

August 5, 2024

The regular meeting of the Montoursville Borough Council held in the John Dorin Municipal Building was called to order by Council Member Robert Brown at 7:00 PM with the following answering roll call: Mayor Bagwell, Tina Kline, Chris Lucas, Misty Emick, and Robert Brown. Absent: Eric Greenway and Mark Tillson.

The Pledge of Allegiance was observed.

The July 15th, 2024 minutes were approved on a motion by Dr. Kline, second by Mr. Lucas. The motion carried.

TREASURERS REPORT/BOROUGH BILLS – Motion by Mrs. Emick to approve the July 2024 treasurer’s report, second by Dr. Kline. The motion carried.

VISITORS AND PUBLIC COMMENT FOR AGENDA ITEMS –

Borough Solicitor, Steven Hartley announced the meeting format for “visitor and public comment agenda items” is reserved for comments about agenda items only and also asked visitors to be courteous and respectful of one another.

Resident, Isaac Johnson, 303 Cypress St, commented on the demolition of 416 Spruce St noting that there are historical WWII items in the building. He questioned what will be done with them and is hoping they will not be put in a scrap yard. It was explained that it is part of the bid package, if he or anyone is interested in the contents of the building, they can contact the winner of the bid package for this particular project.

Resident, Brenda Holdren, 806 Weldon St, questioned the demolition of 416 Spruce St, and requested some clarification if an auction of the contents was possible. Borough Solicitor, Steven Hartley confirmed it would be up to the approved bidder.

NEW BUSINESS –

2024 MONTOURSVILLE BOROUGH DEMOLITION OF 416 SPRUCE ST PROJECT BID --LYCOMING SUPPLY – Council Vice President Mr. Brown presented a bid by Lycoming Supply, Inc in the amount of \$29,948.34 for the 2024 Montoursville Borough Demolition 416 Spruce St. Project Bid for review.

Motion by Dr. Kline to approve 2024 Montoursville Borough Demolition 416 Spruce St. Project Bid to Lycoming Supply in the amount of \$29,948.34, second by Mrs. Emick. The motion carried.

AUTHORIZE CONDEMNATION 20’ X 120’ EASEMENT –TAX PARCEL #34-001-701 –WEIS MARKET- Council Vice President, Mr. Brown presented the Authorization to Condemn 20’ x 120’ Easement of Tax Parcel #34-006-701 Weis Market for review.

Motion by Mr. Lucas to approve the authorization to condemn 20’ x 120’ Easement of Tax Parcel #34-006-701, Weis Market as presented; second by Mr. Brown. The motion carried.

EASEMENT RIGHT OF WAY AGREEMENT -TAX PARCEL #34-006-101 – J. SAVOY CO., INC. – Council Vice President, Mr. Brown presented an Easement Right of Way Agreement for Tax Parcel #34-006-101, J. Savoy Co., Inc. for review.

Motion by Mrs. Emick to approve the Easement Right of Way Agreement for Tax Parcel #34-006-101, J. Savoy Co., Inc. as presented; second by Dr. Kline. The motion carried.

AUTHORIZE BOROUGH ENGINEER, TODD PYSHER, PYSHER ENGINEERING TO PREPARE & ADVERTISE BID DOCUMENTS for WALNUT ST/BROAD ST TRAFFIC SIGNAL REPLACEMENT –

Motion by Dr. Kline to approve authorization of Borough Engineer, Todd Pysher, Pysher Engineering to prepare and advertise bid documents for Walnut St/Broad St Traffic Signal Replacement as presented; second by Mr. Lucas. The motion carried.

LYCOMING COUNTY DISC GOLF ASSOCIATION –COURSE MODIFICATION – Council Vice President, Mr. Brown presented the Lycoming County Disc Golf Association course modification request for review. Council member, Mr. Lucas explained the course modification is to add flexibility to the current disc golf course located in Indian Park.

Motion by Mr. Lucas to approve the Lycoming County Disc Golf Association course modification request as presented; second by Mrs. Emick. The motion carried.

