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

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting  
Date of Meeting: June 7, 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 7:30 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 June 2, 2006 and was advertised in the Herald News in its issue of June 5, 2006; 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 Philip Weisbecker, Joseph Smolinski, William Gervens,  
Carmelo Scangarello  
Mayor Joseph DiDonato

Absent: Councilmembers Robert Nolan, James Warden

Also Present: Township Administrator Richard Kunze, Township Clerk Antoinette Battaglia  
Township Treasurer Art Magnotti

**Budget Discussion**

Mayor DiDonato advised that the purpose of this meeting is to continue reviewing the municipal budget. Administrator Kunze directed the Council to a schedule he prepared showing the projected changes based on the Council's previous discussions. In the current fund, there is a revised appropriation of amount reflecting a reduction of \$257,780.00. He directed Council to information provided about nurse staffing in other communities as well as a pension history and forecast. He advised that tonight he is hoping to get direction from the Council on amendments and how to proceed in time for public hearing. Appropriations, as introduced, were slightly over 3%; the changes would bring appropriations to approximately 2%. Because of the 9½% reduction in the solid waste budget, the overall increase between both budgets is about 1.5%. Councilman Weisbecker asked how much is coming out of surplus. Administrator Kunze noted that he and the CFO did not make any calculations about surplus but, the budget as introduced, reflects \$3.9 million. He advised that he sent a survey to other municipalities asking for information about planning departments and outsourcing planning services. The results are due at the end of the week. Only one of the positions being considered for elimination would have an impact on this year's budget. The part-time nurse position would have an impact on this year's budget while all the others would impact next year's budget.

Council President Gervens stated that he is against cutting any safety-related positions and clarified that he considers the part-time nurse to be safety related. Councilman Scangarello asked what cuts are being proposed to safety. Administrator Kunze advised that there is a 33% funding reduction to aid for fire companies, equipment allocations were cut, and the purchase of a new fire truck has been removed from the budget. The OEM and police department also experienced cuts. Each fire department gets \$10,000 for equipment and \$15,000 for operational expenses. We try to fund vehicle repairs in our maintenance budget. However, if there are extra breakdowns that are not anticipated, we have to transfer or have emergency appropriations. He advised that we have been constraining growth on all our budgets, including maintenance. The fire department vehicle maintenance budget has not been reduced from the figures in the preliminary budget.

Councilman Weisbecker asked how much surplus is being used in the budget and if any redevelopment money is being used. Administrator Kunze advised that we are appropriating \$3.9 million of surplus funds leaving a balance in surplus of approximately \$800,000 and that we are not using any redevelopment money. Councilman Weisbecker urged caution because, with the expected increase to pension funding next year, use of so much surplus this year will create a problem with next year's budget. Administrator Kunze noted that the projection for surplus indicates that the funds will not regenerate at the same level as this year. A sustainable level of surplus would mean that the Council could use the same amount of surplus next year. Councilman Weisbecker stated that, if we adopt this budget, we will be forced to raise taxes again next year and this budget will not only affect next year's budget but the budget in future years also. He stated that he does not wish to see layoffs but that the Council may have to consider layoffs to avoid a large layoff next year or even further down the road.

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Councilman Smolinski stated that we should look at possible retirements next year to determine what impact that may have on the need for layoffs. He also stated that the pension payments will increase for a set number of years and then balance off. Administrator Kunze stated that he will be looking closely at the figures the state generates for the pension payments and will be asking for a breakdown. The original proposals from the state did not reflect the significant increases that are our current reality. He reviewed the proposed staggered increases for PFRS and PERS. We are now anticipating a 117% increase next year. He stated that payments are expected to double in 2006, 2007, and 2008 and then level off in 2009 and 2010. From there, municipalities will be subjected to incremental increases. Mr. Kunze noted that, in the past few years, we have realized savings from retirements and advised that engineering has lost three people, DPW five, planning one-and-a-half, tax one-and-a-half, the clerk's office is using a floater as a receptionist. If we cut staff any further, we will have to cut services. Councilman Weisbecker stated that the Council does not intend to cut police or DPW. However, he stated, there are other departments that, with the loss of home rule, do not have to be as large as they once were. If we get home rule back, we can re-staff. Council President Gervens stated that, before making any such decisions, the Council should know what it would cost to outsource those departments. Councilman Weisbecker stated that it is obvious that we will have increases next year and that the Council should start being proactive now to decide where those increases will be. If not, he cautioned, we will outpace the school board or the county. Mayor DiDonato asked the Council to consider keeping the increase at \$100, keep the cuts, but use a lesser amount from surplus. The surplus account should have \$1 million if it is to regenerate based on the projections. The Auditor has stated that the most prudent long-term plan for the town is to use \$3.3 million from surplus.

