

CITY COUNCIL  
Sunbury PA 17801  
August 9, 2010  
7:00 pm

A regularly scheduled meeting of the Council of the City of Sunbury was called to order with the Honorable David L. Persing, Mayor, presiding. There was a quorum with the following in attendance:

David L. Persing, Mayor  
Todd E. Snyder, Director of Accounts and Finance  
Joseph J. Bartello, III, Director of Public Safety  
Kevin E. Troup, Director of Public Works  
James R. Eister, Director of Parks, Recreation and Public Buildings

Other City officials in attendance:

Michael Apfelbaum, City Solicitor  
Lisa J. Martina, City Controller  
Elizabeth R. Kremer, City Treasurer  
John Bakowicz, City Engineer  
Stephen Mazzeo, Chief of Police  
Michael Rhoads, Property Maintenance Officer  
Terry Specht, City Clerk

There were twenty-three (23) visitors present.

An executive session to discuss personnel matters was held prior to this meeting.

### **MINUTES AND REPORTS**

Mayor Persing announced that the available departmental reports of the City Administrator, Police Dept., Treasurer's Office, Fire Dept., City Engineer, Code Office, Park and Recreation Department, Park & Recreation Board, Public Works Dept, and Planning Commission are in the City Clerk's office for review. On motion by Persing, second by Eister, the available reports and minutes of 7/12/2010 and 7/26/2010 are approved as presented. Unanimous vote.

### **RIVERFRONT PROJECT**

Councilman Snyder stated that at the next meeting he will be proposing to increase Mr. Bill Roll's hours in increments of 10 hour time periods.

### **SRI UPDATE**

Ms. Janet Yonkoskie explained that a board member from SRI (Sunbury's Revitalization Inc) would be attending the council meetings to present an update regarding SRI to council members and the general public. River Festival is the weekend of August 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. There are some new events this year including the hot dog eating contest, air guitar contest and talent contest. They are designed to bring more people into Sunbury. There was an issue with vendors receiving parking tickets on the Friday of River Festival last year. Mayor Persing moved to allow free parking on Friday August 20<sup>th</sup> the first day of River Festival. Second – Eister. Unanimous vote.

### **HOME RULE TIMEFRAME**

Mayor Persing announced that petitions are ready to be picked up at the County Board of Elections Office. They can be passed until August 24<sup>th</sup> at which time they must be filed with the County Board of Elections. If there are not at least 7 petitions filed, there will be no Home Rule question on the ballot. Mr. Norm Gessner said that as of 4:00 pm only 1 petition has been handed out. Mr. Bob Snyder asked if any of the council members were going to pass petitions to be on the Home Rule Study Commission. Councilman Eister and Mayor Persing both stated they felt others should run and council members should remain neutral. At least 41 signatures are needed on the petitions for the question to be on the ballot in November.

### **HEPCO INVOICE**

Councilman Eister moved to pay HEPSCO invoice #2 in the amount of \$100,462.54 as part of the city hall renovations project. Second – Troup. Unanimous vote.

## **CITY ADMINISTRATOR CONTRACT**

Mayor Persing explained that he sent a memo to everyone regarding the City Administrator's salary. The contract states that if it is broken for no reason, the administrator would still get paid for 4 months salary and benefits which would have to be added to the 2011 budget if the contract was not eliminated now. Councilman Troup said he feels it is a personnel issue and he thinks it should be discussed in executive session. Mayor Persing stated that he intended to talk about the position in general but if council wants an executive session he does not have a problem with it. Mayor Persing moved to eliminate the City Administrator contract and have Mr. Apfelbaum review the contract to see what Mr. Graybill should be paid to fulfill the contract. Second – Bartello. Yes – Persing, Snyder, Bartello. No – Troup, Eister. Motion carried.

