



HISTORIC Bellefonte™

Est. 1795

**Bellefonte Borough Special Council Meeting
7:30 PM, Monday, August 17, 2026
In-Person, Council Chambers/Large Meeting Room
301 N. Spring St, 1st Floor**

AGENDA

I. 7:30 PM CALL MEETING TO ORDER

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. ROLL CALL

VACANT, <i>South Ward</i>	Ms. McKean, <i>West Ward</i>	
Ms. Cleeton, Vice-President, <i>South Ward</i>	Mr. Kelly, <i>West Ward</i>	
Ms. Dann, <i>South Ward</i>	Ms. Tosti-Vasey, Pro Temp, <i>West Ward</i>	
Mr. Eaton, <i>North Ward</i>	Ms. Wilson, <i>North Ward</i>	
Mr. Johnson, President, <i>North Ward</i>	Mayor Johnson, <i>At Large</i>	

IV. ADDITIONS TO THE COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA

In accordance with Act 65 of 2021, if a matter is not on the Agenda, Council cannot take official action on it with some exceptions. The Council can act on matters relating to potential or real emergencies. Council may add a matter of agency business to its agenda through a majority vote. The Council should state the reason why the action item is being added to the agenda. Council may vote to add an action item(s) to the agenda.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT (Oral)

Borough Council intends to take public comment related to the motion that is on the floor after it has been duly made and seconded. The order of comments will be public comment and then council comment, including proposed amendments by council members. If amendments are proposed to the original motion, the public will then only comment on the amendment(s) before final votes are taken. You must be a Bellefonte resident, a non-profit representative, a business owner, or an official representative of another governmental agency. Speakers shall identify themselves by name and street, municipality, if outside of the Borough of Bellefonte. Comments are limited to three (3) minutes.

VI. SOUTH WARD VACANCY

Each applicant for the South Ward Council Vacancy will be allotted five (5) minutes to address Borough Council and present their qualifications, interest in serving, and reasons for seeking appointment. Following all presentations, Council may ask questions before considering an appointment.

Suggested Motion: That Borough Council appoint [**Applicant Name**] to fill the South Ward Council vacancy following the applicant presentations and Council deliberation, for the remainder of the unexpired term ending **December 31, 2027**, contingent upon taking the required Oath of Office.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENT REGARDING ISSUES NOT ON THE AGENDA

This Public Comment period is for oral comments regarding items not listed on this meeting agenda. Speakers shall identify themselves by name and street, municipality, if outside of the Borough of Bellefonte. Comments are limited to three (3) minutes maximum.

VIII. COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENTS/FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

Please try to limit all comments/rebuttals to three minutes maximum.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The council meeting will be adjourned at or as close to 9:00 PM as possible.

X. EXECUTIVE SESSION—Real Estate

The Council Public Comment Policy will be included with each Agenda.



Bellefonte Borough Council
c/o Alyssa Doherty at Adoherty@bellefontepa.gov
301 N. Spring Street, Suite 200
Bellefonte, PA 16823

July 20, 2026

Dear Members of Borough Council,

I am writing to express my interest in the vacant South Ward seat on Bellefonte Borough Council. I care deeply about this community and would be honored to contribute to its future.

I purchased my 1st home in Bellefonte in December 2017 and quickly experienced what makes this community special. To my surprise, nearly 30 familiar faces and sidewalk acquaintances joined me for a lighthearted “Doggie DNA reveal and fundraising party” for my beagle mix, benefitting Nittany Beagle Rescue. That gathering grew into an annual “Birthdays, Beagles, and the Belmont Stakes in Bellefonte (B⁵)” celebration that brought together neighbors in the North & South Wards and rekindled an old tradition of neighborhood gatherings.

In 2021, I moved to Memphis to serve as Assistant Dean at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital. The experience was valuable, but after about 18 months, I realized it wasn’t a long-term fit. I chose to return to Bellefonte because this is the community where I feel at home and where I want to invest my time and energy.

Since returning to the South Ward and with some help from my beagle, I’ve built new connections with neighbors through walks, porch conversations, and chance encounters. I have also worked with two local businesses and started my own, deepening my connection to Bellefonte’s local economy. These experiences have reinforced my commitment to this town: I want to see our businesses thrive, our community remain connected, and our borough thoughtfully address both immediate and long-term challenges.

