

BOROUGH OF MORTON

SPECIAL MEETING

2-4-21 – 6:00

Via Zoom

The meeting was called to order by Council President at 6:08 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and Roll was called. The following was roll call response: Michelle Miller-present, John Miller-present, Michele Roberts-present, Robert McGrath-present, Hiele Hodnett-present, Joseph Boylan-present, Douglass Eagar-present, and Mayor Thomas App-present.

Also present: Solicitor Ewald, Chief Laspina, Sgt. Rodstein, Robert Poole Manager, and Martha Preston-Secretary. Ms. Miller then turned the beginning over to Solicitor Ewald.

AGENDA ITEMS

1) Police Personnel/ disciplinary matter

Solicitor Ewald announced that an executive meeting was held last night on a personnel issue. This meeting is being held for Borough council to make a determination based on a police personnel investigation. After this investigation the borough council has accepted the report's findings as credible and believes it calls for discipline. The only item on the agenda is a vote as to whether termination as his employment as a police officer is an appropriate discipline for officer Joseph Laspina. Borough council will open comments for public. We are opening up for 30 minutes because of the large number on this call. Each speaker is limited to 3 minutes. The borough will first open public comments to residents of the borough, and then non-residents may give comments with whatever time is remaining.

He then asked that those who would like to speak raise their hand and be recognized. When you raise your hand on zoom, and click on participants on bottom right there is a button for 'raised hand'. If you are a resident of Morton Borough and want to make public comment, click on the button. The public comment period will close at 6:40 p.m. Ms. Miller interjected to please state name and home address for the record.

Participants-residents of the Borough

Kristin Acquarola – had trouble with audio., could not be heard, and later in the meeting made it be known that she agreed with Representative O'Mara's views.

Participants – non-residents.

Jennifer O'Mara – State Representative - urged borough council to consider the crime and make sure punishment meets. We have already spent thousands of dollars that could be better spent on things like providing a recycling program, and if this goes to appeal and the FOP lawyer gets involved and fights it, will most certainly result in more resources spent. She also spoke on behalf of Officer Laspina has always been an above-board police officer, built a basketball court for children in Morton, he delivered a baby recently, delivered groceries to people on his off time, and has gone above and beyond to be a good officer, while he made have made mistakes, she does not think these mistakes should

result in him losing his job, and wanted council to consider the results that will happen if he is terminated unfairly. Ms. O'Mara stated this could cost a lot of hardship, wasted resources and potentially ruin the life of a young man who has a lot to offer and a lot of potential and has done a lot for the community.

Public – Residents of the Borough

William Thomas – Swarthmore Borough – 30 years a police officer. Has known Joe since he was a kid. Joseph's character is above-board, exemplary officer, goes above and beyond. He was a fireman prior to police officer, and Mr. Thomas also asked council to be considerate when it comes to the decision of the effect this will have long term. We work hand in hand and he would hate to lose an officer like this. He appreciated council listening.

Sunday Dyitt – resident – spoke on behalf of Joe, Jr. – he responded to her home when her fiancé was having a heart attack. Joe was concerned he was there, he was talking him down. When the paramedics did arrive, they thought he was on drugs, but Joe was there the whole time, looking after him and was concerned. When the paramedics did realize he was having a heart attack as he coded, it showed so much truth that our officers are here for us. Joe is always smiling and happy, and a good person in our neighborhood. NO one has to lose their job, there needs to be a repercussion if necessary, suspension, but fired no. Please consider this.

Robert Smythe – Springfield Township – he is a resident of Springfield township, has known since he was a kid. Is a member of the Springfield fire department. Joseph is committed to the Morton Fire Company; this is a serious undertaking for a young person to commit their lives. He is 100% committed to this borough, and as a police officer he has always been extremely professional and shows a deep commitment to the profession and people of this borough. He stated in August, he did deliver a baby, this is a life, if there were mistakes made, part of being in law enforcement is making decisions and acting in split seconds. If there were mistakes made, there are recourse, but if you look at his career and his commitment to this borough he has made way more correct decisions than incorrect and there are a lot of people around today for his actions than may not otherwise be .

Sally Aglidian (not sure of spelling). – 211 W Sylvan – mother-in-law of Mike Malinowski of Morton Rutledge Fire Company who passed away last December. On Sylvan Avenue we have had the opportunity for Joe to respond to 4 different houses on our street and he has always been so professional, he always brings things under control. Not only has he been a great friend and support, and he handles so many things in our neighborhood and we appreciate everything he has done.

Hans Aglidian –(not sure of spelling) 211 w Sylvan – he is disturbed by the allegations- feels there are derogatory allegations, but without knowing charges, no matter what happens this is besmirching Joe's character. Has only known Joe a little bit of time when he was assisting his deceased son-in law after the death of his son-in law. He knows that he is a very helpful individual.

Samantha Newell – (-did not give address) – thanked everyone for showing up. She is a council person in Rutledge and concurred with Jennifer O'Mara is, and urged council to think about your vote – it matters. Think about how the vote will affect multiple people; everyone Joe has touched, helped and saved. She urged them not to take this decision lightly.

Annette Deigh – did not give address- does not know the charge, and stated her frustration with that fact. This is important to know, what is going on with our police department, they are supposed to protect us it must be a serious charge does not personally know Joe and stated she could not make a public comment when she didn't know what happened.

Mr. Ewald did explain again that council cannot discuss personnel item in public. Mr. Ewald explained how to be a participant in the meeting.

