

ALTOONA CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY – FEBRUARY 8, 2021 - 6:00 P.M.  
CITY OF ALTOONA TRAINING FACILITY & COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
1320 WASHINGTON AVENUE, ALTOONA, PA

CALL TO ORDER – by Mayor Pacifico at 6:00 PM

SILENT MEDITATION

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL – taken by City Clerk Linda Rickens Schellhammer

Present: Council members Butterbaugh(via phone), Cacciotti, Carper, Ickes, Kelley and Mayor Pacifico

Absent: Councilwoman Jordan

PRESENTATIONS – Police Chief Janice Freehling was recognized by Mayor Pacifico, Altoona City Council and the City of Altoona with a plaque; Mayor Pacifico stated that on behalf of Council and the City of Altoona he presented the plaque for Chief Freehling’s 44 years of service to the City of Altoona and the Altoona Police Department with 20 years as Police Chief; Chief Freehling stated she has worked under various forms of government for various Mayors, Councils, Managers, Department Heads and Employees over the years and the Chief thanked everyone for the opportunities and the friendships formed; Chief Freehling stated it wasn’t always a smooth journey and although battered and bruised at times, it wasn’t always what happened but how you handled what happened that mattered; Chief Freehling stated the City has a great police department and she would put APD up against any department in the Commonwealth of PA; Chief Freehling stated both sworn and civilian personnel work hard each day to provide great service to the City and they keep the City safe; Chief Freehling stated she is proud of APD and Mayor and Council should be proud as well; Chief Freehling also stated City employees also work very hard and they are a part of what makes Altoona great and they are the City’s greatest asset and that they should be appreciated and supported; Chief Freehling thanked the citizens of Altoona stating they are great people, hard working and caring and it has been an honor and a privilege to serve them for 44 years; Chief Freehling thanked the citizens for a lot of great memories

Mayor Pacifico announced that Council held Executive Sessions on January 14<sup>th</sup> and January 24 for the purpose of personnel

Mayor Pacifico announced his appointment recommendations for authorities, boards and commissions as follows: Jack Speece to the Altoona Water Authority and Larry Bilotto to the AMTRAN Authority (resolutions b and c below)

ALL PUBLIC COMMENT (via telephone) – Mayor Pacifico called for public comment. The call-in number is included on the agenda and on the City’s website calendar approximately one week prior to the meeting. The number is also displayed on Public Access Channel 14 during the meeting for television viewers. There was no public comment.

## RESOLUTIONS

- a) approving the minutes of the Altoona City Council Meeting held Monday, January 11, 2021. (0018-21)
- b) appointing Jack Speece of 711 E. Atlantic Avenue, Altoona, PA 16602, to the Altoona Water Authority to fill the unexpired term of Frank Ake. Said term shall expire the first Monday of January 2023. (0019-21)
- c) appointing Larry Bilotto of 2500 Walton Avenue, Altoona, PA 16602 to the AMTRAN Authority to fill the unexpired term of Robert Reifsteck. Said term shall expire the first Monday of January 2022. (0020-21)
- d) awarding a demolition contract to Earthmovers Unlimited Inc., of P.O. Box 187, Kylertown, PA 16847, for demolition of the following properties: 2024 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 723 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, 202-04 Willow Avenue, 1005 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 2409 Oak Avenue, 2409 Oak Avenue, Rear, 1616 11<sup>th</sup> Street, 1609 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 909 27<sup>th</sup> Street, and 1914 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Altoona, PA in the amount of \$102,602.00, payable from contingency funds or general fund reserves, and further authorizing the City Manager to execute all documents and the City Clerk to attest to same. (0021-21)
- e) awarding a demolition contract to G&R Excavating and Demolition, Inc., of 900 Pennsylvania Avenue, Tyrone, PA 16686, for the following properties: 107 S. 16<sup>th</sup> Street, 1530 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, and 1801 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Altoona, PA in the amount of \$63,140.00, with \$56,000.00 payable from CDBG Funds, and \$7,140.00 payable from contingency funds or general fund reserves, and further authorizing the City Manager to execute all documents and the City Clerk to attest to same. (0022-21)
- f) awarding the HAZMAT Building Repairs Project for 1747 Margaret Avenue, Altoona, PA, to Clark Contractors, Inc., of 145 Clark Building Road, Bedford, PA 15522, in the amount of \$212,824.37, payable from the Capital Budget, and further authorizing the City Manager to execute all documents and the City Clerk to attest to same. (0023-21)
- i.e., "Note: This expense is a reallocation of the \$200,000 in the Capital Improvement Plan for the Construction of a HAZMAT storage building at the Juniata Fire Station."
- g) awarding the Washington Avenue Storm Sewer System Project to Guyer Brothers, Inc., of 1481 Salemville Rd., New Enterprise, PA 16664, in the amount of \$191,321.50, payable from CDBG Funds and further authorizing the City Manager to execute all documents and the City Clerk to attest to same. (0024-21)

