
TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting
Date of Meeting: March 8, 2010
Time of Meeting: 7:00 P.M.
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Mayor Bettina Bieri called the Special Meeting of the West Milford Township Council to order.

Adequate Notice Statement

Mayor Bieri read the following statement:

Please note that in accordance with Chapter 231, Public Laws of 1975 of New Jersey, adequate advance notice of this special meeting was transmitted to the Herald News on January 24, 2010; copies were provided to the Record, Star Ledger, Suburban Trends and Greenwood Lake News and posted continuously on the bulletin board in the main corridor of the Town Hall and on file in the Office of the Township Clerk.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Bieri led all in attendance in a salute to the flag.

Roll Call

Present: Councilmembers Joseph Smolinski, Michael Ramaglia, Robert Nolan, Marilyn Lichtenberg, Daniel Jurkovic, Mayor Bettina Bieri.
Absent: Councilman Philip Weisbecker.
Also Present: Township Administrator Kevin Boyle, Township Clerk Antoinette Battaglia, Township Attorney Fred Semrau, Chief Financial Officer Arthur Magnotti.

Agenda No. II

Purpose

Mayor Bieri acknowledged the presense of a number of police officers in the audience, recognized them and thanked them for attending tonight's meeting. She introduced Mr. George DeOld of the Department of Community Affairs and advised that he is the person assigned to conduct the requested audit of the police department. Mr. DeOld is here tonight to observe and to gain an understanding of the department. Mayor Bieri stated that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to review the 2010 police department proposed budget and she turned the meeting over to Administrator Boyle.

Formal action may be taken at this meeting

Agenda No. III

Review of 2010 Municipal Budget

Mr. Boyle stated that he has met with Department Heads and has asked that every effort be made to keep expenses down. He advised that the operating expenses in the police department are reduced in the proposed budget and he commended the Chief for his work.

Chief Costello reviewed the staffing levels in his department advising that the code authorizes 48 staff members to cover 80 square miles. The dispatch division provides services for police, fire and OEM. There are three civilian personnel in his department. He reviewed the line items in the police patrol budget. Councilman Nolan asked for detail on conferences and association dues. Chief Costello reviewed the related appropriations and discussed who attends various conferences providing the justification for such attendance. He advised that he is attending classes in the HRDI (Human Resources Development Institute) which is a certified managers program geared toward increased productivity. These classes focus on providing better services in state and local government. It is a professional designation related to management skills and he attends one day per week for 3-4 months.

Chief Costello reviewed appropriations for special police officers focusing on staffing and education. He advised that staffing problems in this division are minimal with certain issues arising when there are a number of special events at the same time. While initial training is outsourced, follow up training is done in-house. Discussion ensued about college reimbursement policies for all staff in the police department.

Chief Costello referred Council to a memorandum he drafted which addresses staffing in his department. He read excerpts from the memo pertaining to sectors, staffing and backup. He advised that backup is provided by neighboring sectors within the municipality, Jefferson Township and the Sheriff's department. He discussed radio communications and the differences between local communications and communicating with the Sheriff and/or State agencies. When asked if 8 replacement officers are needed this year, Chief Costello stated that issues arise when calculating the time needed to complete training and transitioning a new officer into everyday operations. Additionally, new hires are subject to a background investigation, and interview process, administrative approval, a conditional offer of employment and medical and psychological evaluations. They then spend six months in the academy and three months in field training. The entire process takes about one year. He discussed the process for intergovernmental transfers and recommended a combination of hiring for academy and intergovernmental transfers. He stated that his department is comprised of professional and dedicated personnel who will always manage to provide quality service despite shortages or absences. However, continuous manpower shortages ultimately result in issues and problems become compounded.

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Ultimately he may have difficulty getting officers to come in to work on overtime shifts. In response to Councilman Jurkovic, Chief Costello stated that staffing shortages ultimately result in cutbacks or reductions in programs including school programs. He reviewed the current staff assignments to school programs and outlined the parameters of the REAL program that is offered to 6th grade classes in West Milford. He stated that the PBA contract restricts assignments in school programs. Chief Costello reviewed the process to get a Department of Personnel list.