PURCHASE & INSTALLATION OF KOHLER DIESEL GENERATOR SET –WELL #5 –HUNTER & LOMISON –COSTARS – Council Vice President, Mr. Brown presented a quote from Costar vendor, Hunter Lomison for the purchase & installation of Kohler Diesel Generator Set for Well #5 in the amount of \$41,544.00 for review.

Motion by Dr. Kline to approve the quote from Costar vendor Hunter Lomison for the purchase and installation of a Kohler Diesel Generator Set for Well #5 in the amount of \$41,544.00 as presented; second by Mr. Brown. Street and Water Project Coordinator, Mr. Clifford Hoffman explained his request for the purchase of a generator is due to the current one being on its last leg. He noted that this is a budgeted item.

The motion carried.

AUCTION ON MUNICIBID – 2007 GMC 6500 DUMP TRUCK including 6’FLINK CALCIUM SPREADER, 8’ FLINK SALT SPREADER & 10’ FLINK SNOWPLOW; 2006 CHEVY COLORADO TRUCK; JOHN DEERE FLAIR MOWER; HTC 8’ BELT SPREADER; 32”D X 65”W X 81”H COMPOSITE HEATED SHED; 6’ X 4’ STONE SPREADER; 500 GALLON STEEL CAMO TANK - Council Vice President, Mr. Brown presented a request to auction on Municibid -2007 GMC 6500 Dump Truck Including 6’Flink Calcium Spreader, 8’ Flink Salt Spreader & 10’ Flink Snowplow; 2006 Chevy Colorado Truck; John Deere Flair Mower; HTC 8’ Belt Spreader; 32”D X 65”W x 81”H Composite Heated Shed; 6’ X 4’ Stone Spreader; 500 Gallon Steel Camo Tank for review.

Motion by Dr. Kline to approve to auction on Municibid a 2007 GMC 6500 Dump Truck including a 6’Flink Calcium Spreader and 8’ Flink Salt Spreader and 10’ Flink Snowplow; a 2006 Chevy Colorado Truck; a John Deere Flair Mower; a HTC 8’ Belt Spreader, a 32”D X 65”W x 81”H Composite Heated Shed, a 6’ X 4’ Stone Spreader and a 500 Gallon Steel Camo Tank as presented; second by Mr. Lucas. The motion carried.

PLANNING & ZONING – Central Keystone COG Reports July 2024.

RECREATION – Council member, Mr. Lucas reviewed and explained Event Permits 2024-20 and 2024-20 as presented.

Motion by Mr. Lucas to approve Event Permits 2024-19 and 2024-20 as presented, second by Mrs. Emick. The motion carried. Council member, Mr. Lucas thanked Mayor Bagwell for taking wonderful photos of the new playground. Council member, Mrs. Emick announced the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the new playground will be held on August 16th, 2024. She also reminded the public that the movie in the park, will be the movie “ET,” and will also be shown August 16th, 2024.

STREETS/WATER – Street and Water Project Coordinator, Mr. Hoffman announced that the Montoursville Borough Water Works will be flushing the hydrants on Saturday’s from 7:30 AM until 3:00 PM. He said the flushing may cause brown water and low water pressure for a short duration. He also stated the drainage issues on Cherry Street are due to the storm drainage pipes that are very small and old. Council members, Mr. Lucas and Mrs. Emick inquired as to the solution of this problem. Street and Water Project Coordinator, Mr. Cliff Hoffman explained if one pipe is enlarged, they all would need to be enlarged throughout the borough. It was noted that feasibility study will be researched.

MAYOR – Mayor Bagwell read a statement and requested it to be included as part of the meeting minutes.

POLICE CHIEF – Chief Gyurina reviewed the July 2024 police report. He also announced that “National Night Out” will be held on August 6th, 2024 at the Willing Hand Hose Fire Company with hotdogs and hamburgers for all.

