

## BUDGET MEETING OF MARCH 24, 2009

Mayor Weinstein called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m.

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, annual notice of this meeting was published in the Record issue of March 20, 2009. Notices were also posted on the bulletin board located on the first floor of the Municipal Building; copies were mailed to The Community News and posted on the Borough of Fair Lawn Website.

**PRESENT:** Mayor Weinstein, Deputy Mayor Swain, Deputy Mayor Tedeschi, Councilmember Baratta and Councilmember Trawinski (late)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Acting Manager Kwasniewski, Assistant Municipal Clerk Bojanowski, Attorney Rosenberg and CFO Eccleston.

### **BUDGET REVIEW:**

Municipal Court - Clare Cabbibo, Court Clerk stated that the new prosecutor was working out well. Councilmember Baratta inquired about a software program that Public Defender Mondello had mentioned. Ms. Cabbibo stated the software was called Westlaw; the Prosecutor and Court do not have it. Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that the Municipal Clerk's office had the software but it was used sporadically. She will check the license to see if the software can be shared. Ms. Cabbibo stated that it could be used to do a criminal or motor vehicle search. Councilmember Baratta stated that Public Defender Mondello had indicated he did not have a large law library; the software would be helpful to him and the Prosecutor. Ms. Cabbibo clarified that the Prosecutor was not part of the Court's budget.

Deputy Mayor Swain noted that the line item for office supplies increased from \$607 in 2008 to \$1,200. Ms. Cabbibo stated they used the Parking Offenses Adjudication Act (POAA) fund to buy parking tickets and a portion of the new filing system that housed parking tickets to stay within the budget. If there are any changes, Court must print new tickets regardless of the supply on hand. All supplies purchased through this fund must be classified for parking use.

Councilmember Baratta inquired about interpreting services. Ms. Cabbibo explained that the service required a phone line in Council Chambers to dial a toll free number. They installed a \$400 sound station that enables them to request any language for \$1.99 per minute. This has produced significant savings over in-person interpreters that receive \$225 an hour, with a two hour minimum.

Councilmember Trawinski arrived at 6:44 p.m.

Tax Collector – Deputy Mayor Swain noted that they had budgeted \$5,700 for supplies and spent \$9,600. CFO Eccleston explained the extra cost was for the estimated tax

bills that were sent because the State did not have its final budget. Collector Lee stated that the bills will be mailed June 30<sup>th</sup> so that revenue will come in August 1<sup>st</sup>.

Councilmember Trawinski stated that he checked with the Department of Community Affairs and was advised that the Council could enclose a separate letter in the tax bills. Collector Lee stated she would need three weeks lead time. CFO Eccleston suggested the letter be limited to one page.

CFO Eccleston stated there were three items in the Capital budget: validating machines, mail openers and a printer. An upgrade in software last year necessitated new validating machines and the printer; the mail opener no longer worked. Councilmember Trawinski inquired why the printer cost \$3,000. Collector Lee explained it was designed to accommodate water postcards. Councilmember Trawinski suggested the Manager or CFO compile a list of items they were required to purchase due to State mandates.

It was the consensus of Council that a list be compiled of unfunded State mandated equipment and projects.

Deputy Mayor Tedeschi asked how old the printer was. Deputy Mayor Swain noted that it was over 50 years old. Collector Lee stated that they could no longer obtain parts.

Construction Department - Construction Official Kolano stated that building permits were down this year, although they are starting to pick up again. Councilmember Trawinski inquired about overtime costs. Construction Official Kolano stated that the overtime was for the Zoning Board secretary who attended meetings. Those costs should decrease as they will be having fewer meetings.

CFO Eccleston stated that there was a request for file cabinets that was removed from last year's capital budget.

Health - Health Officer Wagner introduced Liz Twiggs who works in Human Services.

Deputy Mayor Tedeschi inquired as to the number of human service clients serviced this year as compared to last year. Health Officer Wagner stated the number of cases had doubled. Ms. Twiggs works part time in the morning. The staff will distribute a bag of food, but the clients must come back to see Ms. Twiggs if it involves reaching out to County. Acting Manager Kwasniewski noted that many of these people should be going to the County, as several programs have been removed from the Health Department. Health Officer Wagner confirmed that; this was for people who fell through the cracks. Sometimes the clients just need advice as to where they can go for help. Mayor Weinstein asked if this was done by appointment. Health Officer Wagner stated that returning clients usually walk in. New clients must schedule an appointment with Ms. Twiggs.

Deputy Mayor Tedeschi noted that Ridgewood was not replacing a retiring employee in their Health Department. He wondered how that would impact on Health Officer Wagner since she covered there. Health Officer Wagner stated a part time employee

was being hired fulltime. Although this person had some experience in inspections, she anticipated being more available to help them in the fall. She felt the contract should be increased next year to reflect these additional hours.

