Borough of Jefferson Hills

Regular Meeting of Council

December 14, 2020

The regular meeting of Council was called to order by President Bucy at 7:00 p.m. via zoom in the Municipal Center, 925 Old Clairton Road. Following the Pledge of Allegiance, Council Members Ielase, Reynolds, Ruscitto, Sockman, Steffey, Vice President Montgomery and President Bucy answered to roll call. Mayor Cmar, Finance Officer Drager, Solicitor Gabriel, Lt. King, Borough Engineer Glister, Public Works Director Volpe and Borough Manager Stinner were also present.

LT. KING & CHIEF ROACH:

Lt. King:

Good evening everyone. It is an honor and a privilege for me to deliver this message. Tonight, we begin to bid a bittersweet farewell to Chief Roach, our fearless leader, who, in a couple short weeks, is retiring after 39 years of service and leadership.

A career in law enforcement is not for the faint of heart and Chief Roach has dedicated nearly four decades, the majority of his years, to the profession, and most importantly to his fellow officers and the communities he has served. The Jefferson Hills Police Department and the people we serve have been blessed to have Chief Roach here for the past 10 years.

The Chief’s managerial and leadership expertise and his ability to motivate, have enabled our department to set, meet, and even exceed unprecedented goals that would have sounded unattainable ten years ago. He has consistently led by example with his knowledge of the job and impeccable ethical approach to everyday operations.

Chief, you have held us all accountable and to a higher standard, and all without ever raising your voice. For that alone, we thank you! You have endured a year that no Chief would ever want to experience, but you have done it with great composure and professionalism. We cannot express how much you will be missed and how much we wish we could keep you for another 10 years, but as you have said, you feel that 39 years is enough. On behalf of our of your officers, to quote a wise man, “Understood.”

Chief Roach:

Council – I appreciate you allowing me a few minutes to give a brief farewell…

I read a book not too long ago and the author said we all have so many “somedays” in our lives, such as someday I will graduate from high school, someday I will get married, etc. etc... and we all work through those somedays until we get to our final and last someday. Fortunately, I have not arrived at that last someday, and I hope it is not for a while, but yet I am here having reached another someday - my someday I will retire is here

January 2011 I was hired as the chief of police in Jefferson Hills. I will be days short of completing 10 years when I finish on December 30th. Overall, I will be just short of 39 years as a police officer:

4 years with North Fayette;

25 years with Mt. Lebanon;

10 years with Jefferson Hills.

You don’t do something for 39 years of your life and just stop and not expect to miss it.

I already know I will miss my career and actually being a police officer. and while it’s for others to judge how I did throughout my career, what I do get to take with me is knowing what I did counted for something.

I also know I will miss the officers in this police department – In my time here I have seen them grow considerably into a very impressive and competent group; JHPD I am proud of you; I hope you and the community are proud of them as well.

I will not miss 2020; with COVID-19, which unfortunately continues, but especially having to watch family, friends and colleagues suffer and deal with the line of duty death of Officer Provins.  Fortunately, there was a lot of support, to include the support from the community - Jefferson Hills is an awesome community.

It has been a good journey, but it is my time to exit. I wish nothing but the best to all of you but especially to the members of the JHPD – be safe; thank you.

BOROUGH RESIDENT/TAXPAYER COMMENTS:

