

JOHNSTOWN CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, May 28, 2025

City Council met in a stated session for the special council transaction of business.
Mayor Frank Janakovic called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Reverend King offered the invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The following members of Council were present for roll call:

Mayor Janakovic, Reverend King, Mr. Arnone, Mr. Britt, Mr. Clark, Ms. Huchel,
Mrs. Mock (7).

David Andrews, Esquire, Solicitor; Art Martynuska, City Manager; Michael Capriotti, Assistant City Manager; John DeBartola; Damien Tackett; Catherine-Anne McCloskey; Samantha Shaffer; Sharon Honkus; Transportation Business Line Leader, WSP, Jennifer Louwerse; Associate Principal, CJL Engineering, Alyssa Rouser; Upstreet Architects, Karen Welsh were also in attendance.

PUBLIC COMMENT-AGENDA ITEMS ONLY:

Mr. John DeBartola, 1197 Bedford Street, addressed the Council regarding the Central Park project, calling it the most critical issue on the agenda. He emphasized the strong community interest and thanked Councilmembers Huchel, Mock, and Clark for their involvement, despite his opposition to some of their positions. He criticized the plan to relocate the Christmas tree to the Cambria County Library on Main Street and expressed concern about potential negative impacts on struggling businesses due to proposed street closures and lost parking. He cited Becky Buchko's public criticism of the new design as a "concrete jungle" and highlighted wasteful spending, including \$1.6 million for original plans that were reportedly only 75 percent complete and not owned, along with an additional \$80,000 allegedly spent on new plans with CJL.

Mr. DeBartola described the situation as a failure of leadership and a misuse of funds, claiming the money could have gone toward public safety or neighborhood improvements. He opposed the removal of the Pasquerilla fountain and its replacement with concrete, calling it a disgrace. He expressed disbelief that Council would proceed despite public opposition and four years of delays. He referenced a suggestion by Councilwoman Mock to consider legal action against SCAPE to recover the \$1.6 million and argued this would only further waste time and resources.

Mayor Janakovic responded that the money would not be returned to the government and would be used in the park regardless. Mr. DeBartola reiterated

his view that the park was being destroyed and blamed a lack of leadership for the prolonged issues. He criticized the Main Street Committee, which he said met only once, and claimed the related Main Street project remained unresolved. He concluded by urging Council to table the matter and let the incoming Council, with four current members not returning, determine the future use of the remaining funds.

Mayor Janakovic thanked Mr. DeBartola for his comment and invited Damien Tackett to present his comments.

Mr. Damien Tackett, 125 Franklin Street, a business owner from the Sweet Spot, addressed the Council and expressed appreciation for their service, emphasizing that he was not speaking as an adversary. He acknowledged that the Central Park project would likely proceed and requested the Council's assistance in mitigating the financial impact on local businesses during the transition. Mr. Tackett highlighted the economic challenges already facing the area and stated he anticipated a year-long loss in foot traffic and events, which represented a substantial portion of his annual revenue. While confident in his own business's ability to endure the disruption, he expressed concern that neighboring businesses might not fare as well. He urged the Council to consider measures to ease the transition and acknowledged the contentious nature of the decision. He closed by reassuring the Council of his respectful intentions and support for their difficult position.

Mayor Janakovic thanked Mr. Tackett for his public comments and invited Ms. Catherine-Anne McCloskey to present her comments.

Catherine-Anne McCloskey, 241 School Place, requested that City Council strongly reject the Central Park Renovation Plan. She described the plan as awful and aligned her opinions with those of Mr. DeBartola. She shared personal memories of the park from childhood, emphasizing its sentimental value and stating that elements like the fountain and gazebo should be cleaned and preserved rather than destroyed. She criticized the city for prioritizing a multi-million-dollar park project while infrastructure issues like large puddles on Main Street remained unaddressed.

Ms. McCloskey concluded by inviting the Council to her performance during the Pride event on June 21 in front of the Sweet Spot, where she planned to sing "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag" with updated lyrics from Country Joe McDonald. She urged the Council to leave the park as it is and pleaded with them not to destroy it.

Mayor Janakovic thanked Ms. McCloskey for her comments and invited the next commenter, Ms. Samantha Shaffer, to speak.

Samantha Shaffer, 525 Vine Street Towers, echoed the previous comments provided to Council by Mr. DeBartola. She noted that the park had many grassy and shady regions that were valuable to the public. Ms. Shaffer thanked the Council for their time.

