
TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

Minutes of: Governing Body Budget Hearing
Date of Meeting: February 26, 2025
Time of Meeting: 5:30 pm
Minute Page No: Page 1 of 4

The Budget Meeting of the Governing Body was called to order by Mayor Michele Dale at 5:30 p.m.

Adequate Notice Statement

Mayor Dale read the following statement:

Pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act (N.J.S.A. 10:4-8) adequate notice of this Budget Hearing was advertised in the Herald News and The Record in its issues of January 13, 2025 and posted 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, Michael Chazukow, Marilyn Lichtenberg,
Kevin Goodsir, Matthew Conlon, David Marsden

Absent: Township Attorney Ed Pasternak

Also Present: Mayor Michele Dale, Township Administrator William Senande,

Agenda No. III

Purpose

2025 Municipal Budget

Agenda No. IV

Review of 2025 Municipal Budget

Review of Certain Budget Activities – the following Departments/Division Heads were in attendance:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Finance/Tax Assessor/Tax Collection | 6. Building/Planning |
| 2. Administration/Mayor & Council/
Vital Statistics | 7. Engineering |
| 3. Clerk/Elections | 8. Fire Prevention/OEM |
| 4. Information Technology (IT) | 9. Police/Volunteer Fire and 1 st Aid |
| 5. Court | 10. Community Services & Recreation |
| | 11. Public Works/Solid Waste |

Tax Assessor Brian Townsend indicated that there would be some changes in his department. He is planning to retire October 1, 2025 so there will need to be a personnel change. For 2024, there were two positions, Senior Tax Assessor and clerk. Erin Alvarez has passed her CTA exam, and now has the license to take over his position. That has been the informal game plan for trying to staff the office in the future. He requested to have her title changed from Senior Tax Assessor Clerk to Principle Assessor Clerk. The overall budget decreased from what was requested last year. The Spatial Data license increased and there was a minor increase in the mailing of the post cards, which are required by statute. Mayor Dale asked what the salary would be at step 4 and Mr. Townsend answered \$73,140.

Tax Collector Rita DeNivo reported that there was no significant changes in the budget from last year. She is still planning on retiring and having her last day on March 31, 2025.

Treasurer CFO Ellen Mageean indicated that the budget had not changed. It was \$22,000 last year and is the same for this year. Some money was moved around form various line items. The software contracts went up. Ms. Mageean went over some of the line items from the Health Department that the County recommended. \$12,000 for bacterial work for water testing, bottled water for Banker Road and water sampling of Township facilities. \$56,000 for consulting services, which is what we pay Paul Ferriero on a monthly basis to do our septic reviews. \$11,000 to pay the doctors for public health outpatient clinics. Mayor Dale questioned how Paul Ferriero was paid. Administrator Senande indicated that Mr. Ferriero has multiple contracts and he is still in discussion with the County and is still negotiating with them. They had mentioned having an inspector do the reviews. It is still in the budget at this point but it is still being discussed. Mayor Dale said that in her opinion that money should be taken out of the budget and asked that it be earmarked to be taken out. We are triple checking septic plans. We get them from an engineer, we send them to an engineer and we have REHS's that should be able to review them and sign off on them. That is their whole roll. Administrator Senande indicated that he would discuss and finalize that with the County Health Officer.

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Mayor Dale has been studying Sussex County's streamlined model. They do not do any inspections, they allow the engineer of record, who is certifying the plans to sign off on them. In discussions of the process, they agreed with the exception of the open bed inspection. That inspection is the most important one because of all the lakes around here and the high water tables. Councilman Conlon indicated that the inspection process continued from a time when there was a very high volume and never changed when the number of reviews decreased. People aren't getting their septics done unless they are failing or a house is being sold. He is in favor of streamlining the process.

Administrator Senande indicated that the budget for Administration did not change from the prior year and was set at \$103,400. He keeps some cushion in the budget for emergencies for professionals. It could be for a survey or a planner, it is basically about \$10,000 to \$14,000 for special projects. The overall money is the same. The Administrator's office also covers the Council Budget, not salaries but other expenses and that amount is \$5,300.00. There are no vehicles included. The Registrar has a budget of \$2,000 and has not changed.

Deputy Clerk Diane Curcio indicated that the overall budget basically stayed the same except for vendor increases. That is why it is now \$40,200.00. There are no other changes to the budget. The part time keyboarding clerk would become full time in order to process the licensing of the Health Department, because the County doesn't do the licensing. Administrator Senande indicated that we would be keeping the revenue from the licensing. The County does not have a licensing function. It will offset the increase. The election budget has a bit of a cushion because the effect of the county committees is unsure for 2025. Deputy Clerk Curcio indicated that perhaps the number could be reduced from \$66,800.00 to \$40,000.00. Mayor Dale and Council agreed to make the change to \$40,000.00.