Chief Gyurina reported on the issue of kids/residents speeding via electric scooters on borough streets. He explained aside from the fact that they are prohibited on borough streets they pose an immense safety issue to both drivers and themselves. Council member, Dr. Kline commented that as a nurse, she has experienced kids coming in from accidents on such scooters/bikes. She stated it is not a pretty or happy situation and often doesn't end well.

COUNCIL PERSONS – Council Vice President, Mr. Brown thanked all the residents in attendance at this evening's meeting.. He continued by reading a statement and explained he would like his official statement to be recorded and included as part of the meeting minutes.

SOLICITOR – Borough Solicitor, Steven Hartley once again reminded the audience that council members are their neighbors and requested their public comment time to be courteous.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT – Nothing at this time.

PENDING MATTERS – Nothing at this time.

CORRESPONDENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENTS – The next Council meeting will be held Monday, September 9th, 2024 at 7:00PM. An Executive session for Personnel & Legal issues will be held at the close of the meeting and will not be reconvened.

VISITOR AND PUBLIC COMMENTS – Council Vice President, Mr. Brown reiterated rules for visitors with public comment. He requested to please state their name and address for the record and adhere to a five-minute time limit.

Resident, Ms. Kim Myers, 1127 Elm St, began stating the people on Maple and Tule Streets are not being treated as fairly as the other residents in Montoursville, due to the curb guidelines that drastically changed since the last project. She provided forty pictures of curb issues from the prior project. Ms. Myers also stated that she and other residents want to know what it is going on with the borough especially in the case of the arbitration with Glen O. Hawbaker regarding the Walnut St. project. She questioned why council members were not answering her questions. Borough Solicitor, Steven Hartley paused the timer and reminded Ms. Myers that this portion of the meeting is not a question-and-answer session. He continued stating Borough council cannot in good conscience answer questions and expose the borough to possible litigation as like the current impending threat of litigation against the borough. Resident, Ms. Myers then shared that Glenn O Hawbaker is suing the borough for additional work that the borough did not agree upon with the Walnut St. project, adding that residents could do the curb and apron themselves. She then stated the borough did not pay Glenn O Hawbaker in a timely manner therefore more money was owed for the "punch list," in the amount of \$45,000.00. Ms. Myers shared explained that Borough council did not pay in a timely manner, it went to litigation and the Borough lost. This cost the Borough an additional \$37, 447.00 according to Ms. Myers. She stated Borough council members are not trustworthy and that residents should not be punished for mistakes of the past.

Resident, Ms. Darlene Dandrew, 1016 Weaver St, questioned if restaurants and businesses pay the same amount of taxes to the Borough. Vice President, Mr. Brown stated yes.

Resident, Mr. Ken Rader, 1127 Elm St, noted that he investigated the SCADA Water Project and the total number of change orders that came before council totaling \$644, 550.00 in addition to the original bid. He also stated there are several months of minutes that have not been posted to the website, including October, November, and December 2023.. Mr. Raker stated there were more change orders however some of which he could not locate due to the minutes that he previously stated were not posted on the website. He questioned why council isn't questioning this issue regarding the amount of additional money that was being spent on the water system, totaling \$1,471,782.13. Mr. Raker shared very sternly that due to the lack of last three months of the 2023 meeting minutes being posted on the website; he will be stopping by the Borough Office in the morning to obtain them. Council Vice President, Mr. Brown directed Mr. Raker to not be rude to the Borough Secretary to whom he was directing the missing meeting minutes issue and stated it could be a computer issue for all they know, but to please be courteous. He stated the borough office will

provide him with the documents tomorrow as well as investigate the issue with the missing minutes on website. He once again requested public comments to be courteous.

Resident, Mr. Paul Rinker, 1102 Chestnut St, was unhappy that council members do not have borough email addresses. His reasoning is that he would prefer to email privately instead of speaking publicly at the council meeting. He also stated council needs vetted email addresses so that the public knows nothing can be deleted or misconstrued. It was noted that council current email addresses can be vetted and are subject to the Right to Know law. It noted that the Borough could supply the council members with borough email addresses however there would be a cost associated with providing them.. Council Vice President, Mr. Brown & Council member, Dr. Tina Kline responded sharing they would look into the option of providing council members borough email addresses.

