

Borough of Palmyra
2024 Budget Workshop Meeting Minutes
8:30 am Saturday, April 6th, 2024

Mayor Tait called the budget workshop meeting to order at 8:33 am.

Mayor Tait requested a roll call:

At the call of the roll:

Present: Dr. Laura Cloud, Ms. Natasha Latimore, Mr. John Liebe, Ms. Jessica O'Connor, President Timothy Howard, Mayor Gina Ragomo Tait

Absent: Mrs. Michelle McCann

The pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mayor Tait then read the following open public meetings statement into the record:

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS STATEMENT

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq. Public Notice of this meeting been given by the Municipal Clerk in the following manner:

- Posting written notice on the official bulletin board at the Palmyra Borough Hall on January 14th, 2024.
- Mailing written notice to the Burlington County Times, and the Courier Post Newspaper on January 14th, 2024.
- Notice to All Council Members.

BUDGET WORKSESSION

Mr. Gural stated he wanted to begin by looking at the budget model, he noted that with the current appropriations he sent earlier we are currently looking at a tax increase of 4.471 cents or 3.32 % \$68.50 to the average homeowner. Mr. Gural indicated that we have a lot of challenges this year including sewer. Mr. Gural stated that most of our time would be spent on the budget appropriations document. Mr. Gural noted that Ms. Condo was able to negotiate a lower price for the phone system. Mr. Gural noted he would skip multiple items unless a question or concern arose regarding an item. Mr. Gural explained the color coding of various line items and column headings.

General Administration

Mr. Gural noted the conversations regarding a Social Media Coordinator previously had and included \$6,240.00 in the line item for the salary. Mr. Gural stated this position would go together with the new website which is a capital budget item. Mr. Gural noted the increase in other professional services noting that the

contract with Kaye Personnel is \$18,200.00 for the remainder of the year, Kaye Personnel is the temp service hired as we continue looking for a Deputy Clerk.

Mayor & Council Miscellaneous

Mr. Gural indicated he originally budgeted \$5,000.00 in the Public Relations line for the newsletter, welcome packets, and trash collection /social media efforts, however after giving it additional consideration it was changed and increased to \$7,500.00.

Borough Clerk

Mr. Gural stated that we have the temp clerk, but that contract will end, and we need to hire a Deputy Clerk, so he put funding in the line item in case we hire that additional person.

Elections

Mr. Gural indicated no significant changes in this section.

Financial Administration

Mr. Gural indicated no significant changes in this section.

Audit Services

Mr. Gural indicated no significant changes in this section. Mr. Gural noted this will be Mr. Nehilla last year with us as he will be retiring.

Collection of Taxes

Mr. Gural noted that in collection of taxes other expenses there is a slight increase budgeted for lien foreclosure sale proceedings. Mr. Gural explained the \$50,000.00 item as a potential bid on a property which may go to tax sale that we cannot allow to go to tax sale. Mr. Gural indicated the funding is appropriated, just in case that happens, and if not, it will go back to surplus.

Assessment of Taxes

Mr. Gural indicated no significant changes in this section.

Legal Services & Costs

Mr. Gural indicated the big increase is the legal cost for Fair Share Housing, we budgeted \$25,000.00 last year but spent \$123,992.14. We have reached a settlement with Fair Share Housing, but we don't know if it is over, so we budgeted \$20,000.00.

Engineering Services

Mr. Gural indicated this item increased due to new stormwater management procedures that need to be implemented.

Grants & Planning

Mr. Gural indicated we blow this budget every year, it's up due to applying to grants and cost to prepare two new redevelopment plans.

Land Use

Mr. Gural indicated no significant changes in this section.

Construction Code Official

Mr. Gural indicated we still need a TACO for the construction Office and an additional Building Inspector for the Rt.73 building inspections. Funding for both is included in the salary lines.

Code Enforcement

Mr. Gural indicated no significant changes in this section.

Insurance

Mr. Gural indicated insurance is out of control. There is a twenty percent increase, this included the cost for Burlington County Joint Insurance Fund.

Unemployment Insurances

Mr. Gural indicated no significant changes in this section.

Police Department

Mr. Gural noted the allocations for special officers, an additional police clerk, sign-on bonuses etc. Mr. Gural indicated we currently have 15 officers, but the salary line included funding for 17 officers for the remainder of the year. (driven by Collective Bargaining Agreement)

School Crossing Guards

Mr. Gural noted the reduction in the crossing guards' salaries, stating that we are shorthand but still actively seeking crossing guards.

Emergency Management

Mr. Gural indicated no significant changes in this section.

Aid to Volunteer Fire Company

Mr. Gural indicated the request is for \$25,000.00 up \$2,500.00 for last year. Everyone is aware of the issues regarding the floor.

Aid to Volunteer Ambulance Company

Mr. Gural stated the ambulance squad is struggling and they have requested the Borough take over the company and make an additional department. Mr. Gural noted the increase of the usual \$3,500.00 and an additional \$3,500.00 in case it becomes a new department. The public safety committee will be meeting with them next week and additional information will follow.

