

## Penndel Borough Council Workshop Minutes

April 21, 2025

Council President John Stratz called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

### Present at the Meeting

Council President John Stratz  
Council Vice President Barbara Heffelfinger  
Councilman Mark Moffa - absent  
Councilman Bud Murphy - absent  
Councilwoman Robin Valentis  
Councilman Gary Nickerson  
Councilman Bob Winkler  
Mayor Tom Sodano

### Also present at the meeting

Barbara Kirk, Solicitor, Hill Wallack  
Carol Schuehler, Value Engineering  
Marie Serota, Secretary/Treasurer

### Council or Borough Announcements

A moment of silence was held for the Pope.

### Consent Item

MOTION BY BOB WINKLER TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE APRIL 7, 2025 COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES. SECONDED BY BARBARA HEFFELFINGER. All ayes, motion carried.

### ***Reports:***

#### President's Reports

John Stratz reported that PennDOT has started filling potholes on state roads and have at least, this week, got into the worst of them. There are a few that may have been overlooked and he doesn't quite know what the story is yet. Penndel will be following suit, which is under new business. Gary Nickerson said they always scramble before the Memorial Day Parade because Hulmeville Ave. is terrible. They should start working on that now and put in a request to PennDOT.

#### Solicitor's Report

Barbara Kirk reported that council met in an Executive Session from 7:00 to 7:15 to discuss pending litigation. No formal decisions were made to settle anything, but the litigation is still open.

#### Engineer's Report

Carol Schuehler read her report which is attached.

Carol asked for some direction from council regarding the grant for the walking path around Memorial Park. Someone proposed to connect the trail through the field 3 dug out rather than construct an extensive fill slope into the adjoining Middletown Township property to get around the dugout. She spoke to Geoff who said he believes the interaction between the walking path

and the dugout to be very problematic. She sent an email to council members involved with the grant application presenting options to address Geoff's concerns. They could install gates that could be closed when field 3 is in use or they could construct that fill slope that she provided a diagram of how far out that goes. It's substantial and there is a big drop off back there. She needs some direction as she prepares the grant application. John said it would be a problem with parents walking through the dugout interrupting the flow for that team. He wonders if they would respect two big cones blocking it off with a sign saying stay out of the dugout. Carol thought some gates would not completely restrict access. There is just going to be a barrier that makes people turn around and the gate should be nine or ten feet wide because you don't want an ambulance to try to get through there one day and can't fit. A simple metal swinging gate that could be closed during the game. She doesn't know how much field 3 is used. Gary said field 3 is the little guys, so there are some games a couple of nights a week and Saturdays, but the travel teams are on field 2 by the batting cages and field 1 by the concession stand. Field 3 is probably the least used. He asked if the grant is for \$200,000.00 and they are only applying for around \$100,000.00, what the issue is. He asked if the cost would be too much or that the issue is that Middletown actually owns that property. Ideally, they could go behind. Mayor Sodano emailed everybody, and he thinks he was thinking they could do something with the railing or maybe retaining wall. Carol said a retaining wall would easily double the cost of the project. A fill slope is what she would do, a three to one fill slope going down there but it is going to disturb a lot of vegetation. It's a doable solution but it's just a much bigger encroachment on Middletown Township. She needs to talk to their staff about what they're going to be asking for. Gary said he thought maybe, a pedestrian bridge or almost like a deck on a slope. Carol said once they're doing structural work, they're really escalating the cost. Gary said baseball is played from maybe, the last week in March to the middle of June. Most practices are on weeknights maybe, from 5:00 – 9:00, so they're talking about 2 1/2 - 3 months of usage. It would be open during the day, so you know pretty much 9:00 to 5:00 will be open. Saturdays would be crazy. They would have to figure out a way to balance it. Nothing is happening there the rest of the months. Mayor Sodano said his calculations show that if the rearmost poles of that dugout were simply moved two feet closer to the playing field, which frees up two feet of space there and they have three feet. If they laid a three-foot strip of concrete, they would have five feet. Carol said the slope behind that is an old fill slope and is extremely steep and if somebody steps sideways off that path, it would be a problem. Mayor Sodano said maybe, they can put in a railing. Carol said she wouldn't be comfortable that that would create a safe and stable situation. Barbara suggested they put in a circular piece and people would just go back the way they came. Carol said it would be like a cul-de-sac. Gary asked if they could split it, apply for the grant this year, and do one next year to do the retaining wall. Carol said if they're determined to go around the dugout, then they're looking at the fill slope and that's not undoable but it's going to be initially less expensive and long-term stable, and they won't have to worry about kids falling off the fill slope like they would with a retaining wall. If that's what they want, that's how she will move forward. Carol said ultimately, there was to be a walking trail from this park into the Middletown property, which would really make a nice circuitous walking trail around both properties and if that happens, there wouldn't be a need to go through the dugout. You could go through the adjoining property and have a longer walk. This would be an interim solution until the full walking path concept comes to fruition, but they don't have control over that because it's Middletown. Barbara said she would talk to them at Middletown with Carol, if she wants to. Mayor Sodano agreed that it would make sense to start the project with this grant and go for another next year. He asked if Carol saw that the Wildcats pushed dirt off of the field over the line to Spring Valley Farm. Carol said she would have to check. Robin Valentis said she likes the idea of the walking path. She doesn't have a concern with being a kind of compromise for three to four months max but it's open 9 to 5 daytimes and lot of people work from home, so it's not just going to be older people. She would like to see something get started and she likes

