

SPECIAL MEETING - OPEN SESSION

Mayor Robert Patten called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and read the Open Public Meetings Act statement which stated that adequate notice and posting of the meeting had taken place in accordance with the requirements of P.L. 1975, Chapter 231.

The flag salute was followed by the roll call.

ROLL CALL

	PRESENT	ABSENT
<i>Mayor Patten</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Harinxma</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Quattrone</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Rosenberg</i>		✓
<i>Councilmember Schneider</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Sikorski</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Thompson</i>	✓	

Also in attendance: Candace Gallagher, Borough Clerk/Administrator, and George Lang, Chief Financial Officer.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Upon motion by Councilman Sikorski, seconded by Councilman Thompson, the agenda was approved as submitted.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Patten opened the floor for public comment.

Eugene Sarafin, 600-628 South Main Street, stated that the Mayor and Council are stealing from the taxpayers by not undertaking revaluation until ordered by the county to do so, and by not considering consolidation "until the governor says we have to." He claimed that the Borough is using water and sewer funds to support the budget and questioned why the State would have given us Extraordinary Aid.

No one else came forward and the floor was closed.

RESOLUTION 2006-171, AMENDING THE 2006 BUDGET

Ms. Gallagher reviewed and read aloud and in full Resolution 2006-171, amending the 2006 budget to include \$150,000 awarded to the Borough in Extraordinary Aid and to make a few minor (and offsetting) adjustments to certain revenues and expenses.

The Resolution was moved by Councilman Thompson and seconded by Council President Schneider.

Roll call: Councilmembers Harinxma, Quattrone, Schneider, Sikorski and Thompson voted yes.

Resolution adopted, 5-0.

RESOLUTION 2006-171 AMENDING THE 2006 BUDGET
(included at end of these 7/31/06 minutes)

RESOLUTION 2006-172, ADOPTING THE 2006 BUDGET

Ms. Gallagher recommended the adoption at this time of the 2006 budget, noting that the Borough is facing a cash flow crisis caused by the delay in getting tax bills out. This budget, she said, will call for a municipal tax increase of 20.4 cents, for a municipal tax rate of \$1.329.

Resolution 2006-172 was moved by Councilmember Harinxma, seconded by Councilman Thompson.

Mayor Patten stated that this budget reinforces the need for property tax reform and school budget reform. "We will have to revisit issues previously discussed," he said, "and take steps we thought too severe a few months ago." He said that the first would be to ask our Fire Department to work with the First Aid Squad to handle emergency services and reduce our reliance on MONOC and the associated expense. He also suggested that Council forego their own salaries in 2007 to save a penny on the tax rate. "We will do our part," he said, "to reduce increases in our 20% of the total tax bill. The other 80% is made up of school and county taxes. We must do what we can with our own portion, and we have been doing that diligently."

Mayor Patten went on to say that, if Council is open to considering the concept of consolidating police services with East Windsor Township, provided that benefits for both towns could be identified, "then we can resume the talks that began a few months ago." While this will not affect this year's budget, he said, "it will be a start." He asked Council for their affirmation that they are open to this, if benefits were identified for both towns. "If I can't get that from Council," he said, "there will be no further discussions with East Windsor Township."

Councilman Sikorski expressed optimism that Gov. Corzine's program, once in place, will alleviate the situation we face today. He said that he was disappointed that the Borough did not receive at least as much Extraordinary Aid as was granted last year (\$280,000). Borough residents will face a large tax increase this year, including a six- to eight-cent increase in county taxes and a 14- to 16-cent increase in school taxes. He added that the Borough Council and the Administrator have done all they can to keep taxes in line, and would like to discuss the Mayor's comments regarding consolidation of police services following action on the budget.

Councilman Quattrone stated, "if you read our Extraordinary Aid application, there is only one reason we didn't get what we asked for – there must be no money to give. I thought the State would come through better. We do have a light at the end of the tunnel, and I think we're quickly approaching it." Mr. Quattrone went on to say that property taxes must be addressed at the State level, and many other states are "getting better at it." He feels that Gov. Corzine is on the right path, and needs to find cooperation, which has been difficult. He thanked Ms. Gallagher for her work on the Borough's Extraordinary Aid application.

Councilman Thompson stated, "our budget is a good example of 'status quo.' We know what our services are and we like them." One option, he said, is to accept that this is the level of taxes that we are going to see in Hightstown, with incremental increases each year. Another option is to find another way to raise taxes other than through property taxes (i.e., income taxes). It is important, he said, to gain a better understanding of what the service level and true cost savings would be to outsource some of our services. "We have not explored the alternatives or asked for a service level agreement from another community," he said. Regarding police services, Mr. Thompson stated that he felt that there was

a clear consensus among Council to pursue and investigate sharing those services, and we haven't done that. He encouraged the Mayoral candidates to do that.

At this time, the roll was called for adoption of the 2006 budget.

Roll call: Councilmembers Harinxma, Quattrone, Schneider, and Thompson voted yes. Councilman Sikorski voted no.

Resolution adopted, 4-1.

RESOLUTION 2006-172 ADOPTING THE 2006 BUDGET
(included at end of these 7/31/06 minutes)

Councilman Sikorski asked if it is appropriate to say at this time that Council wishes for him and Mayor Patten to continue talks with East Windsor Township regarding consolidation of police services. Council President Schneider stated that we have an adopted Resolution that still stands. Mayor Patten suggested that we need another Resolution with more specific language, and added that this request is coming not from him, but from Mayor Mironov. Her understanding, he said, is that there is no consensus, and she wants to know that Council is "open to considering" consolidation of police services with East Windsor Township if benefits of doing so can be identified for both towns. He will review minutes from the prior discussion to determine if something more specific is needed.

Upon motion by Councilman Thompson, seconded by Councilman Quattrone and unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candace B. Gallagher, RMC
Borough Clerk