

MINUTES**JANUARY 15, 2003**

The Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren met in special budget hearing session in its offices in the Administration Building, Belvidere, New Jersey on January 15, 2003, at 7:35 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Freeholder Director Doherty and upon roll call the following members were present: Freeholder Michael J. Doherty, Freeholder Rick Gardner, and Freeholder John DiMaio. Also attending were CFO Charles Houck, Fiscal Analyst Dan Olshefski, Personnel Director Jerry Coyle, County Administrator Steve Marvin, and Deputy Clerk Tammy M. Lynn.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by Director Doherty.

Director Doherty read the following statement: **“ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING WAS GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT BY FORWARDING A SCHEDULE OF REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS TO THE WARREN COUNTY CLERK, THE STAR/GAZETTE, THE EXPRESS-TIMES, STAR-LEDGER, BLAIRSTOWN PRESS, THE NEWS AND BY POSTING A COPY THEREOF ON THE BULLETIN BOARD IN THE OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS. FORMAL ACTION MAY BE TAKEN BY THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS AT THIS MEETING. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IS ENCOURAGED. IN ORDER TO ASSURE FULL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, THOSE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO WISH TO ATTEND THE MEETING SHOULD SUBMIT ANY REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE.**

Mr. Marvin stated that there is one resolution to be presented for adoption tonight in order for the Rutgers Cooperative Extension to receive Federal in-kind matching funds. He explained there will be no impact on the county; it is just a procedural requirement. Mr. Houck explained that the original resolution and agreement did not show the correct amount to be received and the Federal Government has been holding on distributing the match until it does. He confirmed there was no additional cost to the county to have this corrected.

RESOLUTION 58-03

On motion by Mr. Gardner, seconded by Mr. DiMaio, the following resolution was adopted by the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren at a meeting held on January 8, 2003.

RESOLUTION APPROVING IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WARREN COUNTY FOOD STAMP NUTRITION EDUCATION PROJECT OF THE NEW JERSEY FOOD STAMP NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM, AS PROPOSED BY RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION OF WARREN COUNTY, FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES DEPARTMENT.

WHEREAS, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Warren County has prepared a proposal for the Warren County Food Stamp Nutrition Education Project for the 2002-2003 federal fiscal year as part of the New Jersey Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program administered by

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Rutgers University; and,

WHEREAS, the New Jersey State Nutrition Education Program is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS) through a contract with the New Jersey Department of Health and Human Services (NJHHS); and,

WHEREAS, Warren County has 1,220 households of 1359 adults and 1223 children currently receiving food stamps, of whom 203 households are TANF with 351 children and 208 adults; and

WHEREAS, these recipients need nutrition education, including learning how to make food stamps and food dollars last an entire month; and,

WHEREAS, the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren does not have an Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program; and,

WHEREAS, the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren agrees to provide the Warren County Food Stamp Nutrition Education Project in-kind contribution of personnel, services, and materials with a value of \$57,699.63 ("match") for the project period October 1, 2002 through September 30, 2003, as set forth in the Project Proposal; and,

I hereby certify the above to be a true copy of a resolution adopted by the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren on the date above mentioned.

Tammy M. Lynn Deputy Clerk

ROLL CALL: Mr. DiMaio yes, Mr. Gardner yes, Mr. Doherty yes

Mr. Marvin noted the follow up issues from the last meeting were included in the revised report from Mr. Olshefski. They were as follows: 75% of the Planning Department clerk salary was shifted over to the Land Preservation Department in the Open Space Farmland Preservation portion. He confirmed the vacant position in the Buildings and Grounds Department will continue to be held until pending criminal action is closed. Mr. Marvin explained if not convicted the individual would be entitled to all the back pay during this individual's suspension without pay.

They looked again at the capital improvements in the Bridge and Engineers Departments and found some leverage to comply with the Boards 10% reduction request. The new Weights & Measures Superintendent was away for training however, it was noted on the written request that the replacement vehicles cost was to come from a trust account not from county tax funds. Information System Director Barry Smith reviewed the utilities and reduced the phone cost by \$15,000.00.