Mr. Frank Steckel,, 619 First Avenue, Williamsport, stated that he attends Williamsport Council Meetings often. He does not agree with a solicitor dictating council not to answer questions, just as what is going on in Montoursville. He stated its third world and dictatorial. He chastised Council Vice President, Mr. Brown for his tone of voice and use of the gavel to bring order to the residents of Montoursville attending the council meeting.

Mr. Rick Hauser, 2440 Blair St, Williamsport, owns property in Montoursville and stated he believes council is disregarding the people they serve, especially regarding the Street Improvement project. He explained making a property owner pay for curbing is making property ownership almost impossible these days for the general population. Mr. Hauser also stated that transparency in government at all levels is a must and this situation has made trust very difficult between the residents and borough council.

Resident, Ms. Kim Myers,1127 Elm St, questioned how residents are to get answers when council is not discussing what is going on with the Street Improvement/cubing issue. Borough Solicitor, Steven Hartley explained once the Borough is threatened by possible litigation, it eliminates the ability of the that party to communicate except through their attorneys in order to best defend themselves. He also explained that public comment section of the meeting is for comments, not questions and answers, however borough council tries when possible to answer questions from the public. in attendance. Ms. Myers admitted that she is the resident that hired an attorney. She stated she is giving the borough, just like Hawbaker did, to sit down and discuss the options for the curbs.

Resident, Ms. Cindy Welshans, 1218 Nicely Ave, stated at the July council meeting the borough's engineer was in attendance and supposedly is an expert. She explained he couldn't even answer the questions asked by the public, which is no different than the meeting tonight. She also stated Mayor Bagwell basically told her to shut up at the previous meeting and now he continues to lecture everyone in the room on how to act and behave this evening.

Resident, Ms. Annette Baker, 1133 Broad St, explained she feels a sense of overkill on the curbing of the Street Improvement project. She continued stating she was told all ninety-two' feet of her curbs need to be replaced when there is actually only one bad spot, and all of this makes her incredibly sad.

Resident, Ms. Darlene Dandrew, 1016 Weaver St, questioned what a driveway apron is noting that this is a big stress on women who live alone.

Resident, Mr. Nathan Allen, 1319 Spruce St., stated he lives on the corner of Spruce and Maple Streets. He questioned when council will be able to provide answers about the curbs. He also stated he believes this is a communication issue. He explained the curbing issue is taking the freedom of choice away from the customer by not permitting them to choose their own contractor. He also stated the verbal projections of the speeches given tonight by Mayor Bagwell and Council Vice President, Mr. Brown, came across as lectures. Mr. Allen expressed that educational communication came across negatively and he knows it was not intended that way. He also asked how long the curbing project was postponed for and if he should preemptively do his curbs. He also let council know that he respects the position.

Council member, Mr. Lucas explained that information on projects is available in open committee meetings that occur prior to the council meeting. The continued stating that's where projects/items get discussed. Council member, Mr. Lucas shared very rarely does anyone from the public attend, the only ones in attendance are the committee members.

Resident, Mr. Rick Welshans, 1218 Nicely Ave., questioned why Glen O. Hawbaker was the only contractor who could do the curbing project. Council Vice President, Mr. Brown stated no one has ever stated this as the project never went out to bid.

Resident, Ms. JoAnn Rinker, 1102 Chestnut, questioned if and how the Montoursville Borough Code can be changed because it's a dictatorship type of code. Council member, Mr. Lucas shared the Montoursville Borough Code can change in a public meeting through the proper processes.

Mr. Dan Mathers, 517 Gentry Lane, Montoursville explained he does not live in the borough however owns four single dwelling homes in the borough. He stated the borough engineer's determination of what curbing needs replaced is very subjective. He questioned the function of a curb aside from directing storm water. He then stated that its function is modest and to impose this cost on the borough residents is worth looking into a cost benefit analysis of replacing the curbs.

