
TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

Minutes of: Governing Body Special Meeting
Date of Meeting: April 19, 2018
Time of Meeting: 6:30 pm
Minute Page No: Page 1 of 3

The Special Meeting of the Governing Body was called to order by Mayor Bettina Bieri.

Adequate Notice Statement

Council President Wagner 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 advertised in the Herald News in its issue of April 15, 2018; copies were provided to the Suburban Trends, the Record and Star Ledger 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.

Please also make note of all fire and emergency exits - located to the left, right, front and rear of this room - for use in case of an emergency. Thank you.

Agenda No. I

Pledge of Allegiance

Council President Wagner led all in attendance in a salute to the flag.

Agenda No. II

Roll Call

Present: Councilmembers Andrena Pegel, Tim Wagner, Peter McGuinness, Luciano Signorino
Patricia Gerst, Mayor Bettina Bieri (arrived at 6:48)
Absent: Mike Hensley, Township Administrator/Clerk Antoinette Battaglia
Also Present: None

Agenda No. III

Purpose

2018 Municipal Budget

Agenda No. IV

Review of 2018 Municipal Budget

Councilman McGuinness requested to discuss the accounts that surplus generation comes from and the surplus from 2015. Mr. Casey explained that surplus is generated from excess revenues, and Councilman McGuinness was inquiring about the number that was unexpended from the 2015 budget. He said that the Township consistently spends 96% of the budget. Mr. Casey displayed the budget sheet for streets and roads. He noted that prior years cancellations were not expended, and the Township has been consistent the past four years with revenue generation.

Mr. Casey expressed that in terms of surplus, they only want to spend surplus money to buy non-reoccurring items, and not fund the regular operating budget with surplus. Mayor Bieri said she agrees with Mr. Casey; she is not in favor of removing money from surplus. Councilman Signorino said he receives the same reasoning every year, and even without following the basic principle, it was a team effort to make the budget work. Mayor Bieri explained that the entire budget is discretionary and the Council does not have to fund certain items by law. Councilman McGuinness asked how low the surplus has been in prior years. Mr. Casey said he spent time with Mrs. Mageean preparing that data. He referred back to 2005, and explained that in 2005, they had more surplus than they currently have in 2018. Councilman Signorino said that people vote for them to lower taxes, and each year they are only cutting increases.

Mr. Casey noted that the current tax rate is up \$749,000. Mayor Bieri explained that the increases in the tax revenues have been less than the statutorily required increases that they are facing. Councilman Signorino expressed his concern about why they are spending more money than they are generating. Mayor Bieri said the problem in the Township is the revenues are set and decreasing, and the costs that are not within their control are increasing. The expenses have risen more than the revenues have risen, so every year they have been faced with having to make more cuts in order to keep the budget and service level. Councilman McGuinness noted at some point in time they have to take control of the increases. Councilwoman Pegel asked what other costs besides salary and wages are out of their control. Mr. Casey explained that they have a requirement for pension payments to the state in the amount of \$2.2 million. Councilman McGuinness asked what would happen if they could not pay that obligation. Mr. Casey said the state of New Jersey will request that the county increase the tax rate. The state controls that part of the budget and the Township has no control over it.

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Mr. Casey noted that they could lay off employees at their discretion, and their window of opportunity is small. Mayor Bieri noted since she became Mayor the Township is down 20% in staff level. Councilman Signorino asked for a comparison of the salaries of the staff today and eleven years ago. Mr. Casey said the budget has a page in it with annual salaries, so he can retrieve the last ten budgets and get the data off of the total salary amount. Mr. Casey noted that the aggregate salaries are readily available in the Finance Office. Councilman McGuinness noted that they are not trying to cut employees; they are trying to find solutions to make cuts in the budget. Mayor Bieri noted that they are controlling the expenses to the best of their ability and the issue is the revenues. Councilman Signorino expressed that no matter where people live, the taxes are the first concern regardless of the services that a municipality offers. He noted that generations of people in West Milford are leaving because they can't afford the high taxes anymore.

Councilman Wagner asked the amount in the snow trust account, and Mrs. Mageean said \$760,000. She noted after removing the brine truck and equipment the balance will be \$645,000. She said that \$324,000 was carried over from 2017. Councilman Wagner asked if they could use the \$324,000 to reduce the \$749,000 out of the budget. Mr. Casey explained that they can't remove it because it becomes available in 2019. They could remove money from the existing snow trust funds account knowing that it will be replenished. Mr. Casey said last year they removed a certain amount of surplus from the snow trust account. He said if the Governing Body wants, they could establish a limit on the snow trust account. Councilman Wagner noted that the snow trust account rises every year.

