

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 11, 2021 – 7:30 P.M.

[THIS MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY FOR ALL PARTIES]

MAYOR'S OPENING STATEMENT: Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM and made the following statement: *In order to comply with all NJ Executive Orders and to protect members of the public, this meeting will be held virtual for all parties. Public Comments will be accepted through zoom or by email to the Borough Clerk and instructions were listed in the agenda. I'd like to welcome everyone to the special meeting to go over budgetary items for the new year. 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 a Special Meeting Notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, the Star Ledger, posted at Borough Hall and the Borough's website. For those joining through Zoom, please note that upon arrival you are automatically muted. If you wish to speak during public portion, you will need to click on the "raise your hand" feature to be recognized. For those joining us through the conference call line, you will need to press *6 to unmute yourself.*

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

ROLL CALL:

Robinson [P] Goodloe [P] Eisenberg Knegten [P] Jubin [P] Martino [P] Hayeck [P]

DISCUSSION

❖ Continued review of 2021 budget requests

Borough Administrator, James Damato introduced Chief Financial Officer, William Hance who took the lead and did most of the work on the budget. Administrator Damato commended Mr. Hance for his fantastic work.

Environmental Commission

CFO Hance started out by explaining that this commission was allocated \$5,000 and gave an overview of the expenses from the prior year and their goals for this year. Rachel Funcheon, Chair of the Environmental Commission spoke on the proposed expenses and events the commission would like to organize if authorized, following all necessary protocols. Chair Funcheon also advised that the commission is interested in acquiring a new shed for Styrofoam recycling. Council Members made inquiries and provided comments on the commission's budget and spoke about public-private partnerships to support various community efforts.

Historical Committee

CFO Hance explained that this committee was also allocated \$5,000; last year they only spent \$3,1060. 25 Chris Vander Fliet and John Malchow were present for the budget review and spoke on the committee's goals for 2021; they would like to request \$6,000 for 2021. Amongst the goals described, they wish to digitally archive a lot of the collections the committee has and they have begun discussions on the borough's 100th anniversary. Council Members made inquiries and provided comments on the commission's budget and advocated for early planning of the 100th anniversary.

Recreation Commission

CFO Hance reviewed the budget lines that were not spent in 2020 because of the pandemic, of their \$80,000 allocated budget only \$11,246.00 was spent. Linda Monetti, Recreation Coordinator, was present for the commission's budget review. She advised that the Commission anticipated not having most of the annual events because of the ongoing pandemic. However, some of the contemplated events for 2021 are "Music in the Park" which could take place in May, pumpkin painting contest was a success in 2020 and likewise could occur again, and the 6-week summer camp. Linda reviewed the estimated expenses for each of these

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activities and compared the activities and expenditures from 2020 with those expected in 2021. Linda also reviewed items to consider if the borough wants to move forward with the summer camp, such as replacing some of the tents. Council Members made inquiries and provided comments on the commission's budget. Council Member Eisenberg Knegten suggested leaving a cushion for the possibly of resuming some of the yearly activities in case pandemic restrictions lift, such as the fall harvest, or partnering some of the activities with food truck events. The Mayor asked CFO Hance to bump up the current budget line for the harvest festival in the hopes that this event could move forward in the future. Council Member Martino inquired on getting an outline of sorts of future potential activities broken down by month, Mayor Balla stated this would also be helpful so that he could look into getting corporate sponsorships on some of these items.

The capital budget for Recreation was also reviewed, Linda explained that a repeated request from prior years has been to add shade to the playground at Mobus field, it is estimated that this would be around \$10,000.

- Additional requests for Mobus Field: adding fencing around the playground (approx. \$6,000), improving the ball field and repair fence (approx. \$1,000.), repairing cracks in the surface of the tennis and basketball courts (approx. \$50,000).
- Requests for Phillips Field: adding finishing touches to the new decking by snack shack deck (approx. \$1,500) and additional parking (estimated at \$20,000)
- Requests for Camp Endeavor: discussions on creating a community garden (approx. \$10,000), creating hiking and/or bike trails through the 9 acres (approx. \$9,000) or use this as an Eagle Scout Project and fund if needed
- Requests for Ness Property or Field by Best Lake: the commission recommends creating a dog park with chain link fencing, running water, double gate entrance, garbage cans, Porta John, Waste bag dispensers and benches (approx. \$50,000)
- Requests for Watchung Lake Walking Path: improving lighting or supplementing existing lights (approx. \$25,000)

Council Member Eisenberg Knegten commended Linda and the Recreation Commission for their efforts in these requests and thanked them for thinking about and incorporating the Ness and Camp Endeavor properties, she spoke of open space grant opportunities for some of these projects.

