

**LATROBE CITY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL VOTING MEETING  
MONDAY, MAY 18, 2026  
LATROBE, PENNSYLVANIA**

Mayor Bartels called to order the Special Meeting of Latrobe City council at 7:04 p.m.  
Mayor Bartels informed all that an Executive Session was held to discuss a real estate matter.  
Mayor Bartels asked all to rise for the Pledge of Allegiance.  
Mayor Bartels asked all for a moment of silence.  
Secretary to Council read Roll Call:

Deputy Mayor Ralph Jenko – present  
Dawn Vavick –present  
Sam Leach – present  
Lenor Rivera – absent  
Eric Hauser – present  
Ann Amatucci - present  
Mayor Eric Bartels - present

Also, present were the following: Sue Trout, City Manager; Hannah Sterrett, Assistant City Manager; Lee Demosky, Solicitor; Richard Bosco, Chief of Police; Beth Straka, Deputy Director of Community Affairs and Police Services; Melanie McGregor, Assistant Public Works Director, and Josh Mayro, Director of Code of Zoning.

**CITIZENS' REQUEST** (related to agenda)

Mark Sorice, representing the Ligonier Country Market, stated that he had informed Solicitor Demosky that he would wait until the end of the meeting to make his comments so members of the public could speak first. Solicitor Demosky agreed that approach was appropriate, and Mayor Bartels granted the request.

Melissa Pilotti, owner of Jo Lea Muse and a resident of Greensburg, spoke about her experience as a vendor at the Ligonier Country Market. She explained that she is a clay artist who handcrafts miniature food-themed items such as earrings, ornaments, bookmarks, magnets, and keychains.

Pilotti stated that she represents many of the vendors who no longer fit into the new direction and business model being implemented by the watershed organization. She acknowledged that some critics have dismissed vendors like her as “trash” or “crap” vendors, but she wanted to share her personal story to demonstrate the value that artists and small creators bring to the community.

She explained that four years ago she was invited to join the market after her work was discovered in a small salon in Greensburg. Since then, she said the market has helped her business grow significantly, allowing her to sell thousands of items, build a customer following, and form strong community connections.

Pilotti also described how the market helped create opportunities for charitable and community involvement. She has partnered with local organizations and businesses, including SHE, Heal Animal Rescue, Fishers Furry Friends, and Schoolhouse Bakery in Latrobe, through fundraising events, classes, and collaborations. She also organizes weekly scavenger hunts that encourage customers to visit and support small businesses throughout Ligonier, Latrobe, Greensburg, and surrounding communities.

She explained that the income and opportunities provided through the market have helped her and her husband purchase their home in Westmoreland County, and she expressed concern about what losing the market could mean for her future and the futures of many other vendors.

Pilotti concluded by asking council to recognize the value of vendors like herself and to understand that the Ligonier Country Market offers a wide variety of products and experiences that appeal to many different people while helping support small businesses, artists, and the broader community.

Nancy Byers from 800 Fairmont Street stated she had not yet decided on the market being held in Latrobe and still had questions that needed to be answered before voting on the proposal. She wanted clarification about whether Ligonier Street had officially been selected as the market location, how many blocks would be involved, and what the overall cost to The City of Latrobe would be. Mrs. Byers thought the residents were able to vote on the matter.

Mr. Demosky told Mayor Bartels he can choose to comment or converse with the residents. Mayor Bartels answered Mrs. Byers that if there's a motion made to vote on this and he will read highlights of the agreement. And those questions will be answered.

Susan Welsh of Weldon Street spoke against bringing the Ligonier Market to Latrobe, expressing concerns about the pace of development and the impact ongoing projects have had on residents, particularly seniors. She asked not to bring Ligonier to Latrobe.

She described living in a newer residential building constructed in Latrobe about five years ago and acknowledged that the city has made many improvements and beautification efforts over time. However, she shared her personal experience during the pandemic, when nearby construction projects — including repeated water authority work and renovations to neighboring buildings — created constant noise and disruption for months. She said the experience became overwhelming and negatively affected her mental health, ultimately leading her to seek professional help.

