

Council Preside Adam Yoder brought the Special Williamsport City Council meeting to order on Thursday, November 28, 2022 at 7:00 PM at Trade & Transit Center II, 144 West Third St, Williamsport, PA.. This meeting was duly advertised in the Williamsport Sun-Gazette.

**Council members present:**

*Adam Yoder, President  
Bonnie Katz, Vice President  
Liz Miele, Councilwoman  
Randy Allison, Councilman,  
Vince Pulizzi, Councilman  
Jon Mackey, Councilman,  
Eric Beiter Councilman*

**Absent:**

**Also, Present:**

*Derek Slaughter, Mayor,  
August Memmi  
Sam Aungst, Fire Chief, absent  
Justin Snyder, Police Chief  
Solicitor Norman Lubin  
Janice Frank, City Clerk absent  
Ara Karvandjian  
Jon Jahanshahi  
Shawn Bastian  
Tracey Rash, absent*

**Ordinance Transfer ARPA #4**

Mayor What you have before you for first reading is an ordinance, transfer ordinance number 4 I believe from the account would be the redevelopment authority and it's in the amount of \$1,050, 998 and this would be for economic development for Farm Vest Partners LLC which is looking to develop an area on Maynard street there at the old foundry. So we bring this request before you this evening. I believe this was initially reviewed at ERC and we do have Ara and John with us here this evening that can answer any questions.

Mr. Yoder: Thank you, Mayor Slaughter. This was reviewed three or four weeks ago, 26th, and the economic revitalization committee and I'll turn it over to councilman Beiter to chair the initial conversation.

Mr. Beiter: Thank you very much for being here and for bringing this forward to us, Mayor Slaughter. Tonight we are talking about a distribution of ARPA funds for a 6.5 acre site on a corner of First and Maynard Street, a section of the city that has long been vacant, I believe this past six years. There has been zero activity on those individual parcels. The developer here tonight has purchased those parcels and is asking for the funds to help do infrastructure work in that area to lessen the cost for the redevelopment of the property. As we look around that corridor of Maynard Street we've seen good development in the past weekend, specifically with the expansion of sheets when they rebuilt in the past few years. Wendy's, and then the car wash behind that. We've seen Penn College acquire the land in front of their main administrative buildings and put a beautiful green space there as well. They've also just recently redone their fencing. What we have been told by the developer, and which I hope you'll expand upon a little bit more tonight, is that they plan to put a few larger national developments there, one being a fast food type restaurant, and the other being more of a gas station type place, a larger chain there as well. So the concerns that came up at ERC for myself specifically were, number one, the traffic patterns that we're going to be looking at there. If these developments are going to go through, there's going to be, I would hope, and I expect to see a very large increase of car traffic there as well as pedestrian traffic, crossing Maynard Street, because unlike Sheets and Wendy's, where they're located on the same side as Penn College, we're going to have foot traffic from Penn College going back and forth. I expect to see neighborhood traffic down there because we have to be mindful that there are still single-family homes on First and Second Streets there. And as we creep up, we have some student housing on Third Street as well so I hope we can expand upon those questions we have. I'll ask Mr. Pulizzi if he has any points to add, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Pulizzi: Sure, thank you very much. Welcome, gentlemen. Glad to see you're here. So yes, there were a couple of points and considerations, potentially some reservations in the City of Williamsport investing into this project with the developers. I myself, whenever we look to invest any kind of ARPA dollars or grant alerta, anything we take away potentially as tax revenue from the city to grant toward development, my approach has always been, well, how is this going to impact the city? What kind of return is the city going to see for this investment we're making on it? That's kind of always been the approach that I personally take. So when this development first came in front of us, we had quite a few questions to Mr. Beiter point, we had questions about the traffic patterns. There was a couple other questions we had that at that time we were not able to openly discuss I believe because of some current legal documentation, nondisclosure agreements regarding the developer and potential tenants that they may have to lease the property. But myself and Councilwoman Katz were fortunate enough to have been read into those. We were able to have a very open conversation with Ara and John who were able to elaborate and

