

**THE CITY OF SHAMOKIN COUNCIL MEETING**  
**Tuesday, December 3, 2024**  
**6:00 PM**  
**Special Council Meeting**

**CALL TO ORDER:**

**PLEDGE TO FLAG:**

**PRAYER:**

**ROLL CALL:**

**PRESENTATIONS:**

**BIDS:**

**CORRESPONDENCE:**

**CITIZENS COMMENTS** (contingent upon business listed on the agenda):

**MINUTES:**

**BILLS:**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

- 1. Request a motion to adopt the first reading of the proposed 2025 Budget, as proposed by the City Administrator.*

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

**BOARDS AND COMMITTEES:**

**SOLICITORS REPORT:**

**CITIZENS' COMMENTS:**

**ADJOURNMENT:**     There being no further business, adjourn the meeting.

**THE CITY OF SHAMOKIN COUNCIL MEETING**  
Tuesday, December 3, 2024  
6:00 PM

**CALL TO ORDER:**

**PLEDGE TO FLAG:**

**PRAYER:**

**ROLL CALL:** Duganitz, McLaughlin, Moyer, Kehler, Ulrich  
Absent: None

**PRESENTATIONS:**

**BIDS:**

**CORRESPONDENCE:**

**CITIZENS' COMMENTS** (contingent upon business listed on the agenda):

Joe Leschinskie asked about the \$800,000 surplus he believes was mentioned by Andrew Sheaf at the meeting in which the City exited Act 47. He also asked whether the budget includes code officers. The City Administrator replied that the budget includes the code officers. Councilman Duganitz added that the City is exploring possible code officer funding through CDBG.

Mr. Leschinskie asked whether the City is seeking to keep the elevated property taxes again this year. He stated that according to the newspaper, one mill equals approximately \$23,000, amounting to a total of \$115,000 for the additional five mills. He asked whether the extra five mills are necessary to balance the budget and the City Administrator replied that it is necessary. The Treasurer added that the City will no longer be collecting the 1.5% EIT, but Mr. Leschinskie stated he believes the loan makes up for that. The Deputy Administrator clarified that the City is not ending this year with an \$800,000 surplus, stating that the figure referenced by Andrew Sheaf was not related to the budget, which does not come close to that amount. Mr. Leschinskie stated that he realizes the City did not put out that amount, but questions the implication of the City being in a favorable position. He commented that he believes there is citation revenue going uncollected, particularly in the case of sweeper violations. The City Administrator replied that he has heard the same complaint regarding the sweepers and that the issue will be addressed. Mr. Leschinskie also referenced local police officers working with police in other municipalities or transferring to other departments.

The City Administrator remarked that many people left due to only receiving 1% increases during Act 47, and employees had no choice but to accept it or find other employment. He stated that this will be changing going forward, but that 2025 will be a difficult year. If Home Rule is not approved next year, it may be necessary to reenter Act 47. However, the City's situation has improved greatly compared to before Act 47, ending with a surplus every year. Controller Kinder agreed that the City's administration walked into hundreds of thousands worth of bills just prior to the decision to enter Act 47, and could not get a tax revenue anticipation note.

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Mr. Leschinskie added that he agrees with a recent letter by Vinny Clausi, and feels that the impact of such proposed changes as the county reassessment, additional county taxes, and Home Rule may be detrimental to the citizens who already have limited resources. He added that he believes there is money being left on the table. The Controller and Treasurer agreed that there will be negative consequences if Home Rule is not passed next year.

**MINUTES:**

**BILLS:**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

On behalf of her department, Councilwoman Moyer thanked the City's administration, especially Deputy Administrator Val Mountjoy, City Administrator Slaby, and the administrative secretary, for their efforts and support in preparing a transparent budget that meets standards. She also thanked the Act 47 team, the Controller and Treasurer, and all those who participated and attended meetings.

*MOTION BY: Ulrich to adopt the first reading of the proposed 2025 Budget, as proposed by the City Administrator.*

Second by: Moyer

Councilman Duganitz asked what is the City's overall savings compared to last year, in light of various cuts to the budget. The Deputy Administrator referred the councilman to the first page which shows the total surplus for each fund versus last year. She added that some items have increased while others have decreased, which is shown on a line-by-line basis, while the first page summarizes each of the City's funds. Councilman Duganitz stated that he believes there are funds still in the Recreation account and asked whether that is transferred over. The Deputy Administrator replied that it stays in the account and does not come off the budget, which is solely a forecast for next year and does include any 2024 bank account balances. The City Administrator thanked Councilman Duganitz for coming in last month to discuss the pool budget and expressed his appreciation for the councilman's input, as well as that of the pool supervisor.

Councilman McLaughlin asked whether the additional five mills are included in the tentative budget, and if there is a "plan B" in the event the petition is rejected by the court. Council replied that the additional mills are included in the budget. The City Administrator added that the additional tax has always been approved in prior years. He believes the reason for this is that the judge has always felt it would not be in the citizens' best interest to cut critical services such as the police department, which would be necessary if the additional tax was not approved. Therefore, the tax has been approved for the past several years. Councilwoman Moyer commented that she would not characterize it as a "plan B" but that cuts would be necessary to balance the budget.