Ms. Welsh expressed concern that additional large events and activity downtown could further disrupt residents' quality of life, especially for older individuals living in nearby housing developments. She questioned whether the city is moving too quickly with development and changes without fully considering the impact on longtime residents.

She concluded by urging council to slow down and carefully consider the direction the city is taking before approving additional projects like the market.

Shawn O' Barto from 1010 Alexandria Street expressed opposition to bringing the Ligonier Market to Latrobe, particularly in the proposed downtown location on Ligonier Street. While acknowledging the value of supporting local vendors and farmers but believes the scale of the market — reportedly around 130 vendors — would create major logistical and quality-of-life concerns for residents.

Mr. O' Barto compared the proposal to existing events such as the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration and Mister Rogers Family Days, noting that even those smaller events already create heavy traffic, parking challenges, and road closures and expanding that level of activity to every Saturday would place significant strain on police officers, residents, parking, and traffic flow throughout the city.

Mr. O' Barto is supportive of local produce and walkable grocery options, said they do not believe a large craft-oriented market is the right solution. He expressed frustration at the idea of losing access to streets and parking near his home because of weekly crowds attending the market.

Mr. O' Barto had concerns about the possibility of relocating the market to Legion Keener Park if the downtown location does not work. He argued that such a move could negatively affect families who use the park, playground, and splash pad, especially with large crowds and increased traffic in the area. This only brings congestion and losing the sense of comfort and accessibility in these public spaces. He also thinks the proposal is well-intentioned but urged council to vote against the market because the negative impacts on residents and neighborhoods would outweigh the benefits.

Kathie Wolfe from Jeannette, owner and operator "Bling It On", stated she started her business 13 years ago. This allowed her to become self-employed and explained that the success of the business has also given her family greater financial flexibility, including allowing her husband to reduce his workload after many years as an automotive technician.

Mrs. Wolfe emphasized the market's economic value, not only for vendors but also for the surrounding community. Citing approximately \$800,000 in economic activity generated over the past several years, she noted that local restaurants, shops, and service workers benefit from the increased customer traffic the market brings.

Mrs. Wolfe also highlighted the professionalism of the vendors and market organizers, stating that vendors take pride in maintaining clean, safe, and welcoming spaces. She described the market as attracting visitors from throughout the region and even from overseas, creating opportunities for local businesses to reach a broader audience. She encouraged council to consider the potential benefits the market could bring to Latrobe and urged officials to give the market an opportunity.

Chris Sylvania, owner of Carmine's Pizza and Pasta, spoke in support of bringing the Ligonier Country Market to Latrobe. Drawing on his experience as a local business owner, he said he regularly interacts with visitors and residents and believes the market would be a significant benefit to the community.

He argued that successful communities attract families through a combination of public safety, economic growth, and community activities. While acknowledging that many market vendors are small business owners rather than large employers, he emphasized that the market's real value lies in its ability to bring people into the city from throughout the region and beyond.

Mr. Sylvania noted that local businesses often struggle to attract customers downtown, as many shoppers instead travel to commercial areas along Route 30. He believes the market would help draw visitors into Latrobe, increasing foot traffic for restaurants, shops, and other businesses throughout the city.

He also praised Latrobe's strengths, including its police department, local government, community character, and connections to figures such as Fred Rogers. He said that continued growth and investment are necessary to maintain a vibrant community and attract families and visitors and believes the market would contribute positively to Latrobe's economy, identity, and sense of community.

Mark Boerio, owner of the Army & Navy store, expressed support for bringing the market to Latrobe and argued that concerns about its impact may be overstated. He noted that the market would only occupy city streets for a small portion of the week—less than 5% of the total hours in a week—and said it would not take over the city as some have suggested.

Mr. Boerio stated with parking concerns, he personally surveyed nearby areas and found hundreds of available parking spaces within walking distance of the proposed market location and claims adequate parking exists and visitors may need to walk a short distance.

Mr. Boerio emphasized the potential economic benefits of attracting more people downtown. He suggested that the market could help draw visitors who might eventually choose to live in Latrobe, particularly those who work remotely and are looking for walkable communities with amenities and activities. He noted that increased foot traffic would benefit local businesses and help revitalize downtown.