Fire Department

Mr. Gural stated the \$78,000.00 represents two stipend firefighters to work with the volunteers, Monday thru Friday, for the remainder of the year. Mr. Stokers stated it is a great culture that is developing which he hopes continues and grows.

Uniform Fire Safety

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Borough Prosecutor

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Streets & Roads – Public Works

Mr. Gural indicated this is a little more complicated, as we are looking for a way to separate the responsibilities of public works operations and trash collections. Mr. Gural noted that all public works employees are listed here, however portions of some of the salaries are being placed in solid waste collections. Mr. Gural noted the additional staffing which will be required once we go into full swing with trash collection. Mr. Gural stated we have already hired one due to be appointed at the next meeting.

Solid Waste Collection

Mr. Gural explained the various changes coming to trash collection. Mr. Gural explained the need for additional personnel and included funding for those potential new hires. Mr. Gural noted the cost of the new trash application which costs \$25,000.00. Mr. Gural and Ms. Condo noted the difference in the cost of workers compensation insurance premiums for public works employees and trash collection employees.

Mr. Gural indicated we are budgeting \$372, 443.00 for Republic for the remainder of the year which is a savings of \$159,356.00.

Public Buildings and Grounds

Mr. Gural indicated the budget reflects the salaries of the community center/field staff and the janitorial/maintenance staff. Mr. Gural noted that some of the salaries are offset by the recreation trust fund. Mr. Gural noted the increase in the operating expenses of the section mostly due to the upkeep and repairs to our parks and playgrounds.

Shade Tree

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Vehicle Maintenance

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Condominium Services Law

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Board of Health

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Animal Control

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Park & Recreation

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Education Functions -Aid to Library

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Community Youth Recreation Donations

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Contribution to Riverfront Senior Program

Mr. Gural noted the \$7,500.00 donation to the newly re-established program for the seniors. Mr. Gural noted the three-year agreement we have with the program.

Accumulated Sick Leave Compensation

Mr. Gural indicated the line is used to pay people when they retire for unused sick and vacation time.

Celebration of Public Events

Mr. Gural explained \$5,000.00 budgeted here for the community garden. Mr. Gural noted the grant we received for \$14,000.00 to build and upkeep the community garden behind the community center and for maintenance at the community garden at the Cove.

Utility Expenses & Bulk Purchases

Mr. Gural indicated the changes in telephone expenses. Mr. Gural explained our previous provider went out of business; new vendor costs are significantly higher even though Ms. Condo was able to get it reduced \$10,000.00.

Gasoline

There was discussion regarding the rising costs. Mr. Gural noted that currently there is really nothing we can do regarding the costs.

Landfill and Solid Waste Disposal

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Statutory Expenditures

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

LOSAP

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes. Great program for our volunteer firefighters.

Municipal Court

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Public Defender

Mr. Gural indicated there are no significant changes.

Mr. Gural explained the issues regarding the sewer utility. Mr. Gural stated we have used all the surplus in the sewer utility. Mr. Gural noted the need to transfer \$50,000.00 from the current fund surplus to the sewer utility to balance this budget. Mr. Gural stated that there is going to be a conversation regarding increasing the sewer utilities.

Mr. Gural stated that \$150,000.00 was also appropriate for capital improvements, used for 5% down payments of capital purchases.

Mr. Gural requested the governing body consider a 3% across the board increase for all employees and not the 2% increase given in the past, as the cost of living has risen a lot. Mr. Gural explained that in the past the

council had given a 4% increase but in recent years due to many factors they have given a 2% increase. Mr. Gural stated that he felt the 3% increase was appropriate now. There was discussion and Mr. Gural noted that that increase difference amounts to just over \$11,000.00.

Sewer

Mr. Gural explained what was done to reduce the sewer operating budget, noting that it is \$108,000.00 less than last year. Mr. Gural noted that the budget is still \$50,000.00 short of what is needed. Mr. Gural again explained the need to increase the sewer utility revenue. Mr. Gural stated that at the next meeting we will be introducing a sewer bond ordinance to obtain the funding to complete the Berkley Avenue pump station improvements as well as some other capital improvements to the sewer plant. Mr. Gural noted the 4.6% reduction to the sewer budget.

Mr. Gural stated that with the cuts we spoke about and the few new additions the new budget model shows an increase of 3.7 cents or 2.77% and a \$57.14 increase to the average homeowner. Mr. Gural explained the largest sources of revenue are the pilot, state aid and surplus. Mr. Gural explained the pilot agreement with the redeveloper. Mr. Gural explained the surplus budget and how it was applied to the budget. Mr. Gural explained that expenses and appropriations are up more than a \$57.00 increase will handle and because we have surplus and a pilot, we are able to stabilize our tax rate.

Mayor Tait noted an email she just received indicating that the Board of Education was successful with their appeal to the State regarding their reduction in state aid.

Mr. Gural explained the surplus balance over the various years. Mr. Gural proposed the \$50,000.00 for potential tax sale property and the cost of the additional 1% across the board increase come from surplus therefore not affecting the tax rate increase. After discussion, the Council agreed.