Cecilia Todd – 110 Althea Lane - a resident since the house was built. We do not know the charges, and also asked how much money has been spent? This could not be answered. On behalf of Joe – he is exemplary police officer, he knows what goes on our street, he is on a first name basis. She is disappointed that this is taking place and would hate for him to be taken off the force, feels that for all he has done for the community to take him off the force would be disgraceful.

Donald Holstein – Chief of Morton Rutledge Fire Company – he has been in the fire company for 34 years and has seen it all. Joe is one of the best we have currently, and it is a shame to have him dismissed from the police force. Reprimand for what is alleged, but dismissal is a big mistake on the part of Morton Borough.

Monica Pitner – Morton Rutledge Fire Department member – no address but lives in Morton is a member of the Morton fire department. Has known Joe a long time, Joe is always there to step up and help any Morton Borough resident and is there for the kids. and exemplifies leadership.

Regina Bright (Neal family) – 30 walnut Street -parents have been residents for 80 years. They know the entire family and Joe has been a help a lot of times to our family. Joe is compassionate and helpful, and she supports and agrees with other callers.

William Lockley -former council member – Joe is a dedicated to the police department. He remembered Joe as a fine young man. He went to the academy with his son, Albert Lockley, who is now affiliated with the Philadelphia Police department. He is not familiar with the charges but be careful with your decision – because you can do a lot of damage to a young man with his life especially as a police officer. If you do charge, be careful there is a lot at stake, for him and the borough as this will cost a lot when the FOP starts to investigate the charge.

Following the public comments, council moved to vote.

Michelle Miller made a **Motion** that the Borough council approve the termination of Officer Joseph Laspina from the Borough Police Department. Heile Hodnett seconded the Motion. Roll call: Michelle Miler-Yes, John Miller-No, Michele Roberts-No, Robert McGrath- yes 'reluctantly', Hiele Hodnett-yes, Joseph Boylan -yes, Douglass Eagar – No. **Motion carried** -4 Yes – 3 No.

*Mayor App then began to speak on Joe's behalf. His communication was cut off for an unknown reason. However, his comments are attached.

*Charles Lillicrapp -114 Locust – had comments but could not get online. He submitted his comments – see attached also.

Adjournment -Mr. McGrath made a Motion to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Preston Secretary

Marty Preston

From: Robert J. Poole <~~robert.poole@mortonpa.org~~>
Sent: Friday, February 05, 2021 9:35 AM
To: Douglass W. Eagar; Hiele Hodnett; 'John Miller'; Joseph F. Boylan; 'Michele Roberts'; 'Michelle Miller'; 'Robert McGrath'; Tom App
Cc: 'Carl Ewald'; 'Marty Preston'; 'Carl Ewald'
Subject: FW: 2/4/2021 Public Zoom Meeting

At his request, I am forwarding the following comments from Mr. Lillicrapp.
Bob

From: clillicrapp@aol.com <~~clillicrapp@aol.com~~>
Sent: Thursday, February 04, 2021 9:56 PM
To: Bob Poole <rpoole@mortonpa.org>
Subject: Re: 2/4/2021 Public Zoom Meeting

Correction: " If the charges become public knowledge and they do not rise to the level of terminating the employment of a police officer the blowback will be significant. And the some."

On Thursday, February 4, 2021, 7:34:14 PM EST, clillicrapp@aol.com <clillicrapp@aol.com> wrote:

Mr. Poole: I phoned into the meetingse. Per Morton Borough's Zoom Meeting instructions. Entered via the meeting ID number. Zoom voicemail acknowledged that I had entered the meeting but will be muted until the host acknowledged me. Was never acknowledged. This is a one off departure from the Borough's Zoom Meeting instructions. Every zoom meeting I have attended via the phone I was recognized to enter into the meeting. So, here is my input. If the "charges" become public knowledge and they do rise to the level of terminating the employment of police officer the blowback will be immediate and significant. And then some. It was instructive that the Mayor and the Chairman of Public Safety Committee, both of whom are directly responsible to oversee the operation of the police department voted no. The Mayor via his statement.
Charles Lillicrapp

P.S. Mr. Poole will you please forward this email to all council members.

I cannot overstate how strongly I disagree with these proceedings against Officer LaSpina. I believe Officer LaSpina to be a true asset to our Police Department. His record is without blemishes or deficiencies. He has served our community with distinction even throughout this difficult 4 ½ month investigation period.

Over the last two years that I have known him, Officer LaSpina has demonstrated a high level of professionalism and character. I witnessed the great restraint he demonstrated during a recorded traffic stop where he was berated and cursed at by the individual. This past fall, he and his partner helped a woman deliver her baby and was featured on the local news. He and the Chief were the first responders at a house fire in Morton and saved a family from disaster. He and his fellow firefighters rescued flood victims during a horrific storm that filled our creeks and homes. Officer LaSpina was recently elected by his peers as the new President of our volunteer Fire Department. He goes beyond the call of duty to help the less fortunate who are homeless and helps fellow staff. He has dealt with the loss of close friends both in the Fire and Police Departments and has shown great compassion for these families.

I have been instructed by the Borough Solicitor that I cannot discuss anything pertaining to this personnel matter or the investigation. However, I want our citizens to know that, as Mayor, I will do everything possible to see that justice prevails and I want to assure everyone that our Police Department will continue to serve and protect our community 24/7/365 days a year.

