



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*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHAMBERSBURG TOWN COUNCIL REPEALS LOCAL NON-DISCRIMINATION LAW AND MAYOR ISSUES NON-DISCRIMINATION PROCLAMATION IN ITS PLACE

Chambersburg – On Monday, January 24, 2022, the Chambersburg Town Council approved a proposed local law, repealing the local non-discrimination ordinance adopted by the previous Council on September 20, 2021.

Background

On September 20, 2021, the prior Town Council approved a local non-discrimination law, under the authority granted by the State Human Relations Act. This adoption followed a report issued by an Exploratory Committee of Town Council, which recommended the adoption of a local law, modeled closely on a similar local law approved in the Borough of Gettysburg.

On Monday, October 11, 2021, the prior Town Council gathered at City Hall and officially received a mayoral veto for the local non-discrimination law. Then Mayor Walt Bietsch was absent from the proceedings, but his written statement was entered into the record. A discussion occurred about next steps. A motion was placed on the floor to override the Mayor's veto. Following the introduction of the motion there was a little less than one hour of public comment including citizens and members of Council. Afterwards, Council voted 7 to 3 to override the veto. Having successfully met the threshold necessary to override the veto, the local non-discrimination law was approved without the necessity of the Mayor's signature.

On Tuesday, November 2, 2021, a local election saw a change in the composition of Town Council. The elected and newly elected were sworn into office at the bi-annual Reorganization Meeting on Monday, January 3, 2022. A majority of Town Council selected Allen Coffman as President of Council. Mr. Coffman had previously served in this role. The President of Council, selected by his peers, serves as the chief elected official of the municipality. Also sworn in on January 3, 2022, was newly elected Mayor Ken Hock. Mayor Hock serves as the day to day manager of the Police Department, a non-voting member of Council, and he is required to approve all new local laws. Mayor Hock replaced Mayor Bietsch.

Also, on Monday January 3rd, during the Reorganization Meeting of the Chambersburg Town Council, the matter of volunteer appointments to various boards, commissions, and committees was discussed by Council. When it came time to appoint the first-ever members to the newly approved Chambersburg Human Relations Commission, which was created by the local Non-Discrimination Ordinance (NDO), thereafter known as Ordinance #2021-07, Council Member John Huber instead of nominating members, made a motion to amend the Council agenda and discuss the repeal of the local law.

Having been approved by a majority of Council for discussion, Town Council set about to discuss the repeal instead of appointing citizens.

On a motion by Vice President Everly, seconded by Council Member Waytow, by a vote of 6-3-1 (Council Members Elia, Leedy and Bigler were opposed; Council Member Hensley was absent), it was approved to direct the Solicitor to draft and advertise an ordinance repealing the Non Discrimination Ordinance (Ordinance #2021-07) to be considered at a public meeting to be held on January 24, 2022 at 7:00 pm in Council Chambers and that appointment of members to the Human Relations Commission be tabled pending that action.

Last Night's Action

On Monday, January 24, 2022, on a motion by Council Member Tom Newcomer, seconded by Vice President Everly, by a vote of 7-3 (Council Members Elia, Leedy and Bigler were opposed), Ordinance #2022-03 was approved to amend the Code of the Borough of Chambersburg repealing Chapter 55, Nondiscrimination and Human Relations Commission in its entirety; and further, to permanently table the appointment of the Chambersburg Human Relations Commission.

Prior to the vote, a local group of citizens as well as stakeholders, faith leaders, and business owners provided Council with input and comments before the vote was taken.

With new Ordinance #2022-03, having been approved by a majority of Town Council, was presented to Mayor Hock for approval. He provided his concurrence.

Prior to this, Mayor Hock addressed his thoughts about discrimination in the community.

In an official act of his office, Mayor Hock issued a Non-Discrimination Proclamation, which he hoped would provide a compromise for those disappointed by the repeal of the local Non-Discrimination Ordinance, and which provides a clear statement of policy by the local government.

That proclamation, issued by Mayor Hock on Monday, January 24, 2022, states:

WHEREAS, in today's world, there are times that bigotry may occur on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, pregnancy, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, family status, veteran status, disability, marital status, or income status; and

WHEREAS, I request that all residents and visitors of the Borough of Chambersburg reject bigotry and discrimination against all individuals in any form or fashion and in any context, including employment, residential housing, and business transactions and sales; and

WHEREAS, strict adherence to the transcendent principles of tolerance, religious freedom, and equal protection will strengthen the Borough of Chambersburg as a community by deepening the bonds of the community and fostering a welcoming environment.

NOW THEREFORE, as Mayor of the Borough of Chambersburg, I declare that no resident or visitor of the Borough of Chambersburg (the "Borough") should be subjected to bigotry, discrimination, or oppression due to their race, color, religion, national origin, sex, pregnancy, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, family status, veteran status, disability, marital status, or income status. All Borough residents and visitors should be treated with respect and dignity.

FURTHER, in the event that any resident or visitor of the Borough of Chambersburg is subjected to bigotry, discrimination, or oppression in the Borough the individual should seek resolution from the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission or any other existing agency with jurisdiction over the matter. I recommend that Borough staff be provided with information to direct members of the public to the appropriate agencies and authorities to report concerns regarding bigotry, discrimination, and oppression.

Signed: Mayor Kenneth Hock

With the NDO repealed, Chapter 55 will be removed from the Code of Ordinances for the Borough of Chambersburg. Just as prior to Monday, September 20, 2021, the citizens and businesses in Chambersburg remain subject to non-discrimination laws on both the federal and state level. Municipalities in the Commonwealth are given the option, but not the requirement, to establish local human relations commissions, which could supplement the protections provided on the federal and state level.

In addition to Mayor Hock's Proclamation of January 24, 2022, the Borough of Chambersburg is required to maintain a separate Non-Discrimination Policy for vendors pursuant to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Management Directive 215.16, as amended. This separate policy is not optional and the Borough of Chambersburg is in compliance with having and enforcing the required vendor policy pursuant to the rules established for federal and state funding. Finally, as was pointed out at the public meeting, the Borough also maintains a local Fair Housing Commission to address discrimination in housing, as is required by the Borough's participation in the federal Community Development Block Grant program.

Please send any questions or comments to Jamia Wright, Borough Secretary at boroughsecretariesoffice@chambersburgpa.gov.

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 providing electric and gas to residents and businesses. 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 multiple 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 1,000 communities to have a natural gas system but 1 of only about 60 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 has a famous Aquatic Center as well. Chambersburg, the County Seat of Franklin County, currently has 20,832 residents (2020).