

**Borough of Palmyra**  
**Council Caucus Meeting Minutes**  
**Monday May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

The Regular Council Meeting of the Borough Council of the Borough of Palmyra was called to order by Mayor Tait at 6:40 PM

**ROLL CALL**

At the call of the roll:

PRESENT: Brandon Allmond, Laura Cloud, Farrah Jenkins, Michelle McCann, Bernadette Russell, President Timothy Howard, Mayor Gina Ragomo Tait

The pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS STATEMENT**

Mayor Tait read the following into the record:

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., and in consideration of Executive Order No. 103, issued by Governor Murphy on March 9, 2020, declaring a State of Emergency and a Public Health Emergency in the State of New Jersey, the Borough of Palmyra does hereby notify the public that to protect the health, safety and welfare of our citizens while ensuring the continued functioning of government, the meeting of the Mayor and Council will be a Virtual Council Meeting. Members of the public are invited to “attend” the Virtual Council Meeting but all members of the public participating in the meeting may be muted and their video image disabled. Notice of this meeting was published in the Burlington County Times on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and notification was sent to the Burlington County Times on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020. Notice was posted on the Municipal Door, Official Bulletin Board and the Borough of Palmyra Website and electronic signs on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and notice was given to all Council Members.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mayor Tait requested a motion for approval of the, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Regular Council Meeting Minutes. Mrs. Russell made a motion to approve the minutes from the, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Regular Council Meeting. President Howard second the motion.

**At the call of the roll the vote was:**

**INFAVOR: Mr. Allmond, Dr. Cloud, Mrs. Jenkins, Mrs. McCann, Mrs. Russell, President Howard**

**AGAINST: None**

**Motion Carried**

## CORRESPONDENCE

Municipal Clerk, Ms. Jackson acknowledged the following correspondence received:

Thank-You Note – The Byrem Family

Thank-You card- Palmyra Seniors

Letter – Gary Gubbei, Director Public Safety Burlington County Board of Chosen Freeholders

Letter – Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, Commissioner State of New Jersey DOT

Letter- Dana M. Burley, Clerk of NJ General Assembly

Notification – Thomas Coleman, III Esquire, Borough of Riverton Solicitor

Retirement Letter- Chief Scott Pearlman

Retirement Letter- Gerri Bright

Resignation Letter- Cindy Palmer

Mayor Tait requested a motion to accept the Retirement letters from Chief Scott Pearlman and Police Secretary Gerri Bright. President Howard made a motion to accept the letters received. Mrs. Russell second the motion.

**At the call of the roll:**

**INFAVOR: Mr. Allmond, Dr. Cloud, Mrs. Jenkins, Mrs. McCann, Mrs. Russell, President Howard**

**AGAINST: None**

**Motion Carried.**

Mayor Tait requested a motion to accept the Resignation letter from Crossing Guard Cindy Palmer. Mrs. Russell made a motion to accept the letters received. President Howard second the motion.

**At the call of the roll:**

**INFAVOR: Mr. Allmond, Dr. Cloud, Mrs. Jenkins, Mrs. McCann, Mrs. Russell, President Howard**

**AGAINST: None**

**Motion Carried.**

## PROCLAMATION

Mayor Tait then read the following Arbor Day Proclamation:

### *Arbor Day Proclamation 2020*

**Whereas**, in 1872, J. Sterling Morton proposed to the Nebraska Board of Agriculture that a special day be set aside for the planting of trees, and

**Whereas**, this holiday, called Arbor Day, was first observed with the planting of more than a million trees in Nebraska, and

**Whereas**, Arbor Day is now observed throughout the nation and the world, and

**Whereas**, trees can reduce the erosion of our precious topsoil by wind and water, cut heating and cooling costs, moderate the temperature, clean the air, produce life-giving oxygen, and provide habitat for wildlife, and

**Whereas**, trees are a renewable resource giving us paper, wood for our homes, fuel for our fires and countless other wood products, and

**Whereas**, trees in our city increase property values, enhance the economic vitality of business areas, and beautify our community, and

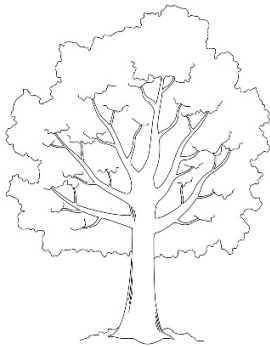
**Whereas**, trees, wherever they are planted, are a source of joy and spiritual renewal.

