

The Tamaqua Borough Council held its first Regular Council Meeting for the month of June on Tuesday, June 18, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers at the Tamaqua Municipal Building, 320 East Broad Street, Tamaqua, PA.

Present were Councilmembers Robert Amentler, Ronald Bowman, Jay Hollenbach Jr., Kathy Kunkel, and Ritchie Linkhorst. Officials present were Mayor Nathan Gerace, Chief of Police Michael Hobbs, Borough Manager Kevin Steigerwalt, Public Works Director Jay Stidham, Solicitor Anthony Odorizzi and Borough Secretary/Treasurer Timothy M. Ziegler. Councilmembers Brian Connely and Mary Linkevich were excused.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Vice President Bowman who informed council and the audience that executive sessions were held on May 31, 2024 via Zoom for personnel reasons, on June 12, 2024 via Zoom for personnel and real estate, and prior to the council meeting on June 18, 2024 for personnel reasons. The invocation was given by Councilmen Hollenbach followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Councilwoman Kunkel. The roll was called with five councilmembers present and two excused.

The reading of the minutes of the Regular Council Meeting held on May 21, 2024 was ordered suspended, and with no additions or corrections, the minutes were approved as written on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Hollenbach, and unanimously approved.

Communication was received from Stephen Milkovits, George Haldeman, Kyle Oliphant, Jael Houser and David Clemson expressing interest in serving on the Police Civil Service Commission. A recommendation was made to appoint George Haldeman to the commission and to appoint Steve Milkovits and Kyle Oliphant as alternates on the commission. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Amentler, and unanimously approved.

Communication was received from David Clemson and Thomas Schlorf expressing interest in the vacant position on the Zoning Hearing Board. A recommendation was made to appoint David Clemson to the board and to appoint Thomas Schlorf as an alternate on the board. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Hollenbach, and unanimously approved.

Communication was received from Gabrielle Mikuchonis and Kelly Gerber expressing interest in serving on the Tamaqua Board of Health. A recommendation was made to appoint Gabrielle Mikuchonis and Kelly Gerber to the Tamaqua Board of Health. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Hollenbach, and unanimously approved.

Communication was received from Christopher Cordes resigning from his position as a police officer, effective immediately.

At this time, Solicitor Odorizzi asked council to move up the mayor's report on the agenda to allow him to address the communication from Christopher Cordes. Mayor Gerace read the following statement:

On Friday May 31<sup>st</sup> I was notified by the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office that Christopher Cordes had been taken into their custody that morning and was being held in Columbia County Prison. Mr. Cordes was, at that time, a full-time officer with the Tamaqua Police Department.

The PAG's office informed me of the alleged crimes Mr. Cordes was arrested for, and the probable cause for making the arrest.

After receiving this information, I immediately placed Mr. Cordes on indefinite suspension, without pay, and notice of suspension was sent to Mr. Cordes.

Later that afternoon I was presented with the full affidavit of arrest with evidence of what Mr. Cordes had allegedly done to be charged with 18 felonies and 3 misdemeanor charges.

Chief of Police Michael Hobbs and I then released a notice to the public informing them that we were aware of the situation, that we were acting accordingly and fully complying with the office of Pennsylvania's Attorney General, and that Mr. Cordes had been placed on suspension without pay.

On June 10<sup>th</sup> Chief Hobbs sent Mr. Cordes, via email and regular mail, notice of a Loudermill hearing on June 14<sup>th</sup> at 9 a.m. This hearing provided Mr. Cordes with the opportunity to present evidence and testimony that might be favorable to him, and to challenge the possible termination of his position with the Tamaqua Police Department. I then made Borough Council aware of all the above information via a June 12<sup>th</sup> executive session.

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, Chief of Police Michael Hobbs, Borough Solicitor Tony Odorizzi, and I were present at Borough Hall at 9 a.m. for that hearing - but Mr. Cordes did not show up. We stayed until 9:15 a.m. and then had statements notarized evidencing the fact that we were present, and he was not.

It is important to note that after investigation by the PAG's office, they noted that no illegal acts had taken place while Mr. Cordes was on duty in his capacity as a Police Officer in Tamaqua. In addition, the PAG's office thoroughly examined the Police Department's computer system and found no improper activity related to Mr. Cordes.

It is also important to note that no other Police Officer employed by the Tamaqua Police Department is under investigation by the PAG or our Department, and we have received no credible complaints or alert of any such misconduct by any other officer in our department.

With all this information being provided and taken into consideration, and the fact that an opportunity was provided Mr. Cordes to provide evidence of his innocence to us, a hearing at which he failed to appear, leads me to ask Council to act on my recommendation to terminate Mr. Cordes' employment with the Tamaqua Police Department, effective immediately.

A recommendation was made to terminate Christopher Cordes' employment, effective immediately. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Hollenbach, and approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

Borough Manager Steigerwalt presented a Fair Housing Resolution to Council for consideration. The Fair Housing Resolution supports equal housing opportunity and states that discrimination in the sale, rental, leasing, financing of housing or land to be used for construction of housing, or in the provision of brokerage services because of race, color, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), national origin, religion, familial status, or handicap, is prohibited by Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 Federal Fair Housing Act and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act adds the additional protected classes of age, ancestry and use of guide or support animals due to blindness, deafness or physical handicap of the user or because the users is a handler or trainer of support or guide animals; etc.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-4**  
**FAIR HOUSING RESOLUTION**

A recommendation was made to adopt the foregoing resolution. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation to adopt the resolution was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Linkhorst, and approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

Borough Manager Steigerwalt also updated council on the Community Development Block Grant application. Proposed projects should be sent to the county by the end of August 2024. The county will have a hearing to finalize the application and will submit the application to DCED by October 25, 2024.

