid because of back problems and was making less now than she was in 2008. She added the morale was lousy because people could not be lied to and the quality of care was going downhill because it was hard to get good qualified aides.

In answer to her question as to what kind of benefits Mr. Brown had and if they were going to be modified, he replied he had the same plan as all the employees. She then commented that she was sure he was not making $25,000 a year after 28 years of employment.
Mr. Brown advised the proposed 2015 budget was intended to address the needs of the County government within the context of the major financial challenges it was facing. He further advised budget expenditures have outpaced revenue generation for the past several years draining the fund balance of the General Fund, the primary funding source to balance the annual budget.

Mr. Brown stated this fund balance was $16.4 million as of December 31, 2011 and was anticipated to decrease to $20.1 million as of December 31, 2014. He further stated compounding the financial challenges facing the County was the continuing decline in total revenue.

Mr. Brown advised for 2015, total revenue of $279.5 million reflected a decrease of $9.4 million. He further advised while tax revenue was expected to increase by approximately $700,000, intergovernmental revenue was expected to decrease $7.3 million primarily due to the reduction in Human Services grant funding.

Mr. Brown stated to reduce the gap between expenditures and revenues, the Administration initiated a systematical approach. He further stated they reviewed every department for operational improvements, current purchasing contracts, organizational structure, use of technology and insurance programs.

Mr. Brown advised as a result of these efforts, the Administration assembled a proposed budget with a total operating fund of $334.4 million, a decrease of $16.2 million.

Mr. Brown stated the tax rate would remain unchanged at 10.8 mills. He further stated in contrast to prior practices none of the fund balance would be required to balance the proposed expenditure plan.

Mr. Brown advised a Line of Credit was being proposed to balance the budget and would be utilized only if the realized revenues were insufficient to support operating expenditure requirements.

Mr. Brown stated it was anticipated that additional savings generated from the expenditure reduction and the cash flow management efforts over the next year would be sufficient to support the 2015 budget requirements.
Mr. Brown advised several major events occurred in 2014 that impacted the 2015 budget. He further advised the Human Services Building became operational in March resulting in the Bechtel and Wolf Buildings to be sold.

Mr. Brown stated the debt service included payments associated with the 2013 Bond Issue that provided funds for capital projects which included reconstruction and rehabilitation of County bridges, replacement of generators at the Courthouse and Gracedale and renovations to the boiler house at the Gracedale complex, which continued through 2014.

Mr. Brown advised beyond 2015, the County faces additional challenges including ongoing reconstruction and rehabilitation of additional bridges, capital needs at Gracedale and the Prison, information technology infrastructure upgrades and the potential construction of a forensic morgue.

Mr. Brown stated to meet these and many other challenges, the County must operate in a cost effective way, ensure the effective and efficient delivery of services both internally and externally, tax rates have to be kept as low as possible without sacrificing core operations and grow our economy and strengthen our communities. He further stated this report recognized the success of any organization, including the County, is our given capital. He noted the employees were the most valuable asset the County had and it is their ongoing commitment that enables it to fulfill its mission.

Introduction of the County Healthcare Resolution

Mrs. Ferraro advised at the request of Mr. Werner, a resolution, was prepared that opposed the previously proposed healthcare changes offered by the County Executive.

Mr. Werner introduced the following resolution:

WHEREAS, Northampton County employees are the County's greatest asset; and

WHEREAS, the County Executive has announced changes to the healthcare program received by County employees; and
WHEREAS, the changes will result in a financial hardship for many of the affected employees; and

WHEREAS, County Council seeks that actions taken regarding healthcare be in the best interests of County employees.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Northampton County Council that it hereby states its opposition to the Northampton County healthcare program changes as proposed by the County Executive.

Mrs. Ferraro stated she sat in on the open enrollment meetings and while the County had to start containing some of its healthcare costs, she felt the co-insurance was the most devastating part of the plan. She further stated she would like to amend the resolution to reduce the co-insurance for at least a year or two to allow the employees an opportunity to become better consumers and contain the healthcare costs.