Mr. Boerio praised city staff and leadership for their efforts and encouraged council to trust them to manage the logistics of the event. He pointed to other communities that have successfully embraced similar events and argued that Latrobe should be willing to think creatively and pursue opportunities for growth.

Mr. Boerio acknowledged that any large event will generate occasional complaints but argued that those issues can be addressed through proper management. He emphasized that Latrobe would be partnering with an established market rather than creating a new one from scratch and urged council to focus on the potential benefits rather than the drawbacks.

Stacey Cunningham of East Second Avenue, a local vendor with the Ligonier Country Market, spoke in support of bringing the market to Latrobe. She argued that the city often discusses attracting economic growth and young families, but downtown is frequently quiet on weekends and lacks activities that draw people into the community.

Mrs. Cunningham said the market would provide an opportunity to bring visitors into Latrobe, increase foot traffic, and support local businesses. She noted that many market attendees make a day of their visit, spending money not only at the market but also at nearby restaurants, shops, and other businesses. She believes the market could help strengthen the local economy and compliment other ongoing development projects in the city.

She also pointed out that the Ligonier Country Market is an established, well-organized operation with standards for vendors, many of whom create, grow, or produce their own products. According to Mrs. Cunningham, the market attracts a diverse mix of visitors, including younger people and families, which aligns with the city's goals of attracting new residents and encouraging community activity. She urged council not to pass up what she views as a valuable opportunity. She praised the market's leadership for remaining professional throughout the relocation process and encouraged officials to work collaboratively to bring the market to Latrobe and help it succeed.

Tiffany Snyder, from 1207 Murray Avenue, spoke in support of bringing the Ligonier Country Market to Latrobe, describing the issue as both personal and important to her as a lifelong resident and small business owner. As the owner of Grace n Mae Designs, she explained that participating in markets and community events has allowed her business to grow and connect with customers throughout the region.

Mrs. Snyder emphasized that markets provide critical opportunities for small businesses, many of which are family-operated ventures built through significant time, effort, and personal investment. She noted that for many vendors, these events are more than a hobby or supplemental income—they are an important source of revenue and a way to support their families.

She also highlighted the broader community benefits of markets, explaining that they bring people together, encourage residents and visitors to shop locally, and increase traffic for nearby businesses. In her view, markets create positive experiences for families, strengthen community connections, and help showcase the unique character and talent of local entrepreneurs.

While acknowledging that any new event may bring questions or challenges, Snyder expressed confidence that those issues could be addressed through cooperation and planning. She concluded by stating that the potential benefits to the community, local businesses, and families make the opportunity worth pursuing.

Julie Bisi, owner of Artemis located on Ligonier Street, expressed support for bringing the Ligonier Country Market to Latrobe. Having grown up in Latrobe, left for several years, and later returned, described the city as a special community with a strong sense of connection and pride.

Ms. Bisi works in the intellectual disability and autism field, emphasized the value of exposing people to a wide range of talents, skills, and creativity. She noted that the market provides an opportunity for artists, makers, and entrepreneurs to share their work with the public and demonstrate the unique abilities that each individual brings to the community.

Ms. Bisi also highlighted the accessibility of the market, noting that it is free to attend and allows people of all backgrounds to experience local art, craftsmanship, and entrepreneurship. She believes this type of event helps foster appreciation for diversity, creativity, and community engagement.

Ms. Bisi stated that a market of this nature aligns with the values of inclusion, community, and neighborliness that Latrobe is known for. She believes this is the type of event that would make Fred Rogers proud.

Laurie Corbett, owner of Eclectique on Main Street, spoke in support of bringing the Ligonier Country Market to the city. She described the proposal as one of the most exciting opportunities Latrobe has seen in years.

Ms. Corbett explained that her business already supports artists, makers, and food producers, giving her firsthand experience with the value that local vendors bring to a community. She believes the market would attract visitors from throughout Westmoreland, Allegheny, and Somerset counties, many of whom would also patronize local businesses while visiting Latrobe.

She noted that increased foot traffic could help fill vacant storefronts and create opportunities for new businesses to establish themselves downtown. In her view, attracting more people to the city is essential if Latrobe hopes to encourage future investment and business growth.