Council member, Misty Emick requested Street and Water Project Coordinator, Mr. Hoffman to explain the functions of a curb, to which he stated their functions consist of directing storm water, snow plowing and holding the road together.

Resident, Mr. Ken Rader, 1127 Elm St, stated Street and Water Project Coordinator, Mr. Cliff Hoffman stated that SEDA- Cog inspect the L-shaped curbs. At this time, Street and Water Project Coordinator, Mr. Cliff Hoffman stated the borough does not use L-Shaped curbs. Mr. Raker explained Mr. Sanso would verify everything that was said..

Resident, Ms. Danielle Lanzer, 412 Willow St, stated she has relatives that work for streets and parks in Williamsport to which they told her liquid fuels funding can be used for the curbs. She questioned if that is the case why isn't Montoursville doing the same. It was noted that the borough's PennDOT representative stated liquid fuels funding cannot be used to replace curbs. A discussion took place among the residents in attendance. At this time, Council Vice President, Mr. Brown thanked everyone for attending the council meeting.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM on a motion by Dr. Kline, second by Mrs. Emick. The motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Ginny Gardner, Borough Secretary

Prepared Remarks
08/05/2024
Robert P. Brown

As always, thank you for attending the council meeting.

For the remainder of my time on Borough council, I will be speaking on multiple issues and subjects during Council person privilege time. The ironic thing about this is that the information that will be provided is information that is readily available. The problem is that in today's society, if it is not instantly available, very few take the time to look.

After the July meeting, several residents questioned why I waited until the "End" of the meeting to make my remarks. I would like to address that issue first. When you enter this room for a council meeting, you immediately see a table with a sign in sheet and copies of the agenda. You will notice that the meeting agenda is structured. There are times when the public is invited to make comments. That is the only time that the public is allowed to make comments. In the same manner, you will notice that toward the end of the agenda, there is a section titled "Council persons". That is when we as members of council are invited to speak our minds. I wanted to speak at the beginning, but was advised that my comments should come under the Council persons section. That is how the system is set up, so I followed it.

During the July Council meeting as well as this meeting, Prior to the start of the public comment period, The Borough Solicitor explained the rules. For those who were not here or were out in the hallway and did not hear, he advised those in attendance that members of borough council would not be responding or answering questions regarding the Street paving and curb replacement project due to potential litigation issues as we had been contacted by legal counsel representing a resident.

I understand it is extremely frustrating for you. I can assure you that it is even more frustrating for us as your Government representative to have to sit here and not answer your questions. Personally, I believe that we as your elected Representatives should respond. However, I also know through the training that I received after I was elected, that if I choose to disregard legal

advice from our Solicitor, I then subject myself as well as the municipality to potential liability.

I would like to talk briefly about budgets and funding day to day operations of the Borough as I hear comments and questions regarding that topic on a regular basis.

Lets start with Revenue or income. Generally speaking, Governments at all levels gets money in several ways,

Taxes – You can be taxed on income, real estate, sales tax, etc.

Fees – in our case, building permits, pavilion rentals, etc, ordinance, vehicle, criminal code violations

Grants – These come from other Government entities. This money comes from Governments which obtain the money through the collection of taxes and fees.

In some cases Non Government Organizations - NGO's Provide grant opportunities. An example would be organizations such as First Community Foundation Partnership here in North Central PA. To clarify, some of these NGO's receive funding from various levels of Government above the local level.

Montoursville Borough receives revenue utilizing all of the above sourcing streams. What you need to understand is that the revenue ultimately comes from you. You fund borough operations when you pay income taxes from your pay check or you pay real estate taxes in early spring when you get your combined municipal and county real estate taxes.

You also fund us through fees such as pavilion rental or when you apply for a building permit.

The Borough as do most municipalities, look for grant opportunities to help fund projects. Examples are the Indian park pond restoration and the recently completed Indian Park playground to name just two.

