

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE MAYOR AND COMMITTEE OF THE TOWNSHIP  
OF WANTAGE, 7:00 P.M. ON  
APRIL 22, 2021**

Mayor Gaechter called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and requested that the Clerk call the roll. Upon roll call, the following members of the governing body were present: Mayor William Gaechter, Deputy Mayor Ron Bassani and Committeeman Jonathan Morris. Also, present: Administrator/Clerk Michael Restel, and Mr. Glenn Kienz, Esq.

Mayor Gaechter stated, "This meeting is being held in compliance with the provisions of the Open Public Meeting Act, P.L. 1975, Chapter 231. It has been properly noticed and certified by the Clerk."

Presentation:

Dr. Scott Ripley High Point Regional High School Superintendent presented the 2021-2022 High School Budget.

Dr. Ripley stated over 7 years High Point Regional High School has seen a significant decrease in State Aid will see that for the next 3 years.

Dr. Ripley stated later in his presentation he will explain a new initiative called SOS Save our Schools. Discussion ensued.

Dr. Ripley explained that last year will be the last time High Point will use all of its CAP Bank and tax levy raise of 14% over the 5 sending districts.

Dr. Ripley stated this year's tax levy will be 2%.

Dr. Ripley stated that student enrollment has been declining and hoping with the housing market the way it's been will help with enrollment. Discussion ensued.

Dr. Ripley stated slide 3 goes over a pie chart explaining the expenses of the school. Dr. Ripley explained that 66% goes to Salaries and Wages. Discussion ensued.

High Point Business Administrator Tina Palecek explained Slide 4 General Fund and Special Revenue Funds. Mrs. Palecek stated these decreased by \$778,316.

Mrs. Palecek stated slide 5 shows Budget Revenues and there are possibly more cuts in June. Discussion ensued

Mrs. Palecek stated Slide 6 explains the Tax Levy shares with the sending districts.

Mrs. Palecek stated Slide 7 breaks down the increase for each town Wantage increased by \$305,362 or 3.8%.

Dr. Ripley stated Slide 8 explains the reduction of budgets over the past couple years. Discussion ensued.

Dr. Ripley explained Slide 9 on how much Aid High Point receives and shows a chart where the reductions are happening. Discussion ensued.

Dr. Ripley stated Slide 10 goes over the difference between Actual Tax Levy and Tax with 2% increase. Discussion ensued.

Dr. Ripley stated Slide 11 explains Fiscal Management Budget Development. Discussion ensued.

Dr. Ripley stated Slide 12 explains the 3 major aspects of the Budget Salaries/Wages, Special Education and Transportation.

Dr. Ripley explained Slide 13 which entails the tax levy distribution with Montague and without Montague as a Send/Receive Revenue. Discussion Ensued.

Committeeman Jon Morris asked what is the possibility of shared positions and having the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade like Kittatinny go to High Point.

Dr. Ripley stated for 7 years High Point Regional High School has attempted to share multiple positions but it didn't work out but thinks in the near future Board Presidents will be receptive.

High Point Board of Education President Wayne Dunn stated we have repeatedly reached out and that there is an open invitation to all districts to review a shared position service.

Mr. Dunn explained a question that was earlier asked pertaining to Montague as a sending district. Mr. Dunn stated if they maintain a certain attendance then as per State Law they have to offer them a position on the Board. Discussion Ensued.

Dr. Ripley stated he would like to setup Quarterly Meetings with the towns to go over what's going on at the High School.

Dr. Ripley explained Slide 14 which is a letter he wrote on March 22<sup>nd</sup> going over the State Aid cuts. Dr. Ripley stated the letter was sent to the parents and posted on the website.

Dr. Ripley stated moving forward he would like to work more closely with Wantage and build a better relationship.

Mayor William Gaechter stated he was shocked to see enrollment down especially with construction up and people buying homes.

May Gaechter asked if there was a number of students who attended parochial schools due to remote learning.

Dr. Ripley stated at the height which was 5 years ago over 200 Students attended Sussex County Vo Tech and as of today that number is 120.

Mayor Gaechter stated is the drop in state aid attributed to the drop in enrollment.

Dr. Ripley stated it most certainly attributes to thew reduction in State Aid. Discussion Ensued.

Mayor Gaechter stated that the expectation of the enrollment dropping should come with a reduction in Budget. Discussion Ensued.

Mrs. Palecek stated even though the budget was reduced the cost to run the school increased and for 2020 with school being remote High Point still had to pay for Transportation. Discussion ensued.

