

A special meeting of the East Amwell Township Committee was called to order at 6:30 p.m. Present were Mayor David Wang-Iverson, Deputy Mayor Dart Sageser, and Committee members Charles Van Horn and Peter Miller. Committee member Tim Mathews was absent. Township Administrator Timothy Matheny was also in attendance.

In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, Municipal Clerk Teresa R. Stahl announced that this is a special meeting, approved as part of the Township Committee Annual Meeting Notice, with a notice published in the Hunterdon County Democrat issue of January 14, 2016. A copy of the agenda for this meeting was forwarded to the Hunterdon County Democrat, Times of Trenton, Star Ledger, Courier News, posted on the bulletin board, and filed in the Clerk's Office on January 8, 2016. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the 2016 budget. The public is invited. Action may or may not be taken.

CFO/Treasurer Margaret Pasqua was also in attendance. She had previously distributed a budget packet to the governing body members. She explained that she included all the cuts previously suggested and added a few more. She did not reprint the entire budget since it "changes hourly." She said that after the first meeting, she cut \$57,000 but it was not enough for the caps. Ms. Pasqua provided a sheet showing the lines that equated to the \$57,000: \$1,500 from administration other expenses; \$1,450 from finance other expenses; \$3,000 from engineering, commenting on the debate of whether to keep at \$10,000 or \$12,000; reducing the Board of Adjustment attorney from \$8,000 to \$5,000 based on the Board only utilizing \$2,000 last year – Mayor Wang-Iverson cautioned that the fund was a type of insurance in case there was an appeal and the attorney was needed; insurance was dropped \$4,011, based on receipt of the actual bills; \$7,500 was dropped from public safety (keeping West Amwell traffic coverage at the same rate as 2015); there was a question about supporting the volunteer rescue squad.

Some discussion took place about having \$5,000 in the DPW abandoned building line item, reducing it from its previous amount of \$10,000. There was a question as to whether the foundation at a property with a bank lien could be removed, and DPW Superintendent Silverthorn obtained a quote of \$12,500 for the work. The bank has indicated that if the Township does the work, they should send the bill to them for payment; Mr. Van Horn said that he would like to see this in writing. When asked, Ms. Pasqua felt that she could find \$10,000 for the line item, but if there were legal fees involved with the liens on the property, she needed other areas to cut to keep within cap.

Further cuts were noted, as follows: the Board of Health budget will remain flat, removing the extra \$700 requested; Social Services will be cut \$750; on a question about Recreation committee's increase, the Mayor recommended leaving the budget flat and communicate with the Committee about their budget; the telephone line item was reduced by \$2,000; electricity was reduced by \$1,100; the capital improvement line item was reduced by \$30,000, as suggested by a Committee member; salaries and wages had a question mark, with Ms. Pasqua noting that the budget included a 2% increase at a cost of about \$15,000 (ballpark, not including FICA and taxes). FICA would mean another \$2,000. Ms. Pasqua said that the cuts would amount to \$57,011, adding that revenues were down from \$1,369,000 to \$1,330,000, and another \$39,000 would have to be cut. She mentioned increasing the reserve for uncollected taxes to \$330,000.

Ms. Pasqua again mentioned the need to get under the 2% cap. Deputy Mayor Sageser asked about principal and interest payments taken from the Open Space Trust Fund. Ms. Pasqua said if more was taken, it would offset the cap; funding for debt service is outside the cap, and playing with figures, it only increased the cap. She concluded that using Open Space Trust Funds doesn't help.

Mayor Wang-Iverson asked how much was used from Open Space in this budget; Ms. Pasqua said the same as last year, \$360,000. The Mayor cautioned that he did not want to see the money run out before the bond. Deputy Mayor Sageser said that would be about 8 years for the bond, and he suggested that the Township would want to consider asking the voters if they wanted to raise the percentage of the tax.

Mr. Van Horn asked if the budget for other years showed actual or budgeted figures; Ms. Pasqua said budgeted. Mr. Van Horn questioned the lines for oil, gas, and diesel, remaining the same since 2013; Ms. Pasqua didn't want to change them since they were based on stock market figures. Mr. Van Horn felt that it was important to see the "actuals" for the year end. Some

discussion took place, including whether or not prices will rise and whether there would be money remaining in these line items at year end balancing. Cuts in electricity and street lighting lines were also noted.

Mr. Van Horn noted flat budgets for both Board of Health and Recreation, asking if there were any increases in boards. Ms. Pasqua said that Historic Preservation asked for an extra \$200.

