

CITY OF JOHNSTOWN  
WORKSHOP MINUTES  
Monday, March 03, 2025

The City of Johnstown Workshop met in a stated session for the general transaction of business. Mayor Frank Janakovic called the workshop to order at 5:00 p.m.

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

The following members of the Authority were present:

Mr. Arnone, Mr. Britt, Mayor Janakovic, Reverend King, Mrs. Mock, Ms. Huchel (6).

Art Martynuska, City Manager; Michael Capriotti, Assistant City Manager; Dave Andrews, Esquire, Solicitor; Sara Williams, Executive Secretary; Robert Statler, Fire Chief; and Dave Williams, Codes Enforcement Officer were also present.

PRESENTATION

City Manager Martynuska noted that Mr. Dave Church with Laurel would give a presentation on how the code system is working, and with Laurel on board, give further details about how the code system is integrating.

Mr. Williams reported as of January 1, 2025, Laurel Municipal Inspection Agency was contracted with the City to perform some property maintenance issues and code. He noted Laurel will go out there internally on criminal charges.

He noted his concern moving forward with City Manager Martynuska that they would still be dealing with resident complaints, et cetera. Mr. Williams reported that some of the bigger issues would be sent over to Laurel for property maintenance. He mentioned his concerns dealing with building codes, dealing with permitting, and dealing with property maintenance. Mr. Williams stated the fire department will be conducting street-by-street sweeps of various streets. He added the fire department staff will be taking pictures, complete a form, which will be shared with himself and another code officer via One Drive.

Mr. Williams stated, as the photographs are reviewed, violations will be sent directly with the pictures captured by the fire department. He noted, if there are any major or continuing issues, a form will be sent to Laurel. Laurel will do their own investigation and file criminal charges, if necessary. He added that the fire department will start in Moxham and Coopersdale. There are a total of four platoons. Fire Chief Statler added each platoon will have a street

assignment. Once the street assignment is completed, another street will be assigned.

It was noted Laurel's City Council representatives are Dave Church and James King. A complaint would be sent from Dave or Shawn Stiffler to Laurel with allowance to investigate the property. Forms are sent first class mail and certified mail to the property owner. The owner then has 30 days to respond. After that time, charges are filed with the magistrate.

City Manager Martynuska reported on a recent meeting with Magistrates Subich and Price. Laurel and City representatives were also present. This is somewhat new for the City process, especially with a criminal aspect attached.

Dave Church, Laurel Municipal Inspection Agency, stated their agency pushes for compliance with these issues. The property owner is encouraged to clean up the property before the issue goes to court. He added, once the issue goes to court, the magistrate usually tries to push for compliance as well. Mr. Church reported the matter ends up with a continuance that runs into a second hearing. Once it gets to the second rescheduled hearing, the magistrate will rule on the individual violations. Each violation on the notice is an individual criminal citation sent to the magistrate. He added that the success has been pretty good, and the ultimate goal is compliance. They just want people to comply and resolve the issues rather than hammering them with fines. Mr. Church stated houses actually get fixed and are safe.

Mr. Arnone mentioned abandoned cars being left on properties. He questioned whether that could also be reported to the police due to it being an ongoing problem. It was noted a code is already established for what a parking space is considered. Mr. Church stated there is a code in property under the international property maintenance for motor vehicles. In order to pursue it, there has to be one of three kinds of threats. It has to be an environmental threat where it is leaking oil, antifreeze, or fluid that would lead to an environmental flood, threat to waterways, threat to ground and so on. It could also be an infestation threat where there is a risk of having rats, mice, and cats living in it or could cause bodily harm. Mr. Church added it could also include partially dismantled vehicles that are sitting on jack stands that could run the risk of falling on people.

Mr. Williams discussed the abandoned vehicle ordinance. He noted an issue with not being able to run a VIN number. The plate of the vehicle in question would have to be run by the Johnstown Police Department (JPD). Whenever the car is towed, the hauler requests a form be completed from JPD, so they can legally haul it away. It was noted that a sweep recently occurred where seven

vehicles were removed. Mr. Arnone noted a truck has been sitting along Pine Street for three years. Mr. Britt added there is a white car on a jack down by the school playground by the fence along Messenger Street.

Mr. Capriotti suggested getting the paperwork from the police ready in advance in order to further expedite the process. There are many cars that have been sitting around Johnstown for over five years that are not placarded. He mentioned the ordinance was passed a while ago and added that the process just needed to be jump started.

Ms. Huchel suggested the fire department also look for abandoned vehicles in their sweeps. It was noted that the board can issue code violations to people if the vehicle appears to look abandoned, but the fire department are not able to go on property. They can write it up and take a picture of it. Vacant lots can also be visited, and for the vehicles that are sitting in high grass, a complaint will be sent to the property owners.