Corbett also emphasized the market's community benefits, pointing out that Saturday mornings are generally quiet downtown and that the market would provide a positive activity for residents of all ages. She suggested that seniors would enjoy having an accessible event within walking distance, while younger residents and aspiring artists could be inspired by seeing local entrepreneurs and creators showcase their talents. She stated that the market offers something for everyone. It would strengthen the community, support local businesses, and create new opportunities for growth in Latrobe.

Duke Rishel of Jennerstown, co-owner of Duke Works, spoke in support of bringing the Ligonier Country Market to Latrobe. He explained that he and his wife began selling their handcrafted woodworking products at the market after being accepted as vendors and were pleasantly surprised by both their success and the positive atmosphere.

Rishel said the market provided a welcoming environment where customers were supportive and vendors regularly helped one another. He described the market as a community-oriented event rather than the disruptive or competitive environment some opponents feared.

He also emphasized the market's role as a business incubator. According to Rishel, many small businesses begin in garages, basements, or home workshops and use markets as a stepping stone toward eventually opening brick-and-mortar locations. He argued that if Latrobe wants to fill vacant storefronts and encourage entrepreneurship, it must first create opportunities for small businesses to grow locally. Otherwise, those businesses may establish permanent locations in other communities.

Rishel further noted that markets provide valuable exposure for communities. Drawing from his own experience, he explained that although he had long been familiar with the area, he only began spending significant time in Latrobe after becoming involved with the market. He believes that bringing thousands of visitors into the city on a regular basis would increase awareness of everything Latrobe has to offer and generate positive word-of-mouth promotion that traditional advertising cannot easily replicate.

In closing, Rishel urged council to view the market as an investment in local business growth, community development, and long-term economic vitality. He argued that attracting visitors and helping small businesses succeed are important first steps toward encouraging future investment and filling vacant commercial spaces in Latrobe.

Tim Joseph of Ali Drive, creator of Sourdough Mama (with his wife), spoke in support of bringing the Ligonier Country Market to Latrobe. Originally from the Pittsburgh area, he explained that he moved to the region about ten years ago, has since built a family here, and now considers the community home.

Mr. Joseph noted that his wife started the business approximately a year ago and has found success through opportunities provided by the market. He emphasized that while vendors are fighting to preserve their businesses, they are also advocating for something that benefits the broader community.

Drawing on his experience as someone who relocated to the area, Joseph said that before moving here he knew Latrobe primarily for figures such as Arnold Palmer and Fred Rogers. Since then, he has come to appreciate the city's strong sense of community, safety, and local pride. He pointed to ongoing investments, building renovations, and community improvements as evidence that Latrobe has been positioning itself for growth.

Mr. Joseph described the market as an opportunity to showcase both Latrobe's history and its future. He argued that the market would help attract visitors, promote the city, support local businesses, and expose more people to what the community has to offer beyond its well-known landmarks and attractions.

He also stressed that the market aligns with Latrobe's family-oriented character, noting that both the community and the market are built around supporting families and small businesses. In closing, Joseph urged council to view the market as an opportunity to encourage economic growth, attract new visitors, and continue supporting the entrepreneurs who help strengthen the local economy.

Mark Sorice, the attorney for the Ligonier Country Market, urged council to view the proposal as a unique opportunity rather than a risk. He suggested that much of the opposition stemmed from uncertainty about the unknown and noted that he had provided council members with information about the market's national recognition, including awards identifying it as one of the top markets in the country.

Mr. Sorice argued that the market's success is the result of strong organization, diversity among vendors, and a proven track record. He described the proposal as a rare opportunity for Latrobe to attract visitors, support local businesses, and distinguish itself from other communities.

Addressing concerns about logistics and costs, he argued that operational issues could be managed and that the potential benefits outweighed the challenges. He emphasized that the market would occupy city streets for only a limited number of hours each year while potentially bringing thousands of visitors into Latrobe who might not otherwise visit the city.

Mr. Sorice encouraged council to take a bold approach and consider the long-term benefits the market could provide. He framed the decision as an opportunity to support economic activity, increase downtown traffic, and invest in a proven event that local business owners and community supporters had largely embraced.

