Easton, Pennsylvania

January 8, 2015

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 (via telephone); Lamont G. McClure, Jr.; Scott Parsons; Hayden Phillips; Seth Vaughn; Robert F. Werner; Linda M. Zembo, Acting Clerk to Council, and Philip D. Lauer, Solicitor to Council. Absent was Kenneth M. Kraft.

Prayer

Mrs. Ferraro led County Council in a moment of silence to open the meeting.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mrs. Ferraro led County Council in the pledge of allegiance.

Courtesy of the Floor

Ms. Sheila Gallagher, 2805 North Delaware Drive, Forks Township, PA - advised she was representing a group of citizens from Forks Township who were very concerned about the compressor station upgrade that was being proposed and was approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to move to the next step. She further advised she had a number of documents relating to this issue (see Attachment #1) that she would like County Council to review and determine what action could be taken to support them in getting the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to make sure the health impacts were minimized or eliminated.

Ms. Gallagher stated the current compressor station had been there for 40 years and had 4400 horsepower, but the new compressors were going to have 22000 plus horsepower so there would be a huge increase.

Ms. Gallagher advised Forks Township passed a resolution and when they met with representatives from Columbia Gas in December, they were told they did not have any plans to present. She further advised the FERC documents indicated the compressors
would increase in size and they had to come before Forks Township to present its plan.

Ms. Gallagher stated Columbia Gas was taking the position since the compressor was there before, they could do what they wanted to the facility because it was the same use even though it was an expanded use.

Ms. Gallagher advised if there was anything County Council could do to help them with this issue, it would be appreciated.

Ms. Gallagher stated one of the documents was a study by Madison County, New York that looked at the health impacts of compressor stations. She further stated it listed the top two concerns as health and food safety.

Ms. Gallagher advised this compressor was located in Forks Township near prime farmland and the vo-tech school which housed both children and elder adults that would be more greatly impacted than other citizens. She suggested the County’s Health Department conduct their own study on the health impacts of this compressor station on their community.

In response to Mr. Vaughn’s question as to what the health impacts were, Ms. Gallagher stated because of the blow downs and different emissions, it was mostly air-borne pollution. She further stated Lehigh and Northampton Counties had non-attainment air quality so the health impacts were cancers, asthma and all of the things that would be attributed to poor air quality.

Approval of the Minutes

Mr. Parsons made the following motion:

Be It Moved By the Northampton County Council that the minutes of the December 4, 2014, December 11, 2014 and January 5, 2015 meetings shall be approved.

Mr. Werner seconded the motion.

The minutes were approved by voice acclamation.
County Council Minutes -3- January 8, 2015

County Executive Report

Mr. John A. Brown, County Executive, advised he did not have anything to report.

Statement by Mr. McClure

Mr. McClure advised he wanted to thank his colleagues for the kindness they demonstrated to his family over their recent loss.

Consideration of the Resolution Confirming the Appointment of the Northampton County Council Solicitor

Mr. Geissinger introduced the following resolution:

R. 3-2015 RESOLVED, by County Council of Northampton County that Philip D. Lauer shall be confirmed in his appointment as Solicitor to the Northampton County Council, pay grade RS-8, salary $52,405, effective January 8, 2015.

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

The vote: Ferraro, "yes"; Geissinger, "yes"; McClure, "yes"; Parsons, "yes"; Phillips, "yes"; Vaughn, "yes"; Werner, "yes" and Benol, "yes".

The resolution was adopted by 8-0.

Name Change of the Economic Development Committee

Mrs. Ferraro stated a request was made by the Department of Community and Economic Development to change the name of the Economic Development Committee to Community and Economic Development Committee.

Mrs. Ferraro advised a review of the Home Rule Charter and the Administrative Code did not indicate that formal action had to be taken. She then asked if there was a motion to change the name or did they want to wait until the department was restructured.
Mr. Parsons suggested they wait until the restructure of the department and the other members of County Council agreed.

Letter Regarding Consolidation of District Justices Offices

Mrs. Ferraro stated the State was closing the District Justice office in Northampton Borough and consolidating it with the Lehigh Township office at the end of 2015. She further stated District Justice Diane Marakovits of the Northampton Borough office had resigned December 31, 2014 so there was a vacancy in that office.

Mrs. Ferraro advised County Council was asked to write a letter to Joseph J. Mittlemen, Esq., Director of Judicial Programs, to suggest consolidating those offices now in order to save money. She further advised the individuals working in the Northampton Borough office would be moved to the Lehigh Township office. She noted if this consolidation took place now, senior judges would not have to be called to cover the Northampton Borough office.

Mrs. Ferraro stated she was just seeking County Council’s approval to send a letter to Attorney Mittlemen.

Mr. McClure advised the Courts clearly have a plan for the consolidation and it seemed to him the individuals in Northampton Borough would like a period of transition before the consolidation.

Mrs. Ferraro asked for a motion for approval to send the letter.

Mr. Geissinger made a motion to send the letter.

Mr. Phillips seconded the motion.

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


The motion passed by a vote of 7-1.
Northampton County Litigation

In response to Mr. Parsons' question as to whether there was any outstanding litigation, Mr. Victor Scomillio, County Solicitor, stated there were still ongoing discussions with Pennoni Associates for final resolution regarding the parking deck. He further stated the case with the roof contractor was underway and a trial was being scheduled for it.

In answer to Mr. Phillips' question regarding the status of the City of Easton commuter tax, Mr. Scomillio advised they were going to be meeting with Judge Stephen Baratta tomorrow.

