

THURSDAY, JULY 2, 2026

A special meeting of the Council of the City of Lebanon, Pa., was held in Dixon Council Chamber of City Hall, Lebanon, Pa., this afternoon, Chairperson Martin presiding.

The meeting was called to order at 4:46 p.m.

Present--Mrs. Haitos, Mr. Maguire, Mr. Potash, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Martin, Chairperson.
Absent—none.

Also present were Mayor Sherry L. Capello; Finance Officer Chele Gible; Director of Administration-Assistant to the Mayor Janelle Groh; Chief of Police Eric Sims; Director of Public Works Chad Yeagley; 13 persons in the audience; and 3 members of the news media.

Mayor Capello read the instructions from the City's 250th Bicentennial Committee regarding the opening of the time capsule. She explained the precautions taken to preserve the items in the time capsule and announced that additional items will be placed in the time capsule before it is re-buried. She announced that the date for the burial of the new time capsule is tentatively scheduled for July 28.

Council Chairperson gave a presentation on the Principles of the Declaration of Independence, as follows:

“The Declaration of Independence Principles

Members of Council, Mayor Capello, and citizens of this great City, join me in reflecting on the principles and purpose of the Declaration of Independence.

As we gather to mark the 250th Anniversary of American Independence by opening this time capsule and honoring our founders' Declaration, I thought it was important that, before we read the Declaration of Independence, we take a few moments to better understand what this document is, and perhaps just as importantly, some of what it is not.

The Declaration is not our Constitution. It does not establish our form of government, nor is it our Bill of Rights, which provides clarity to our individual rights and freedoms.

It is a foundational document for understanding the principles upon which our Constitution and our system of government were built.

Our founders wrote this declaration to King George, to Great Britain, and to the world, explaining why thirteen colonies believed they could no longer remain under British rule.

More than that, it is a statement of first principles—where rights come from, why governments exist, and from whom they derive their authority.

At the beginning of the Declaration, one line immediately drew my attention:

'The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America'.

The founders wanted the world to know that they spoke with one voice. At a time when the colonies were fragile and outmatched, that shared resolve gave strength to what they were about to declare.

As I studied the Declaration, I found myself asking a question:

What gave these fifty-six men the authority to make such a declaration?

Near the end of the document, they answer that question themselves. They declare independence not by the authority of a king, not by the authority of Parliament, but, in their own words, *'by Authority of the good People of these Colonies'.*

The Continental Congress's authority flowed upward from the people, not downward from a monarch. That simple idea that legitimate government derives its authority from the people rather than a sovereign, was revolutionary, and I believe it is one of the keys to the significance and enduring success of the American experiment.

Many people think of the American Revolution as simply a war for independence. But if you read the Declaration carefully, you discover something different.

The founders were not looking for a revolution.

For years they petitioned the King. They appealed to Parliament. They sought reconciliation through every reasonable means, as we shall read later in the Declaration.

The document was not a call to begin the fighting. It was an explanation to the world of why the colonies believed they had no other choice.

The Declaration itself says:

'In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress'.

It even reminds us that they appealed to their British brethren before finally concluding that separation had become necessary.

By the time Congress voted for independence on July 2 and adopted the Declaration on July 4, 1776, the war had already been underway for more than fourteen months. George Washington had already served as Commander of the Continental Army for nearly thirteen months.

Another passage that I found worth studying is this:

'Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes.'

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The founders believed that revolution should be a last resort, not a first response. They did not take the decision to separate—or the violence that would accompany it—lightly.

At its heart, the Declaration reminds us that our rights come from our Creator, that government exists to secure those rights, and that its authority comes from the consent of the governed. Those principles continue to shape our nation today.

Fifty years ago, the people of Lebanon recognized the importance of these principles. They buried a time capsule containing a copy of the Declaration of Independence, local history, and the signatures of many residents who rededicated themselves to its ideals.

They understood that freedom was not simply something to celebrate.

It was something to preserve.

Tonight, fifty years later, it is our turn.