Deputy Mayor Sageser asked about the storm overtime line for DPW. Ms. Pasqua said that \$16,000 was spent last year, and she put in \$15,000 for this year. If conditions are such by the end of January, she may reduce this line to \$12,000.

Mr. Van Horn asked about the affordable housing legal line; Ms. Pasqua said that she "bumped up" the regular legal line. Mayor Wang-Iverson noted that it would be hard to anticipate costs, noting that Special Masters charge \$500 per hour. Additionally, Econsult will have to defend the Township's obligatory number. The Planning Board other expenses budget was kept the same as last year, which already included extra money for the Planner.

Mr. Miller looked at the Zoning Board line items, and he asked if there was any benefit to combining the Planning and Zoning Boards for staff cost savings. Mayor Wang-Iverson said that the Township could look at it, but the large number for affordable housing won't change. He said that the Zoning Board hasn't had a lot of action this year, and the Committee could consider cutting back the legal line item from \$8,000 to \$5,000, adding that the lawyers were a necessary part of defending appeals. Mr. Miller was looking at the staffing aspect as a means of savings. Mr. Matheny explained that the Administrator charges 15 hours to each board (planning and zoning); he suggested if the boards weren't busy, there may be one meeting a month, but if they are busy, there would still be double meetings. The only savings Mr. Matheny thought that there might be was with the professionals. Deputy Mayor Sageser believed that there were different requirements and standards for both boards, i.e., the Planning Board sets the rules and the Board of Adjustment grants variances and waivers, and he could not see saving money since the Zoning Officer still needed to be paid. It was noted that the \$32,700 in the Board of Adjustment budget equated to the salary for two employees, the Board of Adjustment Administrator and the Zoning Officer.

The Municipal Court Clerk provided a handout regarding her request for increase in staffing hours due to increase in services. On a question about the Public Defender line, Mr. Matheny said that this is a statutory requirement. Mr. Miller noted that in many years, the funds have not been used.

Ms. Pasqua spoke about funds going into surplus, e.g., some 2014 funds went to surplus for 2016; the 2015 budget remains active until it goes to surplus in 2017, just in case some outstanding bills for the year come through in 2016. On a question, Ms. Pasqua said that surplus was around \$490,000 with \$170,000 budgeted for 2015. She is waiting for the auditor to complete his work on the Annual Financial Statement; she believed that the figure may be around \$390,000 at this time. Mayor Wang-Iverson asked how much was used for revenue from surplus; Ms. Pasqua thought about \$170,000; she said that after the Annual Financial Statement, she may be able to include another \$20,000.

Deputy Mayor Sageser asked about the cap bank ordinance. Ms. Pasqua explained that there is a calculation you have to do in the budget to keep within the 2% cap. With a cap bank, you can go over the 2%. She mentioned having \$50,000 in the cap bank from prior years, which was used and she is still \$39,000 over cap. She also mentioned using the 2014 bank (nothing left) and \$20,000 from the 2015 bank.

Deputy Mayor Sageser said that based on the last meeting, the Township was \$131,000 over the 2015 budget. By making the reductions of \$57,000 tonight and using some cap bank money, there is still \$39,000 to be cut. Mayor Wang-Iverson asked about using more surplus; Ms. Pasqua said that she would know this in February, after the Annual Financial Statement is complete. Mr. Van Horn asked about the capital improvement fund; Ms. Pasqua said that there is only \$20,000 in that budget line.

Mr. Matheny brought up the matter of SAFE House, which is part of the Township's COAH plan. He explained the agreement that SAFE pays the first \$900 of any repairs, and the

Township (who owns the property) is responsible for all the rest. He noted that SAFE did some extensive repairs to the house in the past with money made available to them. The Township has been made aware of a leak in the skylight. During an inspection, it was discovered that the roof is "shot," and DPW Superintendent Silverthorn got an estimate of \$50,000 to replace the roof. It is a regular shingled roof with two skylights and fans, etc. Mr. Van Horn asked if removing the skylights will help with the leak; Mr. Matheny said that the Township will fix the skylights, and Ms. Pasqua said that \$1900 has been encumbered for that repair.

Mr. Matheny further explained that the issue is that the roof may cost around \$30,000 but with prevailing wage costs, the price will increase. The skylights could be covered, but doing so won't save much money for the cost of a new roof. Committee members asked if the roof would last through the year; it was noted that the DPW Superintendent called in Strober Roofing for the consultation. Deputy Mayor Sageser commented on paying only \$12,000 for a roof on his house; he asked whether the quote was for a tear off or underlay. A suggestion was made to get another opinion. Mr. Van Horn asked about the using the capital budget for the repair; Ms. Pasqua said that the issue came to light today, and although there is \$25,000 in capital surplus, using \$50,000 would "wipe out the fund."