the idea of the gate, so they just turn around and go back. John said this is something the residents have been asking for for years. Carol said it sounds like they want to put in a fill slope and go around the dugout, so she will talk to Middletown. If she gets pushback from Middletown or the costs are extreme, then they can go back to gates and look at the fill in another cycle at another time.

MOTION BY BARBARA HEFFELFINGER TO MOVE TO NEW BUSINESS AND WHEN FINISHED, GO BACK TO UNFINISHED BUSINESS. SECONDED BY ROBIN VALENTIS. All ayes, motion carried.

New Business

MOTION BY BARBARA HEFFELFINGER TO AWARD THE PAVEMENT REPAIRS PROJECT TO HARRIS BLACKTOPPING, INC. FOR \$65,569.45 AS RECOMMENDED BY BOROUGH ENGINEER. SECONDED BY BOB WINKLER. John asked Carol how she got them. He said he's called them three years in a row, and they refused to do streets. Carol said it's probably not the same Harris. There are other Harris companies out there. These are the ones that did the Rumpf Ave. paving back in 2007.

All ayes, motion carried.

MOTION BY BARBARA HEFFELFINGER TO AWARD THE TRAFFIC SIGNAL REPAIRS PROJECT TO ARMOUR & SONS, INC. FOR \$58,309.00 (FUNDED BY RDA GRANT) AS RECOMMENDED BY BOROUGH ENGINEER. SECONDED BY BOB WINKLER. All ayes, motion carried.

MOTION BY BARBARA HEFFELFINGER TO AUTHORIZE ADVERTISEMENT OF BID PACKAGE FOR THE ULTRA-THIN WEARING COURSE SEAL PROJECT ON CRESCENT STREET, HIGHLAND AVENUE AND MANOR AVENUE AS RECOMMENDED BY BOROUGH ENGINEER. SECONDED BY ROBIN VALENTIS. Robin asked if they would have signs put up, since they won't be able to park on them for twenty-four hours. John said the police will put signs up. All ayes, motion carried.

Barbara Kirk explained that recently, the open records law has been amended by the state legislature to deal with issues of people submitting requests that are not on formal request forms and anonymous requests that keep getting generated under what's called the Freedom of Information Act. The borough adopted the state's open records policy in 2009. These are just updates to match the changes in the current state law. The policy remains the same. It just tweaks and brings everything more current, so that the borough is following what the state has indicated.

