

Oakland Borough Council  
380 State Street  
Susquehanna, PA 18847  
Emergency meeting  
March 21st, 2020

Oakland Borough Council held an emergency meeting on Saturday, March 21st, 2020 at 10:00am at the Borough building. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss Borough operations and expenditures given the suddenly urgent health and financial situation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting was called to order at 10:00am.

Present were council members Gary Boughton, Valerie Senese, Robert Muiter, Debra White, and Patrick Gall; Mayor Randy Glover, Solicitor John Martin, Secretary Rhonda Parfitt, Chief John Creamer, Borough EMC Dan Vinsko, and Water Authority Board Member Larena Nickerson. Council members Ron Beavan and Brad Krayski were absent.

Also present were Roy Williams and Debbie Zayas representing Susquehanna Depot Borough; and Oakland residents Doug and Susan Arthur.

Mr. Boughton opened the meeting by stating that they were all present to discuss the possibility of declaring a State of Emergency (hereafter referred to as SOE). Mr. Muiter asked what doing such a thing would accomplish for the Borough. Ms. Sense answered that there is funding available through the state to help with expenses related to emergencies. She could see a need for more police hours and more Secretary hours on the horizon as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are also resources that the County or the State can provide for municipalities when they cannot provide them for themselves.

Mr. Williams stated that County Commissioner Judy Herschel had called him that morning and advised him that Boroughs should be preparing for 4-6 months of emergency operations. He confirmed what Ms. Senese had stated regarding the benefits of a Declaration of Emergency. Ms. Senese asked Mr. Williams to explain the "unmet need" request. Mr. Williams stated that it was a form that could be used to request a resource from the County or State if the municipality was unable to provide it. Mr. Williams stated that the TREHAB food bank in Susquehanna was trying to work with Ron Dubas of Schneider's Market to get food to fill the food bank, but Mr. Dubas was having issues supplying his grocery store and was only getting about 40% of his orders. It was understood that part of the food problem was due to members of the public hoarding food and other supplies when they went out shopping. He did not think it was a good idea for the municipalities to set up their own banks because he thought it would

be a recipe for more people to hoard. Ms. Senese stated that she had spoken with County EMA Scott Aylesworth that morning regarding what to do for people who were not working and wouldn't be able to afford food even if it was on the shelf and available for purchase. Mr. Aylesworth had said that the Borough could request food for people through the unmet need request.

Ms. Senese began to address what the Governor had stated regarding privatized water. These companies would not be allowed to turn off water for non-payment during this time, due to so many people being on reduced or no income. Ms. Senese stated that she had spoken with the Water Authority, who did not fall under the Governor's order due to being independently owned, and the Authority had already decided that they would not shut off water for non-payment at this time. She stated that she had spoken with Ms. Nickerson regarding the Authority's expenditures and inquired how the Borough might be able to help carry them through the crisis if people did not pay their bills. Ms. Senese stated that this needed to be talked about, along with the possible increase in police coverage. She stated that surrounding areas were seeing a rise in domestic situations and child abuse and thought Oakland should be prepared for the same. There was a discussion regarding the time frame for reimbursement of costs, and Mr. Williams pointed out that the expenditures may not even get approved for reimbursement and the Borough would need to be prepared to never get any money back.

Discussion shifted back to the Water Authority and Mayor Glover stated that the past due water bills could just be tacked on to the end of someone's service since that's what the mortgage companies were doing. Ms. Senese asked Ms. Nickerson what her thoughts were regarding payments. Ms. Nickerson stated that they would still be issuing the normal bills with the interest added for late payments. They currently had residents who owed for two years back and were making payments and they had other residents who agreed to a payment plan but never paid on the payment plan. She stated that arrangements could be made for those who were unable to pay due to financial distress and that the Water Authority would not be shutting off any water until the disaster was over. Ms. Senese stated her concern that people who would typically pay their bill with no problem would suddenly have trouble paying their bill and asked if Ms. Nickerson had the same concern. Ms. Nickerson stated that the demographic of the area was mostly older people who should be mostly unaffected financially so they were hoping not to have a problem with most of the bills. She also stated that she hoped unemployment would contribute to people being able to pay and that lack of payment would only be a problem for a few.