Councilman Signorino said if they know the snow trust account keeps rising he would agree to remove \$400,000. Councilman Wagner said if they add the \$324,000 that is anticipated to be added, plus the \$645,000 that is currently in there, the account will equal \$970,000. They could maintain \$500,000 and remove \$470,000 from that account and apply it towards the amount they need to cut out of the budget. Mr. Casey noted that it is in their purview to repurpose that money. Councilman McGuinness asked Mr. Casey if he could identify \$100,000 to cut out of the budget. Mr. Casey summarized that the Governing Body wishes to leave \$500,000 in the snow trust account and move the remaining funds to the revenue side of the budget to increase the surplus.

Councilman McGuinness noted that there is an issue with a fire truck. He said after meeting with the fire house and the mechanic, he would like to propose adding the fire truck back into the capital budget at \$500,000. Mr. Casey said they had a discussion on a truck and loader but they never took any action. The goal is to avoid buying five trucks each year. Councilman McGuinness said he inspected the loader and they could use it for another year. He feels that they should buy a fire truck for \$500,000. Councilman Wagner noted that one DPW truck is completely out of commission; that is why he is proposing to purchase one truck. Mayor Bieri said they have that one line item funded. She asked the Council if they would like to shift the \$500,000 for the fire truck, add the down payment to the operating side, and pull the extra down payment from surplus to get the Township to a zero tax increase.

Councilman Wagner said he does not feel that the Governing Body needs to have the budget meeting on May 1st. He noted that they need the breakdown of the numbers, and they could have a discussion on the budget at the May 2nd meeting. Councilman Signorino said he would like Mr. Casey to summarize what happened at the meeting. Mayor Bieri asked Mr. Casey to recap, and provide the numbers in advance for the Governing Body. She said they will not have the next budget meeting, and solidify the numbers, if need be, at the next meeting on May 2nd. Councilman McGuinness noted that the schools are at a 2.7% increase, and the county will offset the number slightly.

Mr. Casey clarified that the direction from the Governing Body is to remove \$470,000 from the snow trust account and \$300,000 from surplus to bring the Township to a zero percent tax increase. He noted that it will cover the 5% for the new fire truck. He said the Governing Body still has to have a discussion on the capital ordinance, and they already authorized the bond ordinance for the grants. He mentioned that in reference to the DPW truck and loader, the Governing Body will leave that discretion to the DPW Director, Mr. Steines.

Chief Storbeck addressed the Governing Body and provided data on the police vehicles in the department's fleet. He noted that he originally requested five vehicles, and Mr. Hansen suggested six based on the conditions of the vehicles. He expressed his concern for the need of new front-line vehicles. Councilman Wagner asked how many of the front-line vehicles are on the road at once, and Chief Storbeck said 8-10 vehicles. Councilman McGuinness asked if there is a maintenance plan, and Chief Storbeck said there is no plan after 100,000 miles. Chief Storbeck said if they keep delaying the purchase of new vehicles, they will miss the deadline production date, which means more wear and tear and problems on the current vehicles. Mr. Casey noted that when the Captain retires, there will be a vacancy, so he proposed buying two new vehicles instead of hiring an additional police officer. Chief Storbeck did not agree. Mr. Casey said he feels that they could move funds around to budget for two new vehicles. The Governing Body noted that the budget is not finalized and they will refer back to the discussion after they digest the information.

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Agenda No. V

Public Comments

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

There being no one wishing to be heard, Councilman McGuinness moved to close the public portion of the meeting.

Moved: McGuinness Seconded: Signorino
Voted Aye: Unanimous voice vote
Voted Nay: None
Motion carried.

Agenda No. VI

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Council, the Governing Body adjourned the meeting at 8:12 p.m.

Moved: McGuinness Seconded: Signorino
Voted Aye: Unanimous voice vote
Voted Nay: None
Motion carried.

Approved: May 2, 2018

Respectfully submitted:

Sherry Zbrzeski, Keyboarding Clerk I

MAYOR BETTINA BIERI, PRESIDING OFFICER

ANTOINETTE BATTAGLIA, TOWNSHIP CLERK