Mr. Matheny again noted that prevailing wage increases cost dramatically over non-prevailing wage jobs. Trying to make a repair under the prevailing wage threshold was one suggestion made. Mayor Wang-Iverson asked about bonding for the work; Ms. Pasqua thought that this was a small amount for bonding purposes.

Mr. Silverthorn will be asked to get another estimate for repair work.

Amwell Valley Ringoes Rescue Squad President Margaret Case and Chief Peter Molnar were present to discuss their budget.

Miss Case provided a copy of the squad's insurance costs for auto, building, umbrella, equipment, and Workers' Comp at a cost of \$31,000, adding that the \$29,000 that the Township provides in support doesn't even cover their insurance costs. She reminded the governing body that up until 2009, the Township used to contribute a capital donation of \$28,000 also, which was thereafter eliminated.

Miss Case explained that the organization has to use its reserves for everything now. She said that if the Township provided that extra capital contribution over the last seven years, they would have had the money for the new ambulance without using the reserve. The reserve is used for upkeep of the building, repairing rigs, utilities, training, uniforms, pagers, etc. It was also used for the purchase of a new ambulance, which is coming in March, and the reserves are getting low. The old ambulance, No. 55, had 103,000 miles on it and needed to be replaced; this ambulance was purchased "used" from Lambertville, and the squad "got its money's worth." Miss Case also noted that winters are tough in the area, and a number of times the squad had to depend on a member who had a towing service to pull them out of driveways that were not plowed.

Mr. Molnar added that while the squad had planned a building renovation, they knew that it was more critical to get a new ambulance. The building hasn't been renovated in 30-40 years, and the bathroom, kitchen, flooring, etc. need to be replaced, but "the ambulance will get the job done." Mr. Molnar commented also on the 1996 rescue truck that has outdated tools (15-20 years old). He spoke about getting a new set of tools, which is better for calls and can be handled by fewer responders.

Mr. Molnar referenced the new ambulance, which requires an extra \$15,000 for equipment. He also commented that Flemington is buying another piece of equipment for its squad (No. 49), saying that they support their squad.

Mr. Van Horn asked about funding sources. Miss Case said that they do a fund drive every year, and they rely on donations. She again stated that the Township has not funded their capital since 2009, and this is something that the squad had relied upon to fund equipment purchases. She stated that the squad "is bare bones," running calls with limited manpower. She commented on doing a coin toss also. Mr. Van Horn asked about the fund-raising efforts. Miss Case said that they did the drive late this year; they received \$10,000 from the Monroe Foundation and

another \$30,000 for a total of around \$40,000. She also said that the fire company gets more in their campaigns than the rescue squad.

Mr. Miller commented on the squad being strapped on finances, and he wondered about finding a fraction of a penny or a dedicated tax to assist the squad. The squad exchanged comments with the governing body about this and about the requirements to get a question on the ballot. Mr. Miller agreed to work with the squad if they would like to consider this possibility.

Mr. Molnar spoke again about the new ambulance, saying that they paid one half in cash and will finance 5 – 6 years and use the fund drive to pay it off. Miss Case said that their total operating budget is about \$80,000 and they are dipping into their reserves. They use the fund drive for equipment.

Mr. Molnar also noted that they did some research and were able to get a new driveway installed at \$11,000 rather than \$40,000, and the Township DPW installed the aprons. Mr. Molnar asked about having the DPW help with plowing if they are around the area, saying sometimes West Amwell comes through. Mr. Matheny explained that the crew may not be in the area since it is a state highway.

The squad representatives also said that they are looking for new members, adding that two members are going off to college, and they would like to recruit some new volunteers.

Mr. Van Horn asked about the interaction between the paramedics and the squad. Miss Case explained that the paramedics come from Hunterdon Medical Center or from Lambertville. If the squad gets to a call and conditions are worse than they appear, the squad will request paramedic assistance. If the call is not bad, the squad will cancel the paramedics. Miss Case said that the two work in tandem; however, the paramedics will send a bill.

Mayor Wang-Iverson asked about the letter from Hopewell Township regarding change in coverage area. Mr. Molnar said that this would not be a problem, and now the squad has a bigger territory to request donations. Miss Case also commented that the area is not “super populated.”

