

SPECIAL WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING
April 28, 2010 – 4:30 p.m.

The West Amwell Township Committee met on the above date at 4:32 p.m. Present: Mayor Molnar, Committeemen Masterson and Fisher, CFO Luhrs, Lt. Bartzak, Hal Shute and Zach Rich

In compliance with the Public Meetings Act, Mayor Molnar announced that this Special Meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act with notices faxed to the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Trenton Times on April 26, 2010. 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 pledge to the American flag was led by Lt. Bartzak.

The meeting was recorded via digital recording system and a copy of the CD is on file in the Office of the Municipal Clerk.

BUDGET WORKSHOP:

Mrs. Luhrs explained that an e-mail was received from the Division of Local Government Services last Friday, and re-confirmed this afternoon, that the 2009 cap waiver was made permanent. Initially, this waiver had to be deducted from the base for this year's calculations but can now be added back in. This exercise has nothing to do with receiving additional cash. It just means that the levy cap can be increased by the amount of last year's waiver plus 4%, or \$103,341. This could be used to increase appropriations, which would increase the tax rate another 2 cents; used to reduce taxes; or, a combination of tax reduction and restoration of some salaries. Mrs. Luhrs also stated that the \$99,000 is a gift. Next year the levy cap could be 2.5% if the proposed referendum is adopted by the voters, so having the extra \$100,000 in the cap base is a good thing.

A couple scenarios were presented and reviewed showing restored salaries and assistants, as well as possible changes to capital improvement funding and debt numbers, and the subsequent effect on tax rate. The first saw a 4 cent increase in tax rate; the second, a 2.5. Discussion ensued on how the numbers were arrived at and worked to get around the levy cap. That the OE budget is still extremely tight was noted. Mrs. Luhrs noted that Township Committee salaries were not restored.

It was the consensus that option #1 was out. The restoration of the part-time officer was questioned but this can only be accomplished if the other assistant positions are eliminated. He was notified previously that his position was to be cut as of May 1st. Lt. Bartzak was asked about police scheduling and indicated that the department can operate. The availability of this particular officer is minimal and there's money for the other part-timer.

Discussion ensued over the various assistant positions and the status thereof. Mention was also made that salaries are at 2008 levels and that the non-contract staff took a hit last year. The decision was to eliminate the court position but to retain the assistant treasurer, assistant tax collector and assistant waste security officer. The recently amended police contract will also need to reflect the restorations agreed upon this evening. How this should be accomplished will be checked with Attorney Faherty. Lt. Barzak will relay to the patrolmen that there will now be no furlough days starting May 1st.

Given the time available between now and the next meeting, there is no way that the budget can be ready for introduction on May 5th. Therefore, a special meeting will have to be scheduled. The date for introduction will be determined at the next meeting. It is important that the budget be adopted in June so that tax bills can go out in a timely fashion. This will also reduce the postage cost of dual mailings experienced the past two years.

A request from an employee for reduced hours, due to commitments elsewhere as a result of the 15% salary cut that was looming earlier, was approved after a brief discussion of the situation that began at the beginning of the year. An amendment to the salary and wage ordinance will be needed for May 5th.

Attention turned to the Capital portion of budget. A copy of last year's projections was distributed and reviewed. Nothing entered in this section is locked in as the basic purpose is to show intent. An ordinance would be needed in order to expend funds.

- \$80,000 for road equipment (dump truck) was removed from 2010 and added to future years
- \$250,000 for road improvements will cover the Rocktown Hill project

- \$1,500,000 for open space was continued, although the request was for \$1.6 million to include \$40,000 for the Reserve for Preliminary Expenses (Nunn, Gulick III, King, Bowers, and others)
- \$5,000 for office equipment was removed from 2010
- \$75,000 for purchase of fire truck was removed from 2010 and added to future years
- \$15,000 was allocated for township garage improvements (overhead doors) in 2010
- \$25,000 was allocated for a new roof on the fire house in 2011

The purposes for which the Open Space tax money can be used were read. A public hearing is held each year during the budget process. A determination of how to allocate the funds was then discussed with the following results:

- \$ 20,000 maintenance of lands for recreation: salaries & wages
- \$ 5,000 maintenance of land for recreation: OE
- \$ 40,000 payment of bond principal; interest on bonds

The last category will be a number for down payments and soft costs for acquisition of farmland and open space.

