



HISTORIC  
**Bellefonte™**  
*Est. 1795*

To: Council

From: Ralph

Date: April 16, 2021

Subject: Borough Manager's Report for March

March	Meetings/Activities Attended
1	Work Session and Council Meeting
2	Meet with Alyssa, Don to review council action items Borough Authority Meeting
4	Streets Committee Meeting
5	Airport Authority Committee Meeting
8	Met with New Owners and toured former Sutton Property Planning Commission Meeting
9	Safety Committee Meeting
10	Bellefonte Area Industrial Development Authority Meeting
11	PSAB Streets Webinar Streets Committee Meeting Council Agenda Planning Meeting
15	HR Meeting with the Union – Contract negotiations Meeting onsite North Thomas Street, Zoning Issue Work Session and Council Meeting
16	Meet with Alyssa, Don to review council action items Staff meeting to disseminate/communicate information Meet Student at Big Spring – Explain Water Works System
17	Meeting onsite East Howard Street, Zoning Issue
18	Meet with Cruise Chair – Discuss Event PSAB Streets Webinar Streets Committee Meeting
23	Meeting with County Administrator – Parking Issues around Courthouse
24	Employee Hearing/Personnel Issue Interviews for the Assistant Superintendent at the WWTP
25	PSAB Streets Webinar Streets Committee Meeting Airport Authority Meeting Parks Committee Meeting
29	HR Committee Meeting, Union – Contract negotiations Special Meeting – Delta Development re Strategic Management Plan

Activities
Meeting preparation and follow up, coordinate with staff – doodles, directives, policy questions
Unscheduled, informal, meetings, calls, emails to/from staff – Department day-to-day operations
Correspondence – elected, fellow staff, residents, business owners, other government staff, realtors, customers, etc. via emails, phone calls, letters
Assisted with getting information out about rail car incident near the Train Station
Reviewed Revised State COVID 19 Guidelines
Answered questions regarding RV Ordinance
Contacted Millheim Borough re Interest in County Discrimination – Human Relations Council
Coordinated the filling of vacant HARB seat
Coordinated discussions with Mark Hood of LTAP – Pedestrian Safety, Options, Penn DoT approvals needed
Coordinated meeting re Train Whistle necessity in the Borough
Completed obtaining Signatures – Deck Expansion Agreement over Mill Race
Draft meeting minutes review
Stop at Permit Holder Property – Final Sign off for Zoning
Reviewed/provided input on proposed contract changes – union agreement
Vacancy Interviews
Filled in, started training, planning, zoning, HARB administrator re forms, agendas, interpretations, past practices, meetings, questions

Other:

- I have attached a good (In my view) article regarding Local Government and the subject of politics.
- I have asked Don to do some research on Boroughs that have Standing Committees and set meeting times for the Committee Meetings. We spend a significant amount of time following each Council meeting setting up committee meetings with times and frequencies that are always a moving target. I would like to look at some models to see how we might adapt to a standing time and frequency to everyone's benefit. Some of our committees have done this (Streets, Finance) and It seems to be working.

# Losing faith in government? Look to your local town council

 [inquirer.com/politics/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-town-councils-20210329.html](https://www.inquirer.com/politics/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-town-councils-20210329.html)



Forks Township Supervisors John O'Neil (from left), Tim Hughes, and Kelly Keegan before their meeting on March 19 in Forks Township, Pa. National politics is as divisive as ever. But in municipal buildings and on council Zoom screens, it's business as usual. And business is cordial.[Read more](#)CHARLES FOX / Staff Photographer



by [Julia Terruso](#)  
Published  
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Kelly Keegan said she felt “so sick” over Donald Trump’s presidency she joined her local Democratic Party and ran for town council in 2019, hoping that getting involved might help. Less than two years into her term and two months after Trump left the White House, the U.S. remains deeply politically divided.

But Keegan’s bimonthly meetings at the Forks Township municipal building in Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley are another story.

“We really get along,” Keegan, a high school nurse, said of the town’s governing board. “I know that’s probably boring to hear, but I don’t sit around and look at the three Republicans and think to myself, ‘Ew, I’m just gonna disagree with them because they’re Republicans.’ ... I look forward to what they have to say.”

The Forks Township Board of Supervisors has a 3-2 Republican majority, in a politically split town in [the politically split bellwether Northampton County](#), which swung from voting for Barack Obama to Trump and [back to Joe Biden](#).

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That kind of divided terrain has the potential to make for tense local government. But Keegan and about a dozen local officials on split town councils across Pennsylvania said that when it comes to the daily business of running a town, Washington's vitriol hasn't trickled down to Main Street.

They may disagree on big issues like voting rights, abortion, and climate change. But in municipal buildings and on council Zoom screens, it's business as usual. And business is cordial.

"Party affiliation is checked at the door," said Linda Lavender Norris, the Republican president of Coatesville City Council in Chester County. "We don't bring it in the room because whether you're a Democrat or Republican, once you sit in the seat, you help everyone. You try to."