Councilman Kelley asked about the footnote on letter d and the reference to the budget for funding by either contingency or out of general reserves and since it is not in the budget what is the impact; Ken Decker stated the contingency line item that was added to the budget is sufficient to cover this expense; Mr. Decker stated normal procedure is to let Council know before going into contingency; in the event Council did not want to use contingency, the City has general fund unrestricted cash reserves, ending the year in the black in 2020; Mr. Decker stated the note is letting Council know that this is a budget expense; Mr. Decker stated Rebecca Brown feels strongly that the City needs to eliminate this back log of properties before they go through the upset sale again; Councilman Kelley asked what the amount is in the contingency fund at this point; Mr. Decker stated approximately \$257,000

Councilman Ickes asked about the footnote on item f and if that amount was the entire amount allocated for the Hazmat storage originally slated for the Juniata Fire Station; Mr. Decker stated yes it was

Councilman Cacciotti asked about item d and if the items listed would not be in the upset sale at the County, once the resolution is adopted; Mr. Decker stated the properties could still go to tax sale but there will not be structures on the properties; the tax debt that is owed is not absolved by tearing the buildings down; this avoids having people buy something at tax sale that they can't afford to renovate, occupying it and then having the City take legal action to remove them from the structure; the City does not take title to the properties; Mr. Decker stated some of the vacant structures are involved in drug activity and are a fire risk or a health risk and once gone, the problems associated with the properties greatly diminish

City Clerk Linda Rickens Schellhammer read the resolutions into the record; the consent vote was taken by the City Clerk on all items and passed 6 to 0; Councilwoman Jordan was absent

## ORDINANCES

### Introduction

1) AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE CODE OF THE CITY OF ALTOONA BY CREATING CHAPTER 262 "CONDEMNATION ORDERS" TO IMPLEMENT ACT OF OCTOBER 29, 2020, P.L. NO. 101 ENTITLED "MUNICIPALITY CONDEMNATION ORDER ACT" AS ADOPTED BY THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, TO PROVIDE FOR ITS ADMINISTRATION; SEVERABILITY OF PROVISIONS AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

This ordinance was read into the record by City Clerk Linda Rickens Schellhammer and introduced by Mayor Pacifico.

## Introduction

2) AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE CODE OF THE CITY OF ALTOONA CHAPTER 536 ENTITLED "REGISTRATION OF VACANT BUILDINGS" BY REPLACING IT IN ITS ENTIRETY TO CREATE THREE CATEGORIES OF VACANT BUILDINGS INCLUDING: 1) NEGLECTED BUILDINGS, 2) DERELICT BUILDINGS, AND 3) UNSAFE BUILDINGS; REQUIRING REGISTRATION AND INSPECTION OF VACANT BUILDINGS; TO PROVIDE FOR ADMINISTRATION, ENFORCEMENT AND APPEALS; REPEAL OF ALL OTHER ORDINANCES OR PARTS OF LAWS IN CONFLICT THEREWITH; SEVERABILITY OF PROVISIONS AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

This ordinance was read into the record by City Clerk Linda Rickens Schellhammer and introduced by Vice-Mayor Butterbaugh.

