

March 8, 2021 – Budget Workshop Session

The Township Committee met on the above date via Gotomeeting.com with Mayor Liedtka calling the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. Roll call was taken showing present: Mayor Jeremy Liedtka, Deputy Mayor Lido Panfili, Committeewoman Denise Koetas-Dale and Committeemen Shreekant Dhopte and Michael Russo. Also present Thomas Sahol, Administrator; Wendy Wulstein, CFO and Caryn Hoyer, Township Clerk.

Compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act was noted.

Mayor Liedtka stated he called this budget meeting because he is concerned about the loss of added assessments we will be seeing as a result of the final homes being completed and the impact it will have on the surplus. He is getting nervous with the amount of surplus we are relying on to support the budget. He stated that with the added assessment of \$5 million dollars going into this year's budget our surplus is not going to replenish as it has in the past. He asked the Township Committee if they want to look at a different budget scenario to introduce on Thursday in order to preserve some of the surplus. Mayor Liedtka said that the current budget scenario that the Committee chose would spend 40% of surplus and reserve accounts. Mr. Dhopte asked Ms. Wulstein to walk us through her suggested scenario.

Ms. Wulstein provided the Township Committee budget scenarios. The budget is forecasted to be a final proposed amount and all revenues must be determined. Ms. Wulstein said that the amount to be raised by taxation is reviewed and cannot exceed the amount determined by the Levy CAP calculation. The remaining factor between the budget and the amount to be raised is surplus. The surplus is not a set amount, but is the amount needed to balance between the total budget and the amount to be raised by taxes. Mr. Dhopte further asked about the reserve for uncollected taxes calculation and stated that we need to begin having discussions about when we would have to entertain going out to referendum.

Mr. Dhopte asked if we can anticipate any revenues because of the pipeline. Ms. Wulstein said that she cannot anticipate that amount at this time but once that amount is known it will be a plus to surplus. Ms. Koetas-Dale asked what the \$5 million dollars represented. Ms. Wulstein said that WAWA was a large portion of it. Mayor Liedtka suggested reducing the money going to the outside organizations. Ms. Wulstein suggested a 25% decrease each year. Ms. Koetas-Dale does not think we can afford to do a 4-5% increase in the staff and that there is a lot of internal we need to look at. Mayor Liedtka pointed out that the town no longer has a reserve for open space tax. He stated that we would have to put the reserve for open space tax back on if we want to preserve more properties. He believes that can only be done by referendum. Ms. Koetas-Dale would like to have that conversation with the Township Committee. Mayor Liedtka stated the budget scenario the Township Committee agreed on at the last meeting is for a tax rate of .356 and reiterated that he is concerned with the surplus and the added assessments. Mr. Dhopte said that the public needs to understand that we do not have the ability to preserve a large parcel such as the OYCC unless we go out to referendum. Ms. Wulstein stated that in order to use the minimum amount of surplus, it would be a \$100.00 increase on the average household from last year and an increase of \$30.00 from the original scenario chosen at the last meeting. Ms. Wulstein asked Mr. McMahon if the \$5 million in revenue includes the pipeline. Mr. McMahon explained it

would not and includes WAWA and other improvements. The pipeline would be an addition. Mr. McMahon noted that there is a different pipeline in town that will be shutting down and we will lose that value. Mayor Liedtka said that we don't know if the WAWA will go on the books this year. Mayor Liedtka asked if everyone is good with the new scenario and introducing it at Thursday night's Township Meeting. All agreed.

Mr. Dhopte made a motion seconded by Mr. Panfili to open to public comment. All were in favor.

Agnus Marsala from 42 Cromwell Drive asked why we agreed to have the pipeline 24/6 instead of regular hours. She said there are many grants available for preserving land. She asked if there has been a significant increase in the professional services such as the Township Administrator and Attorney.

Vibra Batra from 5 Saddle Way asked if there has been an opportunity to look back at the budget. Ms. Wulstein replied that we had a number of budget cuts after the advisory committee reviewed it. She said that the legal fees were down \$10,000 from prior years.

Greg Hessenger from 122 Davenport Drive requested for future meetings on the budget to have it up on the screen for residents to follow along better. Ms. Wulstein said that she will be doing a full presentation on screen at the public hearing on the budget.

Hearing no further comment, Mr. Dhopte made a motion seconded by Ms. Koetas-Dale to close public comment. All were in favor.

Mayor Liedtka asked the Township Committee if they still want to move forward with the tax rate of .3647. All agreed.

Mr. Russo made a motion seconded by Mr. Dhopte adjourn the meeting at 7:48 PM. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Caryn Hoyer, RMC
Municipal Clerk