Mr. Magnotti advised the Council that the Auditor is making appeals in Trenton to have the pension payments spread over ten years instead of the five years they have mandated. Such measures would assist all municipalities in budgeting for these payments. The Council agreed that they would like to join in that fight.

Councilman Weisbecker clarified that, at this time, the Council is contemplating adopting the budget with the cuts previously discussed and using about \$3.6 million in surplus. Council President Gervens, noting that two Council members are absent tonight, stated that it is critical that all members of the Council are present for such a critical decision. The Council instructed the Administrator to make the amendments to the budget as outlined by Councilman Weisbecker. They further instructed him to place discussion of the planning department on the workshop for July. Administrator Kunze advised the Council that, if he could restore one item in the budget, it would be the police vehicles. He reviewed their use and their life span and stated that removing the purchase of police vehicles from this year's budget will have an impact on the 2007 and 2008 budgets. Councilman Weisbecker recommended that we schedule a meeting with the two absent Council members before we have the hearing on the amended budget. Administrator Kunze reminded the Council that there is a special meeting on June 19<sup>th</sup>. The Council instructed him to add a short budget discussion to that agenda.

**Public Comments**

Mayor Di Donato opened the meeting to the public.

Eric Hastings, Greenwood Lake Turnpike, West Milford stated that he is West Milford's appointee to the Greenwood Lake Commission. He stated that the weed harvesting campaign has been unsuccessful and that the weeds are simply growing too fast. He believes that his fellow commissioners view him as a "wild cannon". He advised that, up to this point, he has done everything pursuant to the wishes of his fellow commissioners. However, he is now going to push for the use of chemicals. He reviewed plans for de-stumping. He stated that the lake must be dredged; the weed harvester is simply making a path across the lake and the weed growth is overwhelming. He asked that the Council back him. He advised that the primary chemical he would recommend is solar and he explained the process. He reiterated that he expects unanimous backing from the Council. He asked for the Council to allow the Township Attorney to speak with him about his liability as a volunteer. He advised that the Greenwood Lake Commission is being asked to take over watershed duties.

Doris Osterhoudt, West Milford asked where the June 14<sup>th</sup> meeting is being held. Mayor DiDonato advised that it will be held here at Town Hall.

Councilman Weisbecker made a motion to close the public portion of the meeting.

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Moved: Weisbecker Seconded: Scangarello  
Voted Aye: Weisbecker, Smolinski, Gervens, Scangarello.  
Voted Nay: None.  
Motion carried.

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**Council Comments**

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Councilman Weisbecker stated that he has lived in Upper Greenwood Lake for over twelve years now and they use solar in the lake. There has been no damage to fish and the water level is excellent. As a result of solar, they experience very few weed problems.

Councilman Smolinski expressed surprise at tonight's report from the Greenwood Lake Commission. He thought the insurance was settled. Council President Gervens clarified that Mr. Hastings was not talking about employer insurance but rather he is speaking about liability insurance for the volunteers. West Milford has taken care of the insurance for the weed harvester operator.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Council, the Township Council adjourned the meeting a 9:30 P.M.

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Moved: Weisbecker Seconded: Smolinski  
Voted Aye: Weisbecker, Smolinski, Gervens, Scangarello.  
Voted Nay: None.  
Motion carried.  
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Approved: June 28, 2006

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MAYOR JOSEPH DiDONATO, PRESIDING OFFICER

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ANTOINETTE BATTAGLIA, TOWNSHIP CLERK