Mayor Glover stated his opinion that COVID-19 was just like the flu and that the whole situation has been overblown. He stated that it may never go away and it would be something that the world had to deal with every year. Mayor Glover stated that he wasn't opposed to declaring a

State of Emergency but that it needed to be specific and not too restrictive. He stated that if he were to declare a State of Emergency, his daughter would not be able to go to work because she worked in New York state. Ms. Senese voiced her disagreement with this statement. Mayor Glover stated that he felt the Council was getting the cart before the horse. Ms. Senese stated that for Oakland, the virus had caused a financial crisis rather than a health crisis and that Council needed to be taking it seriously. She repeated that they were probably looking at increased Police and Secretary needs and that they needed to be looking into getting the finances prepared for such need, with the hopes of getting reimbursement. She stated that a State of Emergency would also allow the Council to meet more regularly to keep up with the COVID changes. Mr. Williams stated that the key would be for Council to be open with the public and explain what was happening so that they didn't incite panic. Ms. Senese repeated that recent events had caused a financial crisis and it needed to be handled accordingly. She asked Chief Creamer if there was anything he needed to be able to operate in Oakland, such as supplies or hours. Chief Creamer responded that Roy Williams and Dan Vinsko had donated out of their personal pockets and bought some supplies- masks and such. Ms. Sense stated that while that was admirable, it could not continue for 4-6 months and that Oakland needed to contribute to supplies. Mr. Williams stated that there needed to be communication between the three boroughs and they would get things taken care of as they came up. He thought it was better for boroughs to take care of themselves rather than rely on the County or the State. Ms. Senese voiced her agreement. She stated that Oakland does not want to push all responsibility to Susquehanna and Lanesboro- Oakland wanted to be part of the solution.

Ms. Senese addressed the Secretary and asked what kind of money Oakland might have available to spend on this emergency. Ms. Parfitt stated that there was about \$36,000 available in Impact Fee money which could be used for emergency preparedness. After a brief discussion regarding matches for grants for road projects, it was determined that there was \$26,000 left. The finance committee had discussed setting aside \$20,000 of this money to save up for a match for the park phases, but it was certainly not a necessity under the present conditions. Mr. Muiter asked if grant money was state money. Ms. Senese stated that yes it was, but she had contacted the grantors and they had said that they were still on schedule, although it could change. Ms. Parfitt noted that the Borough was approximately \$3,500 under budget for plowing since the winter had been kind. There was also a small \$1,000 in Capital Reserve savings that could be used if needed.

At this time, Mr. Williams and Ms. Zayas excused themselves, stating that if anyone needed anything, they should not hesitate to call. Mr. Williams and Mayor Glover agreed to have a meeting on Monday with Lanesboro to discuss State of Emergency for the boroughs.

Ms. Senese asked Mr. Vinsko what kind of things he could foresee needing over the next 4-6 months. He stated that the police department needed masks, gloves, and suits and that they were hard to get a hold of because things were going to hospitals first and then the general public. Ms. Senese stated that she had a lot of supplies and would make a donation to the police department. She asked where she could take them and Chief Creamer answered that she could take them to the Susquehanna Police Department. He also stated that he had not been using the Ford Crown Victoria because he had put all of the equipment in the two Susquehanna cars and didn't want to transfer it back and forth. He stated that he was only taking emergency calls for the time-being to avoid interaction with more people than necessary. Ms. Senese asked if Chief Creamer was anticipating needing more hours to deal with higher call volumes for domestics or other situations. Chief Creamer responded that he would be dealing with the same people he always deals with. Mayor Glover stated that he felt the biggest problem would be more stealing they weren't going to go stir crazy and committing crimes.

Mr. Muter asked if the Borough could have a Facebook page to post information for the residents, in order to offset what they are reading on the news. He recommended that comments be disabled so that there wouldn't have to be any drama for the maintainer to deal with. Chief Creamer stated that Mr. Vinsko had started a page for Susquehanna for EMC needs. Council asked Mr. Vinsko if he was willing to include Oakland and Mr. Vinsko agreed.

Chief Creamer stated his opinion that the Council shouldn't help people until after the virus is over because people will take advantage of it. Mayor Glover stated that Oakland is supposed to be broke and people are going to wonder where all of this money came from. He was strongly opposed to taking tax payer dollars and going house to house feeding people with it. He stated that the best they could do was point residents in the right direction for the resources they needed. Chief Creamer stated that Lanesboro was still having its food bank and Ms. Senese stated that they were not accepting any new applicants. She made it known that she wasn't advocating for Oakland to start its own food bank, but wanted a plan put in place. Ms. Senese stated that a resident had made their needs known in the recent past and it took all day for her to petition individuals for donations. She stated that for a situation that is going to carry on 4-6 months, the Borough needed a plan and people could not be giving out of their own pockets for that long. She suggested that the Council earmark a small amount of money to be put toward such desperate situations. Someone implied that the County or the State should take care of it, and she stated that each municipality is a separate entity and they had responsibilities to take care of their residents.

Mr. Martin requested to interrupt for legal purposes as he had been reading about the State of Emergency procedures. He read that the Mayor issues a proclamation which cannot exceed 7 days unless it is rescinded, modified, ratified, or extended by a resolution of Council. He wanted

to make sure Council was aware that it had to be the Mayor to declare a State of Emergency and that they could not do it on their own.