What you will notice from these explanations is that the vast majority of this money comes from you the taxpayer. When I hear people say “The Government should pay for that”, What that actually means is that you are ultimately paying for whatever it is you want “The Government” to pay for.

The Borough operates utilizing three budgets. The first is the General fund budget The second budget is the Water Company budget. This is the operating budget of the Water Company owned and managed by the Borough.

The third budget is very simply titled “Highway Aid” It contains the liquid fuels money that we receive from the state. Liquid fuels money comes from the \$.576 tax that you pay for every gallon of gasoline that you use. Aviation fuel, jet fuel, diesel, undyed kerosene and undyed diesel are taxed at different rate***. (revenue.pa.gov)¹

Let me start with the easiest. We receive liquid fuels money from the Commonwealth of PA. As with any money from another government agency, there are limitations on what it can be used for. It is used to cover our road maintenance. Simply put, when we pave your street, we use the highway Aid money. Highway Aid money cannot be used for curbing. It can only be used for the roadway portion of a street. That rule is a state level decision. There is a formula used to determine our funding. Currently, we have approximately 26 miles of roadway in the Borough that is included in the formula that determines liquid fuels funding

The water company budget is utilized to fund all aspects of the system that is designed to deliver water to your residence. The system consists of a number of reservoirs and tanks, wells, pumps and many miles of pipes. Money in the water company budget comes from the customers like many of you who receive water at your residence or business. This budget is used exclusively for water company items & issues. We do not use money from the water company to run borough operations. According to the American Water works Association - Local government officials should recognize that funding nonutility-related operating or capital costs with utility revenues is not considered a utility best management practice by credit-rating agencies.²

The system is old. The original system was put in over 100 years ago. As the system continues to age, maintenance becomes more and more necessary, important and expensive. A water line break may cost as much \$10,000 to fix. A new well pump can be as much as \$25,000. We are finishing a SCADA system that allows our water company employees to monitor the system

¹<https://www.revenue.pa.gov/Tax%20Rates/Pages/MFT%20Rates.aspx>

² <https://awwa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.5942/jawwa.2012.104.0128>

without having to report to the office. That system along with needed upgrades cost more than \$1 million dollars. At the current time, we are looking at a project for reservoir improvements. That project is expected to cost \$2-3 million dollars. For those who ask what we do with the money we make from selling water, the answer is that we return that money into the system through needed improvements. And maintenance of the system.

The general budget covers all borough operations. The 2024 general fund budget is just below \$2.8 million dollars. Someone recently asked about what we do with the money that we make in Indian Park. To give you an example, for 2024, we estimated receiving \$16,400 in recreation fees such as pavilion rentals. The line items for expenditures under recreation, which includes the park is \$327,000.

For your consideration, here is another example of the pitfalls of budgeting. For 2024, we estimated \$115,000 of revenue from Act 13 funds, which comes from Natural Gas production activity in the County. That number was based on last years allocation. Less than 2 weeks ago, more than half way through the budget year, we were advised that our act 13 monies will be under \$70,000. That leaves a shortfall of approximately \$45,000 which we will have to address.

Unlike the Federal government, we are required by law to present and operate under a balanced budget. That budget is prepared every year by a committee consisting of 3 council members with the assistance of Borough department heads including the Borough Secretary/ Treasurer, Streets & water Coordinator and the Chief of Police.

The draft budget is completed and presented at the November council meeting with a motion to advertise. It is required that the budget be advertised and be available for viewing / inspection at the Borough office during business hours. It is then voted on by the full council at the December meeting each year. Members of council receive an update to the budget every month prior to the council meeting to see how close we are to the actual money flow. For those who have never done a budget on a scale such as this, please understand that we do not look at just the current year. Decisions that we make this year are applicable years into the future and can affect future

councils. We cannot just look at the current situation, we must look 5, 10, 20 years ahead in order to be effective council persons.

Thank you again for attending the meeting this evening, especially those of you who stayed to listen to the entire meeting.

