



Luzerne County Council
September 10, 2019
Council Meeting Room
Luzerne County Courthouse
200 N. River Street
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701

Minutes
September 10, 2019 Voting Session

Call to Order

The Luzerne County Council convened for a Voting Session in the Council Meeting Room of the Luzerne County Courthouse on Tuesday, September 10, 2019, at 6:01 PM. The meeting was called to order by Chair Tim McGinley.

Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence

Roll Call

Present

Patrick M. Bilbow
Harry Haas
Linda McClosky Houck
Tim McGinley
Rick Morelli (via phone)
Chris Perry
Sheila Saidman, Esq.
Robert Schnee
Stephen A. Urban
Matthew Vough
Jane Walsh Waitkus

Also Present

C. David Pedri, Esq., County Manager
Shannon Crake-Lapsansky, Assistant County Solicitor
Sharon Lawrence, Clerk of Council

Recognitions/Ceremonial Proclamations

Mr. McGinley noted that prior to the Voting Session, a ceremony was held in the Rotunda for the Greater Pittston Area 9-10 All Stars Baseball Team, the Greater Pittston Area 11-12 All Stars Baseball Team and the Pittston Area Girls Little League Softball Team.

Additions to/Deletions from Voting Session Agenda

None

Adoption of Voting Session Agenda

Motion to Adopt: Ms. Waitkus

Second: Ms. Saidman

Vote:

Eleven (11) Ayes – Unanimous

The Voting Session Agenda is adopted (11-0)

Public Comment on Voting Session Agenda Items

Walter Griffith (Trucksville) commented on Item 1, the KOZ extension. Mr. Griffith feels that KOZ's are beneficial to some degree but it has gotten out of hand and the taxpayers are paying the price. He would like to see the taxpayers get a break instead of large corporations. Mr. Griffith feels that corporations will still come even if they do not receive a KOZ and that it should not be approved.

Ed Gustitus (Kingston) commented on the KOZ extension. Mr. Gustitus stated he did not have a problem with Mericle but he did have a problem with the Chamber of Commerce making it a condition of the sale and then passing it through to Mericle and then to the future tenant. He also mentioned another one coming up and Mr. McGinley reminded Mr. Gustitus public comment was for agenda items only and that the "other one" was not on the agenda.

Sam Troy (Wilkes-Barre) stated he was opposed to the KOZ extension and the way the resolution was worded.

Joe McCabe (Exeter) commented on the KOZ extension. He would like to know why the Lobbyist Group that was hired by the County doesn't go out and get grants to get people jobs and out on the floor instead of approving the KOZ.

Brian Shiner (Kingston) commented on the resolution supporting HB 1082 and the KOZ extension. Mr. Shiner stated the HB 1082 resolution was not discussed in a prior work session as per policies and procedure. He understands the ramifications of the KOZ but the small businessman does not get this type of a break. Mr. Shiner feels the extension should not be for another 10 years, it is not fair to the small businessman or taxpayers.

Jason Carr (Saylorsburg) commented on the KOZ extension. He stated he sent a letter over the weekend and hopes it was read. Mr. Carr spoke about the affect a KOZ has on the taxpayers, the working poor and the poverty level. He asked Council to delay their vote, reconvene and reconsider. Mr. Carr feels that it should only be for 5 years and would like to hear from the Chamber and Mr. Mericle as to why they need 10 years.

Wico van Genderen, President/Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber, Robert Mericle, President/CEO, Brian McManus and Lew Sebia, Chief Operating Officer of Mericle

Mr. van Genderen introduced himself, Mr. Mericle, Mr. McManus and Mr. Sebia. He stated they came before Council two weeks prior to seek approval of the resolution to extend the KOZ on the Poseidon property owned by their Industrial Fund and earmarked to be sold to Mr. Mericle. They were present to highlight the financial impact of their request and to make themselves available to answer any additional questions Council may have prior to the vote. Mr. van Genderen provided Council with a Financial Impact Briefing Sheet and reviewed the information with Council. Mr. Mericle and Mr. Sebia provided commentary. Discussion followed and questions from Council were answered.