Mayor Janakovic thanked Ms. Shaffer for her comments and invited Ms. Sharon Honkus to present her comments to City Council.

Sharon Honkus, 345 Main Street, Loft Number 2, stated since 2022, Discover Downtown and its president, Melissa Radovanic, had participated in multiple meetings and walkthroughs of Central Park with City officials and various project consultants including Thaddeus Pawlowski, Ethan Imhoff, John Dubnansky, and Kate Orff, of SCAPE. She noted that during those interactions, it was repeatedly guaranteed that the Christmas tree along with Christmas Village would return. As a property owner, former 25-year business owner, and founding member of the Discover Downtown Johnstown Partnership, she was disappointed to see that Christmas Village would not return to Central Park post-construction

Ms. Honkus explained that after nearly a year of silence from the City, Discover Downtown representatives met twice with the city manager and assistant and also with CJL and Upstreet Architects . Despite appreciating the renewed engagement, she expressed deep disappointment that two years of assurances about the Christmas Village were broken. She detailed that the removal of the gazebo and relocation of features would disrupt the coordinated animation and programming that volunteers had spent hundreds of hours and tens of thousands of dollars to create over the past decade. The current plan, she stated, rendered their efforts worthless and left them with the burdensome choice of starting over or abandoning the initiative entirely.

Ms. Honkus concluded by emphasizing that Discover Downtown is a group of unpaid volunteers committed to improving downtown Johnstown and that the Christmas village and related events have been part of their mission since 1980. She asked Council to consider restoring the village to Central Park by 2026 and acknowledged the dedication and impact of the volunteer group on the community.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Resolution No. 105720

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF JOHNSTOWN,
CAMBRIA COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, APPROVING THE CENTRAL
PARK IMPROVEMENT DESIGN PLANS

Mrs. Mock made a motion to approve the resolution. The motion was seconded by Reverend King.

Ms. Huchel stated she had significant concerns about the current Central Park plan. She explained that the plan lacked community engagement and did not reflect the input gathered during the extensive process conducted by Scape Landscape Architecture. She emphasized that the city paid a substantial amount for Scape's professional design, which was completed and delivered, but then was altered significantly. Ms. Huchel questioned the rationale for changes such as the addition of a large circular feature and multiple pathways, and stated arguments for these changes, including claims about improved accessibility, were unconvincing.

Ms. Huchel noted that the modifications required new studies, including a photometric analysis, and were implemented rapidly within the past seven weeks after she first saw a hand-drawn overlay on SCAPE's plan. She criticized the decision to diverge from the original design, which led to Scape distancing itself from the project, and said this resulted in the loss of the park that both the city paid for and that 300 residents had supported. While she supported improvements such as increased greenery, new trees, better lighting, and improved infrastructure, she stated she could not in good conscience vote for the current version of the plan, as it did not align with what the community had requested.

Mayor Janakovic introduced Ms. Jennifer Louwerson, to present on behalf of CJL, regarding the Central Park Project.

Ms. Jennifer Louwerson, WSP, noted her former position as PennDOT's Deputy Secretary for Multimodal. She explained her involvement in the Central Park project due to concerns from state officials, PennDOT, and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) about the city's ability to manage the complexities of the RAISE grant. She clarified that the RAISE grant, awarded approximately 18 months prior, could not be used for the park due to FTA restrictions. As a result, the park had to be separated into its own design and funding package,

supported by ARPA and RCAP funds, while her team ensured design compatibility across both packages and compliance with federal regulations.

Ms. Louwerson noted that while the original designer changed, CJL Engineering remained consistently involved. She addressed public concerns by stating that although full consensus may never be achieved, the team worked diligently to deliver a plan that maximized benefits for citizens and remained fiscally responsible, staying at or under budget. She emphasized that changes to the plan, including refinements for durability and cost control, were necessary due to inflation, material shortages, and outstanding design comments—over 300 at the 100% design submission stage. She rejected the notion of a \$1.6 million loss in plans, instead describing the updates as typical evolutions for projects of this kind. Ms. Louwerson concluded her presentation and turned the discussion to Ms. Alyssa Rouser.

Alyssa Rouser, Associate Principal, CJL Engineering, presented the detailed plans for the complete redesign of Central Park. She stated while the park would be entirely redone, several elements would be salvaged and reused. The gazebo would be removed, but parts like its copper roof and signage would be repurposed as art installations. The existing border stones would be reused, the Pasquerilla fountain and cannons would be relocated to Sandvaley, and the fireman's bell would move to Fireman's Memorial Park. All other monuments would remain within the new memorial walkway. She noted that Park Place would be closed to vehicular traffic with removable bollards, and several existing trees would be preserved.