Lisa Buckiso, 3041 Shady Timber Drive, I am writing to you regarding Gill Hall Fire Company.  I am concerned about the waffling by some on Council on the probationary period, certification and funding. I am also frustrated with the repetitive lie stated by the mayor, residents and some on Council about the residents of Gill Hall having no fire protection. We have fantastic fire protection provided by JHFR. They have busted their butts to cover to the entire borough, continue to advance their training and answer every call in this borough. Contrary to that, Gill Hall has lied, circumvented Council, procedure and dragged their feet hoping for change on Council.  When that new Council was elected, they again decertified them.  So that is two separate borough councils that have decertified them. That says something.  Let's be blunt. In my opinion, Gill Hall is all about pride, greed and power.  They have admitted to all of that without using those words. But that is the truth. They said they never intended to merge from the formation of the Task Force, said they wanted to keep their run card because of a "pride thing" and want funded equally although they have done very little to move along the process of their reopening.  Mr. Felix has become toxic to their advancement for whatever reason he choses not to say.  Perhaps he should consider stepping aside and letting the new members progress without being influenced by old grudges and bad feelings towards JHFR.  It really is frustrating to the community to see the lack of common sense by some on Council to make a decision and stick to it.  Not sure how many times we will have to endure this nonsense at our monthly meetings, but I can assure you that the entire community is tired of it.  The voice of a handful of people should not be your guiding force. You were elected to represent the entire borough, not the same few that continue to harass Council and anyone who speaks out against Gill Hall. Gill Hall has made their own bed at this point. That is clear. The question is are you strong enough to let them lie in it.   
   
Pete Doel, 420 Old Clairton Road, since council will be discussing how to split the funds to the fire departments, I’d like to again voice my thoughts on how that money should be divided.

The State of Pennsylvania divides their funds to fire departments based on the number of residents in each area.  I’ve asked before, and sent a couple emails to council, but I don’t believe anyone has done any sort of research to get those numbers.  Based on residential assessments and the number of houses built in the Gill Hall area the last 5-10 years, I’d bet it’s somewhere between 50% of the residents live in the Gill Hall area, and 50% live in the Floreffe / 885 area.

Even if we go by taxes received by each, per Karen’s PowerPoint from a few months ago, I believe it breaks down as follows:

Gill Hall – 214 million in Residential, 54 Million in Commercial, and 0 for Industrial, for a total of 268 million.

Floreffe – 66 million in Residential, 54 million in Commercial, and 16 million for Industrial, for a total of 136 million.

885 – 200 million in Residential, 111 million in Commercial, and 1.8 million for Industrial, for a total of 312 million.

So, if you combine Floreffe and 885, they account for 63% of the assessed value of land, and GH accounts for 37% of land.

We could also take into account the number of individual structures in each area, which I’d bet would also give insight to more funds being needed in the Gill Hall area.

It seems clear that Gill Hall is deserving of funds of anywhere between 37% and 50% from the Borough.  One of your requirements for GH to make it through probation is for GH to show up for 50% of the fire calls in the area.  For that to happen, all the fire departments should be on a level playing field.  Our residents deserve better than what council has given us.

No matter how you look at this, the Residents of the Gill Hall area are contributing our fair share to the Borough, and it’s time our Fire Department is given the resources needed to be back in service and protecting our community.  ALL residents of Jefferson Hills deserve the peace of mind of knowing there’s adequate fire protection there for us, in the event of an emergency.  It’s time for council to do the right thing and show they care about all of the residents of this borough, and not just those in the 885/Floreffe servicing area.

Bob Breisinger, 409 Pearson Road, I am a resident at 469 Pearson Road.  Approximately two weeks ago, the first floor of our house was filled with a plastic burning odor at approximately 10:15 PM.  We called 911 and evacuated the house.  Within 10-15 minutes of our call, the first fire department responder arrived followed by multiple other trucks and personnel shortly thereafter.

The fire department personnel thoroughly inspected the house in search of the cause of the odor including the use of heat guns.   This inspection lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour.  All of the personnel were extremely professional and courteous.  We never determined the cause of the odor and it dissipated with the windows being open.  They assured us that we had nothing to worry about and that we did the right thing by calling 911.  They said that they preferred these types of calls versus calls with an active fire.

My family wants to thank the fire department for their fast and professional response late in the evening.  We understand that they have personal lives and dropping everything with a late-night call is not easy to do.  Please thank the fire department on the behalf of the Breisinger family.

MONTHLY BILLS:

Mr. Montgomery moved to approve the bills for the month of November be approved, seconded by Mrs. Steffey and carried unanimously.

