

RIDGWAY BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING
Ridgway Municipal Building
108 Main Street, Ridgway, PA 15853
April 15, 2024

The Ridgway Borough Council meeting was called to order by Steve Caggese at 6:00 p.m. at the Ridgway Municipal Building.

PRESENT: Council members Steve Caggese, Brent Kemmer, Steve Lawrie, Abbi Peters, Chris Matheson, Zack Pontious, and Ron Burkett. Also in attendance were Borough Manager Mike Handley, Mayor Ray Imhof, Chief of Police Shawn Geci, Fire Chief Scott Pontious, Environmental Manager Josh Quattrone, and Recording Secretary Jake Mercer.

ABSENT: Solicitor David Pontzer.

Councilman Steve Caggese made a motion to approve the regular council meeting minutes as scheduled on March 18, 2024. Councilman Burkett seconded the motion and it was approved by the following vote:

Councilman Caggese: Aye

Councilman Lawrie: Aye

Councilman Burkett: Aye

Councilman Pontious: Aye

Councilman Matheson: Aye

Councilwoman Peters: Aye

Councilman Kemmer: Aye

Public Comment

A borough resident asked the borough council how the meeting went with Penn Highlands officials regarding the status of the Ridgway Community Medical Building.

Borough Manager Mike Handley said that he did not have a lot to report since last month's meeting but said that there have been talks to repurpose the existing building into at-market rate apartments per a Penn Highlands official. He said if that plan does not work out, potential demolition of the building is a possibility.

The same resident asked if the building would become a place for at-market-rate apartments and they all could not be filled what the status of them would be. Handley said that Penn Highlands hasn't reported a definitive person to repurpose and redevelop it, but he does not believe the municipality would have control over that matter.

Handley added that if there were a change of use from a hospital to apartments, a zoning permit application would have to be filed. Another resident asked if the prospect of putting in apartments for seniors was discussed at this meeting, and Handley said that only the status of the Ridgway Community Medical Building was discussed.

A third resident asked how much in taxes Penn Highlands pays in taxes for the building, and Handley said they are exempt from paying taxes due to their nonprofit status. Handley said that there is a property in the borough where they do make payments in lieu of taxes. This is part of the Borough PILOT program.

A fourth resident asked what happens to properties when they are no longer a service to the community and will the properties still be maintained. Handley stated that they may be listing other properties for sale to get them back on the tax rolls. Handley said that they are working with lack of maintenance and trying to prevent that from happening for this as well as other properties by the recent hiring of a code enforcement officer.

Finance Department

Councilwoman Peters made a motion to pay the bills. Councilman Pontious seconded the motion and it was approved by the following vote:

Councilman Caggese: Aye

Councilman Lawrie: Aye

Councilman Burkett: Aye

Councilman Pontious: Aye

Councilman Matheson: Aye

Councilwoman Peters: Aye

Councilman Kemmer: Aye

Mayor

Mayor Ray Imhof said that the bicentennial committee is moving forward with their plans and the Ridgway Fire Department for the bicentennial parade on Saturday, June 22. Imhof said that he saw the new photo design for the time capsule and said that “it looks really good.”

Police Department

Chief of Police Shawn Geci said that they have been very busy lately and are down one officer due to injury and gave credit to the part-time staff for “picking up the slack.”

He said facility improvements are underway and the installation of a new camera system has started.

Chief Geci had the opportunity to visit the Senior Junction of Ridgway to discuss with attendees on how to not be victims of phone scams and commented that the Senior Junction is a “huge success.”

Chief Geci said that officers will be attending taser instructor training in Brookville soon and basic SWAT training will occur near the old hospital building this week. Chief Geci added that field sobriety training will occur in Ridgway next month.

Fire Department

Fire Chief Scott Pontious said that his department trained at the new Penn Highlands Building over the weekend. Pontious added Penn Highlands has plans to open their pharmacy in the new building on May 15.

Environmental Manager

Environmental Manager Josh Quattrone said that with the change of the weather, they are in cleaning mode at the plants. He said they have cleaned out the basins at the water plant as well as cleaning the wastewater plant basins.

Quattrone said that the date for the clarifier one replacement is set for either May 6 or May 13 and is awaiting confirmation for the specific date over the weekend.

He said everything else is running smoothly through the high-water events at the plant.

Correspondence

Handley said the borough council has received two letters of correspondence with the first letter of correspondence being tabled for a later discussion. The second letter of correspondence was from the Glory Mountain Music Festival Committee, as they are planning to have a concert on September 7 and requested a dumpster for the event.