Ms. Rouser explained that the Franklin Street side of the park would host the memorial walkway, retaining the Jacob Campbell Civil War statue, time capsule, military service memorials, the 28th Military Police Memorial, and the 1977 Flood Memorial. The Joseph Johns statue would stay near its current location with added seating and signage. Each monument would receive new lighting and interpretive signage. Handicapped parking would be added nearby for accessibility, and the design team had coordinated with each monument group to ensure proper placement and amenities.

On the Park Place side, new sidewalks would be installed in front of nearby businesses, replacing deteriorated surfaces. Park Place itself would receive an asphalt overlay to raise its elevation and be topped with a decorative resin for a unified aesthetic. This area would include picnic tables, lounge chairs, and greenery, creating a welcoming space for gatherings and performances. It would also serve as the site for the Christmas Village, with houses lining the street and new in-ground electrical and data connections eliminating tripping hazards.

Finally, a new interactive water feature would be installed near Locust Street. It would include push-button activation, low precast stone seating for safety, and LED lighting customizable via a Wi-Fi-controlled system. The fountain could be operated on a schedule through a smartphone, allowing flexibility and efficiency in park operations. Ms. Rouser concluded her presentation and turned the discussion to Ms. Welsh.

Karen Welsh, Upstreet Architects, stated the new pavilion design by Upstreet Architects was inspired by the city's industrial heritage, featuring an octagonal rear to resemble a traditional gazebo and a black steel frame, copper-colored roof, and wood ceiling. It would include LED color-changing lights and motorized clear vinyl patio shades on all but the front side to allow year-round use. The pavilion would measure 30ft x 40ft with a 14-foot-deep rectangular front and a 16-foot octagonal rear, standing 10 feet high at the perimeter and 16 feet at the peak. The surrounding event lawn would have a 2.5-foot grade change to create an amphitheater effect and include hardscape for accessibility. A central gathering space, designed for a Christmas tree and seasonal displays, would feature removable planters and benches. The park would include native, low-maintenance landscaping, a rubber mat for tree grates, an irrigation system, and a mix of resin-bound aggregate, pavers, and concrete for surfacing.

Ms. Huchel questioned the motivations behind the design changes, particularly the introduction of a central concrete circle and pathways that split the event lawn. She expressed concern that this prioritizes convenience over community engagement and the original design intent, potentially disrupting the memorial walk and the park's green space. She also sought clarification on who initiated these changes and criticized them as undermining the input from 300 community members.

Ms. Welsh responded that the circle was introduced to connect key park corners and improve pedestrian access, noting her personal experience of using that route. She clarified that the design changes were not specifically requested by city staff but resulted from broader discussions, including budgetary considerations. She also confirmed the pavilion design was completely new, replacing SCAPE's placeholder structure, and stated her team had consulted musicians, focusing on equipment transport and layout.

Mr. Arnone supported the new design by emphasizing that public behavior favors convenience, noting that people often damage landscaping when shortcuts are unavailable. He asserted that adding direct pathways prevents such maintenance issues.

Mayor Janakovic asked for a cost estimate of the savings resulting from the design changes.

Ms. Louwse confirmed the projected savings were between \$800,000 and \$1.2 million and highlighted that some materials, like tree grate covers, were upgraded for durability and long-term maintenance savings. She defended the refinements as thoughtful decisions to preserve the park's condition over decades and reduce future maintenance costs. She described the decision-making as collaborative among consultants and city officials.

In response to Ms. Huchel's question regarding pavilion changes, it was noted that the pavilion was not refined, but entirely redesigned to better represent the city. In regards to performer consultation, it was stated team members had engaged with some performers and described the pavilion as a typical and functional design for musical use. The CJL team clarified there was 30 to 40 feet of open space between the pavilion and the lawn before the new wide path began.

Ms. Mock stated SCAPE's original pavilion was only a placeholder and was not fully designed. Ms. Louwse confirmed that although SCAPE claimed to deliver 100% design documents, they were incomplete and had over 300 unresolved comments. She explained that issuing bids based on those plans would have led to numerous RFIs and increased costs.