MONTHLY PAYROLLS:

Mrs. Ielase moved to approve the payrolls for the month of November be approved, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously.

MINUTES:

Mrs. Ielase moved the minutes of agenda meeting November 4, 2020 be approved, seconded by Mrs. Steffey and carried unanimously.

Mr. Sockman moved the minutes of regular meeting November 16, 2020 and continued November 18, 2020 be approved, seconded by Mrs. Ielase and carried unanimously.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Mr. Sockman moved to Designate the Borough of Jefferson Hills Emergency Management Coordinator as an additional official representative authorized to communicate with Matthew Brown, Chief of Allegheny County Emergency Services, and Gary Thomas, Asst. Chief and 911 Coordinator, as to all issues pertaining to 911 and the VFD run cards , seconded by Mrs. Ielase and carried unanimously.

Mr. Montgomery moved to adopt Resolution No. 21-2020 adopting the Borough Budget for the year 2021 in final form, seconded by Mr. Sockman and carried unanimously.

Mr. Montgomery gave a highlight of the budget

Mr. Sockman moved to adopt Ordinance No. 881 establishing the base Real Estate Tax rate for the year 2021 at 5.66 mills (General 5.226 mills; Fire 0.355 mills; and Ambulance 0.079 mills), seconded by Mrs. Steffey and carried unanimously.

Mrs. Steffey moved to adopt Resolution 22-2020 amending the Borough of Jefferson Hills Fee Resolution adding Impact Fees), seconded by Mrs. Ielase and carried unanimously.

Mr. Sockman moved to adopt Resolution No. 23-2020 amending the salaries, compensation and wages for Borough employees for the year 2021, seconded by Mrs. Steffey and carried unanimously.

Mrs. Ruscitto moved to table the motion to join Clairton Municipal Authority litigation with other members of upstream communities, second by Mrs. Ielase The vote was not unanimous, and a roll call vote was taken. Per the Borough Code, which requires that the minutes show the actual votes by name, below are the votes of each Council Member:

President Bucy  YES

Vice President Montgomery NO

Vickie Ielase YES

Mr. Reynolds YES

Mrs. Ruscitto YES

Mr. Sockman NO

Mrs. Steffey NO

Mr. Montgomery moved to enact Ordinance No. 882 accepting Spaniel Lane in Phase 6b of the Hunters Field Plan of Lots as public streets of the Borough of Jefferson Hills; further accepting the infrastructures of storm and sanitary sewers serving said streets, with the exception of any 6b (1) stormwater detention pond, and (2) storm sewer-related improvement within a (a) stormwater detention pond, and/or (b) private stormwater easement as depicted on the recorded plans for Phase 6b which shall be owned and maintained by the homeowners’ association; and authorizing the appropriate officials of the Borough of Jefferson Hills to execute any and all documents necessary to approve such acceptance and dedication, seconded by Mr. Sockman and carried unanimously.

Mr. Montgomery moved to authorize the execution of a Memorandum of Understanding with the West Jefferson Hills School District to retain the services of law enforcement personnel of the Borough of Jefferson Hills for use of the West Jefferson Hills School District, seconded by Mrs. Ielase and carried unanimously.

Mr. Montgomery moved to adopt Resolution No. 24-2020 granting modification request to Borough Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance Section(s) §22-610.2 and §22-610.5 and preliminary approval for a subdivision plan known as PS-1-2020, Millstone Village, seconded by Mr. Sockman and carried unanimously.

Mrs. Ielase moved to adopt Resolution No. 25-2020 granting preliminary and final approval for a subdivision known as S-4-2020, DePasquali Subdivision, seconded by Mrs. Steffey and carried unanimously.

 Mrs. Ielase moved to adopt Resolution No. 26-2020 directing distribution of the Borough’s allocation of General Municipal Pension System State Aid for 2020 in the amount of $256,039.33 as follows: Police Pension Fund $157,562.66, Service Employees Union Pension Fund $98,476.67, Administrative Pension Plan $9,498.00, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously.