Old Business

None

New Business

Motion to adopt minutes of the August 27, 2019 Voting Meeting

Motion by: Mr. Schnee

Second: Mr. Vough

Vote:

Ten (10) Ayes by Mr. Bilbow, Mr. Haas, Ms. Houck, Mr. McGinley, Mr. Morelli, Mr. Perry, Ms. Saidman, Mr. Schnee, Mr. Vough and Ms. Waitkus

One (1) Nay by Mr. Stephen A. Urban

Motion Passed (10-1)

The August 27, 2019 Voting Meeting Minutes are Adopted

1. Motion to adopt resolution extending the term of exemptions, deductions, abatements and credits for real property, earned income tax, net profits, mercantile, and business privilege taxes within a specific geographic area in Wright Township, Luzerne County designated as a Keystone Opportunity Zone ("KOZ"), Keystone Opportunity Expansion Zone ("KOEZ") or Keystone Opportunity Improvement Zone ("KOIZ") in order to foster economic opportunities, stimulate industrial, commercial, and residential improvements and prevent physical and infrastructure deterioration within areas of Luzerne County, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, upon certain terms and conditions

Motion by: Mr. Schnee

Second: Mr. Vough

Roll Call Vote:

Eight (8) Yes by Mr. Bilbow, Mr. McGinley, Mr. Morelli, Mr. Perry, Ms. Saidman, Mr. Schnee, Mr. Vough and Ms. Waitkus

Three (3) No by Mr. Haas, Ms. Houck and Mr. Stephen A. Urban

Motion Passed (8-3)

Resolution is Adopted

2. Motion to adopt resolution supporting the Jake Schwab Workers' Safety Bill: HB 1082

Motion by: Mr. Bilbow

Second: Ms. Waitkus

Roll Call Vote:

Eleven (11) Yes – Unanimous

Motion Passed (11-0)

Resolution is Adopted

Public Comment

Joe McCabe (Exeter) asked about the multiple inspections of the Water Street Bridge. Mr. McCabe wanted to know what was going on with the bridge and if there was a safety hazard. Mr. Plesh responded that the inspections were a routine in depth inspection of the bars and pins.

Ed Gustitus (Kingston) commented on the KOZ extension and the Chamber of Commerce. He also wanted to know how many Authorities are in the County and feels they are not being audited or watched.

Walter Griffith (Trucksville) commented on the KOZ extension, Bob Mericle and the Chamber. Mr. Griffith spoke about the 35M dollar debt increase. He feels that if the Charter didn't mandate payment of the Debt Service it would probably not get paid.

Brian Shiner (Kingston) spoke about a local company that recently expanded and did it without asking for Council for a tax break. Mr. Shiner noted that the event in the Rotunda was not listed on the County Calendar and should have been. He would like to see all events taking place in the Courthouse listed.

Anthony Stanziola (Freeland) stated the last time he was at a Council Meeting he spoke with a Council Member after the meeting regarding the \$5.00 Vehicle Registration Fee. As a result of that conversation he made the suggestion to charge the Bar Association rent to generate income. If they come up with an excuse saying they do not have to pay it, then he wants to use the same excuse to not pay the \$5.00 Vehicle Registration Fee. Mr. Stanziola questioned who is allowed to speak at the podium. He said that in Freeland Borough if they do not like what you have to say then you are censored and not allowed to speak. He also commented on violence and bloodshed. Mr. McGinley responded and stated that Council has never stopped anyone from coming to the podium even if they were not a Luzerne County resident. He used the gentleman from Saylorsburg who spoke earlier in the evening as an example. Mr. McGinley advised Mr. Stanziola he will need to speak with Freeland regarding any issues he is having with them.

Martin Dartoe (Wilkes-Barre) felt the approval of the KOZ extension was an irrational decision.

Motion to Adjourn: Ms. Waitkus

Second: Mr. Stephen A. Urban

Vote:

Eleven (11) Ayes - Unanimous

Meeting Adjourned at 7:34 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Sharon Lawrence

Clerk of Council

* Audio of this meeting can be found in its entirety on the County Council webpage <http://www.luzernecounty.org/county/luzerne-county-council> or by contacting the Office of the Clerk of Council at (570) 825-1634 or via email to sharon.lawrence@luzernecounty.org