Because of the principles declared in this document, and the constitutional system that followed, we have the privilege of choosing those who represent us, debating our differences openly, and peacefully transferring the responsibilities of government from one generation to the next.

Two hundred and fifty years later, those same principles continue to allow a free people to govern themselves—not because we always agree, as disagreements have been with us since the beginning of time, but because we have committed ourselves to the enduring truths upon which this nation was founded.

As public servants, entrusted by the people of Lebanon, we have accepted the responsibility of preserving these principles not only for ourselves, but for those who will come after us.

May those who gather here fifty years from now look back on our generation with the same appreciation that we have for those who came before us.

And may we prove worthy of the inheritance we have received”.

Mayor Capello and Councilmembers read aloud the City of Lebanon’s 250th Anniversary Rededication Pledge, as follows:

In this 250th year of American Independence,

We, the Mayor and Members of Council of the City of Lebanon,

Standing upon the foundation laid by our nation's founders,

Do solemnly reaffirm our commitment to the principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence.

We recognize that all people are created equal and are endowed with inherent rights and freedoms.

We pledge to uphold liberty, justice, equality, and the rule of law.

We pledge to serve with integrity, courage, and respect for all people.

We pledge to preserve representative government, protect the public trust, and remain accountable to those we serve.

We honor the sacrifices of those who secured and defended our freedom throughout the past two hundred and fifty years.

And we accept our responsibility to leave to future generations a stronger, safer, and more prosperous community and nation.

With gratitude for the blessings of liberty, and with hope for the future,

We rededicate ourselves to the enduring ideals of our Republic.

So pledged this 2nd day of July, 2026.

United in purpose.

United in service.

United in liberty”.

Chairperson Martin introduced Resolution No. 7, as follows:

A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LEBANON REAFFIRMING THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IN COMMEMORATION OF THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

WHEREAS, on July 4, 1776, the representatives of the thirteen American colonies adopted the Declaration of Independence, proclaiming to the world that all people are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, including Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness; and

WHEREAS, the Declaration of Independence established the enduring principles upon which the United States of America was founded, including individual liberty, representative government, self-determination, equality under the law, and government by the consent of the governed; and

WHEREAS, the year 2026 marks the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a historic milestone that provides an opportunity for Americans to reflect upon the sacrifices, vision, courage, and determination of our nation's founders; and

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WHEREAS, the City of Lebanon recognizes that the freedoms and opportunities enjoyed today are the result of the commitment, service, and sacrifice of generations of Americans who have defended and advanced the principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence; and

WHEREAS, the Council of the City of Lebanon and the Mayor desire to publicly reaffirm their dedication to these founding principles and to encourage all citizens to reflect upon their responsibilities in preserving liberty, justice, equality, and representative government for future generations;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, and the Mayor thereof, That:

SECTION 1. On July 2, 2026, at a Special Meeting of City Council convened for this purpose, the Mayor and Members of Council shall publicly read the Declaration of Independence as an act of remembrance, reflection, and recommitment to the ideals upon which our nation was founded.

SECTION 2. The Mayor and Council hereby resolve themselves, as public servants entrusted by the people, to uphold and defend the principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence, including:

- The belief that all people are created equal and possess inherent dignity and worth;
- The protection of individual rights, liberties, and freedoms guaranteed under the Constitution and laws of the United States and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania;
- The preservation of representative government that remains accountable to the people;
- The promotion of justice, equality of opportunity, and the rule of law;
- The encouragement of civic responsibility, public service, and active participation in our democratic institutions; and
- The commitment to leave to future generations a nation and community that remains free, prosperous, and faithful to the ideals of liberty and self-government.

SECTION 3. The Mayor and Council call upon the citizens of Lebanon to join in commemorating the 250th Anniversary of American Independence by reflecting upon the blessings of freedom, honoring those who have preserved it, and renewing their own commitment to the principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

SECTION 4. A copy of this Resolution shall be entered into the official records of the City of Lebanon as a lasting testament to the City's participation in the America250 celebration and its dedication to the enduring principles of our nation's founding.

