

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG

COUNCIL MINUTES

WORKSHOP MEETING OF FEBRUARY 29, 2020

8:00 AM

MAYOR'S STATEMENT: Mayor Keith S. Balla called this Special Meeting to order at 8:05 AM and made the following statement: Under the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., notice of the time and place of this meeting was given by way of special notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG and a MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD

ROLL CALL:

Robinson [P] Black [P] Goodloe [P] Eisenberg Knechten [P] Jubin [A] Martino [P]

Although not present at Roll Call, Councilman Jubin arrived at 8:30 A.M.
Also present were Administrator James Damato, CFO Bill Hance and Clerk Michelle DeRocco.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION:

Review of 2020 Budget Requests:

08:00 am Engineering – Tom Herits & Bruce Koch

Special Projects Engineer Tom Herits of Maser Consulting and current Engineer Bruce Koch, CME Associates spoke in regard to their basic budget needs. They talked about the DOT Grant which was awarded to the Borough, both agreeing that it will most likely be used for Nottingham and Hill Hollow. Mr. Koch said he would like to consider two more streets being done this year, and possibly a sidewalk project. Administrator Damato said sidewalks are very expensive and have been discussed and the County has made it clear they would not assist the Borough in any funding. Councilwoman Goodloe suggested looking into grants for sidewalks, and Mr. Herits said he is aware of grants for sidewalks that are usually awarded to towns in which the children walk to school. Councilman Martino said if the Borough is considering sidewalks, funding of future maintenance of sidewalks needs to be appropriated because once sidewalks go in, they need to be maintained, in addition to the extra responsibilities that will fall onto the Public Works Department. Councilman Martino said he would like to see a plan do 5 streets per year. Mr. Herits said in the past two years, the Borough was able to pave many streets through the co-op program.

08:20 am Police Department – Chief Joe Cina

Chief Joe Cina was present to discuss the needs of the Police Department and the vehicle replacement plan. He spoke of this staff of 30 officers, which comprise 1 Chief, 3 Lieutenants, 4 Sergeants, noting that he is the old timer with 27 years in, followed by Lt. Kelly with 25 years, Lt. Hart with 22 years. He explained that the Department overall is “young.” Overtime costs were discussed and Chief Cina answered questions in regard to the processing of extra duty jobs.

08:45 am Public Works – Robert Burns & Charles Gunther

In the absence of Mr. Gunther, Mr. Burns explained the current Department is made up of 1 manager and 5 staff, noting that other than himself who is now retired, the most senior staff member has 7 years in. Mr. Burns talked about the maintenance of the Borough-owned properties, noting that Gilbraith, a local landscaper assists with the weeding of the triangles for \$200. per month. He spoke of the Department's current fleet and their ages, noting they are subject to more wear-and tare due to the salt in the winter season. Councilman Martino asked questions in regard to the new salt bin at the Weldon site. Mr. Damato explained that we are waiting for an inter-local agreement with the County, which is in process, and that the County is unable to provide us with a loader. He explained the only thing the County wants is access to the salt. Mr. Burns and Mr. Damato answered questions in regard to over-time costs, and Mr. Damato said there is an on-going discussion regarding the possibility of re-organizing the Department and combining it with Engineering. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said she would like to see a separate break-down for the salaries. Mr. Damato pointed out that this budget has no appropriation for any work at Camp Endeavor and Mayor Balla said a community garden would be a good thing to put there and not very costly. Mr. Gunther arrived at this point, and said Camp Endeavor looks like a junk yard and some no-brainer improvements can be easily made. Councilman Martino suggested a community garden could be a collaborative project by the Traffic & Beautification Committee, the Environmental Committee, and others. Councilman Black said it may be a good Eagle Scout project. Mr. Gunther, recently appointed as interim Public Works Manager, said just coming aboard he still has a lot of assessing to do but noted he was pleasantly surprised with the condition of the equipment, that it has been well-maintained.

09:05 am Construction Code – Robert Lacosta

Mr. Lacosta, Construction Official, advised that the fees collected in the Department have been consistent for the past 4-5 years. He spoke of the inspectors and their salaries, and said they are a self-sustained Department. He said the inspectors are all using the SDL software and I-pads, and noted that as of Monday, all will be using and compliant with the 2018 Code, which is mandatory.

09:20 am Fire Department

Councilman Martino recused himself at this time, and stepped down from the dais.

Fire Chief Albert Desandolo was present. He noted in the proposed budget reflects no increase in the stipends, an upgrade in the communications equipment, an increase in safety supplies and from the Capital budget the Department is requesting to purchase a mini-pumper at a cost of \$325,000. Mayor Balla questioned why there was no request for money for gear, and Chief Desandolo explained that everyone received new uniforms this year and the gear is in the Capital request. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten spoke of the need for long-range planning and recommended to continue to put an amount aside every year to put towards new apparatus. The Chief noted that as per the Rogers Report, the Department is behind in apparatus replacement.