MOTION BY GARY NICKERSON TO ADOPT RESOLUTION #2025-6 REVISING THE BOROUGH'S OPEN RECORDS POLICY. SECONDED BY BOB WINKLER. All ayes, motion carried.

MOTION BY BARBARA HEFFELFINGER TO APPOINT JOHN STRATZ VOTING DELEGATE AND BOB WINKLER ALTERNATE DELEGATE FOR THE PSAB CONFERENCE IN JUNE 2025 IN HERSHEY, PA. SECONDED BY JOHN STRATZ. All ayes, motion carried.

Unfinished Business

MOTION BY ROBIN VALENTIS TO AUTHORIZE THE ORDINANCE COMMITTEE TO WORK WITH THE SOLICITOR TO DEVELOP A SIDEWALK ORDINANCE. SECONDED BY JOHN STRATZ.

Barbara said when they were talking about this at the last meeting, it was suggested that they try to find out what the people on your street felt about it and she got a unanimous don't put them in now, put them in when they sell the property, rather than do it right now. People on her street don't have a lot of money, including herself.

Gary said no other town does this curb issue. This is not a thing for other municipalities and they're already designing the streets because they don't want to have people do curbs because it's extremely expensive. They should not do anything with curbs. If somebody wants to replace their curbs, that's great, but they should not be in the business of doing that. But this is about sidewalks, so this is going to separate the sidewalk policy, and this is implementing sidewalks be done when homes are sold. He asked everybody for their comments and the only comment he got was from Mayor Sodano who provided comments to everybody, and he recommended a sidewalk inspection every two years by dividing the town into four quadrants and doing one every two years. Currently, for sidewalks, if there's an issue or someone notices a problem, they would report it and the code inspector would go out and take a look and issue a directive or if a house is sold, part of that inspection is looking at the sidewalks.

Barbara Kirk said the borough follows the International Property Maintenance Code, in which inspection of sidewalks would fall underneath for repairs. They need to be careful if they try to create a new inspection process for sidewalks only when it's already being governed by the Property Maintenance Code. Mayor Sodano said it's not being done. Barbara said implementing it is one thing. The fact that it exists is that it's already there. Mayor Sodano said as it is now, they're expecting people to rat out their neighbors and that's not a fair thing to do. Barbara said the problem is the code enforcement officers don't necessarily have time to just go driving around the neighborhood. They can implement a policy that makes the code enforcement officer start going out and looking at properties. Mayor Sodano said that's why he thought a two-year window was a better way to do it because it doesn't force them to run out and inspect and in a two-year span, they're probably going to be in most areas of a quadrant at least once. Barbara said the fact that they are creating a whole different mechanism for those inspections may affect how they can enforce it under the Property Maintenance Code.

John said this motion is just for the Ordinance Committee to work with the solicitor. The Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs harps on boroughs to do that so they can stay out of trouble.

**Mike Smith**, asked why they will spend money they don't have to spend if they already have an ordinance. Barbara said there's a distinction, which is that most municipalities have a sidewalk ordinance that says sidewalks to be installed generally at the discretion of the governing body. The purpose of this is to establish an event that would trigger the installation of sidewalks. Inspections and repairs would fall under property maintenance codes, so there's the distinction between the two. Mike said some properties in this town have never switched owners. When the road was being done, he knew it had to be done, and he got them done. Barbara said there could be occasions where there might be a different mechanism. Mike said he's one of those people who have ratted out their neighbor, they need to look at the curbs again. He asked John why he hadn't instructed the inspector to go over there and look at them again. John said they're going to as soon as this other little problem is solved.

All ayes, motion carried.