Vinny Amatucci, from 804 Saint Clair Street and a recent graduate of Saint Vincent College, spoke in support of bringing the Ligonier Country Market to the city. He explained that although he had the opportunity to leave the area for college, he chose to stay because of his love for the community and everything Latrobe has to offer.

Speaking from the perspective of a young adult, Mr. Amatucci said that some of his favorite local activities are community events such as the Fourth of July celebration, the Mister Rogers Family Days, and the Banana Split Festival. He noted that these events bring people together and create a strong sense of community pride.

Mr. Amatucci recalled attending a downtown event on July 3 when Ligonier Street was closed to traffic and filled with people enjoying the festivities. He described it as one of his favorite experiences in Latrobe and said he believes the community embraces events that bring residents together.

He acknowledged that hosting the market would require some sacrifices and adjustments but argued that worthwhile opportunities often involve inconvenience. In his view, the benefits of supporting local businesses, attracting visitors, and creating another community gathering space outweigh the temporary disruptions.

Mr. Amatucci encouraged council to support the proposal, believing it would enhance community life and provide a positive opportunity for both residents and local businesses.

Rochelle "Buffy" O'Barto, owner of Pat's Hair Salon on Main Street, spoke in support of bringing the Ligonier Country Market to the city. She noted that her daughter recently opened a facial spa above the salon, making the success of new businesses especially important to her.

Mrs. O'Barto said that attracting the market to Latrobe could benefit local businesses, help fill vacant storefronts, and encourage additional economic activity downtown. While she acknowledged concerns about parking, particularly because her business is open on Saturday mornings, she expressed confidence that those issues could be addressed and worked through.

Drawing on examples from other communities, she pointed to the growth and success of markets in places such as Irwin and Greensburg, suggesting that similar opportunities could help Latrobe continue to grow and attract new businesses.

Mrs. O'Barto stated that the market appears to be a positive opportunity for local businesses, vendors, and the community, and expressed hope that it could contribute to filling vacant spaces and strengthening downtown Latrobe.

James Okonak from 711 Main Street, expressed opposition to bringing the Ligonier Country Market to Latrobe, arguing that the city should not involve itself in the controversies surrounding the market. He noted that the market's departure from the Ligonier Watershed property, its previous association with the Hannastown Farmers Market, and ongoing legal disputes have created uncertainty that could be brought into the community.

Mr. Okonak also disagreed with comments suggesting that Latrobe needs a new identity beyond the legacies of Arnold Palmer and Fred Rogers. He highlighted the significant and ongoing impact both figures continue to have on the city. He cited events such as the Arnold Palmer youth golf tournaments, improvements at the Latrobe Country Club, and numerous community programs and projects supported through organizations connected to Fred Rogers' legacy.

He emphasized that Latrobe already hosts successful community events, including Fred Rogers Family Days, the Banana Split Festival, Holly Jolly Light Up Night, Steelers-related events, and car shows, all of which attract visitors and contribute to the city's identity and economic activity.

Mr. Okonak also raised concerns about the potential impact on Latrobe's existing farmers market, which he noted has operated successfully for years and can attract dozens of vendors during peak growing season. He questioned whether introducing the Ligonier Country Market could create competition that might harm the established local market.

Finally, he referenced discussions about financial arrangements and alternative locations for the market, arguing that council should proceed cautiously and carefully evaluate the potential costs, impacts, and long-term consequences before making a decision.

Mark Sorice clarified that he had not threatened litigation on behalf of the Ligonier Country Market, stating that such claims were a misunderstanding.

He emphasized that the decision before council should focus on the future rather than past disputes or controversies. According to Mr. Sorice, the key question is whether the community wants to continue operating as it always has or embrace new opportunities for growth and development.

Shawn O' Barto spoke stating that, while he did not intend to be disrespectful, he does not support bringing the Ligonier Country Market to Latrobe and expressed his opposition to Latrobe hosting the market.

