

Washington Township Budget Meeting

Budget Meeting
March 21, 2009

The Budget Meeting of the Washington Township Committee was held in the Washington Township Municipal Building located at 211 Route 31 North, Washington, N.J. The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Mayor Samir Elbassiouny.

SUNSHINE LAW COMPLIANCE - The Mayor noted that this meeting was being held in compliance with the Open Public Meeting Law of 1975 in as much as a notice had been published in the Star Gazette, transmitted to the Express Times and posted at the Municipal Building.

ROLL CALL: Elbassiouny, present; Horensky, present; Kovacs, present; Mueller, present; Strunk, present. Also present were Mary Ann O'Neil, Township Clerk, Peter de Boer, Certified Public Works Manager, John Mooney and Dave Evans, Auditors and Barbara Emery, CFO.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

Mayor Elbassiouny said there would be a change in the order of the meeting. Susan Lennon, Director of Senior Services, from Warren County was present to give a presentation to the Committee. She presented a wish list of her wish to use the Park and Recreation Building.

They are looking for a focal point for the seniors, to have a one stop place to go and a place for people with disabilities. They need a place to go, but the problem is rent, the money is tied up right now and they cannot do it.

Mueller asked de Boer what is in the building now? de Boer said the upstairs offices have sports equipment in them and one office has the items left from the meeting room.

Lennon said they would bring in their own equipment and computers if things work out, but they would have to lock up rooms one, two and three. The meeting room would be open. They have a shed the Recreation Department could use.

Strunk said, at their expense, one bathroom would be unisex and the kitchen would be at their expense. He felt the Township could supply three offices at most to the seniors. The rooms should not be used for storage, he would rather see them used for offices. He said we owe this to the seniors of the Township if they need a room during the day, but the big room would have to be flexible. He said they should start with baby steps. The Township should provide space, heat and electricity and three offices right now.

de Boer said he is not against seniors, not against this at all, but wanted to bring up some issues for any group that wanted to use the building. The septic system was in failure for several years and has been babied along to use. The building should not have this usage. The first thing they would have to do is evaluate the septic system., because they are talking about a full kitchen and many people. Lennon said it would not be a full kitchen, they do not cook there, just would serve the food. de Boer said the start up expense should also be considered. There is no air conditioning and elections would still be held in the big room. Also, downstairs, the mower fumes and noise will be an annoyance. The police were always annoyed with this. His department uses the downstairs all the time. Also, seniors do not ambulate that well. The Code and Construction Office and Fire Official should look at the building. How would they get out? They could not use the stair well, just the front door. He will give the Code and Construction and Fire Official a copy of the proposed wish list.

de Boer said the Recreation Commission had discussed renting the big room out for parties. Horensky said there would still be the septic problem to deal if this was done.

de Boer said the whole idea when the new building was built was to use the Parks and Recreation Building as a Community Center/Recreation Center and this would be pulling the rug out from our own feet. Parking would be a problem with handicapped, walkers, etc, plowing and custodian services. The big room is also used by Recreation Group for equipment distribution and sign ups. He wanted the Committee to look at the big picture.

de Boer said possibly a compromise would be other places the County could look at. The Washington Bagel in the mall has a kitchen. He also suggested using the log cabin, and possibly they could add on to the building. Lennon said they feed about 65 on location and there are 6 to 8 on staff. Horensky suggested they use the log cabin for offices. Mueller said it was obvious the Committee was not ready to make any decisions at this time.

Strunk said the kitchen concept is too much, but they could provide three offices at this time. Also, the septic has to be done eventually. He would like to see them use the offices and occasionally the big room. Lennon understood the septic problem and the fire issues, which must be researched. The Mayor said they will keep the options open and see what is out there and Lennon should do the same thing. Lennon said they are good where they are. Mueller said they should provide something to seniors, but this is overwhelming. Possibly, later they could work something out, but this needs further discussion.

The Mayor said this is all new, the first year the building is vacant. They will have to see what other groups may want to come in or who may want to use the offices.

Strunk said, the three offices should be used. The Fire Official should check it out. The Mayor asked where the equipment would be stored. Strunk said the offices should not be used for storage. One room downstairs is empty, put the equipment in that room.

Kovacs said they must sit down and go through all the details of what they want to do with the building. The Youth Association may need office or storage space. The Mayor asked de Boer to send out a request to groups that may be interested in the space. He should get their needs for the calendar year. After the information is received, they will sit down and discuss it further.

Barbary Emery, CFO, suggested de Boer contact the grant writer to see if they could find a grant to fix the septic system. The Mayor said this was a good idea.

Lennon left the meeting at 9:42 a.m.

BUDGET DISCUSSION

Evans said they have to reduce the CAP Appropriations by \$4192 and then pick a date for introduction of the budget. The amended pension bill was passed on Monday. Evans said the Township will not be deferring it. Evans said when they started the budget, the tentative budget increase was 1.8 and would be less than \$4.00 a month on a \$250,000 home.

There was discussion on how to reduce the budget by the \$4192. The Mayor asked the CFO why the telephone bill is running \$20,000 and what is the monthly figure?. de Boer said there should be savings down the road on the telephone. Emery said they could cut \$2000 from salt and \$2000 from Tax Assessor. The Mayor said he did not want to cut Tax Assessor. Emery said to cut \$1000 from telephone. Mueller asked if they could cut back on recycling? The budget is running between \$7000 and \$8000 a year. Can they cut back on the recycling? Can they cut the hours? de Boer said they could cut back on Wednesdays, but it is open now according to the ordinance. The Mayor asked what the attendant gets per hour for the recycling center? de Boer said it runs about \$20/hour. The Mayor asked if this was being done under union or could they use summer help to do it? The Mayor asked why they are paying someone \$20/hour to be there just to oversee what is being dumped. Kovacs suggested they put an ad in the paper and hire someone for \$10/hour. de Boer said Tom Marks, as well as Dan Slack and himself are approved to do this job. Marks is doing this now and before an ad is placed,, he should be offered the job first. de Boer suggested \$11/hour and the Committee agreed.