**Whereas**, the Borough of Palmyra has been recognized as a Tree City USA by the National Arbor Day Foundation and desires to continue its tree-planting practices

**Now, Therefore**, I Gina Ragomo Tait, Mayor of the Borough of Palmyra, urge all citizens to celebrate Arbor Day and to support efforts to protect our trees and woodlands, and

**Further**, I urge all citizens to plant trees to gladden the heart and promote the well-being of this and future generations.

Dated this 4th day of May 2020



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Mrs. Russell commented many trees were planted this month however due to the corona virus pandemic the usual school presentation was postponed until next year when they will be planting two trees.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

We requested those participants wishing to have or make a Public comment, email their questions or comments in advance to Municipal Clerk Rita Jackson at [djackson@boroughofpalmyra.com](mailto:djackson@boroughofpalmyra.com). The opportunity to submit comments prior to meeting expired at 12:00 PM on Monday May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020. All comments will become part of the record and included with the Meeting Minutes.

Mayor Tait asked for a motion to open the Public Portion. Mrs. Russell made a motion to open the public portion for comments. President Howard second the motion.

**All members present voted in favor of the motion. Motion Carried**

Municipal Clerk Doretha Jackson read the following comments submitted into the record:

**Subject: Tree removal in front of 319 W. Broad Street**

To whom it may concern:

We will like to propose the tree removal in front of our property 319 W Broad street. We have noticed for the past three years, the large tree trunk is an obstruction for us pulling out of our driveway. The tree also block the vehicles from opening the passenger side door hence falling branches have caused road hazards for vehicles moving on Broad street. In addition to the road hazard due to the falling branches, it also caused potential hazard for vehicles park in that area damaged due to falling branches. Those parked vehicles may belong to customers from the local soup kitchen restaurant and our visitors. Please kindly review the attached pictures from the storm causing hazard due to the tree.

Your considerations will be greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

David and WenChen Garrison

I don't believe this is a sound solution by which you are to put a bandaid over. Why do we have to be so rash to look at raising taxes on an already economically difficult time? You are asking everyone to pitch in, but that little bit can make or break some families. Why are we looking from within to find funding? Are there no options on the table to pull resources from the state? Why can't we dig into our funds we have now? Why not weather the storm and just establish restricted funds for economic shortcomings like this for the future to draw from instead of raising the taxes?

Why is it we are not reinvesting the money we have on hand for projects like the Riverline and investing in munibonds to earn interest?

While we are talking about savings, For the areas along the river line we should be planting Zoysia, some rose bushes, and maybe some cherry blossoms. These are all hearty items that require very low maintenance. Additionally, why can't we get NJ Transit to pay for our landscaping around the river line or at least Burlington County? If they aren't why can't we open up this topic for them to handle?

What I would like to see are some trends. What is the move-in/move out rate for homeowners in palmyra or 2, 5, 10 years? What is the proportion of homeowners vs renters over 1, 3, 5 years? I think reviewing these items will help you make more financially stable decisions. I just don't view this as a good resolution. I'm not trying to bring up sore subjects but let's be smart about this.

We don't want to make rash decisions. After al look to this example as a shortcoming for Palmyra estimations. (<https://www.burlingtoncountytimes.com/news/20190524/palmyra-school-tax-bill-will-increase-not-decrease-as-indicated-by-administrators>)

I just think this is a temporary problem and you want to impact Palmyra permanently and that's not going to look good for anyone.