Ms. Mock thanked Mr. Martynuska for bringing in the Laurel group. She noted an ordinance passed in 2023 to shorten the timeframe for the fines and then the matter goes to the magistrate. She voiced her concern of the follow-up on citations not getting done. She stated the initial citation goes out, and after that, no one follows up on the second one. There is no system inhouse to alert the follow-ups. She noted the use of paper that it is more labor intensive. It was noted that the new software does notify what is due.

Mr. Arnone stated the issues should be sent to Laurel once the matter gets to the 20<sup>th</sup> day. That is their expertise, the Codes Offices is not backed up with the issues. Ms. Mock noted the fire department will be noting issues that will pile up. Mr. Williams stated the issues will be entered into the software and violations will be sent out directly. Codes will follow up after 10 days. Mr. Williams stated there are two and half staff members to handle the codes violations.

Ms. Mock asked City Manager Martynuska if there was any way to get a temporary employee hired to help catch up with the citations. City Manager Martynuska reported on looking into an additional employee, as well as a summer intern. Mr. Williams explained the process for handling violations. Ms. Mock reiterated Mr. Arnone's statement that after 20 days and there is no satisfaction, the issue should be sent to Laurel. Mr. Arnone stated City Council does not want Codes' staff to be overloaded.

Ms. Mock questioned Laurel Municipal Inspection Agency's follow-up on issues and whether they have a timeframe they abide by after they receive a complaint.

Mr. Church stated, once the complaint is received, Laurel performs an inspection. He reported the property owner will be sent two identical letters (one regular mail and one certified mail). Mr. Church noted the agency operates under UCC Pennsylvania Act 45 and Pennsylvania Statute 35. Their operations will abide by the state statute, which allots for 30 days. At the end of 30 days, charges will be filed with the magistrate. Mr. Church noted James King will be handling the City primarily by himself. A monthly report will be provided to the City on the processing of all code's issues.

Mr. Capriotti noted a question related to the current City ordinance and whether the City has a stricter or faster timeline than Laurel Municipal Inspection Agency is adhering to. Mr. Andrews was questioned as to whether or not the City's ordinance can supersede. Mr. Andrews stated the Laurel agents working for the City can utilize the City's ordinances and language to speed up the process. Laurel Municipal Inspection Agency agreed to utilize the City's ordinances.

Mayor Janakovic questioned Laurel as to options should James King become overloaded. Mr. Church said additional staff would be utilized if necessary. Mr. Capriotti noted the required language was included in the passed resolution.

Further discussion took place between Reverend King and Laurel regarding the time period that the department reviews the information until the Laurel proceeds to magistrate. There would be a discretionary period of 10 days and then the matter would go to civil.

Mr. Britt asked if it would be possible to get a report for follow-up after this board meeting. It was noted that reports could be provided every month to Council.

City Manager Martynuska stated the fire department is going to be more alert when on calls to determine whether there is a rental occupancy in order to obtain the property owner's information. He reported on a recent meeting with Cambria County GIS and being introduced to a program with 360 cameras that can be put on top of the fire engines and squad. This would allow the fire department to just drive down the street and take photos of all three sides of the house. The fire department staff could also take notice of the narrowness of an alley and permitting visibility to issues in real time. He added that these cameras will also give a lot of database information for the City. This will help differentiate between wooden poles and metal poles and what is owned by the City. City Manager Martynuska noted that drones will fly overhead block by block to see what is visible from the air, such as roof problems. He was

hopeful the technology will give the City another set of eyes and will be more than just "foot traffic."

City Manager Martynuska discussed the need for the City to redo all of its street signs because the standards have changed on street sign size. He stated it is unclear as to the total number of street signs in the City. He added that the driving will aid in mapping out the rest of the City.

Mayor Janakovic stated this would help take care of people who are currently living or residing in homes. He questioned addressing the code violations with no one to go after, whether the City would have to clean up and deal with the issue. He noted Act 90 that can be used after the responsible parties. Mr. Williams noted many properties where the property owner has passed away, and it is a multi-dwelling with people still living there paying with no rent. He is working with the county and City Manager Martynuska regarding some properties in taxation. He discussed trying to get these properties on the tax sales, conservatorships, et cetera.

Ms. Mock questioned when the fire department is conducting sweeps and submitting their information to Mr. Williams, if he would be able to see whether it is a rental or not. Fire Chief Statler stated sometimes the determination of a rental property cannot be made by just looking at the GIS and tax ownership. It was noted if a property belongs to a different owner or the owner address is different, a letter requiring a rental registration or a thousand dollar fine will be sent.

Fire Chief Statler commented that many tenants do not know who their landlord is. He stated his staff is informed on calls that patient care is the priority, but the staff will obtain the information if possible.