I am providing a printed copy of these remarks and ask the Borough Secretary to make this an official attachment to the August minutes that will be approved at the September 2024 meeting. Doing this allows the public access to these remarks after the minutes are approved.

Note:

***Aviation fuel is taxed at \$.060 / gallon, jet fuel is taxed \$.020 / gallon, undyed diesel / kerosene is taxed \$.741 / gallon.

I have been disappointed by some statements posted on social media.

There have been allegations of wrongdoing and misrepresentations of facts over a project.

This is a small community, less than 5000 of us. We go to the same churches, eat at the same places, and enjoy the same park. This is not a big city where government officials are far removed from constituents. Our local officials are going to be standing in line with you at the grocery store and getting gas at the next pump from you. Councilmembers live within blocks of people posting on social media things they would never say to a councilperson's face, or at least I hope they wouldn't.

Our council people face the same consequences from their decisions as anyone else does. If they raise taxes, they pay higher taxes. If they require you to do something, they are also taking on the same responsibility.

The council people we have are conscientious and care about our community. I can call most of them at any time and get help, I have called them very early in the morning to quite late at night.

Once, on a weekend, there was a restroom that had been trashed before a large party someone had rented a nearby pavilion for. The person who rented the pavilion contacted me but, on that weekend, there were no borough employees available. I believe I left a message with the council president about the situation. I left to check and see how bad the restroom was and it was awful. I tried calling the president back thinking that maybe I should clean it up a bit since it was embarrassingly bad, and found he was already at the park working on it. He did it all himself, because he wanted Montoursville to be what it should be.

Another time, a day before Memorial Day, late at night, I was informed the flags on Broad St. were very tattered. I didn't like that; we all want flags displayed properly. I was talking to one of our council people about it and asked if he had a ladder long enough to remove the worn flags before the holiday. He said he did and he'd bring it down for me but he didn't want to do it because he didn't like heights, but once he brought the ladder, he removed all the flags on the dark street himself.

We have good people on council. I don't always agree with them, but I support them in all cases because after careful study they do what they judge to be best for the community. I understand not everyone knows the council members as well as I do but everyone should know it is common courtesy to avoid making unfounded allegations or otherwise attempt to embarrass them.

If anyone has any evidence, not suspicions born out of frustration, actual evidence, no matter how slim, that any person on council is somehow profiting, legally or illegally, off any project being done in Montoursville, I do not want to read vague social media allegations. I want to see the evidence. I want to have it given to me, or the police chief, the council president, or the entire council. I do not want to just read, "Something is fishy," on Facebook, if you have actual evidence or a real basis for your suspicions, state what it is. Just because one doesn't like the processes or decisions officials make is not evidence of corruption or usually even incompetency.

I have seen people posting teasers on social media for council meetings like they were for an episode of "Oak Island" where something will be revealed at the next meeting, if you have proof of wrongdoing, state it exactly and for the record. It's easy to stoke anger and get people upset, but in the end, it just makes it harder to do the business of the borough. When there are genuine issues, the public will become involved simply by giving them the facts. The theatrics are not necessary, they are divisive, and ultimately make it more difficult to get real work done and communicate effectively.

There is bogus information being posted that Montoursville is the highest taxing borough in the area. That's false and easy to look up.

There is false information that Montoursville is the only borough that requires property owners to replace curbs, I wondered if that was true, because the people posting it were so adamant that they had the facts. Duboistown and Jersey Shore do require it for sure and I'll bet other communities do as well.

I would hope false claims on social media and at meetings will not continue about Montoursville borough having higher taxes and that in no other community are property owners responsible for curbing when these claims are demonstrably false.

Nothing in government is easy. When I owned a small business and I wanted a new door I ordered one and, in a few days, I would have one.

The inspection process began with me leaving my office and looking at the new door for a few seconds and then watching it being opened and closed a time or two and it ended with me stating, "Looks good to me."

It's not that way in the government. What can be done in a few days at a business takes a local government years to do if federal or state funding is involved. There are many studies, plans, and inspections.