Steve Lawrie made a motion to give the Glory Mountain Music Festival Committee a dumpster for their event. Councilman Caggese seconded the motion and it was approved by the following vote:

Councilman Caggese: Aye

Councilman Lawrie: Aye

Councilman Burkett: Aye

Councilman Pontious: Aye

Councilman Matheson: Aye

Councilwoman Peters: Aye

Councilman Kemmer: Aye

Borough Manager

Borough Manager Mike Handley shared with the council that the borough received a Local Government Excellence Award for Intergovernmental Cooperation with Johnsonburg Borough, as he said there were about 68 nominees throughout the state of Pennsylvania. He also said there were a total of 9 awards broken down into 14 different municipalities. Handley said this is a “great honor” for the Borough of Ridgway.

Handley announced new hires for the two new full-time positions of code enforcement officer and community economic development coordinator in an intergovernmental agreement with the Johnsonburg Borough. The two municipalities were awarded \$180,000 by DCED to fund these two full-time positions.

Emma Coppolo was hired as the community economic development coordinator, effective April 1, 2024 while Chris Lindmar was hired as the code enforcement officer, effective April 1, 2024.

Handley announced that spring cleanup in the borough will take place April 22 through April 26.

Handley was happy to announce that the borough has been approved for Tree City USA for another year. He said that the ginkgo tree that drops fruit on the street will be replaced with another tree that will be planted sometime this fall.

Handley said the new leaf collection machine should arrive within a month and be ready for fall leaf collection.

Committee Reports

The Fire, Police, and Property Committee met on March 26, 2024 and Mayor Ray Imhof and Borough Manager Mike Handley were present for the meeting. A group from the solar farm entity gave a brief presentation for the E.L. Jakes Hollow LLC Project, or the solar farm project. There was a proposal presented to the Borough of Ridgway, and Borough Manager Handley said this presents an opportunity to collect passive funding.

Handley also noted that it was reported by the presenters that an increase in tax revenue will be received by the school district, the county, and the township, which he said is a benefit to those three entities too. Handley said he has contacted the county tax assessment regarding this subject and there is some state guidance to assist.

There were discussions relating to the Ridgway Chainsaw Carvers Rendezvous that centered around warehouse use for vendor parking, dumpster charges, rent and cost in exchange for woodcarving, and questions about entry fees that were charged. It was stated that there were no parking charges, and the liability coverage needs to be presented prior to the event.

Handley said that the borough owns two empty lots across from the municipal building, and instead of just having the space being an empty lot, there were discussions about how to generate foot traffic with the space.

Ideas from the group that were brought up included intergenerational projects such as mini golf and similar activity events and a food truck activity area to serve as an incubator for empty storefronts, and the use of affordable shipping containers fabricated in a way to create outdoor spaces.

Councilwoman Peters added that she is working on a project through Penn State Cooperative Extension to look at intergenerational projects across the community.

She said that there could be great ideas that come out of this to help spur the discussion of how to generate foot traffic downtown and get the community involved.

The committee recommended waiving the cost of the dumpster fees for the Ridgway Chainsaw Carvers Rendezvous with the expectation that tipping fees will be waived by the landfill in cooperation with the Ridgway Chainsaw Carvers Rendezvous.

Councilman Pontious made a motion for this recommendation. Councilman Matheson seconded the motion and it was approved by the following vote:

Councilman Caggese: Aye

Councilman Lawrie: Aye

Councilman Burkett: Aye

Councilman Pontious: Aye

Councilman Matheson: Aye

Councilwoman Peters: Aye

Councilman Kemmer: Aye

The second recommendation that was made was that there will be no property use charge for the Ridgway Chainsaw Carvers Rendezvous in exchange to provide a carving to capture Ridgway's bicentennial celebration.

Councilman Matheson made a motion for this recommendation. Councilman Burkett seconded the motion and it was approved by the following vote:

Councilman Caggese: Aye

Councilman Lawrie: Aye

Councilman Burkett: Aye

Councilman Pontious: Aye

Councilman Matheson: Aye

Councilwoman Peters: Aye

Councilman Kemmer: Aye

The third recommendation that was made was entering into a long-term lease agreement with the E.L. Jakes Hollow LLC Project for the solar farm under the direction of the solicitor.

Councilwoman Peters made a motion for this recommendation. Councilman Pontious seconded the motion and it was approved by the following vote:

Councilman Caggese: Aye

Councilman Lawrie: Aye

Councilman Burkett: Aye

Councilman Pontious: Aye

Councilman Matheson: Aye

Councilwoman Peters: Aye

Councilman Kemmer: Aye

The personnel committee met on April 2, 2024, and the committee recommended allowing Handley to have the ability to raise the Operations Engineer's salary up to 3%.

