

Borough of Northumberland
175 Orange Street, Northumberland, PA 17857
Northumberland Borough Council Meeting
November 15, 2011

President Gregory Carl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Carl explained that this meeting would be a regular council meeting followed by a work session. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and Mayor Len Zboray offered an Invocation.

Roll Call

Council members present were Gregory Carl, Judith Groninger, Robert Long, James Orner, and Stephen Reed. Others present were Mayor Zboray; Paul Ruane, Code Enforcement Officer; Thomas Slodysko, Street Supervisor; and Janice Bowman, Borough Secretary.

The five visitors present introduced themselves.

Public Comment

Mr. Steve Cimino stated that he wasn't present at the last meeting but has some questions. He asked who recommended to the council that they should vote for a joint sewer authority. Mrs. Groninger stated that she has gone to a lot of meetings on the sewer authority. She said that each time they say, "Bring questions", and nobody has any questions. She added that she was impressed with Bill Seigel's presentation and Mr. Seigel is not from Northumberland or Point Township; but a man who does this for a living. Mr. Cimino said that the council did not act in the best interest of the community. He was told that he is entitled to his opinion. Mr. Cimino asked if the township sewer authority has paid their debt to the NSA. Mr. Orner explained that the township authority has agreed to pay the 18 months that they were in arrears, close to \$80,000, and they will set up a payment schedule for the balance. The township authority had approved this plan at their last meeting and will be attending NSA's meeting to present their proposal. Mr. Orner stated that approximately \$500,000 is owed to the NSA.

Mr. Cimino asked why the Borough Council is making the decision to form a joint sewer authority when they don't have all the answers. Mr. Carl responded that he does not have any more questions and that the council is the entity that makes the decision to form a joint sewer authority. He feels that he is qualified to make the decision that he made; adding that he can't speak for the other council members.

Mrs. Groninger stated that when the idea was considered to transfer the sewage to Sunbury, she felt that it would be better to have a joint authority negotiating. She also said that she was told that Hamilton sewer was cut off during the flood, adding that she doesn't want the Borough to be in that position.

Mr. Cimino responded that the NSA can't guarantee that to the residents now. He noted that he thinks the decision was made in haste and council wasn't qualified.

Mr. Long said that prior to the first meeting at Point Township, everyone was saying that Bill Seigel needed to be there since he is the expert. At that meeting, Mr. Seigel explained that he has seen joint authorities formed in several ways. Either they form the authority and then hash out the details or they spend years to hash out the details and then form the authority. Mr. Long said that two things he hasn't heard are any new concerns that weren't voiced on day one, but that he felt were answered for him; or people moving forward on anything other than asking the same questions. The one thing he did see was exactly the type of thing that Bill Seigel warned that the council would get into. Let's bring in the engineers, etc., and Mr. Long started seeing time and money that Bill Seigel warned about. Mr. Long added that it's funny that for some people, Mr. Seigel was the expert until he said what they didn't want to hear. At that meeting with Mr. Seigel, these people were discussing the jointure, and Mr. Long did not feel that they were listening to Mr. Seigel. He said that the council is not professionals or experts but they must make the best decision they can in their opinion.

Mr. Cimino said that he does not know Mr. Seigel, but asked if he had any documentation. Mr. Long responded that Mr. Seigel has 20 years of experience. Mr. Cimino questioned if council would know that the information is the truth without documentation. Mrs. Groninger noted that two attorneys were at the meeting to represent the Borough. The two sewer authorities will come together to decide how to create the joint authority.

Mr. Jim Troup stated that he is neither for or against the jointure; however, he does not feel that there is enough information. He asked if the NSA has told the council that this is a good thing and request that council vote for the jointure. He also asked if council considered putting the topic out for referendum on November 8th. He feels that council should talk to the constituents. He said that he has talked to a ton of people and everyone he has talked to is against it, the way it is going. Mr. Long responded that he respects Mr. Troup's opinion and he hopes Mr. Troup will respect his. He said that by voting for the merger, he feels that he is putting it in the hands of the experts. The council is empowering the sewer authority board to move forward with bylaws and guidelines and things that are going to move that merger forward in a way that the people who are the experts are going to be able to have control over and push it in the right direction. Mr. Troup said the borough already has a sewer authority and the council should let them figure it out and take care of it. He feels that the council is "giving away half the ship." Before, the township was our customer; they did not have our assets. Mr. Carl said the customers aren't going anywhere; they will still be customers. Mr. Carl asked what will happen differently now that they are our partner. Mr. Troup said that one member of the board hold two places. Mr. Reed said that the Borough lost control of something we had control of and he doesn't understand what the rush was. Mr. Long responded that this has been in conversation for three or four months and we are spinning our wheels the same way. Mr. Long responded that this has been in conversation for three or four months and we are spinning our wheels the same place we were then. He said he respects Mr. Reed's opinion, he just doesn't agree with it.

