

**BOROUGH OF SUGARCREEK
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

January 8, 2025

I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Council President James Speth opened the meeting at 7:00 pm, welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted there will be no hurtful or harmful speech allowed. Mr. Speth noted the meeting would be recorded by the newspaper reporter in attendance.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE (American Flag)

Council President Speth led the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. MOMENT OF SILENCE

A moment of silence was observed.

IV. ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM

Present at the meeting were Council members Alan Heller, James Speth, Bogan Goughler, Larry Baughman, Howard Barger, and Mayor Matthew Carlson. Also present were Chief Bob Wenner, Attorneys Brian Spaid and Alex Spaid.

V. DISTRIBUTION OF AGENDA

VI. COUNCIL CHANGES TO AGENDA

VII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (limited to 3 minutes each)

- A. Jeremy Rankin, Rocky Grove V.F.D., presented Mr. Sporer with how the 2024 annual donation from the Borough was spent. As well as the proposed expenses that will be paid with the 2025 donation. Mr. Rankin also presented Council with a letter stating the fire department will be applying for a grant for revitalizing the fire department property. He said, at a later date, the Borough Council and/or Manager may need to submit a letter of recommendation of support for the grant application. But they are currently still in the planning phase of the grant process. Mayor Carlson asked if the department considered a shared – use grant. Mr. Rankin said they did not and he was not completely sure as to what Mayor Carlson was explaining. Mayor Carlson said grant application agencies, such as DCED, prefer to see multiple names/applicants on the grant applications versus one person's name. Mr. Baughman clarified that Mayor Carlson meant applying for the grant and putting both Reno V.F.D. and Rocky Grove V.F.D.'s names on the grant application. Mr. Rankin said the grant they are applying for is for one specific department and not matching.
- B. Dan Marvin, Reno V.F.D., presented Council with an updated report on the department's calls. Mr. Marvin said the Reno V.F.D. closed out 2024 with a total of 242 calls; with about an even split of the calls being for EMS medical calls and fire calls. As of the meeting date, the department has responded to six (6) calls; 19 calls since the December 2024 Council meeting. Mr. Marvin said the department has submitted their request for the annual donation from the Borough and they have an idea on where to use the money. Mr. Speth asked how the submission process of the state aid/funding has gone. Mr. Marvin said the paperwork has been submitted and now they are waiting to hear from the State. Mr. Heller asked if the fire police needing sworn in, have been. Mr. Marvin said those individuals were at an event with the County fire police and there was going to be a judge there to swear them in at the County level. Mayor Carlson said if they still need to be sworn in by him, they are to submit another application to the Borough.
- C. Terri Lowry asked if the 2025 budget could be placed on the Borough's website. Mr. Sporer said he will follow up with it and get it online. Ms. Lowry asked if the finance report that is available at the meetings is placed online. Mr. Sporer said it is not. Ms. Lowry also asked if there is a 2024 end budget placed online. Mr. Sporer said it is not placed online, but is available at the Borough office.
- D. Ken Bryan, Venango County Commissioner, presented Council with an update on the upcoming year and what is in the works at the County level. Mr. Bryan said there have been conversations with oil and natural gas companies that want to come back to the area. He said with the new Presidential administration coming in that there will be an increase in the natural resources the County has to offer. Mr. Bryan said there has been positive conversations with the Cranberry Mall and the new businesses that will be coming to that area. He also gave an update on the ATV ordinance. There are currently 21 municipalities participating in the ordinance and 16

ordinances in place. Mr. Speth deferred the discussion to Mr. Spaid. Mr. Spaid said at the previous Council meeting, the Council had some questions on who or how the signage would be provided. And that Mr. Freer and Chief Wenner had presented Council with a list of Borough roads which ATV's may travel on. Mr. Bryan said the signage would be provided by the ATV Association. He also said the approved roads are up to each municipality. As well as any restrictions or time limits. Mr. Bryan said he would like to have everything together by February and the County would like to launch the program in March. The first payouts from the Association would then be in June. Mr. Spaid then read the minutes from the December 2024 Council meeting regarding the ATV ordinance which was discussed during Mr. Spaid's staff report. He said since that meeting, there has been no further discussion and there needs to be more clarification from the County. Mr. Spaid told Mr. Bryan that the Borough cannot and will not be responsible for issuing and tracking permits. He then suggested Mr. Bryan schedule a meeting with Mr. Freer, Mr. Sporer and Chief Wenner to answer any of the Borough's questions or concerns. Mr. Bryan said he agrees with that and he also suggested emailing any questions and concerns to Mr. Bryan and then they would be able to get them answered. Mr. Spaid suggested also sending Mr. Bryan a copy of the suggested roads and December's Council meeting minutes to get started on answering those concerns which were addressed at the meeting. Mayor Carlson said the Police can enforce the ordinance, but not the permits.