expand on who we're going to be seeing potentially come in, the lease terms, and it was very, very helpful, at least on my point, because we were able to put at ease an awful lot of the reservations I personally had regarding the city's stance on investing in this particular development. I will say what's great, the foundry property looking to be developed, which has been sitting vacant for, oh, how many years now? Six. Mm-hmm. Personally, I didn't think we'd ever really see anybody want to dip into developing the foundry property. Just because it is what it is. So I was very happy to see that that's going to be happening. Looking back at the conversation that Councilwoman Katz and I were able to have with the developers with Aura, with John, asking the questions that we had and then reviewing the development plan they brought forward to us, which was extremely helpful. Thank you very much. The detail in that really helped to illustrate a picture of exactly what we're going to be looking at getting. So after going over that, after understanding who we're going to be potentially having here as tenants within our city, and the commitment they're going to be looking at making to the area, as far as the lease terms, I feel very comfortable now and very, very confident in investing in this project. One, to look to take dilapidated properties within the city that are currently not really generating much for the city, and to see them developed, but also, two, to see a lot more business be brought here, especially through the Maynard Street Gateway. So with that, the numbers speak for themselves, at least the way I see them. The return is going to be there. As we had spoken before, some of the ancillary effects, some of the long lasting effects that maybe can't be quantified at this time, but it will certainly reverberate through the community and the development of the community, hopefully for the years to come, the prosperous growth of that area. So I was very happy with the conversation and I'm very much looking forward to and excited to see this project move forward. Thank you very much.

Mr. Yoder, thank you Mr. Beiter I think you had referenced some work on the -- I think the traffic end of that. I was of the impression you might've been looking into that. Is that correct?

Mr. Ara First of all, again, thank you very much for this opportunity to be here on behalf of John and I. We really appreciate your patience, your diligence, and allowing us this opportunity tonight to hopefully move forward with this project which we're excited about being a part of in the city. John is a longstanding citizen in this community. So it's not only a real estate project, he really believes in the market and I enjoy coming to Williamsport and happy to do some more if we can. So to address councilman's question, when we originally met I believe in early August - - October, excuse me -- in the economic ERC meeting, there were a couple comments made there, it was about traffic, traffic patterns, and what's going to happen with some of the crosswalks, as you mentioned. In addition to councilman asked about the economic benefits of this. We had a presentation, a study done by Muni cap to share at least the quantitative impact of the project. In that meeting to address the crosswalks and the traffic, we went ahead and revised -- immediately went ahead and put together a revised drawing together, showing crosswalks from the university, straight into the parcel and how there's going to be two areas of walkways to the property as well as of improvements that are going to happen at the corner of Maynard and First Street. That said, we are going to look at the traffic patterns to see what the impacts are. That area has been looked at, there are measures that have been taken for the property. But we'll continue to look at what impact the overall tenant proposition is going to create traffic at the location. We also plan to meet with the college to talk about what we're doing to see if there's anything we can cooperate on as far as pathways signage, markings, that we could benefit each other. So there will be no problems with pedestrian traffic. Does that answer that question? I don't know if there's much more to add to Councilman's Pulizzi's comments. Like you mentioned, there's a quantitative impact to this project where the dollars and cents are what they are, but the qualitative ones that we see, especially as you mentioned what's happened at the foundry there for so many years. And it's not only the foundry obviously, it's the greater area with what's the future of what's going to happen with the property in the back? I know you've got a major project planned for the ballparks that are going to be built. So that whole area is hopefully going to have some economic growth. If we're the impetus to that, I think that's where you start seeing what the qualitative benefits are long-term. Something's got to give. And we're trying to give. And we're asking for some help to get there. To summarize what we're doing. If there's any other questions you have as far as the plans there, be happy to answer those questions.