Councilmember Baratta inquired about the food pantry. Ms. Twiggs stated their supply has dwindled since Christmas. Health Officer Wagner explained that they have reciprocal agreements with other agencies such as the Center for Food Action and St. Anne's, who has helped them in the past. Even if clients qualify for County programs there is a waiting period. The Human Services Department assists them in the interim. Ms. Twiggs explained that many of the people they are currently helping never expected to find themselves in this position; they did not know how to navigate the system.

Health Officer Wagner stated that they also do the administrative work for the Meals on Wheels program. They pay for the meals, which are prepared by Maple Glen and are reimbursed by the client. Volunteers deliver the meals.

Deputy Mayor Swain inquired about the increase in salaries for the mini bus drivers. CFO Eccleston explained that one driver was out on disability last year and was not paid. Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated there was an increase in wages as a substitute works when a driver is out so that there are always two buses on the road.

Councilmember Trawinski suggested they discuss signage indicating bus routes at a future work session agenda. Health Officer Wagner stated that people call and ask how they can get from one location to another. Mayor Weinstein agreed that it would be helpful to discuss this. Health Officer Wagner clarified that residents are picked up anywhere along the route.

CFO Eccleston stated there was one minibus in the capital budget but Acting Manager Kwasniewski had recommended waiting one year. Deputy Mayor Tedeschi inquired if there was enough storage files for records. Health Officer Wagner stated they needed to remove old records to create more space.

Deputy Mayor Swain stated that she and Mayor Weinstein attended a JIF meeting, which made them rethink the process of volunteer physicals. She had discussed this with Councilmember Baratta as well. She suggested meeting with the Emergency Service Department Heads to discuss new ideas. Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated she would schedule a meeting.

Mayor Weinstein stepped out of the room.

Miscellaneous Budget Items – Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that the street sweeper retired last year and was replaced with an employee from Recycling. The Recycling position was left vacant, although it was in this year's budget. She inquired about filling the position as of April 1st as the employee was needed to pick up yard waste. If not, she could hire a seasonal person for six months and postpone hiring the permanent employee. Councilmember Trawinski clarified that the Recycling Budget would not increase if they approved the hiring of the employee. Acting Manager Kwasniewski confirmed that.

It was the consensus of Council that a fulltime employee for Recycling be hired as of April 1st, with Mayor Weinstein absent during voting.

Mayor Weinstein returned.

Acting Manager Kwasniewski distributed copies of a budget request from the Property Maintenance Committee regarding monetary awards for school children for participation in Borough beautification programs. This wasn't in the budget, although there is a line item under Mayor and Council for other boards. They are not allowed to give monetary gifts to anyone so the program could not be done as proposed. She will add it to the list of wrap up items to be discussed on April 14<sup>th</sup>.

Councilmember Trawinski stated that a surplus of \$9,952,337 was shown for 2008. He understood that it did not mean there was an account with that amount in it, but he felt residents were confused. CFO Eccleston explained the surplus. Over the years he determined how much surplus was needed to stabilize taxes within a small range, instead of having peaks and valleys. If they could constantly have the surplus grow at that rate with the budget and only use half of that, it would regenerate itself. If the residents read the paper they will see other towns have a problem because they used more and more surplus each year. There has to be a plan to replenish the surplus.

Deputy Mayor Swain inquired if the surplus amount decreased at any point during the year. CFO Eccleston stated the surplus is maintained at an even level. He noted that 98% of the residents paid their taxes on time, which is on the low side. This occurs during a year when there are a lot of tax appeals. Normally they are at 99%. Online payments have made processing of payments a lot quicker as deposits can be made immediately. Roughly 50% of the homeowners do not have mortgages.

Councilmember Trawinski asked if having this surplus made it easier to deal with unanticipated situations such as the reduction in State aid. CFO Eccleston confirmed that. He noted that only the energy tax was still done by formula. Public Service paid them directly. The State changed the law so that it was funneled down to the State. It is now sent to them proportionately throughout the year.

Councilmember Trawinski asked if there was any sound fiscal reason to exhaust more than 55% of the surplus. CFO Eccleston stated there was not. He did use some capital surplus this year to pay down the debt. He noted that revenues from Court and the Building Department were down.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

There were no comments.

#### **ADJOURNMENT TO REGULAR MEETING:**

Upon motion by Councilmember Trawinski and a second by Councilmember Baratta the meeting was adjourned to the regular meeting at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Marilyn B. Bojanowski, RMC  
Assistant Municipal Clerk

The undersigned have read and approved the foregoing minutes.

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Mayor Steven Weinstein

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Councilmember Jeanne Baratta

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Deputy Mayor Lisa Swain

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Deputy Mayor Joseph Tedeschi

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Councilmember Ed Trawinski