Mrs. Steffey moved to approve Borough of Jefferson Hills Police Pension Plan financial requirement and minimum Municipal obligation for 2021 Municipal Budget in the amount of $568,679 for Police and non-uniform service and $9,498 for Administration, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously

Mr. Reynolds moved to increase the salary of the Tax Collector in the year 2022 at the rate increase of $5,000 a year, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously.

Mrs. Ielase moved to accept the 2021 Field Permit Form application, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously.

Mrs. Steffey moved to purchase Borough-wide recreational management software system, not to exceed $8,000, seconded by Mrs. Ielase and carried unanimously.

Mr. Montgomery moved to approve Work Authorization dated December 02, 2020 from Gateway Engineers, Inc. to assist the Borough with preparation of the specifications and bid package for the CDBG Year 46 demolition project in the amount not to exceed $3,000.00, seconded by Mr. Sockman and carried unanimously.

Mr. Montgomery moved to approve Work Authorization dated December 02, 2020 from Gateway Engineers, Inc. for miscellaneous Borough engineering and consulting services in 2021 in the amount not to exceed $15,000.00, seconded by Mrs. Steffey and carried unanimously.

Mr. Montgomery moved to approve Work Authorization dated December 02, 2020 from Gateway Engineers, Inc. for miscellaneous engineering and consulting services in 2021 related to the Clairton Sewershed in the amount not to exceed $10,000.00, seconded by Mr. Sockman and carried unanimously.

Mr. Montgomery moved to approve Work Authorization dated December 02, 2020 from Gateway Engineers, Inc. for miscellaneous engineering and consulting services in 2021 related to the West Elizabeth Sewershed in the amount not to exceed $15,000.00, seconded by Mrs. Ielase and carried unanimously.

Mr. Sockman moved to approve the purchase of a salt brine application sprayer at the cost of $2,505.00, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously.

President Bucy changed the order of the agenda to the following:

Mr. Reynolds moved to distribute Real Estate EMS Tax of approximately $65,000, seconded by Mrs. Steffey and carried unanimously.

Mrs. Ielase moved to table the motion to recertify Gill Hall Volunteer Fire Company, seconded by Mrs. Steffey The vote was not unanimous, and a roll call vote was taken. Per the Borough Code, which requires that the minutes show the actual votes by name, below are the votes of each Council Member:

President Bucy YES

Vice President Montgomery YES

Vickie Ielase YES

Mr. Reynolds NO

Mrs. Ruscitto NO

Mr. Sockman YES

Mrs. Steffey YES

Mrs. Steffey stated: I went back in further details of our extended meeting of November 18th and I put together some things that stood out to me.  At the time stamp of 43:38 Motion from Mr. Sockman to temporarily decertify Gill Hall;  at 43:50 his motion also extended to say temporary until such time they can meet with liaison and come up with something that would help them become operational and operational quickly.   There was a meeting. At 50:04 Mrs. Ielase states she does not trust Gill Hall and not confident as to what they can give us.  President Bucy made the same contributions in that discussion.  I know we had a meeting on Dec 8th and never heard anything from the meeting.  50:47 President Bucy states she would like a probation plan worked out mutually.  There should still be a plan.  At 59:04 Mr. Sockman repeats motion for third time.  At 59:51 President Bucy states we will meet, and we will have an exact plan typed up for the Dec 9th meeting with both parties.  We confirmed that the meeting happened, but there is no plan or written formulation has been given to us.  Without that, I can’t move to recertify them unless we have some explanation as to what happened at the meeting and what is going to make you more confident and comfortable that Gill Hall is operationally ready to commit.  A lot of the time stamps refer to a written plan in writing.  I Would like an explanation as to where we go from here and how things have changed since our meeting on November 18th.

Mr. Reynolds stated Gill Hall did nothing but strengthen my confident in them and their commitment to our community.  Mrs. Ielase and Mrs. Bucy listened to the residents and what they wanted.  We don’t have a written contract with JHFR either, we just need to recognize what’s best for the community.

