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**TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY**

Minutes of: Governing Body Special Meeting  
Date of Meeting: May 13, 2019  
Time of Meeting: 7:00 pm  
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The Special Meeting of the Governing Body was called to order by Mayor Michele Dale.

**Adequate Notice Statement**

Mayor Dale 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 May 5, 2019; 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**

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

Agenda No. II

**Roll Call**

Present: Councilmembers Ada Erik, Andrena Pegel (arrived 7:45), Marilyn Lichtenberg  
Peter McGuinness, Luciano Signorino, Patricia Gerst (arrived 7:03), Mayor Michele Dale  
Absent: None  
Also Present: None

Agenda No. III

**Purpose**

2019 Municipal Budget

Agenda No. IV

**Review of 2019 Municipal Budget**

Councilman Signorino asked the surplus that is left. Mr. Casey said \$1,400,000.00. Mr. Casey said it is very important that the Governing Body authorize the auditor and finance to put a budget together to introduce at the next meeting. It is very important because the County has to strike the tax rate so the tax bills can be sent out in August. Councilman McGuinness asked the impact of the school budget and Mr. Casey said he does not have that information. Mrs. Mageean said the school used the estimate for last year and the actual for this year that is why they show a decrease of \$2.22. There levy is going up a million dollars so there increase is about \$94.00. Councilman Signorino said he would be happy to take what they need from surplus to have a zero percent tax increase.

Councilwoman Gerst asked if they are certain they are going to be able to get the raft for the lake at Bubbling Springs. Mr. Casey said Mr. Voli can speak to that. The issue is ordering it and getting it set up in time for the start of the season. Mr. Casey said that Mr. Voli researched the water depth requirements and found out that some towns have less water than the manufactures requirements. Mayor Dale said that would require a waiver from the State. She said they would have to apply for a waiver from the State. Councilman McGuinness asked why the State has to approve this. Mrs. Mageean said if the manufacturer has a depth that is shorter than 12 feet required by the State, they can apply for a waiver. Mayor Dale noted they purchased something like this several years ago and they are not able to use it. The Health Department has to be involved because of the safety risk and a plan has to be put into place. Councilman Signorino said he is in full support of this because the revenue at Bubbling Springs has been decreasing. He said he will volunteer his time to help filling out the waiver application for the State, if needed.

Councilman McGuinness asked Mr. Voli if he ever had to get a waiver from the State. Mr. Voli explained that the manufacturer puts out a depth for each apparatus. Morris County Lake is under the manufacturer's depth, but they got a waiver from the State by sending a letter and working with the County Health Department. He noted that Morris County Parks and Wayne Township have the Wibit (inflatable water park for the lake). He said both towns needed a waiver, so they sent a letter to the State and received a waiver. Mayor Dale noted that there has to be a plan with the Health Department. Councilwoman Gerst asked how long it took the State to respond to the waiver. Mr. Voli said about three weeks. Mayor Dale noted that she was informed the one that was purchased in 2016 had to be removed because the proper protocols were not followed. Councilman Signorino expressed that they need to do something to revitalize Bubbling Springs. Councilwoman Erik expressed that everyone keeps comparing West Milford to other towns.

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She asked Mr. Voli if the memberships increased in the two towns that have this. Mr. Voli said he did not do that research yet. Councilwoman Erik asked the percentage of the decrease in memberships. Mayor Dale provided the membership data. Councilwoman Gerst asked when they can get the apparatus out of the shed. Mr. Voli said by the end of this week. Councilman Signorino said he would like to invest the \$25,000 for the water feature so they can save a lot more money. He is trying to focus on the positive. Mr. Casey said they are not going to finalize the budget until June. He suggested waiting to see what is in the shed before they budget \$25,000 for the apparatus. Councilwoman Gerst asked for the amount of the non-member participation. Mrs. Mageean said she would get that information for Councilwoman Gerst. Councilman McGuinness said he would like Mr. Voli to submit the letter to the State requesting the waiver.

Councilman McGuinness asked the amount to get the tax rate down to zero. Mr. Casey said they would need to cut \$1,135,000.00 or pull it from other sources. Mr. Casey noted that surplus is one shot revenues. When they use one shot revenues for ongoing programs, they will continue to fall deeper in the hole. Councilman Signorino said, in the past, they had much less surplus, they zeroed out the account and they were told the same exact thing. Mr. Casey expressed; "and because of that, they had significant tax increases the following years". Mr. Casey provided history to the Governing Body explaining how the tax rates increased when surplus was used. He noted that every year they pulled the surplus, the tax rate increased dramatically. He said they have been conservatively protecting the surplus for the past four years. Mr. Casey said the Governing Body adopted a formal policy last year stating that they will always keep \$1,000,000.00 in surplus. That was recommended by the bond attorney and bond auditor.