Mr. Olshefski revised the Warren County Community College appropriation as per the Board request for a 3 % increase. Mr. Marvin also noted that an addition was included to cover the Excess Liability protection for the Warren County Division of Long Term Care (formerly called Warren Haven), because the insurance market is uncontrollable right now. Mr. Marvin concluded that with all the changes the budget was reduced \$500,000 from the last meeting on

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January 11, 2003.

Mr. Marvin stated the report distributed to them showing various personnel actions for promotions, status changes, new positions, and reorganizations is exempt from public release due to the nature of the information provided. He asked the Board to review the first report without discussion as that section relates totally to current negotiations positions that he would not want to jeopardize at this time.

Mr. Doherty asked if all the positions presented included a specific increase for inflation on the salaries. Mr. Marvin responded that the report reflects the contractual 3½ % with exception for units that are negotiating at present, and they are the Correctional Officers, Sheriff Officers, Prosecutors Clerical and the CWA (formerly the Welfare Department), and he noted that the unclassified positions are subject for later discussion.

Mr. Gardner asked why there was a merit increase of 25% for the Fire Marshall position. Mr. Marvin explained it was the request of Chief Burke.

Mr. Doherty asked how the Warren Haven Department will affect the budget. Mr. Olshefski responded that the promotion and adjustment requests have already been included in the budget. Mr. Marvin explained the report presented was reduced \$50,000.00 from the report presented at the January 11th meeting. He also stated that \$95,000.00 cannot be discussed because of current negotiations.

Mr. Coyle explained the report sequence of each department is consistent for uniformity and comparison purposes. The whole salary/wage portion was presented with contractual computations plus employer tax and administration costs. He offered to review any specific areas that were a priority to the Board. He explained that the salary/wage requests were all reviewed by him with the Department heads first and he felt that it was important for the Board to understand that they work day to day with the operations and would give the best input for public services.

Mr. Marvin offered to give recommendations for the Board to consider. The County Clerks request for an additional position should be considered as it is justified by the revenue. He would not recommend the two positions in the PHNA at this time. Under the Correctional Center request, he recommended the creation of the two Captain positions and the Senior Penal Counselor position only. He recommended the 5 promotional positions in the Human Services Department mainly because later in the report there are status changes and the combination of both show a net savings of \$21,000.

Mr. Marvin also recommended the 8 nursing positions for the Division of Long Term Care facility (formerly Warren Haven) noting that with respect to the Health Care Industry overall the county has been very low in comparison with other facility starting salaries.

All these recommendations would generate a net increase of \$61,000 and it will create improved organization, recruitment programs and employee retention.

Mr. Doherty thanked Mr. Marvin for the suggestions and asked what should be considered from the merit increases. Mr. Marvin advised he was not in the position to recommend any at the present time in light of current economics.

Mr. Marvin, reviewing the salary adjustments category, stated that the union contract covering the 9-1-1 Center and Warren Acres has language allowing changes without going back to the bargaining unit. He feels approving these adjustments may improve and slow down the constant turnover of staff in these two areas. He cannot recommend Maryanne Lyons' requests for the Division of Long Term Care salary/step adjustments at this time in view of budget

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constraints.

Mr. Marvin proceeded to the Status Change section for review and

recommended that the Board approve the requests from Engineering, Division of Senior Services, Division of Long Term Care and the Treasurers Department. He would not recommend the two changes for the Prosecutors Office and Warren Acres, again due to budget limitations.

Mr. Marvin moved to the New Positions requested. He made the following recommendations, do not consider the five positions from the Sheriff's Department, or the three Graduate Nurse Positions mainly because the request is missing some soft cost for office space, vehicles, and insurance. He would recommend the Board consider the County Clerk request for an additional clerk typist and have language included that the position would be continued as long as the work and revenue increases justified. He recommended Chief Burkes request which would allow for improved telecommunications services at no additional cost.

Mr. Marvin asked the Board to consider the Public Works Inspector for the Engineering Department with all the additional fieldwork required. He stated that the Prosecutors Department request for a position for the Sexual Assault Division and an Investigator, should be put on hold until the Department restructuring is completed after the Governor announces who will be appointed Prosecutor in July.