Eric Moure of Ligonier, owner of Cabin and Creek Tallow, spoke in support of relocating the Ligonier Country Market to Latrobe. He explained that his business works closely with local farmers and sources materials locally, emphasizing that the market provides products that are often unavailable through large retailers and national chains.

Mr. Moure stated that while vendors operate businesses, their primary motivation is supporting local communities and strengthening relationships between farmers, makers, small businesses, and consumers. He described the market as a network of neighbors helping neighbors, where vendors regularly support one another, share resources, and work together to ensure everyone's success.

Using the example of the Greensburg Night Market, he noted that it grew significantly after receiving community support, expanding from a smaller event into one that now attracts thousands of visitors. He argued that successful markets create partnerships between vendors and local businesses rather than competition, generating additional foot traffic and economic activity for surrounding restaurants, shops, and service providers.

Moure rejected characterizations of vendors as merely selling novelty items, explaining that many vendors create products using locally sourced materials and contribute to regional agriculture and small-business development. He stressed that markets serve as incubators for entrepreneurs while helping communities grow and attract visitors.

He also expressed frustration with what he viewed as internal conflicts and missed opportunities in Ligonier, arguing that communities willing to embrace growth and support small businesses are more likely to benefit from opportunities like the market. In closing, he stated that Latrobe's welcoming atmosphere, strong sense of community, and family-oriented character make it an ideal location for the market, and he voiced his full support for the relocation proposal.

Mayor Bartels stated he will highlight the general terms and agreement, for the Ligonier Country Market and holding the market for one season. This would be a pending agreement, subject to mayor, city manager, and city solicitor approval for any final tweaks that need to be made to the draft.

The agreement stated:

Spaces will be available on Ligonier Street, so that is the designated street, referred to as the market area. This shall commence on noon, Tuesday, May 19th of 2026, and this agreement would terminate at 6 p.m. on Saturday, September 26th of 2026. The first Saturday for the market would be May 23rd, 2026 through September 26th of 2026. Times of operation specified from 6 a.m. until 1 p.m. each applicable date. There are exclusionary dates of June 6th, July 4th, and August 22<sup>nd</sup>, those dates are already reserved. There will be no more than 125 vendor spaces with a maximum dimension of 12 by 24 feet at any single event. The LCM shall provide at least three portable toilets to be made available to the public. The toilets are to be removed each weekend by LCM at its own cost. LCM shall submit a parking plan to the city manager and chief of police 72 hours prior to each event. The LCM shall be required to adhere to amendments issued by the city manager and chief of police. Operation of the market necessary for the

operation of the market, including, without limitation, overtime incurred by the city for police and public works employees, shall be compensated. A monthly invoice will be issued by The City of Latrobe, and the amount due and owing are payable upon receipt. LCM agrees to maintain the market area free of debris, garbage, and other waste at all times. LCM will allow Latrobe Parks and Recreation Farmers Markets vendors to apply to the LCM market at a reduced rental rate with space provided for up to 15 of these vendors.

## **MOTION**

Motion to approve an agreement with the Ligonier Center for Agriculture and Education DBA Ligonier Country Market ('LCM') to hold the market for one season in the downtown area of Ligonier Street in the City of Latrobe. Mrs. Amatucci made the motion seconded by Mr. Leach. Motion carried 5-1, Mr. Hauser opposed.

The following were comments made by the Mayor and council members in regard to their vote on the Ligonier Country Market agreement.

Mayor Bartels announced that council would move into a discussion period, allowing council members to share their thoughts, ask questions, and discuss the proposal. Resident Nancy Byers interrupted and thought voting was open to the City of Latrobe residents. Mayor Bartels explained council members are elected by residents to make decisions on behalf of the community that the matter had been tabled at the previous meeting so council could review a formal agreement before making a decision and that, under the city's governmental structure, council is responsible for voting on such matters.

Mrs. Amatucci stated that city employees, staff, and the police department have committed to working closely with residents and businesses to minimize disruptions if the market is approved. Efforts would be made to ensure that residents maintain access to parking and that existing businesses, such as salons, banks, and other establishments that regularly serve customers on Saturdays, can continue operating without significant interference.

