

March 14, 2020, Council Meeting
Minutes

An emergency meeting of Clarion Borough Council was held on March 14, 2020, in the Clarion Borough Offices. President Lapinto called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Councilmembers present were Dr. Sanders Dédé, Mr. Aaron, Mr. Noto, Ms. Logue (via telephone), and President Lapinto. Ms. Roberts arrived at 10:02 a.m. Mr. Garbarino was absent. Chief Peck, Mayor Whitling, Solicitor Marshall, Mr. Sharrar, Mr. Preston, and Secretary LaVan-Preston were also present.

Solicitor Marshall asked the record reflect that it is an emergency meeting as there was no advertisement.

President Lapinto thanked Solicitor Marshall for attending the meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to come up with a plan on how the Borough is going to address this current situation with coronavirus, and input is needed from all Councilmembers. This meeting will not really follow the Robert Rules of Order. In discussion with Mr. Sharrar and Chief Peck yesterday numerous times, President Lapinto called on Mr. Sharrar, who has been dealing with the County to discuss what their plans are.

In discussion with Jeff Smathers, the Director of Public Safety at the County, Mr. Sharrar reported there is one case that has not been confirmed yet in Western Pennsylvania in Washington County. The individual is showing signs but is still in the testing stages. Mr. Sharrar stated the County is not doing anything and are in a holding pattern. The County is waiting to see if there is actually a case within Clarion or a neighboring County. In discussion about what protocol is, Mr. Sharrar was informed it is the Borough's discretion as how Council wishes to handle it on this end. The Borough could operate with a limited staff or close the door to the public but still conduct business in the Borough. That would limit the chances of employees getting anything.

President Lapinto stressed Chief Peck and she have the same priority which is, first of all, the need to protect the Borough employees but also the need to continue to serve the residents. President Lapinto called on Mr. Aaron, as Public Safety Chairman and the Borough's Safety Committee member, for more comments.

Mr. Aaron reported he spent yesterday afternoon at the Borough having discussions with Mr. Sharrar and Chief Peck and then at a meeting with the police officers about some procedures for his/her safety. The Borough is in a unique situation in where this is a shared building. Even though Ms. LaVan-Preston wasn't here yesterday, Mr. Aaron thinks she will agree there is enough work that needs to be done. Also, no one wants to see anyone's paycheck affected at this point. Mr. Aaron feels temporary measures could be done now and then look in the future if something comes down the pike.

Mr. Sharrar added President Trump is trying to come up with some funding to help governments at the local and county level to help if it comes to that point. The Borough is to keep a running tally of any kind of expenditures, whether lost wages or equipment, in case reimbursement is available.

Solicitor Marshall stated Congress did pass this and it will go to Senate next week.

Because of the shared building, Mr. Aaron reported the Police Department is located in the back. The police have to be out and about so extra safety precautions will be taken.

Ms. Roberts arrived at this point.

Mr. Aaron also stated the front of the Borough building could be restricted to public and essential personnel only with the public contacting everyone by telephone or email. Anyone needing to report a police incident at the office can be directed to use the back door.

Mr. Noto inquired what exactly it means to keep the public out of the building and wondered if it's just using common sense precautions for the safety of all.

Mr. Aaron reported the doors will be locked and no one will be able to come in. A sign can be placed on the door to explain that along with information on how to reach personnel.

Mr. Sharrar feels Council may want to waive the parking ticket late fees since the office is not open.

Ms. Roberts agreed that is a good idea.

President Lapinto also agreed and noted if the individual doesn't have the right change, that wouldn't be fair.

For a period of time, Mr. Aaron agrees the ticket will stay at the minimum fine.

Ms. Roberts questioned if the meter enforcement officer will be out working? No one wants him unemployed, but he shouldn't be out in the public either.

Mr. Aaron thinks that the meter enforcement officer would come in on Mondays to collect the money but really not for any other reason.

President Lapinto relayed that he may be able to work in the office or at Public Works with different jobs.

Mr. Noto stated this way he would still be getting paid but just not doing the same job.

Mr. Aaron reported this is not really different than the protocol every year when free parking is permitted for the holiday season.

