

2024 SPECIAL MEETING

A special meeting of the Duryea Borough Council was held at 315 Main Street on June 6, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. with Council President, Stephanie Shupp, presiding.

After a pledge to the flag, an attendance roll call was taken: (6) council members present; McGlynn absent. Mayor Bauman was not in attendance. With a quorum present, the meeting continued.

This public meeting was advertised in the Citizen's Voice legal section.

Discussion was had regarding the Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority's recommendation to demolish the Stephenson Street Bridge as part of the Wyoming Valley Levee Project and to authorize the appropriate officers of the Borough to act on its behalf.

Public Comment

- Corey Cortese (16 Coco Lane) – Coxtan resident spoke of concerns about high water events and the only access being Swamp Road and the Stephenson Street Bridge once Falling Springs and Coxtan Road near John's Service Station overflows. Requests the bridge remain open for emergency purposes.
- Solicitor Watt clarified that the county would ultimately decide about the bridge closure. The purpose of this meeting is for council to get a unified position about the bridge.
- Joe Neutts (Foote Ave resident) – Questioned if the borough purchased Swamp Road and surrounding area. President Shupp confirmed the recent purchase and explained how a bridge closure would affect the plan for that property.
- Danny Stella (Duryea resident) – stated that it would be a safety hazard if people were using Swamp Road for recreation and only had access on one end.
- Joe Balchune (Coxtan resident) – concerned about access for emergency vehicles in a high-water event. President Shupp stated that it remains as part of the emergency action plan.
- Dave Bartuska (903 Coxtan Road) – worked during previous flood events and for the Road and Bridges department at Luzerne County. His opinion is that the bridge is secure and that the county cannot afford to maintain it. Borough officials explained the inspection reports from Greenman-Pederson Inc. showing the deficiencies of the bridge.
- Carl Bechtold (Duryea resident) – questioned what will happen if the owner of Swamp Road no longer allows us of the road for emergencies. Borough officials explained that the borough is now the owner of the property.
- Jeanne Bieniek (Coxtan resident) – lifelong resident of Coxtan Road. Stated that the bridge is necessary since it has been the only way out during high-water events many times in the past.
- Joe Filipkowski (11 Coco Lane) – shares the same concerns as others about not removing the bridge.
- Solicitor Watt – questioned if anyone is in favor of removing the bridge. No response from the public.
- Jim Gromelski – discussed the possibility of trestle work being done on Coxtan Road and possible closure of the Coxtan Road Bridge for a certain amount of time. Stephenson Street Bridge would need to be available once that occurs.
- Keith Moss, Emergency Management Coordinator – reviewed the Emergency Action Plan. It includes flood gauges monitoring the height of the river. Swamp Road is included in that plan, along with a plan for the use of emergency vehicles.
- Jerry Marsh (Duryea resident) – questioned if West Pittston's levee project will change our plan. Keith Moss stated that it would not. Jim Gromelski stated that Exeter is the only town with a levee project

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underway. West Pittston is still in the design stages. Mr. Marsh also questioned who is responsible for residents during evacuation if the bridge does close. Stated that police would need to remain in Coxtan once evacuated for safety reasons.

- Charles Kearney (Duryea resident) – stated that there may be more traffic through Duryea with work being done in West Pittston.
- Stacey Samuels (Coxtan resident) – questioned the state of the Coxtan Road Bridge. It has been closed numerous times for repair in the past; who inspects that bridge?
- Jeanne Bieniek – has concerns about the process of the inspection.
- Dave Bartuska – discussed the bridge repairs needed to raise the levee.
- Carl Bechtold – If the bridge were to close, the road along the pole lines would need repair to use for emergency access out through Old Forge.
- Joan Orloski (Stephenson Street resident) – questioned raising of the levee. Do we know if the bridge will remain during the next flood events? President Shupp explained the options, which are demo vs repair.
- Jerry Marh – if the county decides to demolish the bridge, will that change the value of the property that the borough recently purchased? President Shupp believes that it will impact the proposed economic development that could come from the recreation area on/around Swamp Road.
- Romilda Crocamo (Luzerne County Manager) – addressed residents about the upcoming meeting with Duryea Borough on June 10th to discuss the future of the Stephenson Street Bridge. There has been no decision made for the bridge yet, as the county is still hearing from the borough and the Flood Protection Authority (FPA). She explained how the county took ownership of roads and that they currently maintain 308 bridges in Luzerne County. The levee project was proposed to the county at their recent meeting. A request was made by the FPA to demolish the bridge in order to construct a complete levee, rather than including a plan to raise the existing closure structure. Ms. Crocamo further explained the repairs, and their costs, that are needed if the bridge were to remain in place. The county is open to input from the public regarding this matter.
- Solicitor Watt – Thanked Ms. Crocamo for taking time out of her evening to attend a meeting in Duryea Borough.
- Dave Bartuska – stated that Duryea residents could feel more comfortable after hearing from the county manager about the possibility of keeping the bridge open.
- Joe Neutts – questioned if the preliminary plan for the current levee project only includes Duryea; is the FPA afraid of backup of water from West Pittston if they implement a levee system.
- Several residents explained how the water pools around the bridge once the Susquehanna River starts to back up, rather than flowing freely.
- Jerry Marsh - explained that waters could flood with or without the bridge in place.

Motion by Marriggi, second by Zinkavich to establish Borough Council's position of leaving the Stephenson Street Bridge in place. Council's position will be advanced at future meetings with Luzerne County Council and the Luzerne County Manager. Roll call (6) yes.

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Motion by Marriggi, second by Tonte to appoint Stephanie Shupp as council's representative to advance Council's position at upcoming meetings relating to the Stephenson Street Bridge. President Shupp stated that she would include another council member to assist, along with Keth Moss, Emergency Management Coordinator. Roll call (6) yes.

With no further public comment or business to transact, motion by Zinkavich, second by Gromelski to adjourn.

Meeting ended at 6:08 p.m.



Carolyn Santee
Borough Manager