Brian Jenkins from the Information Technology Department indicated that there was a 2.16% change to the budget due to software licensing costs. Every year the vendors increase costs somewhere in the 5% range. Additionally approximately 10 to 15 PCs will be replaced this year because they can't operate Windows 11. There was discussion about internet connections. Councilwoman Erik advised to call BPU every time it goes down. Mr. Jenkins indicated that our issue is with Optimum and they have been to Town Hall several times and are trying to trace the issue with the signal to find out where it is. We are still waiting to hear what the engineer finds out. BPU is our back up system.

Administrator Senande gave the overview of the Court budget due to an absence in staff. The major increase is due to the need for an interpreter. There are a lot of different languages coming into Court. It is Administrator Senande's understanding that cases have been held back because they cannot find and acquire interpreters. There is a backlog that will need to be addressed this year. Interpreters are required by law. The other expenditure is maintenance contracts and they need a new recording system. The system is outdated and they have to upgrade it. The budget is going from \$24,450.00 last year to \$37,900.00 in 2025, a 54.69% increase.

Charles Carbone from Engineering indicated that the budget was going from \$102,200.00 to \$113,700.00, an 11.25% increase. Engineering fees for Boswell services went up \$10,000.00. Engineering maintenance contracts went up, SDL and Auto Cad GIS.

Mike Moscatello from Fire Prevention indicated that there was a \$300.00 increase in the budget due to licensing fees. The Office of Emergency Management showed an increase of 17.77%. The costs are due to the radio project and paying rent on the Echo Lake tower. The cost was negotiated from \$1,200.00 down to \$800.00 a month. The requested amount for 2025 would then change from \$105,400.00 to \$100,600.00.

Councilman Conlon stepped out.

Police Chief Sommerville indicated that there was a decrease of 5.05%. The items that went up were community policing, increasing by \$2,000.00. Junior Police Academy has started up and there is an increase there. There is a \$500.00 increase for some mandatory schooling for detectives. Fees for services went from \$18,000.00 to \$22,000.00. Maintenance contracts went up about 10%. They also had to get tracking accreditation for officers.

Councilman Conlon returned to the meeting.

Glenn Dowson of the Fire Company indicated an increase of \$30,000.00 for a requested total of \$100,000.00. Town owned vehicle repair prices are going up. There were increases for equipment and breathing apparatus required by law and fire fighter school went up \$1,000.00. In years past the funds budgeted for the fire alert system were not all used so that was lowered by \$1,500.00. Hardware and tools was lowered \$500.00. Insurance was lowered by \$500.00 and maintenance contracts were lowered by \$500.00 based on need in years past. CFO Ellen Magaen clarified that the LOSAP would be staying at \$140,000.00 as there was a typo on the sheet. Qualification for LOSAP is based on a percentage of calls.

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Councilman Conlon stepped out to attend the Reorganization Meeting of the Wanaque Valley Regional Sewerage Authority as well as give a report in the WVRSA's February Regular Meeting that immediately followed via Zoom.

President Rob Jirouschek of the First Aid Squad indicated a decrease in the budget. There was a 30.56% decrease in the repair to Town owned vehicles due to using the Town garage to do routine maintenance and repairs like tires, oil changes and brakes. The requested amount for 2025 is \$25,000.00. He is optimistic about having less repairs and also the chassis that was ordered will not be received until the end of 2025. Two items that had an increase were utilities based upon the lease for OEM to restore equipment and supplies. He was informed that all of that paperwork was signed off on this morning. That means that it is officially just the one First Aid Squad. The Township's share was a percentage of the electric the heat and the alarm system which came out to be just about \$4,300.00. He would like the Council to support a 4% increase of \$1,000.00 individual stipend to the volunteers. It would be a \$5,700.00 net decrease. He is also asking for a capital request for a new vehicle to replace truck 45 in the amount of \$115,000.00.

Department head and Construction Official Tim Ligus confirmed to Mayor Dale that the 2024 Budget was \$49,700.00 and the department was requesting \$52,300.00 this year along with an additional part time building inspector with access to SDL. It would be a 5.23% increase. The SDL maintenance contract increased. Mr. Ligus indicated that the Planning budget for both boards stayed the same except for the advertising that increased which is required by law.