Councilman Lawrie asked if this was necessary and Handley said that he will review this and just wants the ability to potentially increase the salary for this position.

Councilwoman Peters made the motion for this recommendation. Councilman Kemmer seconded the motion and it was approved by the following vote:

Councilman Caggese: Aye

Councilman Lawrie: Aye

Councilman Burkett: Aye

Councilman Pontious: Aye

Councilman Matheson: Aye

Councilwoman Peters: Aye

Councilman Kemmer: Aye

Councilwoman Peters gave an update on the Ridgway Riverfront Master Site Plan. She said meetings with the consulting firm for the project, Herbert, Rowland & Grubic have taken place every other week, and they presented the project to Ridgway Area High School students on April 3.

They are also working with the intergenerational project to help get more ideas around the project and there will be two online surveys distributed, as there will be one for residents and one for visitors. There will also be paper surveys distributed to local businesses in the community.

Peters said a booth will be set up at the Ridgway Chainsaw Carvers Rendezvous to do one-on-one interviews with maps of the project as well as surveys. She said the consultants will be present.

Updates on the project will be posted on the borough website, according to Peters.

Old Business

Borough council reviewed the Ridgway Ambulance Corporation (RAC) 2024 budget as the voters' referendum opted to permit council to increase the taxes for millage dedicated to the RAC.

Handley said that they are missing some income to balance their budget and said that the borough is working with them to try to fill those gaps but acknowledged that they will still have a shortfall.

Councilman Matheson said that the biggest issue they have is the billing issues, with only being paid 10% of what they are billed.

Handley added that there are instances where individuals deny treatment and do not get paid for that service.

New Business

Handley requested a motion to apply for county aid for liquid fuels. The allocation request is for \$6,000.

Councilman Kemmer made a motion for this request. Councilman Burkett seconded the motion and it was approved by the following vote:

Councilman Caggese: Aye

Councilman Lawrie: Aye

Councilman Burkett: Aye

Councilman Pontious: Aye

Councilman Matheson: Aye

Councilwoman Peters: Aye

Councilman Kemmer: Aye

Councilman Lawrie made a motion to make Josh Quatrone a Ridgway Municipal Authority Signatory.

Councilman Burkett seconded the motion and it was approved by the following vote:

Councilman Caggese: Aye

Councilman Lawrie: Aye

Councilman Burkett: Aye

Councilman Pontious: Aye

Councilman Matheson: Aye

Councilwoman Peters: Aye

Councilman Kemmer: Aye

Handley said that he will have more information in the council's next meeting regarding a vacancy board seat.

Councilman Zack Pontious shared with council that he has been very active with elected officials, local business owners, and organizational leaders since Penn Highlands Healthcare moved to discontinue maternity services in Elk County, along with closing the Ridgmont personal care facility.

Pontious said that he and these individuals have spoken with the governor's office, senators that represent the county, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

Pontious said that through his research, he found that Elk County has a high base of premium insurance and a low percentage of people on Medicaid. He also found that Elk County has the lowest percentage of people without healthcare in the state.

Pontious said that he wants to see what the plans are for Penn Highlands in regard to this subject and what services will move here and what services will stay in the area.

He said that the borough must try to maintain good partnerships with Penn Highlands while ensuring they do what is best for the local community.

Public Comment

A resident asked Councilwoman Peters if she was talking about the Ridgway Mills building when she spoke about the Ridgway Riverfront Master Site Plan.

Peters said she was talking about the whole property including buildings as it relates to the project and that they are going through the planning process to see what could be developed.

A resident asked who owns the red building across from the borough building. The resident stated that there is a large population of feral cats that scream at night.

Council Discussion

Councilman Kemmer asked about the buildings at the Ridgway Mills and council members mentioning that it is in a flood zone. He asked how this would impact hosting potential events at the building.

Councilwoman Peters said that there has been contact with the Army Corps of Engineers about what the plans are with flood mitigation to make sure that everything works together cohesively. She said the purpose of flood mitigation is not to stop flooding but what could be done about when it occurs.

Handley said that the firm is developing a master site plan and not a feasibility study. Peters added that there could not be a timeline for the use of the buildings until this process is completed.

After there was no further discussion, the council adjourned the meeting at 7:04 p.m. before going into executive session to discuss a personnel matter.