## **VACANT BUILDING REGISTRATION**

Councilman Bartello said he wanted to know what everyone's opinion of his proposed ordinance regarding vacant building registration. He said that in Sunday's paper there was an article about a gang sign on a building and he doesn't know if they are squatting in vacant properties. Chief Mazzeo said one of the gateways to the City is Memorial Acres and the police have a good relationship with the executive director. Councilman Bartello said he noticed on the list that there are property management companies from outside of Brooklyn, NY and NJ for properties in Sunbury. Councilman Eister stated that's why the code office needs more help. Councilman Bartello said just knowing where the vacancies are should help. Councilman Eister said the Municipal Authority has a list of any properties where the water is shut off and at this time there are approximately 500 vacancies listed. Mayor Persing asked how a fee would help and what if someone did not have the money to advertise the property for rent. Councilman Bartello said it would be a deterrent to leaving a building vacant. If a property is actively for rent it would be exempt from all fees. The wording can be changed to the proposed ordinance. The Solicitor reviewed the ordinance but if council doesn't agree with the wording it can be changed. Councilman Eister said if he has a rental property that is up to code and passes the code inspection, why would he have to rent it out. Councilman Bartello said if it is to be left vacant it would have to be registered with the City and the fee would have to be paid. Councilman Eister asked why he would be punished if he wants his property to be vacant, as long as it was up to code. Councilman Troup said there is a property near him that has been approved by code and the owner just can't find the right person to rent to and in that case would he have to pay the fee and Councilman Bartello said unless it was actively for sale or rent, the fee would have to be paid. That is one of the things that can be changed after discussion regarding this matter. Councilman Snyder said it sounds like everyone is in agreement that a vacant property, not in compliance with code, has a cost to the City because the code officers would have to check the property, board it up if needed and monitor the property. Some sort of registration or fee would be warranted for that type of property. Councilman Eister said there is already a list of approximately 50 properties that are not up to code (of the 500 in water shut off not all are deficient in code). Registered letters will be sent to the property owners. Those properties in foreclosure will be sent to the current title owner. The code office will cite the property owners and, if they are not brought up to code, the City will take them over. Councilman Snyder said he felt this would work with the nuisance ordinance and not rely on the citations to correct the problem. Mr. Apfelbaum said he feels the City is taking a more aggressive approach to this problem and the task force that has been put together to work on this problem. There are tools in place at this time to take care of the vacancy problems. Mr. Rhoads said the magistrates have been very cooperative with the code office. Mr. Bob Miller asked what the code office does if someone receives 13 or 14 citations and pays them. Councilman Bartello said they just keep citing the property owner. If they are paid, there is nothing else the code office can do. Mr. Bakowicz asked if an equity action through county court could be used. Mr. Apfelbaum answered that yes that has been used in the past and can still be used. It is not an easy process and it is expensive and not a broad based solution. Councilman Bartello explained that his proposed ordinance was to deter property owners from having vacancies become a nuisance which the code office would then have to get involved with.

## **HOME PROGRAM**

Councilman Eister explained that Mr. Bogar is his granddaughter's father and he applied for a HOME grant for a property he owns on Market St. Councilman Eister is not affiliated with the property in any way. SEDA-COG required a public discussion regarding this property before they would add Mr. Bogar to the list. The grant is for owner occupied rehabilitation. Mr. Apfelbaum said it is important that Councilman Eister states there is a conflict and will abstain from any vote that would occur regarding the Bogar home and the HOME grant.

## **STEERING COMMITTEE/COMP PLAN**

Mayor Persing stated that the next Comp Plan meeting is September 28<sup>th</sup> and the discussion on the agenda will be about housing. Real estate people and housing authority members will be invited to attend. Each steering committee meeting will have a different topic so the discussion is not always the same.

## **TAX EXONERATION**

Councilman Snyder moved to pass the tax exoneration as requested by Statewide Tax Recovery. Second – Eister. Unanimous vote.

## **MARKET HOUSE/STROH ALLEY/FARMER'S MARKET**

Councilman Troup stated that no one on council wants to remove the farmer's market from Market St. It is an old tradition and should be kept on Market St. Mr. John Supsic said his family has been with the curb market for 60 years and he does not want to see it moved into Stroh Alley or the Edison Plaza. Mr. Supsic said the biggest help for the curb market and the Market House would be to move the bus stop. Councilman Troup told him that is being planned at this time. The visibility is important for people driving through town. Mr. Supsic said everyone should be trying to make the curb market bigger. Mayor Persing said if someone comes to Mr. Supsic's stand to purchase vegetables maybe they would go in the Market House and purchase a meat product. Councilman Eister explained that this topic came up because the owners of the Market House sent a letter to the mayor and council. Mr. Supsic said he thinks poor advertising is a lot of the problem because a lot of people don't know there is a Market house and a curb market in Sunbury. There are over 400 signatures on a petition to keep the curb market on Market St. that were gathered on one Saturday morning.

## **AUDIENCE COMMENT**

Mr. Bob Snyder read a "Letter to the Editor" that he sent to be published in The Daily Item (see attached). He was told they would not print the letter and he met with Mr. Len Ingrassia and Mr. Gary Grossman to find out why. He was told that his opinions were respected by the editorial staff however they will not print negative comments about the newspaper itself. The editor suggested to Mr. Snyder that perhaps Sunbury could provide something for children to do during the day to help improve the Sunbury's image. Mr. Snyder stated that Sunbury has more to do for children than any other town in the area. Mr. Snyder asked council to consider putting a committee together that could focus on marketing and image improvement for the City. Ms. Lisa Martina said it isn't just about council, The Daily Item does not print much about the functions that do occur that are good in the City. Mayor Persing said that has been discussed through the Comprehensive Plan as well. It is not an issue that was just created it has been happening for a long time.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Specht  
City Clerk