Mr. Yoder Thank you very much. Mrs. Katz, you have a question.

Mrs. Katz: First of all, this is a wonderful project. It's not only bringing added life to the neighborhood, even though we have a lot of businesses in that area, this will add to that dynamic in that area. We've put a lot of time, effort, and money into our county all the way around. And I think the long-term benefits are what we're going to see the benefits from down the line. Right now this is, as you realize, and you know the questions that we ask, it's the short-term delivering the finances right now. But when we look at the bottom line, five, ten, 15, 20 years from now, we're going to benefit from this, tax-wise and everything else. Being a business owner, I know how important it is to get the help that you might need to build your businesses, to bring this into the community. I think where we were coming from financially is we are the county seat. We have one of the highest taxes in the area. And we struggle at times to really pay all of our bills, okay, when it comes to -- when you come to facts of what's going on. And when I ask the question of you, royal sock [name?] Gave you no money. That's fine, that's the way they do things. The state is helping you with the mall. So the city now is going to help you with what's going on here with our city. But we're going to benefit financially and also in a lot of different areas because you bring, like I said, the dynamic to the neighborhood. And I appreciate that tremendously because it's exciting. It's exciting when new businesses

come into an area. Yes, there might be challenges for some of the other businesses. But it puts other businesses on their toes and makes their game, they have to be on top of their game then to make sure they benefit also. So I think this is going to be interesting and fun to watch also. I really do. So I do want to thank you very much for the effort and time, energy, and money that you're putting into this project because it is going to benefit us in the long run.

Mr. Ara: Thank you very much. Thank you. We're going to work hard at it.

Mr. Yoder: Are there any other comments or questions from members of council? We have two members, one on Zoom, Jon and Liz are out there as well, if you guys have any questions, by all means, chime in.

Ms. Miele: Hi, Adam. I have a couple questions if you don't mind.

You guys will excuse me if there's background noise. I'm home with my kids. If you hear anything in the background, I'm not necessarily abusing them but they do like to scream. Anyway. (Laughter) Just a hands on the questions. It might be that Vince is the best person to go over this with me. I know a handful of members of council were able to meet privately with the developer and I was not able to have any private discussions. It might be for the benefit of the general public in a couple ways if I ask those questions publicly anyway to go over it. Vince, I know you said you analyzed the tax benefit. The paperwork we received showed about \$150,000 a year cash benefit to the city. Is that accurate? \$4.3 million over the next four years, did that take into the account that the county is planning to take advantage of the program?

Mr. Pulizzi: I don't have the figures in front of me but the \$4.3 million for tax revenue I do not believe, and feel free to correct me if I'm wrong, did not take into account any kind of increase in tax rate.

Ms. Miele: Okay. That it pretty much couldn't have done but I just wanted to confirm there wasn't some sort of calculated number in there.

Speaker: The 4.3 million accounted for the LRTA and the ARPA.

Ms. Miele: The \$4.3 million accounted for the ARPA funding and what?

Mayor: The LRTA and ARPA work were also considered into the equation to come after the \$4.3.

Ms. Miele: So that's the tax revenue after you subtract the \$1,050,000 we're considering putting into the project this meeting?

Mayor: Yes, that's correct.

Ms. Miele: Gentlemen, perhaps you can help.

Mayor: The revenue would be added. So obviously the LRTA doesn't take away the current tax space that's being paid. It's only the improvements. So there's no reduction in the current steady rate of what tax revenues were coming into the coffers of the city. The \$4 million is the additional tax benefit of the project over the period of time.

Ms. Miele: Got it. But it does take into account the reduction in taxes for the ten years that the LRTA will create, correct?

Speaker: It's only seven years and ramps up after four. It's year four, four years of the deferment then it ramps up to 100% in the seventh.

Ms. Miele: Right. Yep. Sorry, we've done a number of these since I was elected. So sometimes the details are a little fuzzy. And then -- all right. That certainly is helpful, gentlemen. So my understanding is that your total benefit between the LRTA and this requested amount would be about \$1.5 million, correct?