Mr. Ted Koppen said that he understand the rates will go up. His concern, as a citizen who has a vested interest in this Borough, is that he doesn't want the Borough's rates to go up to cover someone else's debt. If the township is paying their debt before the merger happens, he has no problem with welcoming them into the sewer authority. Mr. Carl responded that if they have half a million dollars in the bank, that money goes to the new authority. If he has two checking

accounts and one has \$5,000 while the other is overdrawn, and he transfers \$2,500 into the second account, he still has the same amount of money.

Mr. Koppen asked where the balance sheet stands now. He said that he understands that the township sewer authority is in debt. He does not mind paying his fair share, but doesn't want to pay for someone else's share. Mrs. Groninger explained that at the first meeting, it was explained that the township is made up of several divisions and the borough would be a division. The divisions have different rates depending on the costs for the infrastructure. Mr. Troup questioned if it would remain that way. Mr. Troup asked if the authority has recommended the merger. Mr. Orner said that it was not brought up for a vote. Mr. Long stated that the joint board will remain in place with the current membership for seven years. After that, the board is made up of three members from one municipality and four from the other. The majority changes each year so Mr. Long does not see why one group would want to charge the other excessively when the majority changes the following year.

Mr. Koppen repeated that he is not opposed to the merger; he is opposed to taking on prior debt.

Mr. Robin Bolig asked who needs the merger. He said that the Borough can't grow anymore. He feels that Point Township needs the merger, not the Borough.

Mr. Troup asked how long it would take to complete the merger. Someone said that it could be years. Mr. Troup stated that in two more months it could be a non- issue.

Mr. Orner said that if the two authorities can't agree on things, it could take years. He also said that the council could appoint new people to the authority if they don't feel comfortable with the current ones.

Mr. Cimino asked a question about taking on a company with debt. He is concerned that eventually the group will question why they are paying themselves and absorb the entire debt. Mr. Carl said it's about making structured payments. Mr. Cimino feels that it will only work until the jointure is competed.

Mr. Cimino said he is not opposed to the merger; he wants to make sure that the Borough doesn't pay the Township's debt. He feels the two entities must come into the merger equally.

Mr. Troup asked who owns the facility. Mr. Carl said the authority owns the facility. Mr. Troup said that with the merger, the Borough is giving up half of the value of the sewer plant.

Mr. Troup said that the additional pipes will create additional revenue. Mr. Carl said that the borough's authority can't raise rates to build a nest egg. Mr. Troup said that in order to finance a project, they can raise rates.

Mr. Carl announced that in light of the recent article in the paper and the issues that people seem to have with the amount of time for advertising the vote, he is calling a special meeting for Monday, November 28th to revisit and possibly revote. The meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Carl asked if anyone had public comment on any other issue.

Mr. Bolig stated that trees in the Borough are starting to interfere with the fire apparatus. Mr. Slodysko replied that the street crew will trim trees in a few weeks. They are currently erecting the Christmas decorations.

The council adjourned at 7:39 p.m. for an Executive Session to discuss a personnel issue and to decide upon a maximum bid on a truck for the street department.

The meeting was reconvened at 8:10 p.m.

Mr. Carl moved to authorize Tom Slodysko to purchase a truck up to the amount agreed upon in Executive Session and to authorize the Borough Secretary to transfer the amount required for the Muncibid fee to the debit card account. Mr. Carl seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Zboray requested permission for the Fire Police to assist with security on November 19, 2011, for the Santa Parade at the Susquehanna Valley Mall. Mr. Long so moved. Mrs. Groninger seconded the motion. Council voted unanimously to approve.

Upon motion by Mrs. Groninger, seconded by Mr. Carl, the council voted unanimously to approve Resolution G-2011. This resolution designates Janice Bowman, Borough Secretary, as the Borough's agent for applying for FEMA funds for the damage due to tropical storm Lee.

Mr. Troup asked if the council is planning to sell Jolly Hollow. Mr. Carl stated that council is planning to do so, but may decide to wait until spring.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Janice R. Bowman
Borough Secretary