Deputy Mayor Ron Bassani stated as your aware we met with all 5 sending districts to see what could be done. Mr. Bassani stated the driving force behind it was to explore going out to Bond instead of a 14% increase. Discussion Ensued.

Mr. Bassani stated himself along with the 5 sending districts would like to see if you can move your elections to November. Mr. Bassani, he thinks it would be a strong message for the citizens of Wantage and the sending districts. Discussion Ensued.

Mr. Dunn stated he does see some merits to moving the Election to April that the community weighs in on the Budget.

Mr. Dunn stated Fredon and Montague held their elections recently and we saw a very low Voter Turnout. Discussion Ensued.

Mayor Gaechter stated that this Committee has a lot of respect for the School Board members.

Mr. Morris stated he appreciates what you guys have done for the school. Discussion Ensued.

Mayor Gaechter thanks Dr. Scott Ripley, Tina Palecek and Wayne Dun for attending the meeting.

**PROCLAMATION:**

Mayor Gaechter read into record declared April as Child Abuse Month.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

Mayor Gaechter requested a motion to approve Resolution #43-2020

A motion was made by Mr. Bassani and seconded by Mr. Morris.

Upon Roll Call:

Ayes: Bassani, Morris, Gaechter   Nays: None   Absent: None   Abstain: None

**BUDGET**

A Motion is in Order to Adopt the 2021 Municipal Budget in the amount of \$6,314,864 with the local tax rate of .308, a 2021 open space tax rate of .005 and a total sewer allocation budget of \$126,342. Public Hearing on the Budget scheduled for April 22.

Mr. Restel stated Himself, Wantage CFO and Township Auditor Tom Ferry will present the Budget Jointly.

Mr. Restel stated slide 1 states the Wantage Township 2021 Goals.

Mr. Restel stated slide 2 states the Wantage Township Budget Drivers Fund Balance, Increase in Statutory expenditures, Decrease in Debt Service, Shared Services, Capital Improvement's, Planning for the future and Tax Appeals.

Mr. Restel stated Slide 3 shows Wantage Townships Net Value Taxable. Mr. Restel stated in 2020 the Net Value was \$1,209,436,900 and in 2021 it was \$1,207,436,900. Mr. Restel stated the decrease was due to a major tax appeal.

Wantage Chief Financial Officer Ashley Wilson stated on Slide 4 explains Wantage Townships appropriations. Mr. Wilson stated the overall Budget decreased by \$144,842.

Mrs. Wilson stated Slide 5 explains the breakdown of Debt over the next 10 years. Mrs. Wilson stated by doping the Long-Term finance we will see a significant drop in debt payments as the years go on.

Mrs. Wilson stated slide 6 goes over 2021 Projected Revenues.

Mrs. Wilson stated slide 7 breaks down the 2021 Overall Tax Levy which includes the Schools, County, Municipal and Open Space.

Mrs. Wilson states Slide 8 shows a Pie Chart explain the breakdown on where the tax dollars go.

Mrs. Wilson states slide 9 details the Tax Rate Comparison for 2020. Discussion Ensued.

Mrs. Wilson stated Slide 10 shows the Average Assessed home in Wantage \$255,466 will see an increase of \$14.49 Taxes for Municipal and Open Space Only.

Mr. Bassani asked the overall Budget is \$6,314,84 and of that number almost \$1,000,000 is set aside for Reserve of Uncollected Taxes in which us as the tax payers have to pay for the owners who do not pay their taxes.

Mayor Gaechter opened the meeting to the public for questions pertaining to Wantage Townships Budget.

Kathy Gorman Fernwood Ave: Mrs. Gorman asked Mrs. Wilson about the Green Acres Loan and some clarification.

Mrs. Wilson stated there are 2 separate Loans Green Acres and One for the Dam Project.

A motion was made by Mr. Bassani and seconded by Mr. Morris.

Upon Roll Call:

Ayes: Bassani, Morris, Gaechter Nays: None Absent: None Abstain: None

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## REPORTS

Administrator/Clerk: Mr. Restel stated Friday April 16<sup>th</sup> Wantage held its Annual Rabies Clinic 87 Animals were present, 65 Dogs and 22 Cats.

Mr. Restel stated Recreation would like to do 2 events over the Summer a Farmers Markey to be held at the Townhall parking Lot and a Town wide Garage sale either at the Sussex Wantage Elementary School or Recreation will provide Maps.

Mr. Restel stated as for the Garage Sale he would like to see a Map of listings.

Mayor Gaechter stated he likes the Map Idea.

Mr. Bassani stated both ideas are excellent and agrees with the map for the Garage Sales.