Mrs. Amatucci also addressed concerns regarding churches located along the proposed market route and noted that worship services, funerals, and other religious activities would be carefully accommodated. City staff and the police department would coordinate with pastors and funeral directors to ensure that access to churches is maintained and that religious services and funeral processions are not disrupted by market operations. She emphasized that the city intends to work proactively with all affected parties to address concerns and ensure the event operates as smoothly as possible.

Mr. Hauser acknowledged that concerns about the market had been raised and reiterated that the city could continue to support community events and residents who enjoy them. He expressed concern about entering into a contractual agreement, stating uneasiness about the possibility of contracts being broken and referencing the history and legal context discussed by attorneys. While recognizing the potential opportunity the market could bring, Mr. Hauser is not convinced this is the only option available for supporting local economic activity and community events.

Mr. Hauser suggested that alternatives, such as relocating the market uptown program on Saturdays, might be worth exploring and concluded by indicating they were still weighing the decision.

Ms. Vavick stated that she felt torn about the decision, and she is supposed to reflect the voice of the community. She referenced a public poll indicating majority support for the proposal, while acknowledging that the event could create some inconvenience.

She also shared personal concern, noting that she works with Greater Latrobe Parks and Recreation and that the proposed market could negatively impact the existing Latrobe Farmers Market held on Tuesdays, which has taken years to develop.

Mrs. Vavick expressed strong disagreement with a previous comment made by Mr. Sorice, objecting to the statement that “Fred is dead.” She emphasized that Fred Rogers remains an important and lasting symbol of Latrobe’s identity and community values and found the remark offensive.

Mayor Bartels asked how the city’s code book defines vendor usage and whether the proposed activity would require special permitting.

City Solicitor Mr. Demosky responded that vendors would be required to submit the standard permit application, which is then reviewed by the city manager for approval.

Mr. Leach stated that there are valid concerns and potential inconveniences associated with the proposal, noting that some risks are unavoidable. However, he stated that Latrobe may need a significant opportunity or change to help the city grow and that he views this as a chance to achieve that.

Mr. Leach expressed confidence in city leadership, praising the police department, city manager, and overall administration for their professionalism and daily management of local issues. He concluded by thanking the police chief and city manager for their work over the past several weeks in addressing concerns and preparing for the discussion.

Mrs. Amatucci stated that she believed people should seek accurate information about the situation rather than relying on what is shared on social media, encouraging council and residents to do their own research when questioning the integrity of the market proposal. She acknowledged that no situation is perfect but expressed confidence in the city’s solicitor, manager, police chief, and administration to protect the city’s interests through the lease and its terms. She noted that different markets may attract different audiences and suggested that increased overall activity could benefit both. While acknowledging uncertainty and a lack of complete information, she said she felt the idea was worth exploring with a positive outlook. She concluded by referencing Fred Rogers’ philosophy of “helpers,” suggesting that collaboration between markets and community groups could be beneficial for Latrobe.

Mayor Bartels weighed the proposal as a cost–benefit decision while acknowledging both support and operational concerns. There are flawed emotional comparisons being used in the

debate and emphasizes that the decision should be based on a straightforward cost–benefit analysis rather than rhetoric or historical references. He notes concerns about impacts on churches, residents, public works, and police operations, but expresses confidence in city staff to manage those challenges.

He also raises a practical concern that if public works projects are done during overtime for the event, it may create additional costs or delay other necessary city maintenance, since staffing is already stretched.

Despite these concerns, Mayor Bartels leans cautiously in favor of proceeding, to see whether the event benefits the city. He acknowledges it will increase workload across departments but suggests that the city can evaluate results afterward and discontinue it next year if it does not deliver the expected benefits. He stated that he was opposed to the proposal, believing it would create significant challenges for the city. He acknowledged and appreciated the support expressed by local business owners as well as the vendors associated with the Ligonier Country Market (LCM). However, he noted that while he understood the difficulties facing the market, LCM’s situation was not the city's responsibility to solve. He further commented that if the market were ultimately unable to locate in Latrobe, he believed it would likely find another suitable location, such as the airport or elsewhere. Despite his reservations, Mayor Bartels indicated that he was willing to support giving the market an opportunity to demonstrate its value to the city and stated that he would vote in favor of allowing it to proceed.

