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Borough of Chambersburg

A full service municipality in Franklin County celebrating over 65 years of consumer owned natural gas service over 120 years of community electric and a regional wastewater, water, storm sewer and municipal solid waste utility

CHAMBERSBURG BOROUGH EMPLOYEE UNIONS ACCEPT NO RAISES FOR 2021

Chambersburg – In a series of negotiations that took place over the past several weeks, two of the Borough’s employee unions accepted no cost of living increases for the 2021 fiscal year as a result of the COVID-19 health emergency and the unknown potential impact on Borough of Chambersburg finances.

On July 13, the uniform police officers represented by the Chambersburg Police Officers Association approved an extension on their current collective bargaining agreement, which would have expired at the end of 2020. That extension, approved by vote of the police officers and ratified by Chambersburg Town Council, extended the current labor pact for two more years, 2021 and 2022, with a 0% cost of living increase scheduled for 2021 and a 3% cost of living increase scheduled for 2022.

“We were extremely pleased with this agreement,” explained Borough Manager Jeffrey Stonehill. The police officers were very easy to work with and in these challenging times, with the state of the economy unknown, it is reassuring to agree that pay rates should not increase in 2021.”

Police Officer and Chambersburg Police Officers Association President TJ Smith stated: “The CPOA understands the hardship that has been not only placed on the Borough during this difficult time, but the community as a whole. We as an association only wish to do all we can to support the Borough with maintaining financial security and continuing to provide the excellent services the community deserves.”

On September 29, the non-uniform employees, mostly utility workers and utility support workers, represented by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local #246, approved an extension on their current collective bargaining agreement, which would have expired at the end of 2020. The extension, approved by a vote of the rank and file and ratified by Chambersburg Town Council, extended the current union contract for two more years, 2021 and 2022. It provides a 0% cost of living increase scheduled for 2021 and a 3% cost of living increase scheduled for 2022. In addition, current employees, who have worked to keep the lights on, the water flowing, and the Borough operating during the pandemic this year, will receive a one-time “essential employee recognition incentive” paid either in January 2022 or upon retirement, if they retire before that date.

“We recognize the sacrifice our employees have undertaken in support of the community,” added Council President Alice Elia. “Our employees continued to come to work every day so that we could seamlessly maintain continuity of services for the Borough and our utility customers. Our women and men are the epitome of essential workers, and we are pleased to provide them with this onetime bonus in compensation in 2022, to thank them for their service.” Chambersburg is the only town in Pennsylvania to provide all utilities: water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, natural gas, electricity, electric generation, and solid waste & recycling.

Borough Manager Jeffrey Stonehill explained that generally when the union and Council strike a deal, we extend the details of that labor agreement to the non-union employees of the Borough. Those employees would include the clerical, technical, and supervisory employees such as department heads, assistants, and field supervisors. “Therefore, I anticipate,” said Mr. Stonehill, “that these non-union employees will also receive a 0% cost of living increase in 2021. That will be fixed by Council during 2021 budget approval later this year.”

The Borough of Chambersburg has four employee groups: the police officers; career firefighters represented by the International Association of Fire Fighters Local #1813; the non-uniform employees; and non-union clerical, technical, and supervisory employees. Wages and benefits are now settled for all four groups for the 2021 budget year.

The Borough of Chambersburg has seen the fiscal impact of COVID-19 wax and wane over the course of 2020. “Originally,” explained Mr. Stonehill, “we had some deep concerns about the budget as real estate tax collection was significantly lagging as a result of a deadline extension approved, and utility receivables, folks paying their utility invoices, was also very poor, as a result of a policy to suspend disconnections for delinquency. That prohibition has now been phased out, and we are finally seeing cash flow return to acceptable levels.” Mr. Stonehill added, “we remain very optimistic for Chambersburg’s future, but we need to be cautious as we complete 2020 and move into 2021.”

Unlike private utility companies, Chambersburg has so far received no federal assistance from the Paycheck Protection Program or the CARES Act. Unlike private utility companies across the U.S., providers of public utilities, such as Chambersburg, have been cut out of any packages to assist during the health crisis. “We support the work of the American Public Power Association (APPA). APPA continues to advocate for public power’s priorities in a future COVID-19 relief bill, with our top priority being the inclusion of a forgivable loan program for public power utilities impacted by customer non-payments due to the pandemic. Again, many public power utilities, including Chambersburg, may never need to use this loan program, but we believe that it is important that it exist for those located in communities hit hard by the pandemic.”

The Borough will release a preliminary 2021 budget during the first week of November 2020. In 11 of the last 14 budget years, the Borough of Chambersburg has not raised local Borough taxes. Further, Chambersburg has the lowest composite utility bill in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Customers with both Borough electric and natural gas service can save as much as \$1,000 per year when compared to similar utility customers outside of the Borough.

If you have any questions about this information, contact Jeffrey Stonehill, Chambersburg Borough Manager at jstonehill@chambersburgpa.gov.

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About The Borough of Chambersburg

Chambersburg is a unique community. Chambersburg supplies more services than any other municipality in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In addition to typical town functions, Chambersburg is Pennsylvania’s only municipality supplying electric and gas. Chambersburg is 1 of 35 Boroughs to operate a municipal non-profit electric utility. Chambersburg is the largest municipal electric utility in the State, twice as large as the second largest, Ephrata, Lancaster County; and, the only one to operate generation stations. Chambersburg is 1 of 2 municipalities in PA to operate a natural gas utility. The other is Philadelphia, which does not operate an electric utility. Nationally, Chambersburg is 1 of 2,000 communities to have its own electric system and 1 of 800 communities to have a natural gas system but 1 of only about 50 to operate both. Chambersburg manages a regional water system, a regional sanitary sewer system (not through an independent Authority), and a new storm sewer utility; one of the first storm sewer utilities to form under the new Federal mandate to regulate stormwater. Chambersburg currently has 20,508 residents (2013).