

# SPECIAL WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

## March 17, 2009 – 4:30 p.m.

The West Amwell Township Committee met on the above date at 4:38 p.m. Present: Mayor Corboy, Committeemen Masterson and Molnar. Also in attendance were CFO Luhrs with Susan Molnar and Karen Baldino arriving at 5:20 p.m.

In compliance with the Public Meetings Act, Mayor Corboy announced that this Special Meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act with notices faxed to the Lambertville Beacon, the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Trenton Times on March 10, 2009. A copy of this notice is and has been available to the public and is on file in the office of the Municipal Clerk.

The meeting was not recorded.

### **BUDGET WORKSHOP:**

Mrs. Luhrs reviewed the recently received State aid numbers, noting that there's a net loss of \$48,195 over last year. The proposed pension deferral amount is approximately the amount lost State aid. Legislation is still pending on the pension issue but will involve a 15 year payback plus interest.

A revised Appropriation Summary with \$20,000 for COAH activities and \$15,000 to cover prior legal fees was presented. The resulting \$3,412,210 total is under the required 3.5% cap. The \$20,000 allocation for COAH expenses is an exception to the cap and is therefore a positive in budget calculations. Four separate scenarios were presented showing the effects of various amounts of Extraordinary Aid. If the Township were to receive \$100,000 or less, additional cuts of up to \$88,000 would have to be made in order to keep under the 4% levy cap. This would also prove problematic next year in that the 4% levy cap would be on a smaller amount of money. If no Extraordinary Aid is requested and the budget stands as is, the increase to the tax rate would be around .0379. There is no guarantee that any money would be allocated but a decision about whether or not to apply for Extraordinary Aid is needed soon as it requires the introduction of a budget by March 31 and application by April 15<sup>th</sup>.

A discussion ensued over whether or not an application for Extraordinary Aid could be rescinded if the money awarded would create a situation requiring additional budgets cuts. This would have to be researched with the Local Finance Board as to possible ramifications. In addition, there would need to be some rationale for applying as the Township is not in the same position as last year when there was a total loss of CMPTRA. Concern was expressed about the need to stop the downward budget spiral because it would restrict future township committee's ability to fund the local government. Mrs. Luhrs noted that if the legal appropriation goes away next year, the 3.5% operating budget figure in 2010 would be based on a larger number.

The unanimous decision was to go with a straightforward budget and forego the risk of Extraordinary Aid.

Another question raised concerned the unfunded portion of the pension payment and whether this could be paid down should there be a settlement to the lawsuit. As the bill is only received once a year covering the previous year's contributions, this is an unknown. The adequacy of the appropriation for legal services was discussed in light of the possible need for additional professionals. This is still unknown territory and will turn on the direction of the lawsuit. The salary line for part-time patrolmen was reduced to \$20,000 and the question was raised whether this would be a safe number. A discussion ensued over implemented shift changes and the allocation of available shifts to help with the overtime problem. The possibility of bringing in additional part-timers was mentioned as was looking at other ways for police operations. As there is nothing in the budget for more part-timers, payment would have to come from the overtime account.

With the arrival of Mrs. Molnar and Mrs. Baldino, the conversation turned to COAH issues. These members of the Affordable Housing Board presented a 2009 budget request in the amount of \$18,900. They were apprised that \$20,000 had already been added to the budget as a result of an earlier conversation and will cover the short fall discovered in the Housing Trust. As this appropriation is outside the cap, it actually helped get the budget under the 3.5% operating cap. Also relayed was that the short fall was due to the refund of over \$7000 in COAH fees because of the application of incorrect percentage fees on permits and that the township lost over \$9000 in fees because an affordable unit was provided. On a related note, a call was received from Shirley Bishop about the Township's plan currently under review at COAH. She will be writing a letter to COAH requesting a waiver for the Township as there's a provision in the regulations that states that bonus rental credits can only be received for units created after June 1999. The Township only created two units after 2000. Mrs. Baldino noted that the submitted budget is based on projected costs for the year and expressed concern about whether it'll be enough if Mrs. Bishop has to spend as much time this year as last. Mr. Corboy stated that that plan is in and was more concerned that the plan gets approved.

Items discussed at the staff meeting were reviewed. The plan is to discontinue the municipal building dumpster at the end of the current contract. The suggestion that the DPW crew perform routine maintenance on the police cars will be implemented starting in April. The staff's offer to perform cleaning duties was only viable if full salaries were received, so that was taken off the table. Mr. Corboy remarked that if things turn around, the Committee will take another look at restoring salaries. Lt. Bartzak has cancelled his mobile pager and estimates that this will save approximately \$400/year.

A time sheet policy will be instituted in order to track the required reductions. A quarterly review of police over-time will also take place. The various departments have proposed the following new work hours: Court and DPW will close every Friday and add hours to the other work days. The police secretary will take the reduced Friday hours because other work commitments preclude an extension of hours on the other days. The Clerk's office will be open on Fridays. This will mean that neither the cleaning or bank pick-up schedule will need to be changed. Hours for other department personnel have not been revealed. The proposed schedules were given approval with the caveat that if it is found that it doesn't serve the residents, or if there are problems with keeping to the times and performing the job, it will be re-visited.

The applicant for the MHL/AA position has indicated interest in the position but has expressed some concerns about the offer. These were primarily about the number of hours and the flexibility of same. A proposed letter addressing the stated concerns was presented and approved for release. If the applicant accepts, the Salary & Wage ordinance will need to be amended.

There has been no word from South Hunterdon concerning the mayor's letter about budgeting for police coverage at their events. Mr. Molnar will follow up.

Attention was directed to the Capital budget. Parks & Recreation just recently submitted a request for expenditures but no numbers were attached to the projects listed. The projects totaled \$23,000 although it was noted that the Little League does a lot of work at Hewitt. Mr. Molnar will follow up. The Perrine settlement number is \$195,000 but a dollar figure for soft costs is needed—title insurance, attorney fees, bond counsel and auditor charges for the supplemental debt statement. The attorney is also to be requested to separate his charges on projects involving ordinances in order to avoid hits to the operating budget. Mrs. Luhrs relayed that BANS are due in July for the fire truck; it would be prudent to roll these two items together; and, that timing needs to be coordinated. Also briefly discussed was the need to come up with options for the property once it is obtained.

The Rocktown Hill drainage project can only proceed if funds are received from the DRJTBC. The State has allocated \$200,000 but there's no Township match from local funds otherwise. The possibility of government stimulus grants for building projects was questioned. If available, it might help with the elevator project and eventual move by the police department to the municipal complex. Mr. Corboy will contact Congressman Holt.

The five-year capital projects portion of the budget remains to be completed. This is basically a planning tool and can be addressed at the next budget workshop. The goal is to introduce the budget at the April 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:**

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 6:19 p.m. on motion by Corboy, seconded by Molnar.

Respectfully submitted,

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Lora L. Olsen, RMC  
Township Clerk