

Easton, Pennsylvania

December 17, 2020

The regular meeting of the Northampton County Council was held via Zoom on the above date with the following present: Ronald R. Heckman, President; Lori Vargo Heffner, Vice President; John Cusick; Margaret L. Ferraro; Thomas A. Giovanni; Kevin Lott; William B. McGee; Tara M. Zrinski; Linda M. Zembo, Clerk to Council; Alene M. Shafnisky, Deputy Clerk to Council and Christopher T. Spadoni, Solicitor to Council; Lemont McClure, County Executive; Jennifer Stewart-King, Gracedale Administrator. Absent was Kerry L. Myers.

Pledge of Allegiance

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

Approval of the Minutes - December 10, 2020

Mr. Giovanni made the following motion:

Be It Moved By the Northampton County Council that the minutes of the December 10, 2020 meeting shall be approved.

Ms. Zrinski seconded the motion.

The minutes were approved by voice acclamation.

Courtesy of the Floor

Mr. Heckman asked if there were any questions or comments from the public.

There were no respondents.

County Executive Report

Mr. McClure stated he would reserve his report until later in the meeting as it was to discuss allowing the Gracedale Nursing Home Administrator to offer an incentive to those employees receiving the COVID-19 vaccination.

Public Hearing on an Ordinance Entitled, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE NORTHAMPTON COUNTY COUNCIL AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY OF NORTHAMPTON, EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA, TO LEASE APPROXIMATELY 2,650 RENTABLE SQUARE FEET OF SPACE AT 1710 BUTLER STREET, EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA FROM HELEN GAROFALO AND HELENBETH G. VILCEK"

Mr. Heckman advised Ms. Vargo Heffner and Mr. Giovanni introduced the following ordinance at the December 10, 2020 meeting:

AN ORDINANCE OF THE NORTHAMPTON COUNTY COUNCIL AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY OF NORTHAMPTON, EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA, TO LEASE APPROXIMATELY 2,650 RENTABLE SQUARE FEET OF SPACE AT 1710 BUTLER STREET, EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA FROM HELEN GAROFALO AND HELENBETH G. VILCEK

WHEREAS, Northampton County Administrative Code Article XIII, Section 13.14 Purchase, Sale and Lease of Real Estate Section b. Sealed Appraisals, provides, "The County shall not purchase, sell, or lease real estate without first obtaining sealed appraisals from two (2) professional real estate appraisers."; and

WHEREAS, Northampton County Administrative Code Article XIII, Section 13.14 Purchase, Sale and Lease of Real Estate Section c. (1) Purchase/Sale/Lease of Real Estate, provides, "The County Executive, or his designee, may negotiate a contract for the purchase, sale or lease (with the County as lessor or lessee) of real estate. Any such purchase/sale/lease shall be approved by County Council, and no such contract shall bind the County nor shall any conveyance be lawful, until County Council approves of the terms of the purchase/sale/lease."; and

WHEREAS, Northampton County Home Rule Charter Article 602 (a) (6) provides that the Northampton County Council shall enact an ordinance for any act which "purchase, conveys, leases or authorizes the purchase, conveyance or lease of any real property of the County".

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY ORDAINED AND ENACTED by Northampton County Council that it authorizes the County of Northampton, Easton, Pennsylvania, to enter into a one (1) year lease agreement with Helen Garofalo and Helenbeth G. Vilcek for approximately 2,650 rentable square feet of space at 1710 Butler Street, Easton, Pennsylvania, for \$3,120.00 per month from the commencement of the term of this lease and continuing throughout the original lease term beginning January 1, 2021 and ending on December 31, 2021. The terms and conditions of the lease shall be

in accordance with the lease agreement, a copy of which is attached hereto and made a part hereof as Exhibit "A".

Effective Date - This ordinance shall become effective thirty days after the date of enactment.

Public Hearing

Mr. Heckman asked if there were any questions or comments from the public.

There were no respondents.

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

The vote: Vargo Heffner, "yes"; Giovanni, "yes"; Heckman, "yes"; Lott, "yes"; McGee, "yes"; Zrinski, "yes"; Cusick, "yes" and Ferraro, "yes".

The ordinance was adopted by a vote of 8-0.