Mr. Jenko stated that one of the reasons council tabled the matter was to gather additional input from residents, as council had already heard extensively from vendors and business owners. He explained that two surveys were conducted. A SurveyMonkey survey was conducted and resulted in approximately 75% support for bringing the market to Latrobe. A separate survey was conducted on Facebook, where participation could not be limited to city residents, and that survey showed approximately 63% support.

Resident Nancy Byers spoke out and questioned the validity of the SurveyMonkey survey, stating that it consisted of only two questions and did not provide an opportunity for more detailed feedback. Mayor Bartels had to remind Mrs. Byers that this is not a town hall meeting.

Mr. Jenko stated the purpose of the survey was simply to gauge whether residents supported or opposed the proposal.

Mr. Hauser stated that his primary concern remained the impact on the city's existing Tuesday farmer’s market. He acknowledged that the issue had been discussed but felt that an important question remained unanswered.

He noted that if the city was willing to close portions of downtown and accommodate vendors on Saturdays for the Ligonier Country Market, the city should also consider whether similar opportunities could be provided for its own local market vendors. He questioned why the city's market could not be held downtown as well, rather than at Legion Keener Park, and whether the Tuesday schedule was chosen out of necessity or for another reason.

Mayor Bartels explained that the proposed agreement for the farmer's market includes a reduced rental rate and designated space for up to 15 vendors from the city's existing farmers market. He stated that the city manager, solicitor, and mayor would continue working with market representatives to finalize the agreement's language.

He noted that questions had been raised regarding the number of vendors included in the proposal, specifically the difference between 15 and 42 vendors. Mayor Bartels stated that he was uncertain how those figures had been determined but indicated that additional discussions could take place regarding vendor participation.

Mayor Bartels emphasized that council was being asked to approve the general framework of the agreement, with the understanding that the final wording would be completed by city administration and legal counsel. He characterized the vote as a vote of confidence in the city's staff and their ability to finalize an agreement that protects the city's interests.

He also addressed concerns from residents who felt their voices had not been heard. Mayor Bartels stated that the purpose of the meeting was to gather public input and that council had carefully tracked who spoke, the comments made, and the concerns raised throughout the process. He stressed that council had considered both supportive and opposing viewpoints and had taken all public comments into account in its deliberations.

### **MOTION**

Motion to hire Parker Repko as a seasonal employee for the department of public works. Mr. Jenko made the motion seconded by Mrs. Amatucci. Motion carried 6-0.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Danielle Shiela from 1750 Raymond Avenue, addressed council regarding a tax notice and reminder message she received from the city. She stated that she had received a notification through the city's Savvy Citizen app reminding residents about tax payment deadlines and later received a letter indicating that city records showed her real estate taxes had not been paid and that penalties had been added.

Ms. Shiela objected to the wording of the notice and expressed concern that the language of the letter implied she was delinquent in paying her taxes when that was not the case. She stated that the notice caused her significant stress and confusion, particularly because she believed the wording was inaccurate and potentially alarming to residents.

Ms. Shiela explained that she had visited city hall earlier that day to discuss the matter and emphasized that many residents, particularly senior citizens, could be frightened by receiving a notice suggesting that taxes were unpaid when they believed they had met their obligations. She urged city officials to carefully review the language used in future tax communications to ensure that notices are clear, accurate, and not unnecessarily alarming.

Mrs. Trout acknowledged that the wording of the notice was problematic and explained that the language was generated through the city's tax software system and that the intent of the notice was to remind taxpayers that the discount payment period had expired and to provide a courtesy reminder regarding upcoming tax deadlines. Mrs. Trout apologized for the confusion and indicated that the communication was not intended to accuse residents of failing to pay their taxes.

Ms. Shiela reiterated that she pays her taxes on time and expressed her belief that future notices should be worded more carefully to avoid creating unnecessary concern among residents.

The Special Voting Meeting of the Council adjourned at 8:41 P.M. with a motion by Mrs. Amatucci seconded by Mr. Hauser. All in favor. Motion carried 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,

*Janina Hall*

Janina Hall, Council Secretary