Councilman Signorino made a motion to take \$400,000 out of surplus, seconded by Councilman McGuinness. Councilwoman Lichtenberg asked how this would affect the numbers. Mr. Casey said the tax increase will be \$735,368.

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Moved: Signorino Seconded: McGuinness  
Voted Aye: Pegel, McGuinness, Signorino, Gerst  
Voted Nay: Erik, Lichtenberg  
Motion Carried:

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Councilman Signorino said he would like to discuss the police manpower and the potential retirements. Councilman McGuinness asked how many police officers the department has currently and if they are currently hiring. Chief Storbeck said they have 42 officers and they are trying to hire. Councilman McGuinness asked if they budget for a full year salary for the officers. Mr. Casey said they budget on an annualized basis. Councilman McGuinness asked the number they budgeted for in the 2019 budget for two police officers. Mrs. Mageean said \$40,000 each. Mayor Dale explained that they have to budget on an annualized basis. Mayor Dale noted that they are creating a hole by taking an annualized budget and funding only half of the salaries. Councilman McGuinness made a motion to reduce the police salary line by \$40,000 for the 2019 year, seconded by Councilwoman Gerst. Councilwoman Erik expressed that it will take time to get two more officers; then, there are more officers retiring and if they take away any reserve money, they will not have money to hire new additional officers. There is an overlap and if they are going to cut everything, there will be no room for an overlap. Councilman McGuinness said if five officers retire and five new hires come in, there might be savings there and they won't know until it happens. Mayor Dale asked Chief Storbeck if they have greater overtime expenses due to a reduced workforce. Chief Storbeck said yes, it does create greater overtime expenses. Councilman McGuinness said that is an administrative problem, not a budget problem. Chief Storbeck explained they have a manpower shortage and they need a certain amount of officers on the street. Mayor Dale said the goal is to reduce the impact of the overall expenses. Chief Storbeck expressed his concern about not budgeting this year for the two new officers. He said they are actively pursuing to hire officers. There are two officers that submitted their retirement paperwork, so there will be two more vacancies. He said if they hire someone right from the academy, it will take nine months to get them on the street. Councilman Signorino expressed that Councilman McGuinness is trying to put the money where it is needed.

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Moved: McGuinness Seconded: Gerst  
Voted Aye: Pegel, McGuinness, Gerst  
Voted Nay: Erik, Lichtenberg  
Abstain: Signorino  
Motion Carried:

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Councilwoman Erik asked if the Fire Marshal car was added in to the budget. Mr. Casey said they did not. Mr. Casey said he asked the Chief Mechanic about the car and he was told that it is repairable. He said the issue is if the Council wants to spend \$35,000 on a new car for a part time employee. The car is not in the budget right now. Mr. Casey said his concern is that they have a Chief Mechanic and they are not utilizing his skills. Councilman McGuinness noted that it is not a first responder vehicle; it is only used to drive to inspections. Mayor Dale said the recommendation is not being made by the Chief Mechanic to replace the vehicle. Councilwoman Erik said anything can be rebuilt; it depends on how much money you want to put into it. She wants to know if they have to put \$15,000 in to a car that's worth nothing.

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Mr. Steines explained the condition of the vehicle and said the head mechanic feels they can get more life out of it. He said he does have another vehicle that is useable if the vehicle becomes unsafe. He noted that it would cost approximately \$500.00 to switch over the radios. Mr. Steines said there is no way they can add the apparatus to the lake at Bubbling Springs because the lake is already being filled with water. He noted that they should have done it before they started filling the lake. Councilman Signorino said he will wait until the next meeting to make a decision. He would like to have another follow up budget meeting.

Mayor Dale said she was contacted by the TV Commission Chairman and there is a request that the Council stipend the people filming the meetings. Before they close the budget discussion and move to public comments, she asked the Council if they had any interest in the stipend. Councilwoman Erik expressed that it is hard for the cameraman because they have no home office. They use their own equipment and electric in their own homes. Councilman Signorino said he has been trying to find a home for the TV Commission for the past year. Councilman McGuinness suggested having an annual fundraiser to raise money for the TV Commission.