Professionally, I bring experience across higher education, nonprofit organizations, and business, including service on the Board of Trustees at my alma mater, where I contributed to governance, committee work, and institutional decision-making, alongside managing budgets, building partnerships, and leading complex programs. In my current role as Assistant Vice President and partner in a sustainable manufacturing company, I focus on strategic planning, operations, sales, marketing, and accounting.

I remain actively engaged in the community through my Funky Chicken Art booth at Mish Mosh, regular visits to local businesses, and volunteerism. I represented Jabebo and the American Philatelic Society at the Bellefonte Children’s Fair and attended many other community events like Bellefonte Cruise. These experiences give me a ground-level perspective on what makes Bellefonte special—and where thoughtful support can help it continue to grow and prosper.

Bellefonte is the kind of community that has always been important to me. I grew up in a small mountain town in Virginia, where community involvement was a part of everyday life. Those experiences shape my values and motivate me to step forward and serve here in Bellefonte. I am particularly interested in supporting thoughtful growth, strengthening our local business ecosystem, and preserving the character that makes Bellefonte unique. There is real opportunity to engage residents more fully and invite their ideas, energy, and perspectives into shaping our community. We can also learn from similar towns as we revitalize, support small businesses, and attract talent and visitors.

If selected, I would approach this role with thoughtfulness and a commitment to listening, actively engaging in budgeting and decision-making, and helping shape policies that reflect the needs and character of the Bellefonte community.

Thank you for your consideration. I would welcome the opportunity to serve.

Respectfully,

Tomalei J. Vess

Ph.D., Zoology — Duke University

B.S., Biology — James Madison University

PROFILE

Program developer, educator, and startup leader with a Ph.D. in Biology and a career spanning entrepreneurship, nonprofit education, and cross-sector collaboration. Known for building engaging learning experiences, strengthening networks, and helping people move ideas into action. Brings experience in program design, grant writing, marketing, partnership development, and operations across sectors. A lifelong learner with a practical, relationship-driven approach to complex problems. Passionate about public service, transparent governance, and strengthening local communities through thoughtful planning, research, and active resident engagement.

CORE STRENGTHS

- **Strategic Leadership & Governance**
Executive experience guiding organizational strategy, operations, and decision-making across academic, nonprofit, and business environments
- **Program Development & Implementation**
Proven ability to design, launch, and scale educational, research, and community-based programs from concept through evaluation
- **Budgeting & Financial Stewardship**
Experience managing budgets, aligning resources with priorities, and supporting financial planning and reporting
- **Partnership Development**
Skilled in building and sustaining collaborations with government agencies, industry partners, nonprofits, and community stakeholders
- **Community Engagement & Public Communication**
Strong track record of public-facing work, outreach initiatives, and stakeholder engagement across diverse audiences
- **Teaching, Training & Mentorship**
Delivered workshops and training for students, faculty, staff, and alumni; experienced mentor supporting academic and professional growth
- **Data-Driven Decision Making**
Expertise in assessment, program evaluation, and using data to inform strategy and improve outcomes
- **Fundraising & Grant Development**
Secured funding through grant writing, partnerships, and programmatic support initiatives
- **Sustainability & Innovation**
Application of scientific and operational expertise to sustainability, recycling, and environmentally responsible systems
- **Small Business & Creative Enterprise**
Active contributor to the local economy through art, product development, retail engagement, and small business operations

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Present

Owner and Artist, Funky Chicken Art

- Creator of art centered on humor, whimsy, and joyful depictions of chickens alongside cork ornaments, pop tab earrings, and other upcycled pieces
- Established a presence at Mish Mosh as a local artist, sharing work with the public and increasing visibility of local art while contributing to the town's creative community and small business ecosystem

2025 – Present

Assistant Vice President and Co-founder, LMB RAM Systems (Manufacturing Startup) — Reidsville, NC

- Serve as second-in-command, translating leadership vision into operational and strategic execution
- Oversee daily operations and improve workflows to align teams and support growth
- Manage HR processes including hiring, onboarding, and team development
- Support budgeting, expense tracking, and vendor coordination
- Lead sustainability and carbon credit initiatives
- Contribute to business strategy, messaging, and market positioning
- Work across functions to align operations, communication, and execution in a resource-constrained environment

