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

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting  
Date of Meeting: May 22, 2006  
Time of Meeting: 7:30 P.M.  
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Mayor DiDonato called the Special Meeting of the West Milford Township Council to order at 7:35 p.m.

**Adequate Notice Statement**

Mayor DiDonato 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 sent to the Herald News on May 17, 2006, and advertised in the Herald News on May 19, 2006; and 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 DiDonato led all in attendance in a salute to the flag.

**Roll Call**

Present: Councilmembers Joseph Smolinski, William Gervens,  
Robert Nolan, James Warden, Carmelo Scangarello  
Mayor Joseph DiDonato

Absent: Councilman Philip Weisbecker

Also Present: Township Administrator Richard Kunze, Township Clerk Antoinette Battaglia  
Township Attorney Fred Semrau

Mr. Semrau advised everyone present that he has concerns about the number of people in attendance at tonight's meeting. The room can accommodate 110 persons and we currently have a head count of 107. Noting that the Council does not wish to turn anyone away, he advised that if our attendance exceeds 110 persons, the meeting will stop. At that time, people will be asked to leave voluntarily or the Council will have to reschedule the meeting and hold it again at a facility that can accommodate a larger crowd. He asked for everyone's cooperation should this happen.

**Budget Discussion**

Mayor DiDonato advised that the purpose of this meeting is to continue reviewing the municipal budget. He noted that executive session will be held unless Counsel advised that it is not necessary. There have been a series of budget meetings held over several months. At one of those meetings, the Council instructed the Administrator to prepare sample scenarios of what kind of cuts would be necessary to limit the tax increase to \$25, \$50, \$75, and \$100 for the average home owner. The projected budget increase at this time is \$2.4 million which is driven by non-discretionary forces. The Administrator has presented scenarios, not recommendations. Mr. Semrau advised that Rice notices were sent out to twenty-four employees so that the Mayor and Council can discuss their positions. All twenty-four persons opted to have this subject discussed in open session and, therefore, all discussion may take place in public. However, he cautioned the Council, such discussion does not extend to discussion of any person's performance.

Mayor DiDonato directed the Council to the scenarios. Administrator Kunze noted that the scenarios include a variety of cuts which, in some instances, include personnel cuts. There are also some reductions in salaries and wages that would not require layoffs. In the finance office, the replacement of a retiring employee will realize a savings of \$8,900 this year. Proposed new positions in the Township were cut realizing a savings of \$38,900. Due to the mild winter, we can realize savings in snow removal overtime and operational cuts are included in the budget as introduced. Councilman Scangarello stated that we had a balance in the snow removal account last year of about \$70,000. Administrator Kunze stated that this is correct but that money has not been applied to this budget. The intent was to build a reserve for snow removal so we banked the extra funds for future snow removal costs. The Council recommended putting the \$70,000 back into this year's budget. The Council agreed with the cuts in scenario one.

Administrator Kunze advised that the other scenarios include personnel cuts. He listed a number of positions that were proposed for elimination in these scenarios noting that the savings this year would equate to \$175,000. Council President Gervens stated that the council has an obligation to the taxpayer and an obligation to the town. In the proposed layoffs, there is a scenario which includes the police recruits that were recently hired to reduce overtime and replace retirees. So, ultimately, there will not be a savings. He urged the Council not to cut public safety. The personnel cuts in the DPW include drivers. Therefore, to provide these services we would have to outsource the work. He asked what the savings would be if we factored in the cost of outsourcing. He noted that, if we cut the budget by \$1 million, that is an annual savings of \$86 to the taxpayers which equates to \$1.66 per week. He stated that he does not