Mr. McClure advised he did not believe the healthcare benefits should change at all in the context of no raises. He further advised this resolution was merely persuasive and she had to get a commitment from Mr. Brown to amend the co-insurance to relieve the tremendous burden that was being placed on the employees.

Mrs. Ferraro stated everyone had to be realistic and there had to be a compromise. She further stated every employer was trying to find good, reasonable healthcare costs for their employees while their own insurances were going up, but this co-insurance was an incredible burden that was more than anyone could be asked to absorb especially considering the salaries of a majority of employees.

Mrs. Ferraro made a motion to amend the resolution to reduce the co-insurance from $6,600 and $13,200 to $500, which was the same as Lehigh County.

Mr. Parsons seconded the motion.

Mr. Parsons advised the intention of the resolution was to initiate a discussion and perhaps to reach a compromise, but he did not think putting a number on it was the thing to do at this time.
Mr. Werner stated County Council was powerless to impact most of the decisions made by the County Executive, but they did have the right to voice dissatisfaction with them. He further stated the intent of the resolution was to make it clear that there was a growing concern with the County workforce regarding the implementation of this healthcare plan and its potential adverse effect on their families and loved ones.

Mr. Werner advised the intent of the resolution was to further the communication and dialogue with County Council, the County Executive and the employees, noting should there be no discussion then the resolution would stand as law.

Mrs. Ferraro stated she had a very difficult time supporting a resolution that did not call for any change whatsoever because it was unrealistic.

Mr. McClure advised he would vote for her amendment, even though he did not support the ultimate policy of co-insurance, if she would demonstrate that she understood the impact that this was going to have on the employees and vote to pass this resolution.

As there were no further questions or comments, Mrs. Ferraro called for the vote on the motion.

The vote: Ferraro, "yes"; McClure, "yes"; Parsons, "yes"; Phillips, "no"; Vaughn, "no"; Werner, "yes"; Benol, "no"; Geissinger, "no" and Kraft, "yes".

The motion passed by a vote of 5-4.

Mrs. Ferraro called for the vote on the following amended resolution:

R. 91-2014 WHEREAS, Northampton County employees are the County's greatest asset; and

WHEREAS, the County Executive has announced changes to the healthcare program received by County employees; and

WHEREAS, the changes will result in a financial hardship for many of the affected employees; and
WHEREAS, County Council seeks that actions taken regarding healthcare be in the best interests of County employees.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Northampton County Council that with regard to the network coinsurance provision, it supports a reduction in the in-network out-of-pocket maximum from $6,600 individual/$13,200 family to $500 individual/$500 family.

The vote: Werner, "yes"; Kraft, "yes"; McClure, "yes"; Parsons, "yes"; Phillips, "no"; Vaughn, "abstain"; Benol, "no"; Ferraro, "yes" and Geissinger, "no".

The resolution was adopted by a vote of 5-3 with 1 abstention.

In response to Mr. Parsons' question as to why he abstained, Mr. Vaughn stated he felt the resolution did not seek to accomplish anything other than to encourage dialogue and he did not think County Council had the authority to force dialogue.

Introduction of the County Council Salary Ordinance

Mrs. Ferraro advised at the request of Mr. Geissinger, an ordinance was prepared that provided for the reduction in the salary of County Council members and Mr. Phillips would be co-sponsoring this ordinance. She further advised the public hearing, debate and possible vote would take place at the October 16, 2014 meeting.

Mr. Geissinger introduced the following ordinance:

AN ORDINANCE PROVIDING FOR COMPENSATION FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

WHEREAS, the families of Northampton County, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the United States of America are all facing a difficult economic time; and
WHEREAS, these families cannot continue to sustain public sector wages and benefits that cause the elderly, the hard working middle class and others to support a system that drives up taxes without regard for these economic conditions; and

WHEREAS, it is the duty of elected officials to ensure that government functions at an optimum level of service at the minimal tax burden possible; and

WHEREAS, County Council must first look to itself to ensure it is a prudent steward of the public funds; and

WHEREAS, Northampton County Home Rule Charter Section 106. Compensation provides that, "The County Council shall have the power by ordinance to set the salary of each elected official. No ordinance shall increase or decrease the salary of an elected official during his term of office. No ordinance which increases or decreases the salary of an elected official shall take effect less than one (1) year after its date of enactment."