Public Comment

**Mike Smith**, said this is what happens when you allow them to be patched. It lasted a year and a half and are now crumbling again. Now he has to rat his neighbor out again. Barbara Kirk said maybe, alternatively, something is done where the code enforcement officer goes around and scopes it out and can do it in quadrants. He could split it up and start scoping out properties that need it done. Mike said everybody on his street, when they were told they had to get them done, did it with no problem. There's the stipulation of this whole thing. When his neighbor bought the property, he didn't have to redo his sidewalks. He got away with it, so doing it when you sell it doesn't really help. Barbara said there's a difference between maintenance and installation. Mike said they were a maintenance issue, the same as they are right now. Barbara said this ordinance is being crafted to put an objective event that would trigger the installation of a sidewalk. Maintenance would still fall under the Property Maintenance Code. If there's a sidewalk or curb along someone's street that's crumbling or falling apart, then they should be notified that they need to make certain repairs and that's the code enforcement officer's duty.

Council Members to be Heard

John Stratz said when he bought his house, it came down to the seller having to put in sidewalks and he had to split the cost of the entire sidewalk and curb with him so he could buy the house.

Mayor Sodano said if using the current guidelines is fine, as far as the condition of the sidewalks, etc., they need to figure out a better mechanism for doing the inspections. They only have the inspectors in the borough for two or three hours a week and they're never going to get that done. They need to spend more money, which will give more hours to the inspectors, so they will be here and implement a way to add things like inspecting sidewalks. Yardley looks at everybody's sidewalks every other year and makes them fix them whether they want to or they don't. The mechanism they need to think about moving forward is how do they get more hours for the inspectors to fulfill these types of things.

Gary Nickerson said they probably should have already put the tree in the ground out here because they got all that rain in April. John said he has a picture from a garden center of the various types of trees and that is something they will need to vote on.

Robin Valentis said they need to do the block party vote. They all got a second copy so they should do that at the next meeting, since they are coming up on summertime. Barbara Kirk said the provisions for them to decide if that's how they want to do it, which will then get put into a formal ordinance to be advertised and voted on.

MOTION BY BARBARA HEFFELFINGER TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:22 P.M.  
SECONDED BY ROBIN VALENTIS. All ayes, motion carried.

Submitted by: Marie Serota  
Marie Serota, Secretary/Treasurer

April 21, 2025 Engineers Report  
Pennel Borough, Bucks County

### **DCED Greenways, Trails, and Recreation Program Grant**

As we prepare a grant application for a walking path around Memorial Park, a question requires direction from Council. Following our walk-through last month, it was proposed to connect the trail through the field 3 dugout rather than construct an extensive fill slope into the adjoining Middletown Township property. Geoff believes the interaction between the walking path and the dugout to be very problematic. I prepared a memo on the matter, presenting the options to address the concern. Gates could be installed to be closed across the walking path when ball field 3 is in use, or the fill slope constructed. Direction is needed so I may proceed with preparation of the application and communication with Middletown Township regarding property permissions.

### **>> Pavement Repairs**

Five bids received for the project titled Pavement Repairs to Borough Streets were opened on April 11, 2025. Harris Blacktopping Inc. is the lowest responsible bidder with a total bid of \$65,569.45.

This project will provide pavement repairs on Crescent and Highland ahead of sealing the streets, in addition to repairing numerous potholes recently marked throughout the Borough.

### **>> Signal Repairs: Lincoln Highway and Bellevue Avenue**

The Borough was awarded \$62,309 in grant funding from the Redevelopment Authority to complete necessary repairs to the signalized intersection of Lincoln and Bellevue and repairs to the school zone flasher and radar sign for Our Lady of Grace School. A proposal from Armour & Sons Electric, dated January 23, 2025 in the amount of \$58,309.00 lists the proposed work to replace two mast arms at the intersection, and repair the school zone signs. This is a Costars contract, which means the work is bid at the state level and the Borough can use their contract prices for this work. The Borough is seeking separate quotes to refresh the crosswalk and stop bar markings at the intersection, but we recommend Council authorize Armour and Sons to proceed with their work.

### **>> Ultra-Thin Wearing Course Seal on Crescent, Highland, and Manor**

The bid package is ready to be advertised to seal three Borough Streets. Ultra-Thin wearing course seal is the same process applied to Rumpf Avenue in 2023. Bid Opening is scheduled for May 22, and award anticipated at the regular June 2 Council meeting.