Consideration of Vaccine Incentive for Gracedale Employees Resolution

Ms. Vargo Heffner introduced the following resolution:

A RESOLUTION TO ALLOW THE GRACEDALE ADMINISTRATOR TO INCENTIVIZE THE COVID-19 VACCINATION FOR GRACEDALE STAFF

WHEREAS, it is the belief of the Gracedale Administration that the provisions of a COVID-19 vaccine in Gracedale will save lives; and

WHEREAS, the Gracedale Administration understands that a COVID-19 vaccine will be made available to inoculate the residents and staff in the very near future; and

WHEREAS, the Gracedale Administration has knowledge, information and belief that there may be some reticence on the part of some staff to be inoculated with the COVID-19 vaccination due in part to the rapidity of its development; and

WHEREAS, the Gracedale Administration believes that staff vaccination is as important as the inoculation of residents to protect the health, safety and well-being of everyone that lives and works at Gracedale; and

WHEREAS, the Gracedale Administration has throughout the pandemic left no stone unturned to protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents and staff by implementing the following, including but not limited to: requiring two negative COVID-19 tests before admission to Gracedale; early adopting of universal COVID-19 testing in Long Term Care facilities (which has dramatically reduced infections); collaborating with the Pennsylvania Army National Guard to deal with over 1,200 call-outs during the height of the first wave of the pandemic which led Michael Whalen, BSN, NHDC-BC, CHEP, of The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania to write: "Thank you for allowing myself and LT. Peacock PANG to visit your facility today. As a trained emergency nurse, with a specialty in disaster preparedness and response, I would like to share the following observations. In my opinion, Gracedale Nursing Home has demonstrated several best practices during the COVID-19 Pandemic. You are the largest LTC under single roof in the Commonwealth but your number of COVID-19 patients are well below the average of most LTC in the State"; being the first nursing home in the Commonwealth to ban visitors and volunteers for resident safety; aggressively and successfully obtaining PPE during a time of national scarcity thereby keeping the staff and residents safe; and standing alone in innovating and creating an entire floor to isolate positive COVID-19 residents to limit the spread of the deadly contagion; and

WHEREAS, the Gracedale Administration believes based upon its experience during this pandemic that the flexibility to use some residual Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Emergency Security Act funding to offer a one-time, non-precedential incentive of \$750.00, payable over two (2) pay periods, to staff that receive the full COVID-19 vaccination protocol is warranted.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Northampton County Council does authorize the Northampton County Executive to allow the Gracedale Administrator to incentivize the COVID-19 inoculation for Gracedale staff with a one-time non-precedential payment of \$750.00.

Mr. McClure stated lives and livelihoods would be saved by a robust vaccination program in America, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and specifically at Gracedale. He further stated right now there were more infections and deaths in America and in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania than during any other time of the pandemic and Gracedale was doing a remarkable job in infection control, but it may not last.

Mr. McClure advised they were aware that very soon the vaccine would be available to the people at Gracedale so they wanted to get the residents vaccinated, but more importantly they wanted to get the staff vaccinated. He further advised it was a miracle Gracedale staff did not experience any losses, but the way to prevent that would be by getting everyone vaccinated.

Mr. McClure stated he spoke about livelihood and that referred to Governor Tom Wolf's most recent orders to close bars and restaurants. He further stated everyone wanted to save them from going under and the best way to do that was to get people vaccinated and the place to start was in the nursing homes.

Mr. McClure advised the last time he looked at the numbers for Northampton County nearly 85% of the people who died lived in long-term care facilities and the average age was 80. He further advised Ms. Jennifer Stewart-King, Gracedale Nursing Home Administrator, asked him for the ability to offer an incentive for the staff to be vaccinated.

Mr. McClure stated he thought about this ethically and morally and was told that people should just want to protect those they loved, but it was not that simple because a lot of people were reticent to receive this vaccine so early. He further stated they could not make any progress or save precious lives that it was the County's responsibility to save without getting broad scale vaccinations.

Mr. McClure advised he came across a study called "Predictors of Smallpox Vaccination among Healthcare Workers and other First Responders" that appeared in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine in June 2007. He further advised basically their conclusions were clearly communicating the risk and benefits of vaccination and addressing issues of cost, convenience and compensation may be important for any program where vaccination was provided in the national interest and when the direct benefits of a vaccination were unknown.

Mr. McClure stated this was actually the situation that was happening in the nation, the Commonwealth and at Gracedale. He further stated he believed giving Ms. Stewart-King this ability would be very helpful.