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY ORDAINED AND ENACTED by the Northampton County Council that:

I. Effective January 1, 2016, the members of the Northampton County Council shall be compensated on a per annum basis in the amount of eight thousand dollars ($8,000.00). The President of County Council shall receive an additional five hundred dollars ($500.00) per annum as compensation for his/her responsibilities as presiding officer.

Consideration of the Easton Commuter Tax Resolution

Mrs. Ferraro stated she requested a resolution be prepared to state County Council's opposition to the proposed increase in the City of Easton commuter tax.

Mr. Kraft and Mrs. Ferraro introduced the following resolution:
A RESOLUTION REQUESTING THE NORTHAMPTON COUNTY EXECUTIVE TO STOP COLLECTING ANY COMMuter TAX IMPOSED BY THE CITY OF EASTON

WHEREAS, on July 5, 2012, Northampton County Council adopted Resolution #57-2012 that expressed its opposition to any new commuter tax in Easton; and

WHEREAS, on August 8, 2012, the City of Easton voted to impose a 1.75% Earned Income Tax on nonresidents with no prior notice to Northampton County; and

WHEREAS, workers in Easton already pay a $52 Local Services Tax to the City of Easton; and

WHEREAS, the implementation of this tax on Northampton County workers has had a deleterious impact on many who have seen their net income diminish; and

WHEREAS, through a 14-year planned reduction of both resident and nonresident wage taxes in the City of Philadelphia, jobs are increasing at the rate of 2,800 jobs per year; and

WHEREAS, a recent study prepared by Dr. Robert Inman at The Wharton School reveals that commuter taxes lead to an exit of jobs and businesses; and

WHEREAS, a commuter tax in Scranton was invalidated on September 30, 2014, by the Honorable John Braxton at Lackawanna No. 2014CIV4799; and

WHEREAS, on October 1, 2014, Easton Mayor Sal Panto proposed increasing the commuter tax from 1.75% to 1.95%.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED as follows:

1) That Northampton County Council condemns Easton’s commuter tax as well as the proposed commuter tax increase as a form of taxation without representation that unfairly targets the workers of Northampton County, our most precious asset.
2) That Northampton County Council condemns Easton’s commuter tax as well as the proposed commuter tax increase as contrary to the law as set forth in the Opinion of the Honorable John Braxton at Lackawanna No. 2014CIV4799.

3) That Northampton County Executive John A. Brown is respectfully requested to take all actions to prevent the implementation of the Easton commuter tax, including the suspension of collection and the institution of a Declaratory Judgment action.

4) That a copy of this resolution be distributed to Easton Mayor Sal Panto, as well as all members of Easton City Council.

As there were no questions or comments, Mrs. Ferraro called for the vote.


The resolution was adopted by a vote of 9-0.

Lehigh Valley Planning Commission Liaison Report

Mr. Vaughn advised the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission recently released their Sustainable Communities Outlook and their Comprehensive Plan for the Lehigh Valley for 2030. He further advised this was a very comprehensive report and went into detail as to what they wanted to see done to sustain the Lehigh Valley.

Mr. Vaughn stated overall the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission was working very well under the new leadership of Ms. Becky Bradley, who was present tonight.

Solicitor’s Report

Mr. Lauer advised he had a very small amendment that he was going to propose for consideration at the next meeting to the ordinance reducing County Council’s salaries.
Adjournment

Mr. McClure made a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Kraft seconded the motion.

The motion to adjourn passed unanimously by acclamation.

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Frank E. Flisser
Clerk to Council