: That's correct.

Ms. Miele: Okay. And Derek, I'm not trying to be a jerk here, just so I understand, how much money have we put into other projects in the Maynard Street area with which this might compete?

Mayor: You're asking currently?

>> LIZ MIELE: Yeah, I'm asking if we've had requests from other projects within that Maynard Street corridor. I'm honestly not certain if we provided any assistance to Sheets, if they benefited from a LRTA, et cetera.

Mr. Yoder: I think what Ms. Miele is getting at, are there other requests pending out there that you are aware of, Mayor Slaughter?

Mayor: There's one -- but other than that, no, I'm not aware of any others. As far as (indiscernible) I have no idea.

Ms. Miele: So there are no other requests in the Maynard Street corridor or there's one more you think?

Mayor: There may be one more, for that corridor, but I'm not sure. At this point right now, I'm not sure. I don't have anything to bring.

Ms. Miele: Got it.

Mayor: At the moment I have nothing to bring to council.

Ms. Miele: And to our knowledge, no one else in that corridor has benefited from tax incentives except for LRTA, correct?

Mayor: I really can't answer that one because I didn't look into it.

Speaker: Gary couldn't find anything.

Mayor: Councilwoman Katz asked Gary to look into it and he said no, from what he could find, there was no other in that area.

Ms. Miele: Got it. Okay. I'm just trying to do my due diligence here when we have a moment, and I figure it's best in sort of a public fashion. And none of this is to say, gentlemen, I think this project is terrific, and it is an area of

Maynard Street that has needed to be developed for quite a while. I'm a little concerned about the levelness of the playing field in this case. I personally could support a smaller award but I'm struggling a little bit with the award we're discussing. I know Mr. Pulizzi has run the numbers and the project will pay itself back in seven or eight -- well, not seven or eight years given the LRTA at the front end but in the course of the next 12 or so. And the tenants are long-term tenants and all of that is excellent, and that is exactly the sort of project that we are excited to see in this city. But I'm still struggling a little bit with the total amount of the award. I have the impression that I might be someone in the minority in terms of as a member of council. But that's where my concerns are coming from. Can anyone else speak to that? Does anyone else share those concerns or have something that might allay those concerns to add?

Mr. Yoder: I think Jason Fink from the chamber is on. He might be able to address the question related to the other potential ask. Is he there?

Mr. Fink: Are you able to hear me?

I apologize. I'm actually in Utah right now. Participating in this remotely as you could see. There was a KOZ for the Fairfield Inn property when that property was developed. So that did receive actually a 10-year KOZ.

Ms. Miele: Thanks, Jason, that's helpful.

Mayor: The only other piece I would add, with ARPA dollars, we have until (indiscernible) of '24 and 17 or 18 million to go. That would be the only thing I'd add in there.

Ms. Miele: I appreciate the argument, Derek, but I do think if we had made announcement of the fact we were interested in handing out funding for business projects in the city of Williamsport, we probably would have requests. I guess to me that's a valid argument in the sense we do need to spend the funding. But if we were to put together a project by which we could grant some of that funding out on a competitive basis, I suspect we would have our hands full with applications. And that's something I'd continue to advocate for us putting together in an exceptionally timely fashion if possible. I think at this point we're going to find if we're giving money to land bank and redevelopment authority, we're about out of funding in that area. But anyway. I'm sorry, I interrupted. Other comments on that?

Mr. Arie: Councilwoman Miele, as far as the impact of the project as far as dollars and cents go, there's approximately between the acquisition of the land and the improvements that we're going to make on the project, and the potential tenants that are going to be onsite, over \$20 million is what we're looking at as the total investment here. I'm not taking light of our ask of a million dollars being only 5% of that, but the transformation that this project makes for the million dollar investment and what it brings along with it, as I said, almost \$19 million plus, is what I'm hoping you've got your eye on that project, on the impact of that versus what's the overall dollar amount. What is it doing, the quantitative value as well as the qualitative value.