RESOLVED AND ADOPTED this 2nd day of July, 2026, by the Council of the City of Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

Resolution No. 7 was passed finally on motion of Mr. Martin, seconded by Mr. Potash. Yeas-Mrs. Haitos, Mr. Maguire, Mr. Potash, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Martin, Chairperson--5; nays--none.

Shane Keenan, Archivist and Museum Educator, Lebanon County Historical Society gave a presentation on the News of the Declaration Independence, as follows:

**“News of the Declaration of Independence Reaches Lebanon
July 2, 2026 Rededication Speech**

Thank you Mayor Capello and the City Council for inviting me to speak here today and represent the Lebanon County Historical Society. I will be briefly touching on how the news of the Declaration of Independence reached Lebanon. Unfortunately, we do not have a lot of detailed information regarding this but we do know some of what happened.

After the Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, it took a few days' time for the news to get here. There was no live, instant news like we are so accustomed to today. There was no internet, no TV, no radio, not even telegraphs, or any of the technologies that have enabled such rapid communication and have been developed between then and now. News traveled at fastest by horseback and printing was a slow and tedious process of placing individual pieces of metal called type on the press for every single letter and punctuation mark. After adopting the declaration, congress ordered that it should be printed and spread throughout the army and each state.

Members of Congress from each state were given copies and newspapers began spreading the word and making their own copies, starting with the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* in Philadelphia on July 6, which copied the entire text of the declaration on its front and second pages. The declaration had to be reprinted in local newspapers and broadsides as the news spread. Lebanon did not have its own newspaper yet. Copies had to be shared, read aloud to public gatherings at each community, and the news spread word of mouth from there.

There seem to have been some rumors that something important had happened as the Hebron church diaries note on July 7 that “there is great excitement in town again about the war,” though they didn’t elaborate about what the excitement was over specifically. We know from other entries that they were cautious about spreading rumors, like later in the year when they heard rumors that New York had fallen to the British but they wanted to wait for more news before getting too worried or spreading the news further if it turned out to only be a rumor and worrying the loved ones of the soldiers unnecessarily. Similarly, they may have wanted to avoid spreading rumors about the Declaration of Independence if they turned out to just be rumors.

Official news of the Declaration of Independence had to travel by horseback from Philadelphia and went first to the county courthouse, which at that time would be the Lancaster County Courthouse as we were still part of Lancaster at the time and we did not become our own county until 1813. The county sherif read the Declaration of Independence at the Lancaster County Courthouse at noon on Monday July 8, 1776.

The citizens of Lebanon did not hear the news until a few hours later that same day. According to local tradition, a wagon train brought the news while passing through town on the way from Philadelphia to Harris Ferry. The bell of Salem Lutheran Church was rung to announce the occasion and call people to hear the declaration. We are not able to completely verify that the bell was rung but it would make sense that the bell would be rung to call people together as would commonly be the case for important announcements and Salem would have been one of only two options in town, the other being Tabor. We don't have much information beyond that to know how the local population reacted to the news, but we do know that the area was largely in support of the war and many local men had left to fight the British, so there was probably a good deal of celebration as there was elsewhere. That also means that the crowd may have been rather small with so many fighting in the war and the town was not very large at the time to begin with.

Whatever Lebanon's reaction was in 1776, it did not take long for locals to start yearly celebrations of July 4th as the anniversary of our independence. The Hebron Moravian Church diaries note on July 4, 1778 that some locals were celebrating and firing cannon in town and in Balthasar Orth's field, where some local militias had previously trained for the war, because it was the day our independence was declared. They did so even though the same entry says the outlook of the war was grim at the time and people thought everything would soon be lost. But at least some locals were still optimistic enough to celebrate in the face of uncertainty. Thankfully they were right to be optimistic and we won our independence a few years later. And now in 2026 we are here today celebrating that same event through this rededication of our commitment to the principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence".

Mayor Capello extended an invitation to the public to sign the Rededication to the Declaration of Independence.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

Janelle C. Groh, Acting Clerk