[https://issuu.com/newspapermediagroup8/docs/palmyra\\_sun\\_current\\_issue](https://issuu.com/newspapermediagroup8/docs/palmyra_sun_current_issue)

**Nick Papaioannou**

Cinnaminson Avenue

No other comments from the attendees, President Howard asked Mr. Gural to explain/ recap the budget process, the need to collect both the school taxes and county taxes, and the resulting need to raise taxes.

Mr. Gural indicated a detailed explanation describing how the process works is on the website, he noted we only increased our appropriations in the 2020 budget by \$10,990.00 over the 2019 budget. Mr. Gural explained of the \$79.89 tax increase anticipated only \$3.51 is due to new spending the remaining is due to the anticipated \$157,000.00 in loss revenue, the school district tax increase of \$380,000.00 and the anticipated county tax increase. He explained the various revenue source losses anticipated this year and the need in the budget calculation for reserves for uncollected taxes. Mr. Gural noted we are using \$1,314,800.00 from surplus in the 2020 budget.

**Mr. Papaioannou – Cinnaminson Avenue** – Mr. Papaioannou asked of our short comings for uncollected taxes, can you give him an amount that we are short and an amount of what he needs to cover for his neighbor in uncollected taxes. Mr. Gural indicated all the information you are asking for is on the website; Mr. Gural explained uncollected taxes noting the reserve for uncollected taxes is a state requirement. Mr. Gural also noted the amount included in the 2020 budget for uncollected taxes is \$682,025.45. Dr. Cloud noted that in order for him to make the calculation he needs to know how many properties in Palmyra are paying taxes. Mr. Gural indicated there are 3300 line items. Mr. Gural indicated there have also been inquiries from residents regarding the tax rate, asking why our tax rate is what it is versus other municipalities. Mr. Gural stated it's important to note that you really can't compare municipality tax rates as there are many variables in different communities. Mr. Gural explained the differences.

No one else from the public wishing to be heard, Mayor Tait asked for a motion to close the Public Portion. Mrs. Russell made a motion to close the public portion, President Howard second the motion.

**All members present voted in favor of the motion. Motion Carried**

## RESOLUTIONS

Resolution **2020-122** to Resolution **2020-123** will be enacted as a single motion, if any resolution needs additional discussion it will be removed from the consent agenda and voted on separately.

Mayor Tait asked if any resolutions needed to be removed. None noted. Mayor Tait read Resolutions 2020-122 thru 2020-123 and requested a motion for approval.

**Resolution 2020-122**, Resolution Authorizing a Contract to ERI for the 2020 Road Improvement Program per their Proposal dated April 22, 2020 in the amount not-to-exceed \$97,000.00.

**Resolution 2020-123**, Resolution Extending the Grace Period for 2020 Second Quarter Property Tax Payments.

Mrs. Russell made a motion to approve Resolutions 2020-100 thru 2020-120. President Howard seconded the motion.

**At the call of the roll, the vote was:**

**INFAVOR: Mr. Allmond, Dr. Cloud, Mrs. Jenkins, Mrs. McCann, Mrs. Russell, President Howard**

**AGAINST: None**

**Motion Carried, Resolution 2020-122 thru 2020-123 were approved.**

## **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

Mr. Gural indicated we will have an Ordinance for introduction at the second meeting in May for adoption in June, of a policy which limits the vacation time payout upon retirement for Borough employees. It should become effect 20 days after adoption making it effective sometime in July. Mr. Gural indicated the current recommendation is \$15,000.00 which coincides with the sick time retirement payout currently in our employee policy and procedures manual. Mr. Rosenberg inquired if it only applied to non-uniform employees. Mr. Gural indicated it will apply to non-uniform employees and also the Chief of Police and Lieutenant as they are not covered by the CBA of the police department.