Mr. Sharrar suggested he could wipe everything down every other day to keep things clean.

Mr. Aaron doesn't feel that is part of the job description, but he probably wouldn't have a problem doing that job.

President Lapinto stressed that Mr. Aaron and she discussed this yesterday and are firmly committed to all the employees and do not want him/her without a paycheck.

Mr. Aaron repeated precautionary measures have to be taken to ensure that none of the employees are exposed to multiple people from the public and also protects the public as well. No one wants to imagine what will happen if Clarion has a confirmed case, especially with the police force.

President Lapinto asked Chief Peck for comments.

After much thought, Chief Peck reported the Borough is in a unique position in that the Police Department provides services to the residents 24-hours a day, 7 days a week but does worry about the officers. Chief Peck recommended that Council do what he/she is discussing now to limit the access to buildings. Secondly, there is a bigger picture here, and no one knows how long this will go on. The longer it goes, the more chance someone could get affected. In discussions with the officers and listening to their concerns, the officers still have services to provide. With that being stated, Chief Peck commented depending on the nature of the call, the officer may take care of the situations in a different way than normal, meaning the individual may get a phone call from the officer rather than a visit to his/her house. However, if there is an emergency, Chief Peck stressed the officers will be there.

If the meter enforcement officer is cleaning, Mr. Noto suggested perhaps the police car, especially the back of the cruiser, could be wiped down as well.

Dr. Sanders Dédé agreed and asked if the officers have gloves that can be worn?

Chief Peck stated yes.

President Lapinto pointed out there might also be an incident where an officer has to bring someone to the station.

Chief Peck agreed that is something that cannot be prevented. At least the Borough has the cage in the kitchen to detain them instead of just sitting in a chair in front of the officer.

President Lapinto inquired how Council would implement this policy?

Solicitor Marshall informed Council it could be passed by resolution and then ratified at the next Council Meeting. It could also be done by the Mayor by proclamation, and then Council would have to approve it within 7-10 days at an open meeting. If the Mayor does it, Solicitor Marshall suggested holding a Special Council Meeting sometime next week that can be advertised and then the decision could be ratified at the April meeting.

Dr. Sanders Dédé inquired if this is to start today then?

Solicitor Marshall stated it can be effective Monday.

Mr. Sharrar asked how long it will be in effect?

President Lapinto reported that's up for discussion.

After much discussion, all Councilmembers feel it would be best until further notice.

Mr. Aaron stated if Council did it for 2 weeks plus 1 day that would be about the time of the Council Meeting.

Chief Peck and Secretary LaVan-Preston stated there is an extra week this month, and the Council Meeting is April 7th.

Solicitor Marshall asked the discussion to include where the meeting will be held as the Borough Office will be closed.

Ms. Roberts pointed out the library is closed as well.

Mr. Noto stated that is upstairs for the actual library.

President Lapinto asked Ms. Logue if she had any questions or comments?

Ms. Logue stated everyone covered everything she was thinking about as well.

Mr. Noto asked what the proclamation would say then. Good ideas have been mentioned, but how do you put that down.

Solicitor Marshall understands it would state there will be no public access to Borough-owned buildings until further notice.

Mr. Noto inquired if the reassignment of duties of the meter enforcement officer needs to be listed?

Everyone agreed it did not. No tickets will be written during this time.

President Lapinto mentioned it should include that the minimum fines for parking tickets will be extended until further notice as well.

With the University students returning from spring break along with high school students returned from a trip to New York City to see a Broadway musical, everyone agreed it may not be stopped from coming to the area but agreed the Borough is trying to reduce the risk factors.

Mr. Aaron also pointed out it's not so much an issue in the Clarion community itself but being in close proximity to Interstate 80 and people getting off at the Clarion exit for gas or whatever. All it takes is for their GPS to direct him/her into the town in error.

Mr. Ron Wilshire, exploreClarion, stated Mr. Smathers, the Public Safety Director, mentioned at the Commissioner's Meeting it would be a good idea to wear gloves whenever you get gas.

President Lapinto discussed this with Mr. Preston as there are three firemen in the room.

Mr. Preston reported the Department responds to calls all the time on I-80 and will continue to do so. Gloves are available and will be worn. The only masks available are for breathing.