Councilman McLaughlin stated that this is his first experience with the budget process and that he is uncomfortable with several aspects of the process. He asked what changes can be made to the tentative budget before the end of the year if there are questions and concerns, referencing fire department, code and parking enforcement items. The Treasurer remarked that the budget must be public for a certain period of time. The Solicitor added that the budget must be balanced and any increases will have to be taken from another part of the budget.

Councilman McLaughlin commented that he was not involved in the budget meetings and was never invited. The City Administrator clarified that an invitation was recently extended for Councilman McLaughlin to view the budget in-person. Councilman McLaughlin replied that he was invited on Tuesday and could not attend due to running his business. Councilwoman Moyer remarked that it would be a grave oversight if in fact the Councilman was never invited to any meetings. Councilman Duganitz added that he was invited for his own department budget meeting to review the pool expenses. Councilman McLaughlin commented that he heard about the budget meetings via Kevin from the Street Department. Councilwoman Moyer suggested that McLaughlin could have contacted her with any questions about the budgeting scheduling process, but McLaughlin said he did not know how the process works and that this happened within the past thirty days. He added that he is not directing blame at anyone, but believes the budget should be made available sooner. The Mayor stated that he believes everyone had the opportunity to review the budget. Councilman Kehler confirmed he was offered an opportunity to go over the budget. Councilwoman Moyer commented that she would have assumed Councilman McLaughlin would have reached out to her if he felt he had been overlooked, as they talk often and he has never hesitated to ask questions. Councilman McLaughlin stated that he did not realize how the process works and heard about the special meeting in the newspaper, while Councilman Duganitz stated he was informed about his own budget meeting by a staff member. Councilwoman Moyer apologized if in fact Councilman McLaughlin was overlooked, but stated she wished he had asked her.

The Controller added that this is the same process that has been used since the City entered Act 47 as well as prior to that. Department heads are invited to review their portions of the budget separately in what are known as budget hearings or meetings. Councilman McLaughlin remarked that he believes what we have been doing for fifteen years does not work, and Councilman Duganitz added that some council members are new and unfamiliar with the process. The Controller added that we did not always have the organized budget process that we have now. The Treasurer and the Controller commented that the budget can be amended next year. Councilman McLaughlin acknowledged that the City Administrator and Deputy Administrator answered approximately twenty of his questions on the budget but that he now has several more questions he needs answered before he can vote for a permanent budget. He added that he can certainly vote for a tentative budget. The Treasurer stated she believes we do not have time to change the budget. The City Administrator stated that Councilman McLaughlin's additional questions will be answered with the same service as the original twenty-seven questions. Councilman McLaughlin stated he never saw the entire budget, especially the year-to-date figures. Councilwoman Moyer replied that those who attended the meetings did see the year-to-date figures, and the Controller added that the budget is created using year-to-date figures. Councilman McLaughlin stated he has those figures for his own department, but not for other departments.

ROLL CALL: Ayes: Duganitz, Moyer, Kehler, Ulrich  
 Nays: McLaughlin  
 Absent: None

Councilman Duganitz asked whether McLaughlin would be providing his questions to the City Administrator. Councilman McLaughlin replied that he has them at this time and can make a copy.

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

#### **BOARDS AND COMMITTEES:**

**SOLICITOR'S REPORT:**

**CITIZENS' COMMENTS:**

Joseph Leschinskie defended Councilman McLaughlin's stance on the budget, stating that he believes it is the responsibility of the person holding the budget meetings to inform the department heads. He stated he does not believe it should be a responsibility of the new person. Councilwoman Moyer commented that there should be an official notification. Mr. Leschinskie referenced past council members who felt they did not have an opportunity to view the budget, and the City Administrator stated that he defends the employees who were involved in the budget process at that time.

The Deputy Administrator stated she believes everyone should be notified and that efforts were made to notify everyone. She added that there are many newcomers to the City, including herself, and that preparing the budget within deadlines is an extremely time-consuming process which may have resulted in some oversights. She stated that in the future she would like to have everyone in for meetings somewhat sooner, but believes best efforts were made under the circumstances. In Councilman McLaughlin's case, scheduling was particularly challenging in light of his business schedule. The Deputy Administrator added that she did not think it was possible for Councilman McLaughlin to attend the meeting he referenced with Kevin as it was held during daytime hours, and McLaughlin was unavailable. Councilman McLaughlin replied that he can take time off from his business to attend meetings if he has sufficient notice. Councilman Duganitz mentioned that he also needed a week's notice to prepare. The Treasurer acknowledged that many of us have other jobs and responsibilities, but pointed out that she and the Deputy Administrator are also working together on numerous grants and other projects aside from the budget.

Mr. Leschinskie commented that he does not understand why the five mills, which he believes are not guaranteed, are included in the budget, but the \$700,000 loan from DCED is not. The Deputy Administrator replied that the loan is in fact included in the budget, and that the budget would not be balanced without it. The Controller agreed that the money is needed to get through 2025. Mr. Leschinskie asked if the paper is correct in stating that one mill generates approximately \$23,000. The Treasurer replied that she believes it is around \$24,000. Mr. Leschinskie stated that five mills will then generate \$115,000, which is why he does not agree that it is necessary to balance the budget. The Deputy Administrator replied that the \$115,000 does in fact make the difference by a significant margin. If the City did not have that \$100,000, or the \$700,000, the budget would not be balanced.

**ADJOURNMENT:** There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:33 P.M.

Minutes taken by Val Mountjoy, Administrative Accountant