VIII. STAFF REPORTS

A. Maintenance Foreman:

1. Mr. Heller asked if the Maintenance Department could plow and salt the apron of the front of the fire departments' buildings. Dan Marvin said he has a plow on his truck and he is able to maintain the area around the Reno V.F.D. Mr. Rankin said if the Borough is plowing and salting along Shuffstall Street and able to quickly throw some material down and clean off the apron, it would be appreciated. Mr. Sporer said the Borough has not plowed for the fire departments due to liability reasons. If something were to be damaged, it would be the Borough's responsibility. Mr. Sporer said it would also not be a priority; the streets would have to be cleared first and then the fire department. Mr. Heller just said he was concerned with the storms that come in and the fire trucks have to get out quickly. Mr. Rankin said he currently plows and salts the fire department. Mr. Heller said he is also pleased with the work the Maintenance Department has been doing with the recent snow storms.

B. Police Chief:

1. Chief Wenner said the department was involved with Community Services and the food drive before Christmas. The collection was held at Walmart. There were also toys donated and were able to be delivered to families in need. Patrolman Johnson attended and passed his D.R.E. certification training the previous week. Patrolman Wilson was voted on to the Board of Directors for the National Law Enforcement and Public Safety Network which sets the continuing education goals for colleges and Vo-Techs. Chief also said the department was able to purchase a camera to be used for evidence, using the Drug Forfeiture Fund through the County DA's office. Chief also presented Council with the total cost of \$10,745, for seven (7) bulletproof vests. The out - of - pocket cost to the Borough would be \$7,633.95; the grant is in the amount of \$3,111.05 from the Department of Justice. Chief said there is \$1,000 in the 2025 budget, leaving a balance of \$6,633.95. Chief requested a motion to have the remaining balance paid from the Reserve Account since there is no other place in the budget to have it come out of. Mr. Baughman questioned if there was another line item in the Police budget that the outstanding balance could be taken out of. Chief Wenner said he could not find any and gave the example of the police hours be less now than they were in 2018. And some of the budgeted items are less than they were in 2024 and he does not expect costs to drop, especially with a \$50,000 hit to his budget. He said the vests should be in around March. Mr. Heller asked what the life was of the vests. Chief said they are five (5) years. Mayor Carlson said he would like to see a motion made to purchase the vests since the Police have to have them. Mr. Baughman asked Mr. Sporer if there is room in the budget for the outstanding cost of the vests. Mr. Sporer said he could find the money. Mr. Sporer asked if the Borough has to pay the full \$10,745.00 up front and then get reimbursed. Chief said it is a matching grant and the grant is already approved. Chief said the Borough needs \$6,633.95, after the \$1,000 which was budgeted in the line item for vests. Mr. Sporer said he will find a place in the budget to take the balance out of. Mr. Speth asked if this was not anticipated and could not have been placed in

the budget in October or November. And what is the current age of the vests the department has now. Chief said in the initial budget he gave Council, he documents saying it was grossly low, as well as the police service hours and operating expenses. He said he gave Council copies in Executive Session where he discussed his concerns with those three (3) line items. Mayor Carlson said it was brought up. Mr. Speth said he does not recall the vests being requested in the budget at that time, but he may be wrong. Chief said he told Council about the grant, which was for about \$3,200, rounding up. And at least another \$3,200 the department would need for the remaining balance, but he was not sure of the exact cost since it has been five (5) since he bought vests. He said this is under state contract. Mr. Speth asked if there is anything in writing saying the grant is approved. Chief said he has that. Mr. Speth said he is not doubting Chief, but he knows how grants can work. Mr. Speth questioned what the name of the grant is. Chief said it is the Department of Justice Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant. Mr. Heller asked if they come and fit them. Chief said they have already been fitted; that needed to be done so they could get the final cost of the vests. He said all he needs is the approval and he can then sign the estimate. Mr. Baughman said he has found that CO-STARS is not always the best pricing on equipment. Chief said he's sure there is another company or companies that also supply vests, but he has always used Markl. Mayor Carlson said Markl is the only one who will come to the Borough for fittings. Mr. Speth asked if the Council needs to approve the total cost of \$10,745.00 or the out – of – pocket cost to the Borough of \$6,633.00. Mr. Spaid said the Council will need to approve the full purchase price and then the funding source(s) is what is in question. Mr. Sporer said the motion in the minutes can reflect the full purchase price of \$10,745 and the breakdown of that total cost: total purchase price of \$10,745.00, \$3,111.05 in grant money received from the Dept. of Justice Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant, \$1,000 from the 2025 budgeted line item and the remaining \$6,633.95 will be paid by the Borough.