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believe that the residents of West Milford would want to lose those services for a \$1.66 weekly savings. He stated that the Council should know the projected cost for outsourcing these services. Councilman Nolan stated that notices were sent to twenty-four people. The Council is proposing a \$100 increase for the average homeowner and is using \$600,000 of surplus. The proposed personnel cuts would have minimal impact this year; the savings would be realized next year when we are faced with even greater contributions to pension and possibly less state aid. He urged the Council to look at the affect to upcoming budgets. While layoffs are never pleasant, the Council must be fair to the taxpayers. Councilman Smolinski reminded everyone that, if we kept the municipal increase to 0%, residents would still see an increase of over \$200 due to County and school taxes. He cautioned against treating personnel like equipment. He stated that he intends to do everything possible to have no layoffs. He urged the Council to look for the fat and trim it without hurting anybody. Like Mr. Gervens, he would like more information about the cost of outsourcing for services currently being provided by Township personnel. He stated that he is glad to see everyone here tonight and encouraged them to continue to be actively involved. He stated that the Council wants to hear everyone's opinion and will stay here as long as it takes to hear everyone.

Councilman Warden, stating that the realized savings from layoffs would be \$170,000 this year, asked what that figure would be next year. Administrator Kunze advised, that a combination of all the scenarios, the Township would realize a savings of \$1.1 million next year. Council President Gervens acknowledged those savings but asked again what it will cost to outsource for those services. Mayor DiDonato reminded the Council that they had previously discussed operational and capital cuts and that they are scheduled to discuss the personnel cuts tonight. He asked the Administrator to begin reviewing the impact of the proposed personnel cuts.

Administrator Kunze stated that the proposed elimination of the Environmental and Historical Commission secretaries would mean that the work will fall upon the volunteers. The part-time nurse assists with clinics and administrative duties. If we eliminate this position, we would have to bring in a nurse on a per diem basis to continue providing those services. Elimination of the veteran affairs position would mean that the services would be reduced although the intent would be to try to shift the work with the recreation department. If we eliminate the Deputy Assessor position, we will experience difficulties in a few years because we expect to have a revaluation and a certificate of habitability program that will mean an increased workload for this department. The Principal Planner is responsible for plan review, administration of COAH-related matters, grant administration, redevelopment, and highlands issues. If this position were eliminated, we would have to assess how we would provide these services. The working relationship with various boards and commissions would also suffer. The Registrar is a statutory position that cannot be cut. However, there are options to handle the workload. Elimination of the assistant violations clerk in the court would require shifting of this work to other personnel at a time when the workload in this department has increased.

Scenario number 3 would eliminate the position of Senior Engineering Aid which would affect both operations and capital projects. The road program would take longer and plan review time will increase. If we eliminate the two mechanic positions in DPW, we will either have to shift the work to outside vendors or defer routine maintenance and return fire truck maintenance to the fire departments. The loss of truck drivers will impact road maintenance programs, stormwater management requirements, and have a negative impact of snow removal. Cutting the four cadets in the academy will impact police services and increase overtime expenses. There will be fewer proactive programs and we will be working in a reactive mode. The elimination of the senior clerk typist's positions will mean the elimination of our senior programs, a reduction in other programs, and the shifting of work to our finance department. The elimination of a laborer position in the parks department would diminish our ability to maintain fields and recreations facilities and this department is already strained.

Councilman Smolinski stated that he sees a lot of contradictions in these scenarios. If we eliminate the purchase of new police vehicles, we will over-use the existing vehicles, yet we are contemplating eliminating mechanic positions. In his opinion, we cannot do both. If we continue busing but eliminate programs, where are we busing the seniors? He does not want to see veteran services affected and we need our police department to ensure the safety of our residents. Councilman Nolan stated that the Council instructed the Administrator to prepare the scenarios but they left it to his discretion. After reviewing them and knowing that the taxpayers will see a \$100 increase in taxes, he believes that we must lay off some people to meet pension and insurance premiums in future years. He has reviewed the list of twenty-four people and, at this point, can see the logic in laying off the registrar, part-time nurse, principal planner and planning director. He would also reduce the judge's salary to \$25,000. Councilman Smolinski agreed with the proposed cut to the judge's salary but stated that he would like to know what affect the elimination of the planning department would have on other departments. Council President Gervens recommended reducing the number of days the recycling center is opened, cease the practice of allowing commercial use of the recycling center, and absorb those personnel into the other departments. He reiterated his concerns about the cost of outsourcing.