CITY MANAGER UPDATES – Mr. Decker stated the following: the PA Department of Health issued modified guidance earlier in the day regarding COVID vaccinations and then later rescinded that guidance; vaccines were given to the Altoona Police and Altoona Fire personnel and all other City employees are waiting

Mr. Decker congratulated and thanked Chief Freehling for a career of distinction with 20 years as the Police Chief and 44 years in the same City; Mr. Decker stated Joe Merrill will become the Acting Chief when Chief Freehling retires, effective March 1<sup>st</sup> and there will be discussion about moving forward in terms of the recruitment process and how to proceed to fill that vacancy

Mr. Decker stated he attended a meeting with Champion Life Church and several local pastors and Mayor Pacifico, Vice-Mayor Butterbaugh and Councilman Ickes to discuss fire inspections at places of worship and the advantages the program has particularly to the fire department

Mr. Decker stated there were issues with collective bargaining units that have been resolved and the relationship with the three units are cordial

Mr. Decker will be making a presentation to AMBUCS on Tuesday at their meeting

There is an application for a recovery house in the process which Mr. Decker states he has experience with; this will be discussed with the City Solicitor and the Zoning Hearing Board and the Planning Commission

Mr. Decker stated the conditional approvals were made by the Planning Commission for the Curry project (Vipond Building) and the Redevelopment Authority met and approved the amendment of the deed restriction; there are a few technical corrections that need to be made to the plans

Mr. Decker stated that with the departure of city staff there will be movement by current staff and the goal is to continue to keep customer service on the first floor of City Hall

MAYOR & COUNCIL DISCUSSION ITEMS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS – Councilman Carper extended personal thanks and congratulations to Chief Freehling on her years of service

Councilman Kelley congratulated Chief Freehling stating it's a tough job that only gets tougher and looking at the landscape across the country at this time the City is very fortunate to have someone like Chief Freehling for all of these years; Councilman Kelley stated Chief Freehling will be missed

Councilman Kelley stated if looking at what was done tonight, this is probably the most properties that were voted on for demolition at one meeting; the reality is probably going to be that in most instances there will not be anything built to replace those structures; this points out that there needs to be housing initiative in the City to create housing that people want and that can be used to attract people because if not the erosion will continue; there is probably another list that could be added to the list that was voted on; Councilman Kelley asked that working on a housing initiative should move up to the top of the list of things Council should be working on

Vice-Mayor Butterbaugh congratulated Chief Freehling on her service to the City stating the City is blessed to have the police department as they do a great job and work very hard to keep the City safe

Vice-Mayor Butterbaugh stated it is good to catch up on the properties the City is behind on and a housing initiative is a great idea; Vice-Mayor Butterbaugh stated he believes the streamlining of the land development process will help the housing initiative and make it easier to work and develop property in the City

Vice-Mayor Butterbaugh thanked Pastor Baldwin and Champion Life Church and those that attended and Chief Hileman and Inspector Free for explaining the fire inspection program and the importance of the program

Councilman Cacciotti congratulated Chief Freehling for 44 years of excellent service in the City stating that people like Chief Freehling are the reason Altoona is what it is, which gives a lot of hope for the future and to stay strong behind the men and women in uniform that are on the frontlines; Councilman Cacciotti thanked Chief Freehling and everybody serving

Councilman Ickes thanked Chief Freehling for her dedication to the City of Altoona; Councilman Ickes stated in a little over one year on City Council he has done three tours with the Altoona Police and had the opportunity to see interaction in a wide spectrum of circumstances to include drug related issues, homeless issues and

children and youth issues, to name a few; Councilman Ickes stated he is proud of the officers at APD and he looks forward to working with Chief Merrill

Councilman Ickes stated he had a conversation earlier in the day with the Mayor about housing stock in the City and that speaking with developers in the City would be a good starting point at the city level in order to present ideas; 50% of Altoona's housing stock is pre-1940; the long term plan can't only be from an economy standpoint but also that people want to live here and raise a family here and that begins with housing

Councilman Ickes stated in recognition of February being black history month, it is worth noting that our community over the last week lost 2 pillars of the community to include Don Witherspoon, President of the Blair County Chapter of the NAACP; Councilman Ickes stated through COVID, he and Mr. Witherspoon served on the 30 Day Fund together and got to know each other in 2020; Councilman Ickes stated Don was a great asset helping to raise funds and distribute funds to small businesses that were adversely affected during the COVID shut downs; the other pillar was Virginia Day, Vice-President of the Blair County Chapter of the NAACP; both were great representatives for the City and Blair County and for civil rights

MEDIA – media attendance included Bill Kibler, *Altoona Mirror* and Amanda Lee, WTAJ TV-10 who asked questions of Mayor Pacifico and City Council Members.

ADJOURNMENT – by Mayor Pacifico at 6:36 p.m.