» ***[READ MORE: Democrats had a brutal 2020 in Pennsylvania besides Biden. Now they're charting a path forward.](#)***

Governing on one of Pennsylvania's more than 2,000 municipal town councils is very different from federal, state, or even county politics. You're sharing a smaller community with your constituents, where local government's powers are limited. It's pointless to get into an argument about gun control or immigration without any power over those issues, officials said. And it's a waste of time when there are potholes to fill or a community center roof that needs repair.

"We have to stay engaged with what our constituents want," said Laureen Pellegrino, a Democrat on the Nazareth Borough Board in Northampton County. She said the dividing line is how long you've lived in town, not your party: "We don't have the luxury of forgetting where we came from because we're still here. We're here 100% of the time."

Still, there's something pleasantly surprising about people from opposing parties working together these days. The country is [deeply polarized](#), and as both parties' centers of gravity have moved away from each other, bipartisanship is increasingly rare. Nearly three-quarters of Republicans and Democrats believe the parties can't agree on basic facts, according to [a 2019 Pew Research study](#). And negative feelings about the opposing party worsened from 2016 to 2019.

Not a single Republican voted for [Biden's \\$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill](#).

But a vote by the Bensalem Township Council this year to install lights on the girls' softball field? That was unanimous. So was the Forks supervisors' decision to buy a new fire truck. And in Coatesville, debate over how to reinvigorate the economically distressed city rarely falls along party lines.

"There's a saying, 'There's no Democratic or Republican way to fill a pothole,'" said William Marble, a Stanford researcher who coauthored [a 2019 study on polarization at the local level](#).

The study surveyed 1,000 residents each in eight metropolitan areas, and found few partisan divides on local issues. Those issues included topics you might expect to trigger ideological splits, like tax incentives for businesses. Decades of research show a majority of Americans have far more confidence in local government.

"It's basically good for everyone if there are more residents, more tax dollars, more companies investing in the city," Marble said. "And this kind of limits the scope of partisan disagreement."

» ***[READ MORE: Here's what Pennsylvania and New Jersey are getting out of the \\$1.9 trillion stimulus package](#)***

Local leaders say they do have to work to keep divisive issues out of meetings. Bensalem stays away from ceremonial resolutions such as backing a certain group or voicing a stance on a specific issue outside council's purview.

"It can be hard but we try to avoid that," said Joseph Knowles, part of the Republican majority on Bensalem's 3-2 council in Bucks County. "We have state representatives and congressmen ... and that's what they should do."

Debates over charter schools still divide local school boards. Environmental issues can be another sticking point. Prior to joining the Forks council, Keegan pushed for a plastic bag ban that some Republicans opposed.

Calls for police reform, reignited by the police killing of George Floyd last year, can also become partisan flashpoints. Shortly after Democrat Jesse Sloane was elected to Bensalem's council, he wrote an op-ed with suggestions for how to improve race relations between police and residents, inspired in part by Floyd's killing and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests.

A few weeks later, his colleagues admonished him in [an executive session](#). "It was a four-hour meeting and three hours of which was spent attacking me for saying ... 'maybe we can be better,'" Sloane said.

It's one of a number of smaller disagreements that arise, he said. There are jabs at Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf from Republican members. Things tend to heat up closer to election season.

» ***READ MORE: [Welcome to Pennsylvania's very progressive 2022 Democratic Senate primary](#)***

The pandemic has forced some cash-strapped towns to lay off employees or cut costs in other ways. While local officials interviewed expressed some disagreement over the scope of Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill, no one questioned the need for aid their town stands to get.

"I personally did not agree with Gov. Wolf and the lockdown and the impact it had on small businesses," said Tim Hughes, a Republican supervisor in Forks. "But we can't do anything at a local level."

Personal connections help keep the peace. In Forks, Hughes lives on the same block as John O'Neil, the Democratic chair of the board. It was O'Neil who suggested Hughes run. Another supervisor knows several of his colleagues' children from coaching soccer.

"I know people think Democrats and Republicans are like the Hatfields and McCoys up here, but we're really not," O'Neil said. "I just wish more politicians further up the chain were more about the people. It would go a long way."

In Coatesville, the largely Democratic city is governed by a town council with a 5-2 Democratic majority. But Norris, a Republican, is the council president.

"She does a good job," said Donald Folks, one of the five Democrats. "If she didn't, we'd vote her out. No one really thinks of Linda as a Republican."

Folks said there's little time for partisan squabbling given the city's problems. There is no supermarket, no community center for kids, and only one bank in town. With a median household income of \$34,716, according to census data, it's the poorest city in the state's wealthiest county.

"If somebody's trying to turn this city around, I don't care who it is. It can be Santa Claus," Folks said. "We have bigger problems than party ID."

Norris hopes it stays that way: "I don't ever, by the grace of God, want to see our community politics resemble the national."

*There are more than 2,000 municipalities in Pennsylvania. This story highlighted just a few. We want to hear how your local government is functioning right now. Is there an issue dividing or uniting your town? Tell me about it: [JTerruso@inquirer.com](mailto:JTerruso@inquirer.com)*

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Julia Terruso



I cover politics and our divided electorate. I'm interested in what unites and separates us, shifts in voting trends, and grassroots movements.