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Councilman Smolinski stated that, in 2005, the planning department brought in \$1.1 million in grants and have applied for over \$1 million in grants this year. He noted that the Council has discussed hiring a grant writer while we have these resources right here and are now discussing terminating them. Councilman Warden stated that it seems that, as a result of tonight's discussion, DPW, police, seniors, and recreation are off limits. We are now down to making a decision about four positions. Councilman Scangarello stated that, when we began budget discussions earlier this year, the Auditor cautioned against using too much surplus because of the impact that will have in future years. He asked what would happen if we were to utilize some of the \$1 million redevelopment money in this budget. Administrator Kunze stated that the Council would make that decision. He stated that this is non-recurring revenue and, as such, is generally used for capital appropriations. Councilman Nolan cautioned against using this money for the budget noting that we could use it to purchase Eagle Ridge. The Council reviewed the projections for the regeneration of surplus funds.

Mayor DiDonato instructed the Administrator to get information to the Council about outsourcing and the associated costs. Councilman Smolinski asked that, with that information, the Council be provided with information about impact on response time to residents as a result of outsourcing. Councilman Warden instructed that those figures reflect potential savings next year as well as the impact that will be seen this year. Councilman Nolan asked that the numbers also reflect the pension and benefits payments also.

Mr. Semrau noted that there is no need for executive session tonight.

**Public Comments**

Mayor Di Donato opened the meeting to the public.

Les Lynn, 2 Richmond Road, West Milford advised that he served on the environmental commission for eighteen years and chaired the commission for ten. West Milford was known to be in the forefront of environmental protection. We need our planning department now more than ever. They can decipher the ever-changing highlands legislation and the staff in the planning department has always been concerned about what happens in our town and to our environment. The environmental and planning boards need the planning department. He stated that he has been privileged to work with West Milford's planning department.

Keith Hansen, DPW and Fire Department Mechanic and West Milford taxpayer thanked the Council for the jobs they saved tonight. He reviewed his qualifications and advised that his functions within the township relate directly to safety. He has saved the taxpayers of West Milford thousands of dollars. He provided instances where fire trucks were repaired in the past by outside vendors and compared the associated costs with the actual cost of such repairs that have been done by him since the fire departments have had their vehicles maintained in-house. He compared the hourly rates with outside contractors in his industry to his hourly rate. He noted that in-house repairs have saved time, energy, and money for the taxpayers of West Milford.

Barbara Ann DelSol, Township Nurse stated that she has worked for West Milford for seventeen years. She advised that public health is more than clinics; the public health nurses educate the police, fire, and ambulance corps for blood borne pathogen programs. They take care of many people through inoculations, flu clinics, SMAC clinics, screenings, immunizations, and tests. They provide services to seniors, children, and families. She provided an overview of the number of appointments they have had in the past year as well as advising that the health nurses process communicable disease reports and audit nursery schools.

Dr. Patricia Baron, Oakridge advised that she is the Township pediatrician. She is trained in bio-terrorism, as are both the public health nurses. She cautioned the Council that the town needs more than one nurse reminding them that the avian flu may become a pandemic. She noted that the part time nurse works nineteen hours per week without benefits, earns \$35,000 per year, has been here for twenty-four years, and is a trained pediatric nurse who is renowned in her profession. Her services cost the average taxpayer \$3.10 per year which is a bargain.

Steven Sangle 236 Bearfort Road, West Milford has served on the environmental commission for twenty-five years and currently serves as chairman. He advised that the environmental commission is comprised of volunteers who rely very heavily on the planning department to investigate environmental problems and apply for grants. They have applied for over \$1 million in grants thus far this year and, he opined, these grants are critical. He stated that the Township would lose more in grants alone than they would save by eliminating these positions. Every month, the environmental commission relies on the planning department to bring information to their meetings, to review plans and to provide overviews. They rely on their expertise, judgment and advise. An outside company would not have the background knowledge. He implored the Council to reconsider eliminating positions in the planning department.

William Drew, Planning Director stated that he has worked in West Milford for fifteen years, the principal planner has been here for eighteen years, the planning board secretary fifteen years, and the GIS