Mr. Williams reported on 150 plus, 180 rental inspections performed in the month of January 2025. It was noted that 2023 did not count. People need to register every year. There is a \$1,000 fine for not having a rental registered after March 1, 2025. Reverend King inquires as to how many rental properties there are in the City altogether. Fire Chief Statler stated they do not know as they are always finding rental properties that they were not aware were rentals.

Mayor Janakovic asked how many city staff members are employed to deal with the high grass and matters the City handles. Mr. Williams stated there will be three seasonal laborers in 2025, which is the same as last year. Mayor Janakovic asked additional options were being considered, such as the judges work crew or other volunteers as there are programs out there. Mr. Williams

noted additional options being investigated for additional laborers. It was noted that Vision is allocating \$15,000 and wants to do the same lots every two weeks. Mr. Williams is working with them on determining what lots to do within the City.

Mr. Williams stated last year's seasonal summer crew went over with Mr. Campagna and worked on the seasonal winter crew. As long as they are doing well, this staff will come back. The staff could potentially get hired full-time and rotate between the winter and seasonal shifts, which is being discussed with City Manager Martynuska and the finance director. It is projected to have this staff starting to work either in March or April.

Ms. Huchel questioned the nature of the letters that will be mailed out for violations and wanted to know if there would be different letters for different purposes. It was noted the letters will not script criminal charges immediately.

Reverend King suggested the Housing Authority may be able to assist in certain areas.

Ms. Mock stated, at the meeting with the magistrates, a question came up with the LLCs and the out-of-state people. She mentioned that Magistrate Subich requested everything be given to him, so he could deal with the mechanics and figure it out on his end. It was suggested there would be some hesitation on filing against somebody with an LLC or if they were from Philadelphia or New York. The City still has to determine the owner of the LLC, as that is the only way to press charges against an actual person. The magistrates would then be provided the names to move on.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Joseph Warhul, 44 Clover Street, Johnstown, stated he was hearing fines as being a punishment as well as being harsh, being gentle, and nice. He stated the laws need to be applied to people without passion or prejudice. Mr. Warhul stated, if an old lady by his house has grass two feet high and the city wants to fine her, call him and he will cut her grass. He reported that a gentleman residing in Brooklyn purchased a house across from him and has not touched it since. Mr. Warhul has called multiple times and added the grass grows constantly. He takes care of his own three properties and also takes care of the little park down the bottom of his street.

Mr. Warhul helps an elderly woman and a disabled gentleman. He understands that people do not have money, funds, or people, but he has made an investment in three properties. He has performed three sewage projects. Mr. Warhul stated

does not have rental properties. He owns the property next to his house, and he gave it to his daughter to live in. He pays the taxes on it. Mr. Warhul reported the problems are rental properties and younger people, as the elderly people tend to keep their houses decent.

He stated his frustration with the 30-day, 10-day plan as he does not understand who to call or what to do. He hoped there was something on the website, so he can know what he is to do. Mr. Warhul told Council that they will be hearing from him when the grass at his neighbor's property starts growing two-feet high. He added that he should not have to call multiple times or keep going to the same places. He mentioned the filthy houses and garages falling down that need to be cleaned up. Mr. Warhul reported the American dream of building equity and passing something on to your children is not the experience he is getting over on Clover Street. He is going to leave his child a "freaking headache to try to get rid of at a loss." He would like to see the surrounding neighborhoods get more attention.

Mr. Warhul stated that if the City wants to legislate on people and force them to do things, then do it. He added there are churches and people around to help those less fortunate.

He asked the City Manager Martynuska to clarify or explain how that all would work. City Manager Martynuska reported on planning a follow-up with Mr. Andrews's office to clarify establishing a website and providing information on violations. There was further discussion regarding the reporting system, and it was noted that process is not changing. The only thing changing is the information that is being gathered, and a system is being established to increase compliance.

Mr. Warhul mentioned various violations involving cat food and cans and questioned if anyone would be giving violations for those things. He added that cans are just being thrown outside of apartment buildings along the City sidewalk.

Mrs. Warhul stated she walks her dogs around the neighborhood and observes the empty houses with their roofs caved in. She added that the light of day can be seen from the outside. These properties also have notes on them dated 10-15 years ago that they were tagged by the City. She also noted a property along Coleman Avenue has glass windows that are really hanging out, and she voiced her concern for the public's safety. It was noted the City has knocked down 723 houses. Part of the problem is money, because it takes about \$10,000 per house to knock a house down.

Monday, March 3, 2025  
Workshop, continued

8 of 8

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the workshop was adjourned at 5:48 p.m.

It was noted that Council would meet at 6:00 p.m. for the City Council meeting.