Mayor Wang-Iverson mentioned a comment from the public regarding a situation with the Flemington-Raritan Squad. Mr. Molnar explained that the Flemington-Raritan Squad is a paid squad and they are looking to expand their area to where the Amwell Valley Ringoes Rescue Squad now serves (e.g., parts of Old York Road, Everitts Road, Copper Hill School, Country Club Road, etc.) He spoke about the split of the coverage zones and also noted that the Flemington-Raritan Squad has a number of lights to go through to get to this area. He mentioned the equipment at Route 202/31 at the Hess Station to change the light from red to green that Amwell Valley Ringoes Rescue has installed and mentioned other lights at Cornet and Everitts. Flemington-Raritan claims that they have the staffing and can beat the Amwell Valley-Ringoes Squad to the area. Squad members explained that their squad gets less calls than Flemington-Raritan, and if the first crew in Flemington-Raritan is out on a call, they would have to call back up to respond, either in-house or perhaps a squad as far as Whitehouse or Clinton. Miss Case said that part of the issue is that Flemington-Raritan is a paid squad and have a different opinion of volunteer squads; she explained that both squads have the same training, and the Amwell Valley-Ringoes Rescue Squad often has a first response vehicle at a house before the ambulance arrives.

Deputy Mayor Sageser asked who would be deciding how to address the issue. Mr. Molnar spoke about going to the houses in the affected area and getting a signed petition of support; he spoke about having 130 signatures. Miss Case added that this is about the fourth or fifth year that the issue has come up. Mr. Miller commented on dealing with this about two years ago with an attorney; the assumption is that the Squad will try again with a new Mayor in Raritan. Mr. Molnar mentioned that Raritan Township and the Police have received no complaints about the Amwell Valley Ringoes Rescue Squad service, and the Squad responds in good time; he added that if the Squad couldn't handle the territory, they would tell Raritan that it couldn't be done.

Mr. Miller said that ultimately the Township Committee decides on the coverage, based on pressure from the community, and the squad with the shorter response time should be the

compelling decision. An ordinance or resolution would have to be adopted to allow only the Flemington-Raritan Squad to respond to the area.

Deputy Mayor Sageser asked for confirmation that the territory in question was not located in East Amwell at all; he was told that was correct.

Miss Case added that a resident could request the Amwell Valley Ringoes Rescue Squad, and a lot of people are familiar with the care that they provide. She added that the squad has already gotten some signatures on a petition. She commented that the squad "does it from the heart, ... they are not a business ... they have a care for their brethren."

Mr. Van Horn commented on using the local squad's services on occasion, and he was very pleased with the response with the squad coming before the paramedics.

Miss Case said that she's been on the squad for 28 years, and this year there were two calls that required CPR, one on Wertsville Road and one for a person who lived on Back Brook Road who was taking an historic tour. Mr. Molnar added that the first response team arrived before the paramedics and made the two saves.

Mr. Miller concluded that he would look into the referendum question for the squad. He agreed that they were underfunded, and he was supportive of regular funding from the residents. He will continue to work with squad members on this matter.

Ms. Pasqua asked the Township Committee what was being considered for salaries for next year, adding that she would like a decision by the end of the month. Deputy Mayor Sageser mentioned a memo regarding staff and personnel salaries with specific increases. He asked if this would be discussed in open session for individual adjustments. Mr. Cushing said Rice Notices would be necessary, while some Township Committee members remembered that discussions about the DPW increases last year were done in open session.

Deputy Mayor Sageser was thinking in terms of giving all employees COLA increase of 1% and responding to issues in the memo to provide better equity in the salary scale and make some adjustments. He mentioned \$15,000 for 2% could be cut in half and add about another \$14,000 in the line item to address memo issues. He felt that with about \$22,000 everyone would get the COLA increase and some employees would come closer to what others are being paid in their positions elsewhere.

Mayor Wang-Iverson said that he would love to do that, but it would be hard since the Township Committee still had to cut another \$40,000 to make cap. Deputy Mayor Sageser took that to mean that perhaps even the 1% COLA would have to be cut, similar to what was done in the past.

Mayor Wang-Iverson concluded that the assignment for the January 28, 2016 meeting is to think about an additional \$39,000 to cut.

Mr. Miller asked if the budget for the rescue squad was in the proposed budget at this time; Ms. Pasqua said yes.

It was also noted that the Recreation Committee budget will be kept flat.

The Committee will determine at the next budget meeting whether staff will receive a 1 or 2% raise.

Motion by Mr. Van Horn, seconded by Deputy Mayor Sageser, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:31 p.m.

Teresa R. Stahl, RMC/CMC
Municipal Clerk