It was suggested to take \$2120 from salt, \$1500 from recycling and \$1000 phone to make the budget work. Evans said, at this time they need to set an introduction date. de Boer asked the Committee consider letting him get a lap top for Zoning Officer. After discussion, the Committee advised de Boer to get the new lap top for himself and give his old lap top to the Zoning Officer. After discussion, the budget will be introduced at the April 20, 2009 meeting.

OTHER

1. The Mayor asked for a representative to work with the Route 57 Scenic Byway to attend their meetings. The next meeting is March 30 in Franklin Township. Kovacs said he would attend the next two meetings and see what happens. The Mayor said he will work with him on this if he is unable to attend.

2. de Boer said at the last meeting the Committee wanted an ad put in the paper for a part time acting administrator, do they still want it done? The Mayor said they should advertise the position that de Boer is temporarily holding until the end of the year. Kovacs asked why this should be done, they cannot do anything until next year anyway. Mueller said he felt it was alright the way it was until the end of the year. The Mayor said this was on a temporary basis until there is an interview process. Horensky felt they do not have to advertise. Mueller said the ad should wait until next year. Kovacs said they know what they have in de Boer. After discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee that the advertisement will wait until the end of the year. Kovacs said, by the end of the year, the Committee will know if he can do it. A memo was to go out advising all employees that Peter de Boer will be appointed as a Part Time Acting Administrator. Also, the Mayor will be the liaison for the Acting Administrator.

3. There was discussion on two sink holes (Changewater Road and Retention Pond at Pacesetter). de Boer said he has put a fence around the pond for now and has talked with Nevitt and Gleba from Finelli Engineering. They are also looking to the Homeowners Association as to who is responsible for pond. de Boer said this is a health and safety issue and suggested they go in with a cement mix and fix it. There was the issue of going on private property, which could be a problem. Strunk suggested they have Lavery look into the deed structure of the properties to see how they read. de Boer was to do nothing until Lavery does this research. Horensky suggested that language be put in ordinance on this issue, if no Homeowners Association, then expenses go to the property owner.

4. de Boer said he is working on sending out a newsletter to the residents and asked for the approval to include a message from the Mayor. Also, the liaisons should be in the letter.

5. Emery said that Lavery approved the form she sent for review for escrows and professionals. She has sent out to all professionals.

6. Emery said that all departments are encumbering funds before going out for purchases.

7. Horensky said he had been asked by the Committee to research the issue regarding the Risk Manager. A resolution was done at the Reorganization Meeting changing from Sharon Cooper to Wayne Dietz. This was a decision made in December of 2008. Basically, he found out that the position is there to just look out for the Township, to make sure they are getting the very best deal on the insurances. They research all the insurance available and make a recommendation to the committee on how to go. In the past, he was not saying they had poor service from Ms. Cooper. However, if she was the Risk Manager and she also works for the insurance company as broker, then brokered out the insurance to her old company, which is something that has been done. If you look at the record, you have always had the same Risk Manager giving the same recommendations from the same companies. He was not saying this was not the cheapest way to go, but from the perception point of view, it is hard to have someone justify, in his mind, being judge, jury and executor. There is nobody watching over and making sure, yes, it is a disinterested third party so to speak. This is what the Risk Manager would be, no stake in the matter on where the insurance goes, other than the best deal for the Township. He suggested that the Committee put a resolution together to hire Dietz as Risk Manager. There is no change to what the present insurance is or provider, its just an opportunity to be advised in the future as to what is out there from a non-biased person. That was his recommendation to hire Dietz's firm to do this. Emery said the hospital insurance will also be coming up for renewal. The Mayor asked Strunk if he wanted to serve on this Committee. He said, yes, he does not recall the appointment and he does not know Dietz's qualifications. Horensky said this was a decision the Committee made in December 2008, based upon the credentials presented and proposal presented at the meeting and it was a unanimous vote. The Mayor said the whole idea was to explore ways to save money. This would be at no cost to the Township. Strunk asked if the Committee would pay Dietz, Mayor said no. Strunk will work on revisiting the insurance issues. The Mayor said that Dietz will explore whether the insurance company is providing the best insurance. Kovacs asked why they would make this change now when they are locked into PAIC for three years. Strunk asked what he should do. The Mayor said he would serve on all insurance purpose committees and copies of all plans should be sent to Dietz.

The Mayor said that Horensky has done his job and he has heard from both sides. He said he could call Sharon Cooper again, but she always has the same recommendations. The Clerk asked when she has insurance problems or accidents, who does she go to? The Mayor said she would go to Dietz. Emery said it sounds like they are talking about two different things, one person to research the insurance and a Risk Manager. The Mayor would like a Resolution put together making Dietz the Risk Manager. Dietz would be the Broker of Record for non health insurance and would make his recommendation once he reviews the information.

Horensky made a motion to have Wayne Dietz be Broker of Record and make recommendations on the insurance on what way to go, at no cost to the Township, Mueller seconded.,

ROLL CALL: Horensky, yes; Mueller, yes; Elbassiouny, yes. Kovacs, abstain. Strunk, still did not know the qualifications so he voted no on the resolution. Strunk asked what he should do. Strunk was to get copies of all insurance and send to Dietz to review and come back with recommendations to the Committee or Strunk and the Mayor.

There being nothing further to come before the Committee, Kovacs made a motion to adjourn at 11:25 a.m., Horensky seconded. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Ann O'Neil RMC/CMC/MMC
Township Clerk