Mayor Whiting commented the gloves are in every truck.

Mr. Aaron encouraged it needs to be emphasized to all firemen to take precautions.

As far as Public Works, President Lapinto stated the workers will not just be inside. Normal daily work will continue and potholes can be patched.

Mr. Aaron stressed everyone needs to pay attention to the work that is being done and wash hands often and thoroughly. Contact should not be made at this point and keeping distance from one another will eliminate unnecessary chances.

Chief Peck voiced concern about the police officers providing services for a long period of time without any interruption. One officer doesn't feel well and he has been around the other guys, this is a concern.

Mr. Noto questioned if anyone has mentioned getting test kits for first responders as he/she have to be out and about.

Mr. Sharrar stated not yet and there are limited test kits available.

After much discussion, Solicitor Marshall understands Council wants a resolution that there will be no public access to all Borough-owned buildings until further notice and the additional penalty for parking fines will be waived until this is lifted as well. Nothing about reassigning

employees to different duties needs addressed in the resolution as long as the employee agrees to it.

Chief Peck agreed to contact the meter enforcement officer and discuss this with him.

Solicitor Marshall asked if anything else needs addressed in it?

Mayor Whitling feels this is good and is concerned with the health of the Borough employees and community.

Mr. Preston asked about the park? The only way it could be closed is to shut the gates.

Mr. Aaron reported Little League is shut down until April 6th and doesn't feel that anything else needs restricted. Individuals can use it at his/her discretion. As far as the restrooms, they are not open at this time. The purpose of today is to maintain the Borough and keep all employees healthy.

Ms. Roberts agreed the Department could continue to get the park ready.

President Lapinto noted the park will not be shut down.

Mr. Noto questioned if there is enough protection in place for the police and firemen and asked what else he/she may need?

Chief Peck commented hand sanitizer.

Ms. Roberts understands the Blueprint Committee has suspended it's meeting at the time being and recommended that unnecessary meetings be eliminated at this time to avoid contact. This would go for the Storm Water Authority Meetings as well. Also, Ms. Roberts voiced concern about the next Council Meeting and asked if there are rules in place if a quorum is not possible because individuals are sick.

Solicitor Marshall thinks Council will have to deal with this as it arises. There are provisions in the law that says you are supposed to have an open meeting, but if you don't, then you can ratify the decision at a later open meeting. However, if a meeting is held it has to be open to the public as well. Solicitor Marshall cautioned Council doesn't hold emergency meetings any more than necessary. If Councilmembers are sick and bills and decisions need to be made, then it will have to be dealt with as it comes up. As long as a quorum is present, Solicitor Marshall also pointed out other members may participate by telephone if he/she wants. In emergency situations, you are allowed to modify that and ratify it at a later time. However, you do not want to do it consistently, it needs to be an actual emergency.

Mr. Noto asked if this would qualify as an emergency meeting?

Solicitor Marshall believes it does. As mentioned earlier, the Mayor could have taken the action to close down the public buildings for a period of time, but then Council would have had to hold a meeting either 7-10 days after that to approve and extend that. Council has the right to act on an emergency basis to protect the health and safety of the Borough employees and the public, which can be done by resolution. All Council is doing is restricting public access to all Borough-owned buildings until further notice starting Monday and the only other provision would be that the additional parking fines or penalties for late payment would be waived until sometime in the future. Solicitor Marshall stated another thing to consider is to implement special rules for Borough meetings that specify who specifically needs to attend, public being one of them; and if a bigger facility is necessary in order to hold the meeting, it could be found. In this case, even though the meeting was not advertised, Councilmembers notified the press to attend.

Mr. Aaron agreed that personnel could be cut down to only people that are necessary for more comments other than what is provided in the reports.

Solicitor Marshall recommended Council should consider between now and the next regular Council Meeting who is essential? Also, could he/she participate by telephone?

Ms. Roberts agreed Mr. Sharrar, Mr. Preston, Mr. Colosimo, and Ms. Schwabenbauer could potentially not have to attend the meeting. The Chairman of each Committee should be able to relay to the rest of the Councilmembers what is necessary to know.