A brief exchange ensued about work needed at Hewitt Park and recommendations from the insurance company concerning the bleachers—replace or eliminate. As most people bring their own chairs, elimination will be considered. The possibility of a new parking lot will also be explored as to price. Mrs. Luhrs noted that the open space budget can be amended at any time.

Returning to a couple of items on the regular budget, the computer in the Construction office is experiencing errors when attempting to transmit information to Trenton and a link is needed between the two PCs in the office. A request for repair has been held pending availability of funds. Mr. Gill will be requested to look at the situation.

A question about the use of Clean Communities money was raised. DPW salaries for road side clean-up can be charged to the grant (\$1800) with the balance used to pay recycling costs. Item approved.

Mayor Molnar was reminded that a budget message is required. A couple of ideas for inclusion were floated for consideration. Agenda items for the next regular meeting will include a discussion on a five man committee and an update on SHREC. Mr. Fisher indicated that he will be speaking with another Township concerning possible shared service opportunities.

A memorandum will be sent to the staff about the cap waiver situation; that furloughs and the proposed 15% reduction are no longer needed; and, that salaries will continue at the 2008 level.

With this budget now close to being ready for introduction and subsequent adoption, Mrs. Luhrs cautioned that the Committee should begin thinking about next year and how to cover costs. The OE lines are fixed and the lack of revenues is a problem. There is no excess purchasing occurring, and with the exception of police OT and legal, the remainder of the budget is bare bones.

DISCUSSION CONCERNING POSSIBLE MEETING WITH DCA COMMISSIONER:

Mayor Molnar has reached out to former mayor Bill Corboy to join him at a meeting scheduled for May 3rd with Acting Commission Grifa. He also requested that Mrs. Luhrs attend. Mr. Fisher commented that the Governor's cuts were done to everyone but that doesn't make it right. The State took the taxes owed to the Township by a former utility, lumped it under CMPTRA and energy receipts and is playing with the numbers. No one is around in Trenton from the 1989 fight, so the Township may be 'barking up the wrong tree.' However, he is willing to attend the meeting depending on attorney review of the OPMA.

Hal Shute referenced the April 9, 1991 minutes that was attended by Geoffrey Marsh, the Chief of Public Utilities Tax in the State Division of Taxation, who indicated AT&T owned the wire in West Amwell; paid the Township on what they owned; and, that there can be miles of wire in a cable.

The Acting Commissioner has requested that agenda items be provided for the upcoming meeting. The discussion offered the following:

- CMPTRA loss was high percentage of municipal budget; no apparent accounting for this factor
- Majority of CMPTRA loss to Twp was/is not 'aid' but tax revenue

- Direction on 'stopping the bleed' of twp revenue that was co-mingled under a hold harmless directive that originally put these funds into CMPTRA, where they were supposedly 'safe'
- How to plan when revenues are at the whim of changing administrations

Some background materials from Township files will also be provided. These will include:

- Mayor's Deal's 1991 "A Civics Lesson"
- Mayor Corboy's 2008 speech to the Senate Budget & Appropriations Committee
- A synopsis prepared by Cathy Urbanski in 2008
- A 2008 letter by Bill Dressel in The Times

Mr. Fisher stated he has had conversations with our legislators—Doherty, Peterson, DiMaio—and they seem to understand the problem. However, it's the Governor's budget and the elected officials have not yet had their review time.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:

Mayor Molnar announced that he's requesting that Jeff Slowick attend the upcoming Sourlands Smart Growth meeting on April 29th. Mr. Masterson was requested to attend the South defeated budget meeting set for May 6th on behalf of the Township Committee.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 6:18 p.m. on motion by Molnar, seconded by Masterson.

Respectfully submitted,

Lora L. Olsen, RMC
Township Clerk