Mrs. Steffey stated we have heard nothing from the liaisons about the meeting you had.  We received a list of people taking the class in January and a copy of their line officers.  I also spoke to a lot of residents that don’t feel confident in Gill Hall and feels they can be a liability to the community.  I haven’t received anything otherwise.

Mrs. Ielase stated We are stuck here We did discuss a plan and we did not do that.  We need to decide if we are making this plan and putting it writing.

Mrs. Steffey stated if Gill Hall had given what we have asked for months ago, they would have been up and operational, but they have not done that.

Mr. Sockman stated if Gill hall is not open and members go to training, they would not be able to train without workers comp.

Mrs. Steffey confirmed that Workers Comp does cover them as an entity not individual depts and would be covered.  Any member has the ability to take the classes and be covered under our workers comp.  The new members are also automatically added as well as an entity.

Mr. Reynolds stated you are asking members to train for a team that may or may not ever be certified and that’s a lot to ask for.  He’s in support of Gill Hall and ready to vote.

Mrs. Bucy stated, as far as the plan, I think we made headway.  We got the line officers and who’s taking classes.  Gill Hall would have their fire fighters 1 completed in 18 months.

Mrs. Ruscitto stated, I’m curious, we are going over all these issues and here we go back again about the fire halls.  Everyone agrees in executive session and now that we are in the meeting and back to square one.

Mrs. Steffey stated we didn’t discuss recertifying Gill Hall in Executive Session, that’s illegal.  We discussed money.

Mrs. Bucy stated individuals signed up for classes.  If they aren’t going to follow through with these classes, then we would decertify them at any point and time if necessary.

Mrs. Ielase moved to table rescind Resolution No. 5-2019, certifying JHFR as the sole fire company for Jefferson Hills Borough, seconded by Mr. Sockman and carried unanimously.

Mrs. Ielase moved table to adopt Resolution No. 27-2020 acknowledging that Jefferson Hills Borough has two certified fire companies;1) JHFR, comprising of Jefferson 885 Volunteer Fire Co and Floreffe Volunteer Fire Co; and 2) GHVF Company as an independent volunteer fire company, seconded by Mr. Sockman. The vote was not unanimous, and a roll call vote was taken. Per the Borough Code, which requires that the minutes show the actual votes by name, below are the votes of each Council Member:

President Bucy YES

Vice President Montgomery YES

Vickie Ielase YES

Mr. Reynolds NO

Mrs. Ruscitto NO

Mr. Sockman YES

Mrs. Steffey YES

Mr. Reynolds moved to table distribute Real Estate Fire Tax of approximately $290,000, seconded by Mrs. Ruscitto.  The vote was not unanimous, and a roll call vote was taken. Per the Borough Code, which requires that the minutes show the actual votes by name, below are the votes of each Council Member:

President Bucy YES

Vice President Montgomery NO

Vickie Ielase YES

Mr. Reynolds YES

Mrs. Ruscitto YES

Mr. Sockman NO

Mrs. Steffey ABSTAINED

REPORTS:

Fire Chief

* Included in packet

Ems

* Included in packet

Engineer Glister reported

* Nothing to add
  + Mr. Montgomery asked Mr. Glister if they paved Frontier Drive and he answered yes it was.  He also stated we are still under the amount awarded

Finance Director Mr. Drager reported:

* Nothing to add

 Public Works Director Mr. Volpe reported:

* Nothing further to report

Police Lt King reported:

* Mrs. Bucy stated, on behalf of Council I would like to thank Lt. King and Chief Roach for their presentation this evening.

Mayor Cmar

* Congratulated Chief Roach on his retirement

* She is disappointed of the Gill Hall vote
* Merry Christmas and keep safe and healthy

Borough Manager Mr. Stinner reported:

* Nothing more to add

Borough Solicitor Gabriel reported

* Council met in executive session to discuss matters about personal and past and active fire hall litigation from 2005 that dealt with issues of funding.

