

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG  
MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

**SPECIAL MEETING  
JANUARY 8, 2022 – 8:30 A.M.**

***[THIS MEETING WAS HELD IN PERSON & BROADCASTED VIA ZOOM]***

**MAYOR'S STATEMENT:** Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM 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 in person and virtually for all parties. Public Comments will be accepted through zoom or by email to the Borough Clerk. For those joining through Zoom, please note that upon arrival you are automatically muted. If you wish to speak during the public portion, you will need to click on the “raise your hand” feature. For those joining us through the conference call line, you will need to press \*6 to unmute yourself. 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 the Special Meeting Notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, the Star Ledger, posted at Borough Hall and on the Borough’s website.”*

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

**ROLL CALL:**

Jubin [ P ]   Robinson [ P ]   Martino [ P ]   Hayeck [ P ]   Dahl [ P ]   Ead [ P ]

**DISCUSSION**

❖ 2022 Budget Requests from Various Departments.

Appearing from the Construction Department was Robert LaCosta, Construction Official, who provided an overview of the department’s requests. Councilmember Martino asked for an explanation of the hierarchy of the Construction Department. Mr. LaCosta explained the office process in detail and noted that the office is a self-sustaining department.

Council President Jubin inquired on the vehicles the department uses for inspections and also asked when was the last time the permit fees were reviewed. Mr. LaCosta noted the permit fees were review last year and realized they have not been updated in quite some time and are relatively low compared to other municipalities. He also stated it is better if the new fees are established in the beginning of a new quarter.

Administrator Damato commented that a small electric vehicle for the inspectors to use was added to the capital budget. Mr. LaCosta advised there is limited jurisdiction on residential and more leeway on the commercial fees in relation to the fire inspectors’ role. Councilmember Robinson questioned if there was a larger increase in revenue this year. CFO Bill Hance stated that last year’s revenue was about \$110,000.00 and this year was about \$300,000.00 collected. Councilmember Robinson questioned if electronic applications are mandatory and Mr. LaCosta advised they are not. Councilmember Robinson also mentioned there are multiple grants and incentives available for the electric vehicles. Lastly, Councilmember Martino suggested that the information from the Department of Community Affairs on upcoming changes be placed on the Boroughs website.

Appearing for the Police Department was Chief Hart and Brian Townley who presented the departments 2022 requests.

Chief Hart started by noting that the 2022 operating budget had a \$2,000.00 difference from last year which included training and the purchase of swift water vests. Brian Townley proceeded to discuss items of the operating budget in great detail. He noted the line item for vehicles and stated that they are waiting on

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reimbursement for damaged vehicles. Mayor Balla asked for clarification on the Rodgers group maintenance program. Chief Hart explained that the Rodgers group provides a service that keeps the departments policies up to date. He clarified that when new policies are added from the Attorney General's Office and/or updates arise from the Somerset County Prosecutors Office that this data is sent to the Rodgers Group and they in turn rewrite their policy to include the updates and as a result Watchung PD follows Best Practices in the State.

Chief Hart further discussed the vehicles the department is looking to replace. He advised the two vehicles ordered from last year's budget were still not here and the backlog of cars is a concern. Chief Hart stated the Power DMS training system has to do with anything training related and the officers electronically sign off on policies that are sent to them. Chief Hart discussed possibly imposing charges for some of the OPRA requests received. Under the Police Department budget, the pension and healthcare costs are in two separate line items in the budget. Chief Hart discussed the capital expenditures for the Police Department. He noted the department is in need of 33 new handguns totalling an estimated cost of \$12,338.00. Mr. Hance explained in detail how the purchasing process works in this regard.

Mayor Balla called for a 5-minute recess.  
Mayor Balla called the meeting back in session at 10:47 A.M.

Administrator James Damato reviewed the Buildings and Grounds and Roads budgets. He advised these two budgets have been fairly consistent from year to year but the road paving projects are not listed in this budget overview. He stated the road paving projects cause the most questions and inquiries. Mr. Damato discussed the new guidance for recovery funds, which allows the use of storm water repairs. He also mentioned that PARSA stepped in when the Borough could not obtain a C2 wastewater engineer license operator and going forward would like to be compensated for their services. He suggested reviewing the agreement and mentioned the cost is about \$13,000.00 for PARSA to maintain, inspect and add the chemicals at the treatment pump stations.

CFO Bill Hance proceeded to provide a further breakdown of the Buildings and Grounds and Engineering budgets and provided Council with an overview in comparison to last year.

Councilmember Martino inquired about the \$50,000.00 allotted to the Traffic and Beautification budget. Mr. Hance stated it is a capital ordinance with about \$42,000.00 left for expenditure. Mr. Hance advised there is \$46,000.00 left in the tree bank fund.

Administrator Damato mentioned that Camp Endeavor and the Ness Property were not shown in this part of the budget. He advised Council they can move forward with some type of improvement for Camp Endeavor however, the money would have to be appropriated separate and apart from this budget. He also explained that there was asbestos found which will need to be remediated before the buildings are demolished over at Ness. Mayor Balla suggested that the asbestos removal and the demolition of the buildings be factored into the budget.

CFO Bill Hance spoke on the capital budget projections from notes of the previous Public Works Director. He also mentioned the Green Team was looking into possible grants for these the improvement after the Borough does an energy audit of all the facilities. Administrator Damato also suggested that the Fire House and Texier House Museum roofs be looked into for repairs.

CFO Hance continued with the review of the Roads budget. He mentioned that the salaries for the Department of Public Works employees are now listed here.

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Mayor Balla inquired on the training requirements and Administrator Damato advised all employees are properly trained and required to hold a CDL license with additional training through the Joint Insurance Fund.

CFO Hance discussed line items regarding the sewer budget in detail. Administrator Damato also mentioned a claim for damages was submitted to Selective Insurance in the amount of \$35,000.00 of which only \$10,000.00 was reimbursed. He also advised the remainder will be submitted to FEMA in hopes for reimbursement sometime soon.

CFO Hance proceeded to discuss line items of the Mayor and Council budget, the Administration budget, the Clerk and the elections budget. He reviewed line items for copying fees, computer expenses, advertising costs, membership dues, general code updates, etc. Councilmember Robinson questioned if the general code updates are on an annual basis. Clerk Gil explained this process. Council President Jubin suggested possibly moving offices towards more electronic means of responding and maintaining documents. Clerk Gil discussed the process of scanning documents throughout the different departments. CFO Hance concluded by discussing the line items of the Finance Department's budget.

**PUBLIC PORTION**

No one provided comments.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 12:41 PM to the Call of the Chair. The next meeting of the Mayor and Council will be a Special Meeting held on Saturday, January 15, 2021 at 8:30 A.M.

Submitted by:

Regina Angelo  
Deputy Clerk