Borough Manager Steigerwalt reported that he prepared a Request For Proposals for a pool consultant as required by the Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant for the H. D. Buehler Memorial Pool. The RFP was prepared and was sent to the grant manager at DCNR to review. This is the first step in preparing plans and specifications for rehabilitation of the pool.

Borough Manager Steigerwalt also reported that there will be a preconstruction meeting for the North Ward and South Ward Playground Improvement Project on June 25, 2024. There will also be a bid opening for the paving of Cedar Street and Clay Street on June 26, 2024 which will be held through the PennBid online bid management system.

Under the Building and Equipment Committee report, a motion was made to advertise the sale of a 2014 Ford Interceptor police car, a 2016 Ford Explorer police car and a 2005 Dodge Ram 1500 truck on the Municibid online government auction website. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Amentler, seconded by Linkhorst, and unanimously approved.

Under the Parking and Traffic Committee report, a motion was made to approve a handicapped parking space application for 39 North Greenwood Street. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Amentler, and unanimously approved.

Under the Parking and Traffic Committee report, a motion was made to amend the agenda to approve a handicapped parking space application for 324 West Rowe Street. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Amentler, and unanimously approved.

Under the Parking and Traffic Committee report, a motion was made to approve a handicapped parking space application for 324 West Rowe Street. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Linkhorst, and unanimously approved.

Under the Finance, Wage and Salary Committee report, a motion was made to approve the permanent transfer of Shane Young to the Mechanic/Street Worker position. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Linkhorst, and unanimously approved. Under the Finance, Wage and Salary Committee report, a motion was made to proceed with filling the vacant street worker position. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter.

The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Linkhorst and unanimously approved.

Under the Finance, Wage and Salary Committee report, a motion was made to hire John Leinthall as a Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator at a pay rate of \$25.90 per hour. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Amentler and unanimously approved.

Under the Finance, Wage and Salary Committee report, a motion was made to adopt a revised Fee Schedule Resolution.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-5**  
**FEE SCHEDULE RESOLUTION**

There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation to adopt the resolution was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Amentler and approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

Under the Neighborhoods, Downtown & Historic District Committee report, a recommendation was made to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for outside renovations at 250-258 Mauch Chunk Street. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Hollenbach, seconded by Kunkel, and unanimously approved.

Under the Neighborhoods, Downtown & Historic District Committee report, a motion was made to approve the sale of 236 and 238 Columbia Street to Steve Matalavage for \$1,000 with an agreement to demolish within 1 year. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Hollenbach, seconded by Kunkel, and unanimously approved.

Under the Recreation and Youth Committee report, a motion was made to hire part-time lifeguards at a pay rate of \$10.00 per hour plus \$0.25 per hour for each year of service. The lifeguards are Nicole Aguerro-Ramirez, Madelyn Schaefer and Jack Tharp. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Linkhorst, and unanimously approved.

The meeting was opened to the floor:

Thomas Williams of 232 West Spruce Street wanted to know when the debris sitting on the corner of North Railroad Street by the train tracks will be cleaned up. Public Works Director Stidham said he has been in contact with the railroad, and they will have the debris cleaned up soon and place soil and grass in that area. Mr. Williams asked both Mayor Gerace and Chief Hobbs about the abbreviation DTF in the monthly police report. It was explained to Mr. Williams that it is a Drug Task Force program for reimbursement from the District Attorney's Office for any drug enforcement work that was done.

Michelle Calkins of 411 North Lehigh Street said that she is looking for a swing set for handicapped children for the South Ward Playground. Michelle wanted to know if the borough could help with purchasing one for the playground. Borough Manager Steigerwalt said we may be able to get something through COSTARS vendors and he will see if the borough can find

something for them. Michelle also asked when the new fence will be started. Borough Manager Steigerwalt said he will let her know or they are welcome to go to the meeting being held on June 25 at 10:30 a.m. at the North and Middle Ward Playground.

TJ Shearn from the Tamaqua Community Ambulance Association asked if they would be able to come to the council meetings to give a monthly report on the ambulance. Vice President Bowman said we can add this report to the agendas going forward.

With no one else wishing to address council, the meeting was closed to the floor.

A recommendation was made to accept and file the various reports of borough officials. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Amentler, and unanimously approved.

A recommendation was made to pay all properly approved bills and claims against the borough. There was no one from the floor wishing to address council about this matter. The recommendation was so ordered on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Linkhorst, and unanimously approved.

Under New Business, Manager Steigerwalt said there is still a vacancy on the Planning Commission, and if anyone is interested, they should submit a letter of interest to the borough. Also, the East End Playground Association is looking for volunteers. Councilwoman Kunkel said she will speak with Councilwoman Linkevich and perhaps have a meeting to discuss a way to get volunteers for the playground.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:32 p.m. on motion of Kunkel, seconded by Amentler, to meet again at the call of the President.

ATTEST:

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Timothy M. Ziegler, Borough Secretary/Treasurer