GENERAL BUSINESS BOROUGH COUNCIL:

Mrs. Steffey stated:

Wished Chief Roach the best in his retirement.

I know some of the things I say about Gill Hall may cost me reelection, but I hope me not wavering back and forth has proved that I can’t be bullied or swayed.  I’m here to fight what is best for the community.  If my decision does cost me reelection I can walk away knowing I have a clear head and heart and stuck by my beliefs.  I’m not doing it in spite.  I spent 9-10 months completely emerged in this fire dept. Issue trying to help.  If Mr. Reynolds can have more luck getting the information that’s great.

Mrs. Ielase stated:

Best of luck to Chief Roach and his wife.

Wished everyone a safe and healthy Christmas and New Years.

I also have to reiterate with what Mrs. Steffey stated.  I also have a clear conscience with everything I’ve done with Gill Hall.  I still believe they can be opened if they continue to provide information and if they continue with their classed, I feel that they will be opened again.  I just going on my gut and what I have talked to other citizens.  It’s not as black and white. There are stil thing that need to be straightened out and reorganized all the way around in all the fire depts.  My conscience is clear on what I’m trying to do for the whole Borough.  I hope it works out for everybody to be comfortable with.

Mr. Sockman stated:

Thanked Lt King for remarks about Chief Roach.  Kevin, you have done an excellent job so far.  Hope you do well in the future.  Many of things you said I was going to say also.  I am proud to be associated with you.  I hope you and your wife enjoy your future.

Who’d of thought we would be sitting with zoom meeting with masks on.  Let’s hope we have a better 2021 in health for this community and throughout our nation.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

Mr. Reynolds stated:

To the Gill Hall members, keep up the fight and believe in your organization. I apologize to the residents of Jefferson Hills as we go into another calendar year and still not resolving this issue.

Chief good luck and happy holidays to everyone.

Mrs. Ruscitto stated:

I would like to state the fact that along with what Mrs. Steffey said, it is our right to agree and sometimes to disagree. That’s what makes local government local government.  It’s the beauty of it to speak from your heart and do as what needs to be done.

I thank Lt King for being such an upstanding professional and dedicated officer to the Borough.  Chief, I didn’t work with you long, but I wish you the best in the future and thank you for dealing with some challenging times in 2020.

Happy holidays

Mr. Montgomery stated:

Thanked Chief Roach for elevating the performance level of the Police Dept.  I’m sure that Lt. King will carry that tradition on.  It’s an honor when other chiefs would come up to me at SHACOG meetings and tell me that we have a good chief in you.  You have a lot of respect within the South Hills community.  Our Chief was the inspiration of creating the CERT Team unit.

Mrs. Bucy stated:

Congrats to Chief Roach.  It’s not often you get three things in your retirement.  Good health, the money to enjoy it and time to enjoy it.  Hope you will take advantage of that.

Thank you, Lt. King, for stepping up to the plate.  We know you show leadership by example.

I would like to have a New Years resolution. One that the issue of CMA is either on or off.  Would like to see more information on this.

I would also think a course of action of Gill Hall needs to be done.  Plan needs to be put in action Next meeting Jan 6th and Jan 11th.  Let’s see this moving forward and start the new year off in the right direction.

In reference to the elections and polling places.  The distribution of the number of people in the polling places needs to be looked at.   A lot of the people that work on these poles have a lot of good ideas on how this can be rearranged.  I would like to have a plan and present it to the judges and poling workers.  If we leave it up to the election board it won’t get done.

Mayor Cmar stated: I went down to the election board and asked them to fix it.

Mr. Montgomery stated I talked to district 5 they are the largest district.  I Don’t think it would be that hard to break these districts up.

Mayor Cmar spoke to workers. After the census is when they start working on it.  I did everything I could at that point.

 Safe and happy holiday

ADJOURNMENT:

President Bucy adjourned the meeting at 8:47 p.m. on motion by Mr. Montgomery seconded by Mrs. Steffey and carried unanimously.

John P. Stinner

Secretary/Borough Manager