I think it took over 3 years to get new door openers for the handicapped in the borough building. Any project in government is hard and there is more to consider than someone who has not been involved would think.

For example, people complain about replacing sidewalks, so I'll use sidewalks. Some people think the borough should just pay for the sidewalks to be done. Seems fair enough. Taxes would have to be raised, because no matter what the property owner is going to pay for it one way or another, so research would have to be done to see how much taxes would have to be raised.

We'd have to know whether replacing sidewalks for residential and business owners also meant we'd have to replace the sidewalks for all the Montoursville School District properties located in the borough, maybe the State Police, airport, churches, or other entities that pay no taxes to Montoursville. If these non-taxpaying entities replace their sidewalks now, they are doing so with money raised through donations or are largely funded through the state, federal, or the taxes raised on people living outside the borough. Maybe Montoursville would be taking on all that burden.

Then we'd have to know if we provide one property owner new sidewalks because theirs were bad, if we have to give the next property owner new sidewalks even though theirs were still OK, because we have to treat everyone equally. If one

person has new sidewalks maybe everyone has to have new sidewalks. And we'll need to know if we might even have to install sidewalks on properties where they have never been required to have them, because maybe that property owner under a changed system is entitled to them now.

Nothing is easy and nothing is obvious. I don't think most people in Montoursville would want to pay for miles of school district and other entities sidewalks because council jumped at an idea without realizing that it would increase the burden on the citizens of the borough of Montoursville by taking that burden away from a larger group.

Normally, the Montoursville borough council is a very communicative body. They usually allow interruptions of the business portion of their meeting to answer questions or rehash the thinking that brought them to the point they are when a resident speaks out of turn. I have rarely seen them rebuke anyone for not following proper decorum in any way. Council has always been open and available to all people. Anyone saying differently has been to very few, if any, meetings.

When lawsuits are threatened, that muzzles council. That is unfortunate, because I know they would love to explain everything happening but the solicitor advises against doing so. They could disregard the good advice given designed to protect the borough, but that would be foolish. I wish council could speak as freely as they always have and I'm sure it bothers them to not be able to do so.

I have seen a post on social media that none of our borough employees do work. Being upset with council is not a reason to bash borough employees who are hardworking people. At a normal borough council meeting there are always a number of borough employees that I have called on their days off, during vacations, or even at 2AM, because I needed something. The next day or during the phone call I apologize to them and they always say there is no need for an apology and most of the time thank me for the call. They thank me because they care about their job and the borough. It hurts when you are doing good work and care about the community and people who know nothing about what you do say you are worthless.

As I have said, I don't always agree with borough council's decisions.

The public will not always agree with the decisions either. The council will not always have unanimous decisions, so they don't always even agree with each other.

Disagreement should not lead to derision. If after a vote by borough council, one member turned to another and started yelling and making baseless claims that someone must be scratching their back or they were somehow personally benefiting from the vote, without any evidence, because they didn't like the vote, we'd all think the councilmember was a nut, and we'd be right. When a member of the public gets on social media and makes baseless claims, they really don't look any better.

I'd like to hear from the public thoughts as to why after generations of property owners in many neighborhoods paying for the curbing at their property, that now that we have entered this area that should change. I'd like to know if there is anyone in attendance at borough council meetings who has paid to fix their own curbing that desires to have their taxes raised, if necessary, to pay for the curbing in front of others properties.

I would hope anyone commenting at a public meeting will do so politely, stick to facts, and be respectful of the council members and borough employees who have spent years working hard to make the best possible decisions for everyone after weighing the likely consequences. Do not confuse national politicians with your neighbors on borough council. They all live the same way you do. They all suffer or enjoy the same consequences of their decisions as you do.

Attempts to embarrass or harass public officials whether on social media or in real life, because one doesn't like their decisions should be beneath all of us. When this is done to local officials it is not the same as sharing a nasty meme on social media about a federal official that will never see it. It's a direct attack on the person who might be sitting the next pew over from you on Sunday.

Stephen Bagwell, Mayor
Montoursville Borough