Director of Community Services and Recreation Dan Kochakji indicated that a 2.14% increase was requested. The amount would go from \$140,000.00 to \$143,000.00. The cost for umpires and program coordinators has continued to rise. The department is seeing what they can do to transition some of their softball programs into independent programs. The department is requesting less money for the chemicals that are used at Bubbling Springs, though that is somewhat weather dependent. There has been an increase in the cost of software. Mayor Dale indicated that we have looked into getting less costly software vendors but they were found to be unsuitable. There will be someone retiring at the end of May. The replacement will be titled as a Recreation Leader and will have a reduction in salary. The department is planning on expanding their fireworks event on June 28th and it will be a larger community event. It will take place at Nosenzo Park from 12 to 5 p.m. The Tree Lighting Ceremony will be expanding as well. Mayor Dale indicated that we would be collecting vendor fees and sponsorships and that would help to offset costs. Regarding vehicles, the Department is looking for a van instead of a bus because you do not need a CDL license to drive a van, and it would still be handicap accessible. Administrator Senande indicated that the State had changed the rules and it is much more difficult to get a CDL license.

Department of Public Works employees Jason Casbarro, and Greg Visser presented the Budget Overview and Justification and 2025 Capital Budget Request. The Budget has increased 10.21%. Mr. Casbarro indicated that vehicle leasing is responsible for the big increase and also safety equipment is getting more and more expensive. Vests need to be replaced often as they get dirty and lose their reflectivity. Administrator Senande indicated that there had been a PEOSH inspection recently and there were just a few minor things that needed to be fixed and they were fixed right away.

The streets are required to be swept three times a year. The cost of stone has increased. The stone is used on non-Township roads when the roads get washed out. Mayor Dale indicated that the dilemma was that she gets calls from residents when there is a storm or some type of water runoff, and people feel that because they pay a lot in taxes they should have their non-Township roads repaired. We are not supposed to be maintaining non-Township roads. We are supposed to maintain them to the requirements of fire access, EMS, garbage, mail and school buses. Either we do not continue to do so, or we face a significant increase in the money for the stone to fix the roads. The increase is 41%.

Administrator Senande explained that there is money in the budget for classes for foremen so that they can get certified as a Public Works Manager because if you don't have one on staff you can't replace your director without having it. Greg Visser received the certificate and Jay Casbarro is in the process.

Jay Casbarro indicated that regarding the traffic lights, the contractor should be the one to service them so that the expensive relays do not get damaged. So the contractor needs to come out whenever there is any type of problem.

In the Department of Public Works under the Public Properties account there is a 1.03% increase. The luncheonette never got done last year at the Police Department. The Recreation Center building is getting old and there are repairs needed. There were issues with heating and with the elevator. For parks and playgrounds there is money budgeted for a new paint machine for painting the fields. We no longer do the fields by the Presbyterian Church.

The 2025 request for snow removal was \$1,434,000.00, an increase of 16% mostly as a result of the cost for ice treatment. There was discussion regarding the snow plowing. Administrator Senande indicated that 8 trucks were added this year and there were actually bids rejected because they were too high.

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Given that, we should see an adjustment with the bid numbers going down next year as they take that into account.

Vehicle Maintenance went up to \$608,500.00. Vehicle leasing always goes up. Police parts and tires tend to moderately fluctuate so those numbers remain steady. The street sweeper took a long time to be refurbished and we are doing the second one now. It is really hard to get parts because no one is keeping an inventory of parts. The Township bus is costing more to repair due to the fact that it's getting older and the mileage is going up. There was discussion regarding the shop supplies and that number could ultimately be lowered but not to go lower than \$20,000.00. A \$2,000.00 increase each year would be about right. Council and Mayor were in agreement. Regarding rig #45, it is Mr. Visser's opinion that the vehicle is at it's end. Manufacturers aren't making parts anymore and they have been repairing the vehicle with aftermarket parts and they are becoming scarce.

Councilman Conlon returned.

The budget numbers overall went down for Solid Waste by 10.47%. Disposal of comingle increased by \$5,000.00. Postage went up a little. Fees for service went up \$40,000.00. Administrator Senande indicated that the overall budget for the Police was down, the new contract being a reduction of \$350,000.00, along with the tipping fees, about \$120,000.00 and recycling collection was reduced about \$180,000.00, but there were some adjustments and some money was moved around and the total budget is down 10.47%. Administrator Senande indicated that Capital Budget requests were submitted but that would be a separate presentation on April 2, 2025.

Agenda No. V

Public Comments

Mayor Dale opened the meeting to the public.

There being no one wishing to be heard, Councilwoman Erik moved to close the public portion of the meeting. Seconded by Councilwoman Lichtenberg.

Moved: Erik Seconded: Lichtenberg.
Voted Aye: Unanimous voice vote
Voted Nay: None
Motion carried.

Agenda No. VI

Council Comments

None

Agenda No. VII

Adjournment

Moved: Erik Seconded: Chazukow
Voted Aye: Unanimous voice vote
Voted Nay: None
Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 6:41 p.m.

Approved: March 19, 2025

Respectfully submitted:

Deidre Ellis, Keyboarding Clerk III

MICHELE DALE, MAYOR

WILLIAM SENANDE, TOWNSHIP CLERK