

Myerstown, PA
Thursday, October 20, 2016

Chairman Park W. Haverstick, II called the advertised special meeting of the Myerstown Borough Planning/Zoning/Public Safety Committee to order at 6:33 p.m., on Thursday, October 20, 2016. The meeting was held in the Myerstown Government & Business Center, 101 S. Railroad Street, Myerstown, PA 17067.

A roll call was taken. Present were: Committee Chairman Park W. Haverstick, II, and Committee Member Eric L. Powell. Absent was Committee Member Vince Podolski.

The Borough Councilmember and officials present were, President Bryan L. Rittle, Mayor Gloria R. Ebling, and Manager Christopher J. Moonis.

Chairman Park W. Haverstick, II stated due to increasing concerns regarding public safety, the committee decided to hold a public meeting. This is the first of a series of meeting the committee would like to hold on this matter.

Chairman Haverstick stated public safety is a common problem. It is a complicated issue, it is an evolving issue, and an expensive issue. In the wellbeing of the community, children, neighbors and yourself it is a very important issue to discuss. As far as Public safety being an evolving problem, the world isn't getting friendlier. Shootings are becoming common, going out on a Friday night you are as worried if you have your wallet as you are to lock your doors, not like years ago.

Chairman Haverstick stated the biggest concern being heard by Council is police services. The Borough is currently covered by State Police. While he believes the State Police are an extremely professional force with a lot of great resources, they are stretched pretty thin across the state. The Borough is not the only municipality that rely on State Police for coverage. It is becoming more and more common because police departments are expensive. While the State Police are good, the problem is response time.

Chairman Haverstick stated when the Borough dissolved the police department, the Council listed options as to what to do. First, he would like to review why the Borough dissolved the police department.

- 1.) Cost - he hates to put a price tag on public safety, but sometimes you have to be fiscally responsible for the way you spend money.
- 2.) Was the Borough getting what it was paying for – all in total for police service the total was approximately \$243,400.00 a year for a part time department.
- 3.) Officers were close to retirement – the question became does the Council keep the department going or was it time to dissolve, and look at reforming it in the future.
- 4.) Police contract – police are a union group and with that receive many benefits. Those benefits are costly.

Chairman Haverstick stated the next question is, where did those dollars go? The funds have been placed within other projects. The last road project cost was nearly \$800,000.00, with many more needing to be done. Cost to run the Borough services increase annually as they do for everyone.

Options the Borough has;

- 1.) Do nothing, stay with the State Police coverage
- 2.) Reform local department – to implement with 24 hour coverage, it would take at least 6 officers. If 3 officers were costing approximately \$250,000.00, you would have to now double that total cost. Plus purchase costs for equipment, like vehicles and weapons which would be costly.
- 3.) Regional force – in his opinion, this would be the best, but will probably be the hardest to achieve. You would need the surrounding municipalities to be part of the regional force and share in the costs. There is a school board member who is interested in spearheading this option and is trying to get the municipalities together to have a roundtable discussion on this type of force.

The Borough Council President stated a Borough police study was done as part of the EIP I Grant. Copies of police study were given to review. President Rittle stated the study found the police department was not efficient and has a recommendation for a regionalized police force.

The Mayor stated the regional force was discussed years ago and the other municipalities were not interested.

Chairman Haverstick stated a regional force is still a theory, and a hope as well. If a regional force doesn't work, then the Borough would have to continue to discuss on their own.

The Chairman opened the floor for Citizens and Visitors Comments:

Michael Yiengst – 130 W. Washington Avenue – stated he agrees with the regional police force. He is not familiar with regional police forces, but as far as regional fire departments the majority have worked.

Michael Yiengst just wanted to comment on a statement made earlier about not raising taxes for ten years. He knows that is something to be proud of, is the no tax increase. Michael Yiengst stated he can only speak for himself, but he does not mind small incremental tax increases as long as Borough services are getting better or being maintained. He does not have a problem in paying a bit more.

Michael Yiengst stated at the last Council meeting when public safety was discussed. The Manager asked if people would mind paying double taxes for police services, he would rather not, but if the community is getting a good service, he is not totally against it.