At this time the Council took a 5-minute recess. At 10:13 am, the meeting resumed and Councilman Martino returned to his seat.

09:45 am Traffic & Beautification

Vonnie Mott was present and explained to the Mayor and Council the annual projects that T&B is responsible for. She said with their \$2500. annual budget, they purchase the tee-shirts for Operation Pride and purchase the flowers for the triangle near the circle. Ms. Mott was asked about the \$50,000. that was designated for town beautification from the Capital Budget and she explained that a total of \$100,000. was allocated, however they are using a portion each year, and said that is where the trees on Somerset Street came from. Councilwoman Goodloe said she appreciated the feedback on how this money should be used, and noted some of the suggestions were for new

holiday decorations such as candy canes and a new menorah. Ms. Mott said they also want to do an improvement at the bottom of Hillcrest as that is where so many visitors come into town, and also improve the walkway to Best Lake and delineate the Best Lake parking lot with railroad ties. Mayor Balla suggested holding a “planting day” for families.

10:00 am Recreation Commission

Recreation Coordinator Linda Monetti came forward and said she is requesting an additional \$29,400. for events that Recreation intends to hold. She added that many of the events such as the Community Picnic and Harvest Fest are mostly supported by donations from local vendors. Mrs. Monetti also asked for an additional \$15,000. for the summer Camp program, so she can plan more trips in the case of rain, as she needs to find alternate activities in inclement weather, and possibly another staff member. Councilman Black thanked Mrs. Monetti and commended her efforts saying she has taken Recreation and particularly the Camp program to a new dimension. Mrs. Monetti said she is looking into more programs for all, such as yoga in the park, mini-golf, and a “stroller-workout” fitness class. She said she is still looking into a practical way to provide shade for the playground at Mobus, and as always, continues to look for solutions to the goose poop problem. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knechten suggested that a Yankee bus trip be planned around hometown Yankee Anthony Volpe’s first game.

10:15 am Historical Committee

Amber Murad was present to represent the Historical Committee. Mayor Balla began by pointing out to Ms. Murad that the cost of the flood insurance for the Texier House Museum is over \$7,000. and if there are any programs being planned to raise money to offset this cost. Mayor Balla said sometimes Museums bring in out-side displays for temporary viewing, and said people will come for the interest in the special display. The Council asked Ms. Murad questions in regard to the past and current monetary obligations in regard to the preservation of the mural and Ms. Murad explained how this process was started and where it is now, adding that they annually apply for Historic Preservation grant money from the County and have been successful for two years in a row, and are working on this year’s application. (at 11:21 A.M. Councilman Black left the meeting.) Councilman Martino suggested that the Historical Committee use the upcoming newsletter to recruit new members, and said he would be available if Historical needs assistance. Councilman Jubin pointed out that with the centennial coming up, the Historical Committee could be an important part of the planning of this event. Council President Robinson suggested Historical host a table at the Community Picnic.

11:35 am Although not on the Agenda, Mayor Balla noted that OEM (Office of Emergency Management) Coordinator was present and it would be important to discuss her budget requests.

Mrs. Solon said her budget request reflects an increase of \$6,700. And explained their needs which include added supplies for the OEM trailer, addition programs and training, laptops and fax machines. She said the Borough at this time has no equipment for animal sheltering. In expectation of the spreading of the Coronavirus, she is requesting hand sanitizers for every department. Mrs. Solon said she is in constant communication with the Borough’s Health Officer Kevin Sumner and is providing daily updates. She said the CERT Team needs radios as the ones they have do not afford them the ability to communicate with the County. Councilman Martino spoke of the NIMS requirements and explained there are concerns with the people in the field having access to other emergency services.

10:30 am General budget overview and questions

Now being 12:00 noon, the Council briefly discussed some budget questions. Councilman Jubin suggested the replacement of our current lights with L.E.D.’s saying there would be a large savings after the initial conversion. Administrator Damato announced that he was apprised by Somerset

County that there will be a large increase in recycling costs, noting a 7-10% increase this year and possibly a 50% increase next year. Mr. Damato said that the Environmental Commission is asking for a shed to collect recycling material such as styro-foam and Mr. Hance said we can use recycling grant money for the purchase of a shed. CFO asked if it is the Council's intention to put money aside annually for a future piece of Fire Department apparatus, and all agreed. Council President Robinson asked Mr. Hance where we are with the budget and he said we are "at cap."

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said she felt the discussions that were had this morning were very productive and confirms the need for "goal setting" workshops.

PUBLIC PORTION

No one from the Public was present

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council, this Special Workshop meeting was adjourned at 12:30 P.M to the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Mayor and Council scheduled to be held at 7:30 PM on Thursday, March 5, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle DeRocco, RMC
Clerk