Mr. Muiter questioned whether the Borough's eligibility for funding or resources would be affected if a State of Emergency was not declared. It was answered yes.

Mayor Glover stated that the Council should not use taxpayer dollars to provide for the residents because it was starting a precedent the Council did not want to continue. Ms. Parfitt stated for the record that Impact Fees are not taxpayer dollars and this would be the first place money was pulled from. Mayor Glover was adamantly against using Borough dollars for the cause which Ms. Senese had suggested. Mr. Vinsko stated that the federal government was issuing stimulus checks and that would help people. Ms. Senese stated that it would be an oversight to not consider the financial situation of many residents and stressed the need to prepare and have a plan in place for the future. Some of those present voiced that they did not agree with the Governor's order and that people needed to calm down. Ms. Senese stated that personal opinions of the Governor's order aside, the implications of the order needed to be addressed and the Borough needed a financial plan. Mr. Vinsko argued that the Borough could not prepare too far into the future because things were changing so fast. Mr. Muiter stated that if the County was giving advice to declare an emergency, the Borough should do it. If there were going to be resources available, he wanted the Borough to have them. He noted that the Borough needed to use some foresight in such uncertain times. Ms. Senese stated that it would be better to have a plan in place and not need it rather than need a plan and not have it.

Mr. Martin stated that if the Water Authority was in need of money, they would go get a loan at the bank and the Borough would have to guarantee the loan. The Borough did not just have to hand over money to help the Water Authority. He stated that he agreed with Ms. Senese in needing a plan moving forward.

Mr. Muiter asked if the Borough could ask the bank for an interest-only payment on the mortgage loan to save some money monthly in order to put toward the crisis. Mr. Martin stated that banks are prepared to do that as they are flooded with money and he knew of a large business owner in Honesdale that had already been in contact with the bank regarding such an arrangement.

Mayor Glover got up to leave the meeting. Ms. Senese asked him if he had any intention of declaring a State of Emergency, to which Mayor Glover stated that he would let her know on Monday.

Ms. Senese asked if the Council felt the enforcement of the EIT should be suspended or retracted. It was discussed that it would take some work to repeal, and after the whole ordeal they had had to go through, it wouldn't be worth it. If Oakland didn't collect it, another

municipality would just collect it anyway. Ms. Senese stated that perhaps the Council should advocate at the County level to suspend the collection of the tax and also suspending real estate taxes. Mr. Martin stated that the Council would know more in two weeks, after the governor's closure order had expired. He stated that the first step would be getting the Mayor to declare an emergency. If the Mayor refused, Council's hands were tied as far as emergency operations were concerned. Mr. Muiter asked if there was a way around it, and Mr. Martin stated that there was not, as far as he could tell.

Ms. Senese asked if Council would be okay with having another meeting in one more week to discuss any changes. She asked Chief Creamer and Mr. Vinsko to come prepared with a proposal or a list and cost of items that they may need, including extra hours of work. Mr. Boughton asked if someone could make a list of resources that were available to the community. Ms. Senese stated that they already had one from Judy Herschel which had been given out months ago. It could be reprinted and distributed. She also stated that many of the resources on the list were already out of supplies or turning away new applicants. There was a discussion about the elderly, as some Council members were concerned that the elderly would be the most affected due to not being able to get out of the house and being too proud to ask for help. Ms. Senese suggested that the Borough should be forming relationships with Children and Youth Services and Adult Protective Services so that they might be made aware of needs. There was a discussion about how to inform those without internet about the most recent news. Ms. White suggested a flyer. Ms. Senese suggested leaving it to the EMC to do his job.

It was noted that the three boroughs were having a meeting of the mayors on Monday and that after Monday, they would know more.

Ms. Arthur stated that she had received a number of tax payments already and that she should have a deposit prepared at the end of the month.

Chief Creamer asked if the Council would be willing to pitch in money for things Susquehanna had already purchased. Council answered with resounding agreement. Ms. Senese asked Chief Creamer and Mr. Vinsko to bring receipts for Oakland to review and a proposal of costs that they foresee in regards to the pandemic. They were to be presented at the meeting on March 28th. Ms. Sense stated that Susquehanna could not keep covering Oakland's share for things that were going to be used to help Oakland.

As a final note, Ms. Senese stated that the 2018 Audit was not yet completed and that because of this, the Survey of Financial Condition had not been filed with the DCED and this may affect funding. Mr. Muiter asked if the Borough had made every effort to do their part, and Ms. Senese answered that the Secretary had been in contact with the auditor and that there was no

lack of effort on the part of Ms. Parfitt. Mr. Muiiter felt the Borough should not be penalized for something that was not its fault.

Ms. Sense wished to thank Chief Creamer and Mr. Vinsko for the hours they had already put in planning for the pandemic preparations.

Mr. Boughton adjourned the meeting at 11:20am.