

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Hightstown Borough Council**  
**Budget Workshop Meeting**  
**February 25, 2012**  
**6:30 pm**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Kirson at 6:34 pm and he read the Open Public Meetings Act statement which stated, "Adequate notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, pursuant to Public Law 1975, Chapter 231. Said notice was sent to the *Trenton Times* and the *Windsor-Hights Herald*, and is posted in the Borough Clerk's office."

The Flag Salute was followed by roll call.

	PRESENT	ABSENT
<i>Councilmember Bibens</i>		✓
<i>Councilmember Bluth</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Doran</i>		✓
<i>Councilmember Quattrone</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Thibault</i>		✓
<i>Councilmember Woods</i>	✓	
<i>Mayor Kirson</i>	✓	

Also in attendance: Debra Sopronyi, Borough Clerk; Michael Theokas, Borough Administrator; George Lang, CFO; William Searing, AWWTP Superintendent; Ken Lewis, Public Works Superintendent; Larry Blake, Water Plant Operator; Larry VanKirk, Fire Chief; and Bill Lecorchick, First Aid Captain.

Councilmember Woods moved the agenda for approval, Council President Quattrone seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Council members Bluth, Quattrone, Thibault, and Mayor Kirson voted yes.

Agenda Approved, 6-0

Mayor Kirson opened the Public Comment Period and the following individuals spoke:

Scott Caster, 12 Clover Lane – offered good luck to the Council with the budget; noted the mission appears to be status quo but Council should find ways to lower taxes.

Water Sikorski, 326 N. Main Street – commented that it is possible to reduce taxes without reducing services, sub-committees have done it in the past; He recommended that Council take a look at shared services and union contract negotiations; he noted that Senior Citizens have lost their rebates and Retirees no longer receive cost of living adjustments.

There being no further comments, Mayor Kirson closed the public comment period.

### **Budget Discussion**

Mayor Kirson reviewed that following the first budget meeting, the budget showed a 3% increase.

George Lang, Chief Finance Officer, noted that the upcoming bond ordinance will require \$25,000 and there is a need to budget for engineering services performed for the project. There is a onetime revenue of approximately \$50,000 from Hurricane Sandy that can be used for these expenses making it a wash. He noted that he has yet to address the Police Director's cuts, but they have no significant impact on the budget.

There was discussion regarding the re-assessment and the average value of properties in the Borough. With reduced values, the tax increase equals about 1 cent, in order to reduce taxes it would be necessary to reduce the budget by a minimum of approximately \$130,000.

Mr. Theokas advised that the intent is to introduce the budget on March 18<sup>th</sup> and adopt it at the second meeting in April. If adjustments to the budget are necessary, they can be made between the introduction and adoption.

## **Advance Wastewater Treatment Plant**

Mr. Theokas advised that this budget is contingent on the bid results for the polymer and sludge cake disposal.

Mr. Searing noted that the electric cost at the plant will be reduced by \$20,000 but there is an increase of \$5,000 for gas and diesel fuel; a \$35,000 increase for polymer purchases; sludge disposal cost is unknown but he has budgeted \$135,000 as an estimated cost. He also recommended a \$5.00 increase in septic disposal fees and a \$3.00 increase in gray water disposal fees. There was discussion regarding anticipated revenues and increased costs; sludge press and sludge removal; the possibility of recycling the sludge; and DEP permit restrictions and compliance. He also informed Council that within five years there will be a requirement for DEP compliance for UV disinfection.

Mr. Searing stated that money is available from Hurricane Sandy for his gate and generators; he is waiting for the application.

Mayor Kirson noted that \$127,000 in the budget is to cover payments for the 2011 bond improvements.

There was discussion regarding chemical cost and usage, the actual cost of taking in gray water and septic, and the impact on residents rates if the process of receiving septic and gray water was to be eliminated.

## **Water Plant**

Mr. Blake noted that he has submitted a flat budget on the hopes that creative revenue building will assist with expenses. Mr. Blake then stated that when established, the revenues from septic and gray water were to be allocated toward capital improvements and debt service, but inquired as to where it was actually going.

Mayor Kirson explained how the budget works and revenues vs. expenses. Mr. Theokas noted that the funds do go toward debt. There was additional discussion.

## **Public Works Department**

Mr. Lewis reviewed the hand-out given to Council detailing his budget, and advised that his budget is flat with the exception of the rent being paid on the Lucas property for the temporary Police facilities. He noted that the Fire Department is donating radios to Public Works and that the administrative costs include his salary. Pursuant to an inquiry of Council, he advised that his hours are not allocated to specific jobs due to the nature of his position.

There was discussion regarding salaries and contracts, vehicle maintenance costs, and staffing.

Mayor Kirson reviewed the surplus of other municipalities in comparison to the Borough and how actual cost cannot be predicted.

Discussion then continued regarding equipment and revenue generated from the shared services agreement with Roosevelt for trash removal.

## **Fire Department**

Fire Chief Larry Van Kirk advised Council that there is a request for a budget increase due to apparatus repairs that are needed on the ladder truck and maintenance, member training, equipment needs, device and equipment testing requirements, and turn out gear. He continued that if Council would budget \$75,000 for capital purchases to include the turn-out gear and air packs, the budget could be reduced by those costs, giving a flat budget for 2013..

There was discussion regarding the expiration date and cost of turn out gear and the lack of needs for boots, gloves, hoods and helmets. Chief Van Kirk noted that there is a significant increase in the cost for vehicle maintenance because the vehicles are older, but the ladder truck will be in good shape with new hydraulics. He also noted that they had an ISO Classification inspection last year and it went well.

## **First Aid**

Captain Bill Lecorchick stated that there have been a lot of changes at the First Aid Squad and that they are requesting a budget of \$42,500; they rely heavily on donations and hall rentals. There are 17 new members that must be trained and

outfitted, and they need assistance with the training costs; the cost for a baseline certification is \$1,300. He noted that they have opened their doors to the community for hall use for various meetings and now they are occupied most every night and weekend. Captain Lecorchick advised that a vehicle has been donated to the squad and they have had it repaired for use; donations have dropped and they are applying for grants.

There was discussion regarding membership, expiration of equipment and the age of vehicles.

Council then went back to general discussion regarding the budget noting that the increase would be approximately \$80.00 per household and how much of the \$143,000 budget increase is non-discretionary or statutory. Mr. Lang noted that salary increases are not a big issue at 2%; health insurance costs have increased 8.5%, which is not excessive considering the rate increases in the open market.

There was additional discussion regarding opportunities to increase revenue, health benefit options and the impact on future budgets, and the state budget and possible sequester.

Mr. Theokas then reviewed the capital needs for 2013 which includes the Fire Department, Greenway Walking Bridge, First Aid, Borough Hall, Advance Waste Water Treatment Plant, Water Plant and Public Works, noting that it should be easily covered with the exception of subsidizing radio upgrade needs.

Councilmember Bluth moved to adjourn at 8:27 pm, Councilmember Woods seconded. All ayes.

Respectfully Submitted,

Debra L. Sopronyi, RMC  
Borough Clerk