President Rittle stated there are more things coming that regional cooperation maybe the answer to in handling these issues, like MS-4. The Manager stated there will likely be more federally unfunded mandates coming that we all have to deal with in the future.

Chairman Haverstick stated Michael Yiengst hit the nail on the head, and for himself as a tax payer he agrees he would not mind paying higher taxes if there were more services. The Borough Council is trying to look at the benefit of incremental tax increases. Smaller increases may be better, than no increases for years, rather than having to do a large increase in five to ten years to catch up.

The Manager stated as the surrounding areas continue to grow, he believes there will be more and more pressure to have more services like police. With a regional force you will get officers on duty all the time to patrol and response times will be quicker regionally then out of the Jonestown barracks. This may not be the right time for everyone to be involved in a regional force, but he believes it will come.

A comment was made from the audience stating they believe if other municipalities are on board and another isn't, people are going to push. If the Borough starts this with others, and that community sees they are not getting patrolled, they are going to want to know why and push for it.

Chairman Haverstick stated the residents of each community must go to their governing body to endorse and encourage participation.

The Manager stated there is another option that was not discussed. The Borough could contract with an existing police department for police services. You would pay a specific fee for hours or days when they would be providing service to the Borough.

The Manager stated there are funds available for the regionalization approach. The State likes municipalities that want to do joint services. They will give funds to do a regionalization study and they want you to continue with the results of the study and will offer seed money to get the regional force up and running. There are 2600 local municipalities in Pennsylvania. There are more police chiefs in PA then in the entire United Kingdom. With that, local government officials get very territorial when trying to establish a regional effort and can hinder the creation. The Manager stated the feasibility study will tell you what the best next step is.

Chairman Haverstick stated police do help with code enforcement as well. Speeding is always a big concern and a local police presence can be a deterrent, as well as for the growing drug issues.

The Manager explained the process for filing a property maintenance complaint with the Borough and how it is handled.

A rental inspection program was discussed. There would be an annual fee that would be paid by the property owner for the annual inspection. The Manager stated this type of program works but will require a lot more staff and administrative time and a fulltime employee to implement the program.

Michael Yiengst stated the fire companies are in need of funds. Calls are going up with funding limits staying the same. He is not sure imposing a fire tax is the right way to go, but it would insure everyone pays their fair share with a fire tax. The Manager stated this has been discussed with the preparing of the 2017 budgets. The concern, was would a fire tax hurt their contributions?

Michael Yiengst stated he spoke to other fire companies in the area who have a fire tax. The consensus was the annual donations went down for a few years but their donation drives are now stronger than ever even with the fire tax. Imposing the tax effected contributions for a short time. The Borough having two fire departments also creates more costs as well.

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Chairman Haverstick stated this is just speculation, just for conversation. If two companies were to merge would the donations received be enough to support the one company? Michael Yiengst stated if companies merge the State has grants to provide funds for things like station improvements, station enlargements, administration, legal fees, and equipment. Again, the encouragement of regionalizing or interoperation.

The Manager questioned if the Council was to enact a fire tax, what could the fire companies do to help get cooperation in imposing the tax? Raising taxes is never easy. What kind of support would the fire companies garner to help with the image and concept of what the Borough is trying to do for the fire companies. Would the fire companies be vocal around the community stating they support the Councils move and it is a good thing for the communities? Michael Yiengst believes the companies would do that. The consensus of the audience present was in support of a fire services tax.

The Manager stated if a fire tax is enacted the fire companies would have to be fiscally responsible and would be required to provide expenditure reports to the Borough.

The Chairman stated he felt this was a great start and thanked everyone for coming.

The Chairman asked if there were any additional comments for the good of the borough. Seeing none, a motion was made by Park W. Haverstick, II, seconded by Eric L. Powell, to adjourn the meeting at 7:50 p.m. All those in favor: Motion unanimously carried.

Respectfully submitted by,
Christopher J. Moonis, Manager/Secretary

As transcribed by,
Lisa A. Brubaker, Deputy Secretary

CJM:lab