Ms. Miele: Thank you. And I appreciate those points. As I said, there's absolutely no -- my concerns on providing the funding in no way reflect a lack of value to the project that I see. I'm simply concerned with I guess a certain equality in what we're providing to businesses in that area, and I understand certainly windows open and close and not everybody, you know what I mean. This is a very special time in the city's history and it's not funding we ordinarily have to hand out. With that said, I just -- it is still of concern to me and as I said, I believe a number of my fellow council members are fully behind this initiative. I have no reason to think my concerns are shared by the majority of council. And I am excited about the project and very impressed by it. But nonetheless I haven't heard any arguments as yet to reverse my position on it. Thank you.

Arie: Thank you.

Mr. Yoder: Thank you, Ms. Miele. Any other comments or questions for members of council? Mr. Allison.

Mr. Allison: First of all, I want to thank my colleagues on council. I wasn't directly involved in any of these discussions. But I did have a few conversations, Vince and I. And he kept me in the loop and up to date. And we talked a lot about all of these issues, how they might be resolved. And I want to thank him and Councilwoman Katz for engaging and being council's face and representatives. And Councilman Beiter for your work on ERC, especially in relation to this project. That was all important. And that's the way council should work, a collaborative effort. And I really appreciate that when I see it because we all have the same questions. I believe councilwoman Miele's concerns are legitimate. We should still, separately from this project, we should still investigate and really look into setting up a structure where we can still take some of this money and offer it to developers. Because it all goes back to the one issue. We need to grow ourselves to grow our economic economy to really address the problems we have financially and the obligations we already have with contracts as they move into the future. Those aren't going to decrease. And all third class cities are struggling with this. I think maybe some of you read an article today about Altoona. They're using their ARPA money to balance their budget this year and do some things to improve for this year. But they're looking at really tight circumstances that are going to push the economy negatively in the future. That's a very common theme you hear throughout Pennsylvania with third class cities because we have a unique set of laws and circumstances that put us in a precarious place at certain times. In any case, this particular project, I really think it is important. Councilman Pulizzi referred to it as a gateway. And it is a gateway. I really think there's three main gateways into the city. There's Market Street, Basin Street, and Maynard Street where a lot of the traffic flows that way now, comes in off the beltway. The old Route 15 used to be it, but it's

not now. Those are the three main gateway feeders. And the basin street and the Maynard Street are what we're investing in for the future. We're not going to see all the benefits, probably not even a high percentage of it. But Williamsport in ten years and the people that are sitting in these seats and the community are going to experience the benefits and be grateful I believe for the work they're doing now. And I really look at this somewhat as similar to the eastern street gateway and that took a lot of time to develop, but we put together a structure of grants and loans and some city money to make that happen. And we had a partnership there with the college. When we have partnerships with private developers, that's primetime to me. That's really going to produce bang for the buck. But the college has been a great partner and transformed that area. You could refer to this area as underdeveloped. So that would be a brown field on Maynard Street. That's going to so change the flow of traffic and everything in that area. So I think all those things are important. And one other thing we haven't talked much about because it was done several years ago now, up Maynard Street, all the way up to UPMC is called the Pathway to Health and that was accomplished with a lot of state revenue that they wanted to pour in because they saw that as ambulances and everything come in off of that gateway and head up to UPMC which really isn't too far from this intersection, our main hospital isn't far away from this. So to me, that ties into that area, and we have the Park Avenue project up there that we want to see developed. So I'd like to see how we can take the momentum from what's happening on Maynard Street and somehow leverage that into Park Avenue if there's a way to. Whenever you reach critical mass, I would call it, economically things begin to happen because people are making things happen. So somehow we can make this a part of that as well, I think it multiplies the effect and leverages it. So yes, I'm really in favor of this. We know the land has sat there for quite some time undeveloped. And to think we have a big investment under this current economic climate, kudos to you gentlemen for believing in the future and investing in the future because a lot of people pull back at a time like this. We need people who need a vision for big things. And that helps. That helps smaller things to happen around it. I'm behind the project and thankful for everybody that's worked on it.