Mr. Scomillio stated a Consent Order had been put forth by the City of Easton. He further stated this Order allocated the residents of the City of Easton and the non-residents/employees would be paying the same amount under Act 205 that would take into effect this year and subsequent years.

Mr. Scomillio advised it alleviated the concerns the County had regarding an establishment of a rate of pay and a quality of greater pay. He further advised it also addressed the concerns that were raised by Judge John Braxton in the Lackawanna County decision.

Mr. Scomillio stated there was a companion suit filed by the Deputy Sheriffs and they were considering the same Consent Order.

Personnel Reclassifications

Mr. Werner requested a listing of all reclassified personnel for 2014 whether or not they were approved by County Council.

Capital Projects and Operations Committee Report

Mr. Phillips advised he would be holding four Capital Projects and Operations Committee meetings in 2015. He further advised the first meeting would be held at the Louise Moore Pine Homestead on January 20, 2015, at 6:30 p.m., to discuss the confirmation of the requirements and the state of the funds for this project.
Mr. Phillips stated the second meeting would be held on April 21, 2015, in the County Council Meeting Room, at 6:30 p.m., to discuss bridge bundling.

Mr. Phillips advised the third meeting would be held on July 21, 2015, at Gracedale, at 6:30 p.m., to discuss the generator project and to provide a physical survey of the Gracedale site and placement location. He further advised the Controller would provide a report on the performance audit of the County’s Maintenance Management System.

Mr. Phillips stated the last meeting would be held on October 20, 2014, in the County Council Meeting Room, at 6:30 p.m., to review the 2016 budget as it pertained to Capital Projects and Operations.

**Gracedale Advisory Board Liaison Report**

Mr. Werner advised Gracedale was experiencing problems with the heat valves, but they were working with the McClure Company to rectify the situation.

Mr. Werner stated the census was 669.5 and that meant the County would get $65,000 in disproportionate funding and another $215,000 in bed hold dollars.

Mr. Werner advised Gracedale was budget neutral for the last quarter, which meant they would be down approximately $5 million. He further advised that may change as they were still bringing money in and working on their books.

Mr. Werner stated Gracedale received all the new equipment that was ordered for the tracking of data and the NTT System was up and running. He further stated there were medication dispensing machines on all of the floors.

Mr. Werner advised there have been no complaints for eight months and no other major problems occurring.

Mr. McClure commented he understood the County’s contribution for 2014 was $3 million and $8 million was budgeted so that was good news. He then he asked if there was $15 million in receivable.

Mr. Werner stated there was $25 million in receivable outstanding that would not all be booked in 2014.
In response to Mr. McClure’s question as to what would be booked for 2014, Mr. Werner advised they were estimating approximately $3-4 million. He further advised he believed Mr. Millard Freeman, Gracedale Administrator, would be able to provide more accurate numbers at the January 22, 2015 Human Services Committee meeting.

Mr. Brown stated the County contribution was $5.8 million and the budget neutral included the County’s contribution. He further stated Gracedale lost $1.1 million in revenues, noting $700,000 was from the potential bed sale that was booked in the budget, but never realized and $400,000 was lost due to loss of census when they experienced the hot water issue during the first quarter.

Mr. Brown advised the Kennedy Law firm was doing an excellent job in collecting receivables. He further advised they were putting together a model that would provide a clearer picture of where Gracedale would finish.

Mr. Brown stated he was aware of the issue with the valve and it was not related to any other issue. He further stated to repair it was approximately $17,000.

Mr. Brown advised Gracedale had been able to hold and maintain the census for approximately five months so it was maximizing its revenue potential.

Mr. Brown stated some of the challenges they were facing was making sure the infrastructure started to get some attention and even though they did put some money in for capital improvements for 2015, there were some large needs to be addressed.

Mr. Brown advised Gracedale’s revenue potential was going to be linked to what it would be receiving from the government in terms of increases and reimbursements. He further advised the staff was working on bringing in a broader mix of residents.

Mr. McClure stated the budgeted County contribution for Gracedale for 2014 was $5,845,696 and as of December 31, 2014, the actual was $3,802,053.

Mr. Brown advised they were continuing to accrue expenses for 2014 so those figures could be a little misleading. He further advised they anticipated the $3.8 million figure to come in closer to the $5.8 million plus or minus $.5 million.
Mr. Brown stated they were putting all the right things in place and they expected to realize some savings that would drive down the County contribution. He further stated the systems at Gracedale were working well and they were identifying what the facility could or could not do.

Mr. McClure asked Mr. Brown if he would agree that the decisions made after the voters voted to keep Gracedale County owned was moving it in a positive direction.

Mr. Brown advised many of the items in the plan provided by Premiere Healthcare Resources were able to be implemented in 2014 so he would agree with that statement.

Mr. Werner stated Mr. Freeman was working on a collaborative effort to work with the hospitals so the doctors could follow their patients. He further stated other nursing homes in the area were having a terrible time with the flu and because of the way Gracedale was being managed, they were getting more residents to stay at Gracedale.

In response to Mr. Parsons’ comment that maybe this year they could see the $700,000 from the bed sale, Mr. Brown replied it was not likely.

In answer to Mr. McClure’s question as to what was the issue, Mr. Geissinger advised no one wanted to buy them.

Adjournment

Mr. Geissinger made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mrs. Ferraro seconded the motion.

The motion to adjourn passed unanimously by acclamation.

Linda M. Zembo
Acting Clerk to Council