Mayor Tait stated we would take a 5-minute break.

Mayor Tait requested a motion to suspend for a 5-minute break at 10:00 am

President Howard made a motion to suspend for a 5-minute break. Dr. Cloud second the motion.

All voted in favor of the motion.

Mayor Tait requested a motion to reopen the workshop. Mr. Liebe made a motion to reopen the workshop.

Ms. Latimore second the motion

All voted in favor of the motion.

Capital Improvements

Mr. Gural explained the Capital budget and how some items are being funded. Mr. Gural noted the various items being considered in 2024, redevelopment efforts, computer system hardware, codification of ordinances,

vehicle for maintenance, records storage building, website improvements. Mr. Gural indicated that the security system, cameras on poles around town in parks don't work properly and need to be upgraded/improved.

Mayor Tait indicated the Fire Company came and wanted to speak with the council regarding the required floor improvements. Mr. Gural indicated that we cannot include an item in the capital budget for something that we do not own. Mr. Nehilla indicated he felt it would have to be included in the budget. There was discussion regarding the repairs and how the Borough could help if possible. The fire company was called out to a fire and the council did not have the benefit of being able to talk with them. Ms. Condo indicated that monies given to the Fire Company had to be used for equipment, explaining the reason for the lease with the company to house our equipment. Mr. Gural stated that if we budgeted some portion of the need, we would have to increase the lease due to the restrictions on donations. There was discussion regarding how to fund any increase and it was decided that it would have to come from surplus so as not to affect the taxpayer. Ms. Condo suggested the Borough let them borrow the money and repay it over time. After much discussion it was decided to put \$25,000.00 in the budget contingent upon further discussion, take it from surplus, and have a discussion later as to how if at all it would be given.

Mr. Gural stated we have now used 2 million seven hundred thousand from surplus.

Reserve for uncollected taxes.

Mr. Gural indicated the reserve for uncollected taxes is \$681,915.18 which when added to the budget makes our budget total \$11,006,584.19. Mr. Gural again noted the use of \$2,000,700.00 million dollars from surplus to offset the tax levy. Mr. Gural stated the average home is assessed at \$148,798.50 and with that assessment the average homeowner would pay \$57.14 or 1.42407% or 3.707 cents on the tax rate.

Mr. Gural noted the total General current fund appropriations are 10,324,669.00. Mr. Gural noted the Reserve for uncollected taxes is \$681,915.18 making the total budget \$11,006,584.18.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Tait asked for a motion to open for Public Comment. President Howard made a motion to open the public portion for comments. Ma. Latimore second the motion

All members present voted in favor of the motion.

Ms. Veitenheimer- Rowland Street – Ms. Veitenheimer asked about the funding for the Senior Program. Ms. Veitenheimer stated the senior program is collecting dues so why are they getting all this funding. Mayor Tait stated an agreement was signed with the Riverfront Senior program and they asked for funding due to start-up cost and we approved it, if you have questions regarding why they are collecting dues or how that money is being spent you would need to ask the senior program. Ms. Veitenheimer also asked about the Community Gardens and why if they received a grant they need the additional funding. Mr. Gural indicated the grant was

for \$14,000.00 and the funding is for additional items and upkeep of the garden. Ms. Veitenheimer asked how the sewer rate increase would affect seniors. Mayor Tait indicated that currently that is unknown.

Dr. Cloud asked if the maintenance of the turf would be paid for from the recreational facilities appropriations from the redeveloper. Mr. Gural indicated S J Turf does the natural fields and grooming comes from the budget.

No one else from the public wishing to be heard, President Howard made a motion to close the public portion. Dr. Cloud second the motion.

All members present voted in favor of the motion.

The Mayor and Council thanked Mr. Gural for all his efforts in getting the budget and documents prepared for the workshop meeting.

Mayor Tait read and asked for a motion to approve the following resolutions:

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution 2024- 110 Resolution Certifying Compliance of the Governing Body with the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

President Howard made a motion to approve Resolution 2024-110. Mr. Liebe seconded the motion.

At the call of the roll, the vote was:

AYES: Dr. Cloud, Ms. Latimore, Mr. Liebe, Ms. O'Connor, President Howard

NAYES: None

Resolution 2024-110 was approved.

Resolution 2024- 111 Resolution Authorizing the Introduction of the 2024 Budget of the Borough of Palmyra.
(Public hearing to be held May 6th, 2024)

President Howard made a motion to approve Resolution 2024-111. Mr. Liebe seconded the motion.

At the call of the roll, the vote was:

AYES: Dr. Cloud, Ms. Latimore, Mr. Liebe, Ms. O'Connor, President Howard

NAYES: None

Resolution 2024-111 was approved.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Tait requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. President Howard made a motion to adjourn the Meeting. Ms. Latimore second the motion.

All members present voted in favor of the motion.

Meeting adjourned at 11:28 AM

Doretha R Jackson, RMC

Municipal Clerk

Approved: May 6, 2024