Mr. Yoder: Well said, Councilman Allison. Any other comments or questions? The only thing I would say is just thank both of you for your patience. So I think this came in front of us about a month ago. And we took some time to kind of work through some of this. None of us really knew about this being on the horizon. So it initially caught us off guard for sure. But I appreciate your patience and collaboration with us to aid that learning process and to get us more familiar with the project and to get us to this point tonight. So thank you both very much. We're excited to see this go through, and excited to see where this goes.

Developers: : We appreciate that. If I can make one comment about that process, because we don't mean to be cloak and dagger, what we do here, but sometimes we just have to appreciate one person's point of view, a tenant's point of view, and we have to keep things under wrap. And we try to work, in working with Mayor Slaughter was the only line we could've taken with the information as well as Jason helped us as well. But we appreciate your patience. And we'll try to give as much information as we can if we're bringing the next project around also.

Mr. Yoder: Yeah, certainly some of the specifics with this lend itself to that. I certainly understand and respect that. I think a lesson learned. We really shouldn't be involved throughout the entire process, right, but it would make some sense on future developments I think, once you get toward the back end of that, start to understand what it looks like, make sure that council's engaged a little bit. And this is more for I think the administration, right, just to make sure that there is some kind of communication going back from both branches of government. Our role is really advisory and to provide some additional insight, all seven of us have a little bit different backgrounds and perspectives on our community. We all live throughout the city. We all bring different things to the table. I think moving forward, and we've run into this I think with prior negotiations as well, I think to ensure both branches are on the same page, that communication makes a lot of sense at the proper point toward the back end of that process. But that's neither here or there. We're thankful to be here. All right. Seeing no other comments or questions, I'll move for a vote here. Mr. Allison. We moved and seconded. Just to be safe, is there a motion to second?

**Mr. Pulizzi made the motion and it was seconded by Mr. Mackey.**

Mr. Yoder asked for a vote on the ordinance in first reading.

**The ordinance was carried in first reading with a vote of 6 to 1.**

**Mr. Allison voted yes, Mr. Mackey voted yes, Mr. Pulizzi voted yes, Mr. Beiter voted yes, Ms. Miele voted no, Mrs. Katz voted yes, and Mr. Yoder voted yes. Ms. Miele was the no vote.**

Mr. Yoder: 6-1 vote in favor. We'll do second reading at our next regularly scheduled. And I guess I'd appreciate your patience working with us. And I appreciate your investment in the city. Look forward to working with you.

Arie:: I apologize for next week. I won't be here. I'll be at a conference.

Appreciate it and John and I are at a conference but he may be able to join. I enjoyed joining tonight and thank you for your support. Appreciate it. We'll work hard at it.

#### Announcements

. The next regularly scheduled City Council meeting will be held on Thursday December 8, 2022 at 7:00 PM, Trade & Transit II, 144 West Third St. 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Williamsport, PA There will be a Police Pension Meeting immediately following tonight's Council meeting.

Upcoming Meetings:

Monday, Dec 5	12:00 PM	Planning Commission*
Tuesday Dec 6	1:00 PM	Finance
	2:30 PM	Public Works
Wednesday Dec 7	9:00 AM	ERC
	11:30 AM	Public Safety
Thursday, Dec. 8	7:00 PM	City Council Meeting*

Comments:

- a. City Council
- b. Administration
- c. Members of the Public
- d. Members of the media

**Meeting adjourned** upon motion by **Mr. Pulizzi and a second by Mr. Allison** Meeting adjourned at **8:41 PM** **PM with unanimous ayes.**

**Submitted by,**

**Janice M. Frank**  
**City Clerk**