Mr. Gural stated the Rt. 73 South Redevelopment Project has been progressing. Mr. Gural indicated the financial partner of the redeveloper has a just under one-million-dollar lien on the Fillit property; which was due to be foreclosed on by sheriff sale on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Mr. Gural noted with the current restrictions in our court systems due to the corona virus pandemic, that has not taken place but when the courts open again that should be moving forward. Mr. Gural noted the redeveloper will then own the single largest property in the redevelopment area. Mr. Gural noted the soil boring project has been completed on the Fillit property. Mr. Gural indicated the redeveloper is continuing to work on an agreement with National Amusements for acquisition of their property. Mr. Gural indicated we are also waiting for release of the HDSRF funding. Mr. Rosenberg asked if there had been any resolution of the compaction study as to whether a redeveloper can built on the site without extra ordinary means. Mr. Gural indicated they have completed the geo-technical work and they are confident that dynamic compaction will work on that property which facilitates larger scale construction. Dr. Cloud inquired as to the status of the DEP Land use Wetland permit. Mr. Gural indicated they are not going to require us to request an additional delineation but will move forward as if the old one was in effect, noting no additional damage to the land but requiring our redeveloper to restore them. Dr. Cloud indicated she had concerns about the proposal to mitigate for wetlands as appose to impact on the wetlands noting she didn't feel it has been addressed. Mr. Gural indicated there has been no discussion it that regard.

Mr. Rosenberg indicated a hearing has been scheduled before the commissioners for superior court to determine the value of the Highland Avenue property. He noted once the value has been determined

the redeveloper would have to pay that value. Mr. Rosenberg indicated the hearing has been scheduled for May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

#### **ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT**

Mr. Gural indicated due dates for taxes are determined by the statues. Mr. Gural indicated the Governor signed an executive order extending the grace period for 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter taxes to June 1, 2020, which we adopted a resolution earlier this evening to also adopt. Mr. Gural noted although the grace period had been extended for our residents; the taxes to the county will still have to be paid on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 whether collected or not. Mr. Gural stated an extension was requested to allow that payment to be made on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 instead of May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 but there had been no response from the county regarding doing so. Mr. Gural indicate the potential reduction in interest for 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Taxes will need to be discussed, however he does not recommend we do so as many financial institutions take advantage of it.

#### **MAYOR AND COUNCIL COMMENTS**

**Mrs. Russell** had no comment.

**Mrs. McCann** indicated the Governor closed the schools today until June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Mrs. McCann indicated she hopes everyone is sticking together and getting thru it. She noted she was especially sad for the 2020 Class seniors and hope everyone would be supportive of them thru this difficult time.

**Dr. Cloud** indicated there are also cases of corona virus which have not been confirmed so everyone needs to stay home and practice social distancing. Dr. Cloud asked how many seniors are in the graduating class. Mayor Tait indicated 68.

**Mrs. Jenkins** indicated additional thought needs to be given to extending the grace period for third quarter tax payment.

**Mr. Allmond** had no comment.

**President Howard** indicated he too is concerned about the 2020 Senior Class and hoped everyone would be supportive of them and show them some love. He noted he had reached out to the school to get some understanding as to how they intended to handle scholarships for graduating seniors. President Howard noted Virtua will be holding another food pantry tomorrow at 12:30 in front of the community center for families with school aged children.

**Mayor Tait** indicated she spoke with Mr. McBride regarding the food pantry for the families of school aged children. He indicated he would like to know if any other opportunities arise to help those families and would help disburse information if need be. Mayor Tait also noted the school is honoring to the senior class of 2020 by turning the lights on in the stadium for 20 minutes at 8:20 (military time 20:20). Mayor Tait indicated they do not want anyone to come to the stadium just the honk horns bang pots from their homes at that time. Mayor Tait asked everyone to complete the 2020 Census. Mayor Tait indicated that the Borough currently has 29 confirmed cases of the corona virus and urged

everyone to stay home and practice social distancing. Mayor Tait indicated that many residents of Palmyra are hurting and in need; she noted reach out to her or the Borough that there might be something we can't directly help with, but we can direct you to resources to help with various situations.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Tait asked for a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Russell made a motion to adjourn the meeting. President Howard second the motion.

**All voted in favor of the motion. Motion Carried**

Meeting adjourned at 7:48 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Doretha R Jackson, RMC  
Municipal Clerk