Office of Emergency Management

CFO Hance reviewed the departments budget and advised that there were no changes from last year; all budget lines remained the same. Council Member Jubin inquired on the Cares Act and FEMA monies that the Borough applied for and how that reflected against the budget. CFO Hance stated that the monies had not yet been received, but that as soon as they were, he would alert Mayor and Council.

Tax Assessor

CFO Hance reviewed the departments budget and advised that at the request of Mayor and Council, he removed all photocopy and computer expense line from this department and all others and consolidated them under 1 department. All photocopy expenses were moved to the Clerk's budget and the computer expenses were moved to the Administration's budget. When reviewing the professional services budget, the Mayor asked CFO Hance to speak with the Tax Assessor to determine if that budget line should be increased in case more tax appeals were expected, due to the pandemic. Administrator Damato mentioned the same and asked that the line item be increased to at least \$10,000. Council Member Martino inquired on the deadline for tax appeals, which is May 1st.

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Tax Collector

CFO and Tax Collector Hance gave an overview of all budget lines. Mayor Balla inquired if there would be any auction this year, Mr. Hance stated no properties made it to tax sales this year, however in the coming year there might be.

Legal

CFO Hance gave an overview of all budget lines and explained that the services here were for general and labor attorney costs. Last year the Borough spent about \$56,000 in labor attorney fee's and about \$174,000 in all other legal fees, he kept the same numbers for 2021. Council Member Martino inquired if those numbers included the Planning and Zoning attorney fees; they do not. CFO Hance explained that Planning and Zoning had their own budget lines for this purpose and that most of it came from escrow. Council Member Jubin inquired on the number budgeted for 2021 and asked if there were anticipated lawsuits to justify that number. Attorney Murphy explained that he could no predict or advise of any anticipated lawsuits, he also explained that not all planning board fees come out of escrow and there were other bond counsel transactions that also came from this budget line.

Mayor and Council

CFO Hance gave an overview of all budget lines, in particular the community relations budget line increased because it has all of the zoom subscriptions and the necessary equipment to be able to broadcast the council meetings and several of the supplies for all of the mailings they had as well as Memorial Day wreaths. The professional services budget line was also increased in anticipation of Council awarding a contract to rebuild the website and the possibility of a Media Consultant. Council Members Hayek and Robinson inquired on the budget expenditures of prior years since the numbers seemed a bit high, CFO Hance explained that in prior years some Council projects were taken out that budget line as well as the deer hunt that occurred in prior years. Council Member Eisenberg Knegten noted that several Members would have questions on this budget line and asked CFO Hance if he could provide a breakdown of these expenses for the last 5 years so that all Council Members could understand. Inquiries were also made on the zoom subscriptions for all committees.

Finance

CFO Hance provided an overview of all budget lines.

Clerk

CFO Hance provided an overview of the election budget line separately and afterwards went over the general Clerk budget. Mayor Balla inquired on the expenses of the Deputy Clerk and mentioned it would be appropriate to move the Deputy Clerk expenses from Administration to the Clerk budget. The Clerk mentioned that there are records that need to be digitized and inquired on how that should reflect on the budget, CFO Hance explained that the costs would come from the capital budget.

Construction Code

CFO Hance provided an overview of all budget lines. Robert LaCosta, Construction Official, was present to answer any questions. Mayor Balla inquired on the construction fees collected, CFO Hance gave an overview of the various fees collected between 2019 and 2020. The numbers for 2020 were much lower because of the pandemic. Mr. LaCosta informed Mayor and Council that the Borough currently has adopted UCC fees based upon the state's guidelines, which is relatively low in comparison to surrounding municipalities. Administrator Damato asked Mr. LaCosta to provide a recommendation of the UCC fees that the Borough should be charging.

Administration

CFO Hance provided an overview of all budget lines and reiterated that all the computer expenses from other departments went into this budget line.

Rescue Squad

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CFO Hance provided an overview of their budget request. He explained that their budget primarily consisted of the stipend. Council Member Martino inquired on an outline of sorts to help Council understand their expenses and budgetary goals.

PUBLIC PORTION

- 1) Bruce Ruck, submitted comment via chat feature, “are any of the covid expenses being reimbursed from the State or FEMA?” CFO Hance explained that about \$75,000 was applied for from the State, the Borough submitted for everything covid related, however we have yet to find out how much will be awarded to Watchung. Administrator Damato also advised that there is supposed to be a second round of relief funds that the federal government is working on.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business the meeting ended at 10:25 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next regular meeting of the Mayor and Council will be held on Thursday, February 18, 2021 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Edith G. Gil
Borough Clerk