Mr. Britt asked how much larger the new pavilion was compared to the existing one, to which, it was noted that the new pavilion is approximately ten feet longer and five to eight feet deeper, increasing from 20ft x 30 ft to 30ft x 40ft.

Ms. Mock reiterated her longstanding concern that the original budget estimates were unrealistic, especially with inflation, supply chain issues, and tariffs. She argued that the \$900,000 saved on a stone wall and other items helped offset these issues and enabled accurate, final bid-ready documents.

It was noted that cities typically do not have reserve funds for cost overruns and that incomplete estimates can lead to painful decisions about cuts later, making early cost control crucial. Additionally, Ms. Louwse noted that cutting project components is not free, as redesigns must be paid for. She confirmed that this project was being planned carefully to avoid such inefficiencies.

Ms. Huchel asked if Discover Downtown had requested the central location for the Christmas tree. It was clarified that the idea originated from the project team and evolved naturally due to the layout of sidewalks connecting park corners.

The central location was seen as a more visible and functional centerpiece for events throughout the year.

Ms. Huchel expressed concern that the new layout, with large concrete areas and potential crowding, might lead people to step into flower beds. Ms. Louwrese replied that the tree would sit on an 8- to 10-foot sidewalk at the park's high point, offering visibility from all areas.

Ms. Huchel pointed out that SCAPE had previously offered to save \$850,000 by reducing the volume of blue rock. She acknowledged that while some of the blue rock was replaced, helping preserve much of the park's layout, the event lawn had effectively been lost.

Mayor Janakovic commented that although there had been comments regarding how money was being spent, the city had successfully secured significant funding. He noted that, through efforts with Senator Casey, the city received a \$24.5 million RAISE Grant, the third highest in the United States, and an additional \$30 million from ARPA funds. In total, \$54.5 million had been obtained. He acknowledged that spending \$6 to \$8 million on the park was substantial, but emphasized that 85% of the funds were allocated to other projects across the city. These included home repairs, sewer work, business support, nonprofit aid, Point Stadium, and the Main Street project. He commended Council for its efforts to distribute the funds broadly to benefit many parts of the city.

Ms. Louwrese further explained that the RAISE Grant awarded to Johnstown was especially notable because it required a 0% local match, unlike most grants which typically demand a 30% local match. This exception, attributed to strong support from state and federal elected officials, was described as extremely rare and a significant achievement for the city.

Mayor Janakovic concluded by emphasizing that receiving such funding was likely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Johnstown and underscored the importance of carefully considering all associated projects.

Ms. Mock called for a vote.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yeas: Mr. Arnone, Mr. Britt, Mr. Clark, Mayor Janakovic, Reverend King,
Mrs. Mock (6).

Nays: Ms. Huchel (1).

OLD BUSINESS:

None.

NEW BUSINESS:

None.

PUBLIC COMMENT – NON-AGENDA ACTION ITEMS:

John DeBartola 1197 Bedford Street, expressed strong criticism toward Deputy Mayor Sylvia King, noting that she only gave a yes vote without offering any commentary, opinion, or explanation. He stated her silence was unacceptable and warned that this would be a problem in the upcoming November election. He then addressed Mayor Janakovic, referencing a Right-to-Know request he had submitted regarding ARPA funds. He revealed that city records showed \$250,000 had been mismanaged or misappropriated with \$115,000 needing to be returned, and criticized Council for not informing the public. He claimed he had to share the information himself on Facebook.

Mr. DeBartola further alleged that \$1.6 million had been wasted, referencing \$80,000 spent on plans from CJL that were not being used. He described the situation as a disgrace and accused Council of making excuses and playing politics instead of listening to the community. He questioned Council's ability to manage Central Park funds if they could not manage other city finances properly. He also mentioned that Discover's Christmas tree had no place to go in 2025, citing it as another example of mismanagement. He concluded by urging Council to speak up, stop hiding, and listen to the residents, asserting that most people in the room disagreed with them unless they were being paid.

Mayor Janakovic responded by expressing pride in the leadership of the city, both past and present. He highlighted several accomplishments, including the city's exit from Act 47 after 30 years and progress made in areas such as sewage. He concluded by commending his fellow council members for their work.

An interjection occurred during public discussion. Mayor Janakovic informed the public member that they were required to schedule their comment in order to present at the Council meeting.

Attached to the Minutes are the provided Central Park Plan diagrams and statement from Mr. Clark.

Wednesday, April, 2025,
Stated Meeting, continued

10 of 10

RECESS/ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 6:04 p.m.