President Lapinto inquired where the meeting will be held if the library is closed?

Since the Borough owns the building, Mr. Noto feels the meeting room could still be used. The area closed to the public is the main library on the top floor. Individuals can attend, if he/she wish, but be strategically placed to avoid contact.

President Lapinto stated Council is being pro-active.

Mr. Rodney Sherman, [The Clarion News](#), stated the State Library Association closed the library to all the public. However, being on the Board at Knox, the building can still be held for meetings just not the library part itself.

President Lapinto asked the press if they had any questions?

Mr. Wilshire read where some places are misting their offices and wondered if that would be a consideration for the police section of the building?

Mr. Noto reported the school district does have a sprayer that is used for the classrooms, halls, and all areas of the school that goes everywhere to clean it and recommends the Borough may want to contact the school to use at the facilities.

Mr. Sherman did not have any questions.

Chief Peck asked both to provide their contact information to him and if any kind of press release goes out, it will be forwarded to them.

Mr. Aaron suggested something will be put on the Borough's website as well.

If Council is ready to enact the resolution, Solicitor Marshall stated it is needed in the form of a motion with a second and then voted on.

On a motion by Dr. Sanders Dédé with a second by Mr. Aaron that Borough Council approves a resolution regarding safety issues for the employees and community as it relates to the coronavirus as discussed at this Emergency Council Meeting. The motion carried with a vote of six yea.

President Lapinto asked for any other questions or discussion at this point?

Ms. Logue understands that the student teachers at the school did a health check before he/she left the school and another one will be required before he/she is permitted back in the school and asked Mr. Noto if that was done for the teachers as well now that they are off for 2 weeks?

Mr. Noto is not aware of that and did not have a health check.

Ms. Logue isn't sure if this is something that could be offered to the Borough employees as far as taking his/her temperature and listening to his/her lungs just as a precaution. From what everyone is saying, temperature is one of the first signs.

Ms. Roberts thinks the reason the student teachers were doing this is, because the superintendent sent out a notice that the district was eliminating outside people from coming into the school. This was a way of allowing them back into the school.

President Lapinto feels this is a good idea but doesn't know who the Borough would contact.

Mr. Aaron feels if someone has a fever, he/she should stay home. If he/she develops one while at work, he/she needs to go home. All employees need encouraged to follow the guidelines on how to operate and monitor this crisis.

If you don't feel good, President Lapinto stressed stay home.

Chief Peck pointed out the police officers are different than the other employees as they provide services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. If a couple guys are not feeling well, then the issue with overtime comes up. Some guys may have to stay longer than their normal shift, and that is another struggle that may come up. Chief Peck stated this is a team

effort and feels if officers start to call off there will not be an issue if he steps up and fills a gap if need be that would normally require overtime.

President Lapinto repeated the main thing is to protect the employees and still maintain the services to the Borough residents. President Lapinto asked for any other questions.

Dr. Sanders Dédé asked when the resolution will be done?

Solicitor Marshall reported it will be ready for signatures Monday morning and feels it can be ratified at the regular meeting.

Since Council approved this until further notice, Mr. Aaron asked what happens if the State Library Association opens the library up in the 2-week timeframe that the schools are on now? If Council waits to ratify this at the next meeting, how will this be handled?

Solicitor Marshall stated if Council wishes to stop it, then another meeting will need held but doesn't feel that would be classified as emergency. It should be done by advertising a Special Council Meeting.

Mr. Aaron pointed out the reason is if the library opens in 2 weeks, the resolution stated all Borough-owned buildings.

Solicitor Marshall asked Council if he/she would want to amend the resolution to state that the library will be opened in accordance with the State Library Association? If so, someone will need to make a motion to amend it with a second, and then voted on.

On a motion by Mr. Aaron with a second by Dr. Sanders Dédé, amending the resolution to include that the library will be opened in accordance with the State Library Association, was carried with a vote of six yea.

Ms. Roberts verified this resolution will not affect the fire hall.

Mr. Preston commented the fire hall is closed to the public already.

On a motion by Mr. Noto with a second by Mr. Aaron, the meeting was adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

Linda LaVan-Preston, Borough Secretary