Ms. Stewart-King advised this would be a tool in their toolbox and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided them incentive money to fight infectious disease. She further advised she wanted to give the vaccine out and by offering this incentive more people may be inclined to receive it.

In answer to Ms. Zrinski's question as to whether she knew how many people would be receiving the vaccine, Ms. Stewart-King stated the cost would be \$490,000 if everyone received the vaccine and they had \$4.4 million of CARES Act funding they could use.

In response to Ms. Zrinski's question as to whether there would be any repercussion if someone did not get the vaccine, Mr. McClure advised the County solicitors have informed him they could not mandate the vaccine for current employees, but that did not mean they could not do something for future employees or admissions. He further advised they would like everyone to get it, but some people had some very valid concerns.

In answer to Mr. Heckman's question as to whether she felt safety was the biggest concern people had for not getting the vaccine, Ms. Stewart-King replied there was a concern because it was fast-tracked.

In response to Mr. Heckman's question as to how would the money be an incentive if it were a medical concern and were people still receiving hazard pay, Ms. Stewart-King stated the hazard pay was in place until December 31st. She further stated this was just another incentive and may push someone to get it if they were on the fence about it.

In answer to Mr. Lott's comment that there was money at Gracedale to provide this incentive, but he wondered when the Corrections Officers would be vaccinated, Mr. McClure advised as soon as it was made available for them, they would be vaccinated as well as the inmates.

In response to Mr. Heckman's question as to whether there was a concern that when this occurs, other employees would be requesting money as well, Mr. McClure stated Gracedale operated on incentives and they were part of their contracts. He further stated it was a concern, but 85% of the people who died in

Northampton County were residents of long-term care facilities and this was the way for things to get back to normal.

Ms. Stewart-King advised through the diligent efforts that each and every staff member had done, they currently have only two residents that were positive and there have been no other positives cases since November 30th. She further advised she had heard that there were nursing homes that were going through the terrible things that Gracedale experienced in March.

Ms. Stewart-King stated the entire staff was dedicated, they were wearing the proper Personal Protective Equipment, did what they were asked to do and took care of the residents like family. She further stated she hoped that they would be able to open up to visitors once everyone was vaccinated and the families could prove that they received the vaccine.

In answer to Ms. Zrinski's question as to whether there was any liability on the County for incentivizing employees to get vaccinated, Mr. McClure advised there was not because in the end it was their decision.

In response to Ms. Zrinski's question as to whether the employees at the Department of Human Services would be offered an incentive to get the vaccine, Mr. McClure stated they were pretty high up on the list to receive the vaccine, but there was no CARES Act money for their vaccinations. He further stated the incentive was coming from CARES Act money that was given to Gracedale for infection control.

In answer to Mr. McGee's question as to whether there would be a timeframe for the employees to receive the vaccination, Ms. Stewart-King advised they should hear something by December 28th as to when they would receive the vaccine and once they received it the employees would be urged to get the first shot and then receive the second one approximately a month later.

Mr. McClure stated he would empower Ms. Stewart-King to use her best judgement because if someone wants to get their vaccination in July, it would be looked at a little different than now.

Mr. Heckman left the meeting at this time.

In response to Mr. Cusick's question as to whether the employees would still have to follow the safety protocols currently in place after they received the vaccine, Ms. Stewart-King replied they would.

In answer to Ms. Vargo Heffner's question as to what was the plan as far as who received the vaccine first, Ms. Stewart-King advised they were working with CVS and Omnicare on the rollout and how they would like to proceed because it was going to be staggered.

As there were no further questions or comments, Ms. Vargo Heffner called for the vote.

The vote: Vargo Heffner, "yes"; Lott, "yes"; McGee, "yes"; Zrinski, "yes"; Cusick, "yes"; Ferraro, "yes" and Giovanni, "yes".

The resolution was adopted by a vote of 7-0.

Executive Secretary to County Council Retirement

Ms. Vargo Heffner stated on behalf of County Council she wanted to say congratulations and well wishes to Ms. Sharon Wengryn, Executive Secretary to County Council, who would be retiring at the end of this calendar year and she did not want to close out the year without thanking her for many years of faithful service to this body.

Adjournment

Ms. Zrinski made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Lott seconded the motion.

The motion to adjourn passed unanimously by acclamation.

Linda M. Zembo
Clerk to Council