Council President Smolinski stated that he read in a recent newspaper article that the proposed DCA study could take a year to complete. The same article also mentioned that the Chief could obtain a similar study through other means and he asked Chief Costello to provide an explanation. Chief Costello stated that he spoke with Administrator Boyle in November about getting a study and he obtained a proposal in the amount of \$12,000. He is aware of three or four sources who conduct such studies. Chief Costello stated that the Council budgeted for 48 officers in 2009 and thus far there is funding for 47 in 2010. He asked why he is being prohibited from hiring in accordance with the funding. Councilman Nolan asked Chief Costello what he would do if the study determined he needed fewer officers. Chief Costello stated that he believes that studies other than the one provided through DCA would be completed faster. Chief Costello stated that he has the credentials to determine the needs of the department but if a second opinion is needed, the Council should pay for it. He stated that it would cost \$19.29 per household to replace eight officers this year which equates to \$2.40 per officer per year. He asked that the Council reassess their values. Councilman Jurkovic stated that it is the Chief's responsibility to ensure that we are adequately staffed and he supports the Chief's numbers. Mr. Magnotti advised that the Township has appropriated about \$90,000 for retirement payouts with about \$180,000 in reserves. Generally, such payments are spread over two years if the retirement comes in the latter part of a given year. Mayor Bieri stated that if the officers eligible to retire do so this year, it will cost the municipality about \$800,000 and Chief Costello opined that the Township should budget for those costs. He stated that if the Township were to hire a new officer now to go to the academy, it would cost \$19,000 for the remainder of this year. Mr. Magnotti stated that funding is available because salaries are being fully funded in the proposed budget. Mayor Bieri stated that, while this may be so, there is not sufficient funding for retirement buyouts and thus the salary & wage funding would be consumed with the buyouts.

Councilman Jurkovic noted that the Township will be compelled to hire if we call for a list. He suggested that the Chief be allowed to call for a list with approval to hire one person. In the meantime, he asked that additional information be provided to Council. Chief Costello stated that anything is better than nothing. He stated that he will work within the confines of the funding provided by Council and public safety will not be an issue. The level of service and overtime costs may become issues and, based on that, he recommends hiring eight people. Discussion ensued about funding, staffing levels and public safety. Chief Costello asked the Council to provide him with direction.

Mayor Bieri advised that the Chief of Police has been requesting staffing increases, promotions and amendments for the past two years. She has not ignored those requests but rather has requested justifications as she does from all departments. The information was not forthcoming and repeated efforts to glean such information went ignored. Finally, after a protracted four-month effort, she was provided with volumes of information at one time. She spent innumerable hours sorting, digesting, and conducting research to understand the information provided. Ultimately, she has sought outside help by virtue of the Department of Community Affairs in an effort to fulfill her obligations to residents and staff. She stated emphatically that she has never questioned the commitment or performance of staff. However, she must understand the operations to make educated decisions about staffing and promotions. She did make interim promotions based solely on the Chief's recommendations. She noted that statistics are easy to gather and can be manipulated to support conflicting arguments. She referenced the statistics provided by the Chief which are pertinent to County operations rather than municipal entities. She did research about police department staffing and operations in other municipalities that have similarities to West Milford. She reviewed those statistics and compared them to the statistics referenced by Chief Costello. Chief Costello commended the Mayor on her extensive homework and disputed many of her comments regarding training, overtime and statistics. Mayor Bieri directed Chief Costello to a report he prepared in 2005 with then-Administrator Richard Kunze. She noted that the report concluded that the Township should request and proceed with a free-of-charge study from the DCA. She stated that the concerns expressed about the timeliness of that study that she has now requested almost five years later are baseless. If time were such an issue, the Chief would have proceeded in 2005.

Council President Smolinski stated that the Township cannot wait to learn if additional staffing is needed in the police department. He accused the Mayor of failing to share information with the Council and attempting to run the municipality in a vacuum. He expressed concern for residents' safety. Councilman Jurkovic asked the Administrator to obtain a DOP list and proceed to hire one new officer. He also asked for additional information about alternative reviews and studies.

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Mayor Bieri opened the meeting to the public after advising that there is a five-minute limit for each speaker.

There being no from the public Councilman Nolan moved to close the public portion of the meeting.

Moved: Nolan Seconded: Jurkovic
Voted Aye: Smolinski, Ramaglia, Nolan, Lichtenberg, Jurkovic.
Voted Nay: None.
Motion carried.

Agenda No. V

Council Comments

None.

Agenda No. VI

Action Items

None.

Agenda No. VII

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Council, the Township Council adjourned the meeting.

Moved: Smolinski Seconded: Ramaglia
Voted Aye: Smolinski, Ramaglia, Nolan, Lichtenberg, Jurkovic.
Voted Nay: None.
Motion carried.

Approved: June 2, 2010

MAYOR BETTINA BIERI
PRESIDING OFFICER

ANTOINETTE BATTAGLIA
TOWNSHIP CLERK