

**MINUTES OF THE BUDGET MEETING OF THE MAYOR AND COMMITTEE OF THE
TOWNSHIP OF WANTAGE, HELD AT THE WANTAGE TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL
BUILDING, 888 STATE HIGHWAY 23, WANTAGE, N.J.
ON THE DATE OF FEBRUARY 3, 2011**

Mayor DeBoer called the meeting to order, and requested the Clerk to call the roll. Upon roll call, the following members of the governing body were present: Mayor DeBoer, Committeeman Bassani, and Committeeman Gaechter. The following member was absent: None. Also present: CFO Michelle La Starza, Administrator Jim Doherty

Mayor DeBoer stated, "This meeting is being held in compliance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, Public Laws 1975, Chapter 231. It has been properly noticed and posted to the public, and certified by the Clerk."

FLAG SALUTE

Mayor DeBoer invited all persons present to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag.

Recommendation for Action: Interim Staffing of Court Offices

Mr. Doherty presented the Judge's recommendation for interim staffing of the court offices.

Mr. Gaechter moved to hire Rachel Nestel as a part time temporary clerk typist in the court office for the time period February 4 – March 15, 2011, at a rate of \$10 per hour for up to 20 hours per week. Mr. Bassani seconded the motion. Upon roll call,

Ayes: Bassani, Gaechter, DeBoer **Nays:** None **Absent:** None **Abstain:** None

Revenue Projections

Chief Finance Officer Michelle La Starza reviewed the projected revenues for 2011 with the members of the governing body, including fund balance (surplus) figures. Ms. La Starza explained that today's projections are based on an expectation of receiving the same amount of State Aid in 2011 compared with 2010. The State of New Jersey will not be releasing that information for several months yet, and once those figures are known, it may become necessary to revisit the budget plan.

Discussion turned to a local Tax Impact Projection for 2011. Based on the anticipated revenues and proposed spending plan scenario as it exists today, the average Wantage Township taxpayer would see about a \$26 increase in their tax burden in 2011.

Mr. Gaechter pointed out that approximately half of this increase can be attributable to the Reserve For Uncollected Taxes, a formula-driven non-spending line item over which the governing body has no control.

The members of the governing body agreed to continue their review of the proposed Appropriations for 2011 between now and Budget introduction, to consider further potential cost reductions that would translate into additional tax savings for taxpayers.

OPEN PUBLIC SESSION

Mayor DeBoer opened the meeting to the public for any questions or comments.

William Gettler, Gemmer Road, asked if Property Maintenance Fees are included as a revenue within the municipal budget.

Ms. La Starza responded that these fees are treated as a non-budget revenue item.

Mr. Gettler suggested not assessing a local Open Space Tax in 2011.

Mr. Gettler suggested increasing the Tax Collection rate being utilized in the Township's calculations as a means by which to reduce the Reserve for Uncollected Taxes and by extension, the local tax burden.

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Mr. Doherty stated that the danger in doing this would involve the possibility that the Township does not match the higher tax collection rate being predicted for 2011, which would then further deplete the already low Surplus figures of the Township.

The governing body agreed to give due consideration to Mr. Gettler's suggestion.

Mr. Gettler inquired regarding the status of the Township's salt supply.

Mr. Doherty responded that the supply is low, but that DPW Supervisor Bob Wagner is taking necessary steps to secure additional supply for upcoming needs. General discussion of winter storm response activities and strategies took place at this time.

Ann Smulewicz, Route 23, expressed the opinion that the late fee penalties currently assessed by Wantage Township for non-payment of taxes is not fair.

General discussion took place regarding the impact of non-payment of taxes on the tax burden of the rest of the taxpayers.

Ms. Smulewicz stated that she would appreciate an update presentation from a member of the Land Use Board, as suggested by Mr. Bassani earlier in the meeting, to update the governing body and the public on current and anticipated applications before that board.

Ms. Smulewicz inquired regarding the status of the governing body's review of the staffing needs in the Land Use office. Mayor DeBoer informed that no decisions had yet been made on that matter.

Ms. Smulewicz expressed unhappiness with actions taken by a member of the public at the January 27 meeting, categorizing those actions as being "bullying".

As there was no one else from the public who wished to address the Committee, Mayor DeBoer closed the meeting to the public.

Mr. Bassani reported that he attended a recent meeting between the Sussex Technical School Administration and Board members, and Superintendents/Board members of various High Schools within the County, for the purpose of discussing the concern over the Technical School's tuition fee. Mr. Bassani reported that it was his impression from this meeting that the Technical School has no intention of changing its position, and appears to be taking the position of "too bad for you" with respect to the tax burden it is passing on to the other high schools by their actions.

As there was no further business to discuss, Mr. Bassani moved to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Gaechter seconded the motion. Upon roll call,

Ayes: Bassani, Gaechter, DeBoer **Nays:** None **Absent:** None **Abstain:** None

Mayor DeBoer declared this meeting to be adjourned.

James R. Doherty, Administrator/Clerk