2025

Education Director, American Philatelic Society (APS) — Bellefonte, PA

- Launched an online community and learning platform
- Supported development and delivery of educational programming for collectors at varying levels
- Contributed to online learning content and materials for virtual and in-person audiences
- Collaborated with subject-matter experts to design structured learning experiences
- Assisted in outreach efforts, including program promotion and audience engagement
- Contributed to youth programming initiatives and community-based education efforts
- Developed and refined communications materials to support participation and engagement

2023 – 2024

Education Specialist, Jabebo Studio — Bellefonte, PA

- Designed and delivered informal, community-based learning experiences through demonstrations, tours, and events
- Engaged directly with customers, shaping how products were presented and understood
- Developed outreach and social media content to expand audience engagement
- Contributed across operations including product development and event coordination
- Strengthened brand messaging through hands-on work in presentation and customer experience

2021 – 2022

Assistant Dean, PhD Program — St. Jude Children's Research Hospital — Memphis, TN

- Developed recruitment strategies and communications to attract high-quality applicants
- Directed admissions evaluation and onboarding processes
- Managed program budgets and supported reporting and assessment
- Coached students on academic and career development
- Mentored faculty and contributed to program improvement initiatives

2015 – 2021

Director, Office of Science Engagement — Penn State University — University Park, PA

- Designed and led large-scale experiential and co-curricular learning programs
 - Managed ~\$600K program budget and funding allocations
 - Built partnerships with corporate, academic, and community stakeholders
 - Developed and implemented strategic communications and outreach initiatives
 - Delivered workshops, events, and networking programs
 - Mentored staff, students, and program participants
 - Assessed outcomes and refined programs based on data and feedback
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2011 – 2013

Director of Undergraduate Research — Virginia Tech — Blacksburg, VA

- Built and led university-wide experiential learning and research programs
- Designed program infrastructure from concept through evaluation
- Secured external funding and supported grant proposal development
- Developed partnerships with faculty, industry, and community stakeholders
- Created systems to connect participants with opportunities and resources
- Increased engagement through communications platforms and outreach

2013 – 2014

Special Assistant to the Director — Virginia Bioinformatics Institute, Virginia Tech

- Developed undergraduate research training programs
- Collected and analyzed program impact data
- Served as liaison to biotechnology industry partners
- Supported leadership on strategic projects and initiatives

2009 – 2011

Associate Director, Education & Training — Genome Sciences and Policy — Duke University — Durham, NC

- Designed and delivered interdisciplinary training programs, workshops, and seminars
- Assessed educational needs and developed responsive programming
- Contributed to grant writing and program development proposals
- Built partnerships across departments and institutions
- Mentored students, postdocs, and faculty
- Translated complex topics into accessible learning experiences

2004 – 2009

Assistant Dean/Director for Graduate Student Development — Duke University — Durham, NC

- Executed existing student recruitment and retention programs designed to increase the number of underrepresented students pursuing doctoral degrees both at Duke and across the nation.
- Cultivated relationships with academic departments, faculty, consortia, and educational institutions to facilitate the academic and personal growth of students.
- Developed support services that address the specific needs of the Graduate School's diverse student community—for example, international students, gay and lesbian students, students with disabilities, women, and the student population at large.
- Created orientation and graduation events and other activities for graduate students.
- Provided counseling and suggest resources that address the academic, financial, social, personal, cultural, and other pertinent needs of students.
- Recommended change consistent with the mission of the Graduate School based on the assessment of best practices in graduate education at peer institutions.
- Designed recruitment and retention strategies for graduate programs
- Developed professional development programming and support services
- Managed partnerships across institutions and departments
- Delivered training in communication, research ethics, and academic development

SELECTED IMPACT

- Designed and delivered learning programs across in-person, virtual, and hybrid formats
- Built and sustained partnerships across academia, nonprofits, and industry
- Supported and contributed to grant-funded educational initiatives
- Developed communications strategies (newsletters, outreach, engagement campaigns)
- Mentored and coached individuals across academic and professional pathways

MORE ABOUT TOMALEE – Appalachian girl, Artist (with a soft spot for chickens), beagle rescue volunteer, gardener, and dedicated foodie — and special assistant to her dog who is a celebrity in the neighborhood.