The Council invited Bob Nicholson to the podium to speak about the request. Mr. Nicholson expressed that the meetings are taking an incredible amount of time. They are getting calls the following day asking if and when the meetings will be up. He provided a run-down of what it takes to film a meeting. He said it is hard to get people to spend 5-6 hours to volunteer. Councilman Signorino said he has been trying to get the two rooms downstairs in the old library for the TV Commission. He would like to work with the TV Commission to make this happen. Mayor Dale said she would be more than happy to meet with the Commission to discuss the use of the rooms. Mr. Nicholson said they are volunteers, but he does not know one Committee or Commission that operates like the TV Commission. He noted that he contributes 25-30 hours week. He is asking for the stipend for the camera people. He asked if there is a manual on how many hours a volunteer should put in. Councilwoman Pegel finds that a fundraiser will be the most profitable way to continue to operate the wonderful program that the TV Commission provides to the Township. Mr. Nicholson said they would need someone that has professional fundraising experience. Mayor Dale said the question is; is the Council is interested in in funding the stipend. Councilwoman Gerst said her concern is that if they do this for the TV Commission it will open the door for other committees and commissions to request the stipend. Mr. Nicholson said they could take it out of their budget to pay the camera people. Mayor Dale noted the Council is not interested in funding the stipend. She said they can discuss the TV Commission taking the money out of their budget at the next meeting.

Mayor Dale noted that the new website went live. She said if the Governing Body chooses not to fund the \$4,500 to back up the information on social media sites, she will be informing the departments via memo to turn off all social media accounts. She expressed that they have to be able to retain the activity on the social media sites because the activity is operable. Councilman Signorino said he has had issues with the memos in the past. He noted that the blame will be on the Council because they chose not to fund this. He said to disable the commenting. Councilwoman Pegel thinks that all the Facebook accounts should have an administrator to control the commenting. Mayor Dale mentioned that they do not have the capability to monitor every single comment. The information has to be stored and archived even if they don't allow commenting or clicking; whatever is posted needs to be archived for OPRA. Mr. Miller explained that Mr. Jenkins can set it up so there are key words that if anyone uses the word "the", their comment will not get posted. He explained that even if they could turn off commenting, clicking and liking, everything that is posted by government people has to be operable and retrieved later. Councilman McGuinness said before they shut everything down, he would like Mr. Jenkins to come to a meeting and explain. Councilwoman Gerst asked if Facebook stores and archives the data. Mayor Dale said she believes they only do that for two years and OPRA has no time limit. She expressed that she does not want to see social media go away, but she will not continue to expose the Township to the liability that they could possibly have unless they have the proper equipment in place to monitor and store the information. Councilman Signorino expressed that he does not want to see social media eliminated. The Council agreed to have Mr. Jenkins at a future meeting.

Councilwoman Erik asked Mr. Casey if they put back the fire aid to the fire companies. Mr. Casey said the fire aid is at the same level from recent years. Councilwoman Erik noted that there was an increase. Mr. Casey noted that it was discussed, but it was not added to the original budget. Councilman McGuinness said they moved money into the operating budget permanently. Mr. Casey said they did not increase the \$15,000 per company at all. Councilwoman Erik said she would like to discuss the fire aid and she invited the Fire Chief to the podium to speak. Mayor Dale noted that they would have to close the budget discussion and move to public comments. The Council gave consensus to move to public comments.

Agenda No. V

**Public Comments**

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

Robert Bloch, 17 Lookout Lane – Noted that he has been a resident of West Milford for 25 years and he is currently the Fire Chief at the Apshawa Fire Company. He expressed that the fire aid funds are vital to the department to be able to pay the skyrocketing necessities at the department.

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He noted that each year the financial reports are itemized and submitted to the Township. He explained why they need the additional funding. He said they are taxpayers and they get it; they all want to see their taxes reduced or stay flat but emergency services should not be a victim. The volunteers save taxpayers millions of dollars annually. They need to be properly funded; training to be the best and helping the residents of West Milford. He asked the Council to please restore the direct aid funds that they requested.

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

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

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Councilwoman Erik said she is speaking from experience from the ambulance. She expressed that the commodity is very important and Police, Fire and Ambulance are the essential services and they can't let them fall by the wayside.

Agenda No. VI

**Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Council, the Governing Body adjourned the meeting at 9:27 p.m.

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

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Approved: May 22, 2019

Respectfully submitted:

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Sherry Zbrzeski, Keyboarding Clerk I

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MICHELE DALE, MAYOR

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ANTOINETTE BATTAGLIA, TOWNSHIP CLERK