2. Motion by Alan Heller, being duly seconded by Larry Baughman to approve the purchase of seven (7) ballistic vests, plates, VELCRO name tapes and shipping costs, from Markl Supply Company, Inc., at a total cost of \$10,745.00. Motion carried unanimously.
 3. Chief also asked if it could be placed on the agenda to have the Borough Manager and the Oil Region Alliance (ORA) develop an MOU for all the agencies to apply for grants as they become available. Mr. Spaid said he is already working on it, but it is not done yet.
- C. Administrator/Special Projects:
1. Motion by Bogan Goughler, being duly seconded by Larry Baughman to issue Rocky Grove V.F.D. and the Reno V.F.D. their annual donation of \$27,000 to each department. Motion carried unanimously.
- D. Zoning Officer:
1. No report.
- E. Solicitor:
1. Mr. Spaid said he only had matters for Executive Session. Those matters include the Rural King tax appeal and Police negotiations and he anticipates action to follow the Executive Session.

IX. COUNCIL REPORT

- A. Alan Heller reported he was recently at the Rocky Grove V.F.D. and they were looking at a new truck and would be trading in two (2) trucks for one (1) new truck. Mr. Rankin said the department was looking at a 2025 Ford F – 550, 4 – door crew cab, fire & engine rescue. It can hold 300 gallons of water with a 1,500 gallons per minute pump. His only concern was the weight the water and hose would add to the frame of the truck; with everything loaded it would weigh near 23,000 lbs. The cost of that truck was \$340,000 - \$360,000. He said they are looking for alternatives because of the cost and the funding can be a problem. Mr. Heller also asked Mr. Bryan with the discussions going on about the Cranberry Mall, is there or can there be any discussions with getting more businesses along Rt. 8. Mr. Bryan said he knows the gentleman who bought the Big Lots building went through the County. But he has not heard of any other discussions. Mr. Heller said he would like to see them push the discussions for Rt. 8.
- B. Jim Speth wanted to thank his fellow Council members for serving alongside him. He also wanted to thank those in the public who attend the meetings as well. He thanked Mr. Sporer, Mr. Freer and Chief Wenner for the good jobs they are doing in each of their departments.

X. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. Motion by Bogan Goughler, being duly seconded by Larry Baughman to approve the minutes of the December 4, 2024 meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

XI. FINANCIAL REPORTS

- A. Motion by Larry Baughman, being duly seconded by Alan Heller to approve the payment of bills/issuance of checks as presented by the Treasurer. Motion carried unanimously.

XII. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Mr. Spaid anticipates that the Council will approve the settlement agreement with Rural King. Mr. Spaid wanted the public to be aware of the impact of these tax appeals. Currently, he expects the Borough, County and school district to approve the tax appeal. It will be a \$17,900 cost or loss in taxes to the Borough. The Borough is still working on the Joy Chain Plant and the storage units in Reno have also challenged their tax assessments. Mr. Spaid said more of these appeals will continue to come in and it is extremely problematic. He wanted to clarify that this is not a reflection on what happened with the Police budget. He said Council needs to be aware of the impact of the tax appeals and the impact they are having. Mr. Spaid explained that there is an increase in residential property values, due in part to the rent costs. But the commercial values are plummeting and the burden falls on the homeowners going forward. He said it is important to negotiate what the municipalities can but they are unable to control the appraisals. He also explained that these appeals affect not only the Borough, but there is a large hit at the County and school district level, which will affect residents' school taxes. He also wanted to let the public know he does not blame the business owners for taking advantage of this, but the public needs to be aware of what is happening. And going forward, the Council needs to be cognizant when it comes to discussing expenditures since the Borough is not a corporation and the only source of income for the Borough is taxes. Mr. Spaid also said another reason the budget was affected, was the Borough owes these businesses for last year's taxes, which was not in the 2024 budget. With Rural King's appeal alone, it is a \$36,000 hit to the Borough's budget in 2025. Mr. Bryan said the County is looking at losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue due to the tax appeals. Mr. Spaid said the public really needs to understand the full effect of these appeals. Mr. Speth said not only himself and the rest of Council, but Mr. Sporer have tried to keep the taxes in line and not have to raise taxes, especially with today's economic climate.

XIII. NEW BUSINESS

XIV. CORRESPONDENCE

XV. BOARD OF APPEALS

XVI. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Council recessed at 7:52 pm for an executive session to discuss personnel and legal issues which, if conducted in public, would violate a lawful privilege of information or confidentiality protected by the law and any action to follow. The meeting was reconvened at 8:48 pm.

XVII. NEW BUSINESS CON'T.

- A. Motion by Alan Heller, being duly seconded by Bogan Goughler to ratify the 2025 – 2026 – 2027 Police contract. Motion carried unanimously.
- B. Motion by Larry Baughman, being duly seconded by James Speth to approve a settlement of the Rural King tax appeal. Motion carried unanimously.

XVIII. ADJOURNMENT

- A. Motion by Bogan Goughler being duly seconded by Alan Heller to adjourn the meeting at 8:49 PM. Motion carried unanimously.

Joseph M. Sporer, Borough Manager

James Speth, Council President