Mayor and Committee agreed to move forward with the idea unanimously.

Attorney Glenn Kienz: Offer no report

Mayors Report: Mayor Gaechter offered his condolences to Justin Vandergroef on the death of his Father Chris and was a great man that was highly respected in Wantage Township.

Mr. Bassani offered his condolences to Justin Vandergroef on his loss of his Father.

Mr., Morris stated he was approached by Mr. Tom Madsen pertaining to Wantages presence at the Sussex Wantage Chamber of Commerce Meetings.

Mr. Restel stated he did reach out and Wednesdays are difficult due to his kids going on virtual at 8:30am.

Mayor Gaechter stated to send him the information for the next meeting.

Mr. Morris explained a situation in which 2 teenage children were running on top of the Berry Road House.

Mayor Gaechter recommended getting a cellular camera to face the house.  
Discussion Ensued.

Mr. Morris stated himself and Mr. Restel met last week to discuss truck replacement plan.  
Discussion ensued.

Mayor Gaechter stated Wantage Township Fire Department is present and will discuss the possible new truck.

Chief Mark Snook spoke about the letter that was distributed to the Mayor and Committee.

Chief Snook stated the department is looking to reduce its fleet at Beemerville.

Chief Snook provided a brief explanation on the trucks they would like to sell of trade in.

Chief Snook stated the tanker they are looking to replace is a homemade tanker and doesn't comply with the NFPA Standards.

Chief Snook spoke about the Brush truck that is currently out of service and looking into replacement possibly purchasing just a Cab and Chassis and installing the skid on the back. Discussion ensued

Chief Snook explained the possibility of a COOP Truck which means Forest Fire would supply the truck and the Township is responsible for Insurance and Maintenance. Discussion Ensued

Chief Snook stated he has reached out to Appraisers to get an Appraisal on the old Brush truck and Tanker.

Chief Snook stated the Tankers Cab and Chassis offers a lot of value to a truck driver due the limited hours and miles on it. Discussion Ensued.

Chief Snook stated the Fire Department is looking out 20 Years for their replacement plan. Discussion Ensued.

Mr. Bassani stated you would like to sell 645 and 647 and replace with a new cab and chassis with the existing skid and that you are converting 2 Fire Trucks into 1 and Replace a Fire Truck. Discussion Ensued.

Mayor Gaechter asked Mrs. Wilson if Wantage purchased a Cab and Chassis can we do this without Bonding.

Mrs. Wilson stated it would be easier to lump multiple Vehicles and Projects into one Bond. Discussion Ensued.

#### APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

A motion is in order to approve the minutes of the March 25, 2021 Mayor and Committee Regular Meeting.

Mr. Bassani made a Motion and was seconded by Mr. Morris.

Upon Roll Call:

Ayes: Bassani, Morris, Gaechter   Nays: None   Absent: None   Abstain:

OPEN PUBLIC SESSION:

Kathy Gorman Fernwood: Mr. Gorman stated she was not happy with the Land Use Board Meeting this past Tuesday Night. Mrs. Gorman stated the meeting became a filibuster because the Plaintiffs Attorney knew there was a hard stop at 10pm.

Mrs. Gorman stated the Attorney that could not be presents comes from a large firm and there could've been a substitute sent in his presence.

Mrs. Gorman stated there was no need to keep bringing up stuff from 2006 during the testimony at the Land Use Board Meeting.

Mrs. Gorman stated the Attorney should have stopped the testimony. Discussion Ensued.

Carl Hoffman Mudtown Road: Mr. Hoffman stated his opposition to the Bridge replacement on Mudtown Road.

Mr. Hoffman stated there is nothing wrong with the bridge.

Justin Vandergroef Shady Lane: Mr. Vandergroef stated everyone traveling in and around Wantage should be careful with all the road construction going on.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

A motion is in order to approve Resolution #44-2021 for the Township Committee to go into Executive Session to Discuss Legal Matters.

Attorney Glenn Kienz read into record the Executive Session Statement.

Mr. Bassani made a Motion and was seconded by Mr. Morris.

Upon Roll Call:

Ayes: Bassani, Morris, Gaechter    Nays: None    Absent: None    Abstain: None

ADJOURNMENT:

Mayor Gaechter requested a motion to adjourn. Mr. Bassani made a motion to adjourn and was seconded by Mr. Morris.

Upon Roll:

Ayes: Bassani, Morris, Gaechter    Nays: None    Absent:    Abstain: None

Meeting Adjourned 9:57PM

Respectfully submitted by

Michael L Restel

Administrator/Acting Clerk