Mr. Marvin asked Mr. Coyle to explain the request from the Division of Long Term Care regarding Seasonal Institutional Attendants. Mr. Coyle explained that this position is currently subject to civil service, state regulations that require the new hires receive six weeks of training. History in this department shows the difficulty dismissing the new hire for performance deficiencies. The alternative title Seasonal Institutional Attendant eliminates processing appeals and administrative court costs. Mr. Coyle said this will also confirm that the new hire is serious about the senior population and care they provide. Mr. Coyle mentioned too often this Department had more new hires out on Workers Compensation claims than working, which is not the service that the residents should be afforded.

Mr. Coyle concluded that another alternative would be to subcontract this section of services and eliminate all the civil service regulations, workers compensation claims and employer costs all together. Mr. Marvin responded that this option could be looked at during this year's operation. He recommended against the \$35,000 request at this time.

Mr. Marvin explained the reasons for Warden Fosters request for 5 positions however, he confirmed the total staff would never be more than 52

officers. He recommends this request to maintain organizational efficiency and there would be no additional costs if approved.

Mr. Marvin summarized that all the changes and recommendations would cost \$130,000 annually. However, he noted that with the budget review in process and the time to complete these actions the actual total would be around \$95,000. on this years budget. Mr. Doherty responded that all the recommendations will be reviewed and a final decision set on Saturday.

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Mr. Gardner asked what will happen in the Prosecutors Office if emergency situations occur requiring added staff. Mr. Marvin explained that the Prosecutor has \$70,000 included in his proposal for overtime to cover emergency situations. He also informed the Board that the last contract settlement in 2001 stated that beginning in 2003 the work week for Prosecutors Detectives / Investigators would be changed from 40 hours to 37 ½ hours a week without a change in pay.

Mr. DiMaio stated that he would like to see that Chief Burkes' request for the 9-1-1 Telecommunication Center be considered. He mentioned for a long time this center has been a revolving door and this will offer incentives for retention. This is one very important portion of County services that are provided to the municipalities. Mr. Gardner agrees and hopes this will end the constant turnaround of staff. Mr. Marvin responded that the industry turnaround is 20% while our county 9-1-1- facility has a 30% turnaround.

The Board thanked Mr. Coyle for providing the detailed personnel information for this budget and he left the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Mr. Doherty asked to begin the review of the 2003 budget proposals received from the County Library Commission. He asked if there is an update on the amount of county residents using the Phillipsburg Branch. Mr. Marvin explained the latest report shows steady increases, around 54% of the use is from county residents. He explained that Phillipsburg use remains the same while the surrounding districts with all the growth are the cause of the steady increases in the county use of the facility.

Mr. DiMaio asked what is the county library tax as compared to last year. He stated Tax Administrator Melissa Pritchett faxed over the revised tax for 2003 to be 4.9¢, which is a reduction from the 2002 tax of 5.85¢. The reduction total will be .9¢ on the new levy. Mr. DiMaio thought the dedicated tax showed

reductions. Mr. Olshefski explained that Library Director Tom Carney sent over a revised letter in the beginning of January, which confirmed the request to reduce to .9¢ with each town having its' own equalization formula.

Mr. Gardner noticed the proposal showed an increase in equipment and maintenance. Mr. Olshefski confirmed they had requested new equipment and that included costs for the maintenance agreements. He reminded the Board that this item is not as great as their Capital Improvement request.

Mr. Marvin commented concerns relating to Federation Agreement with Phillipsburg. There are supposed to be three Freeholder representatives on this Board and there has not been one communication delivered back to the Board. The largest part of the county library budget growth is to cover the 20% increase from Phillipsburg. The Board had some discussion relating to what districts would best represent the Freeholders on the Phillipsburg Library Board.

Mr. Gardner commented that the County Library Franklin Branch had the highest use countywide this past July. He also stated that the County contribution to the Federation

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Agreement appropriation for 2003 of \$721,476 seems to have jumped substantially from the 2002 amount of \$613,925.

Mr. Marvin responded that this is solely for funding the existing facilities. The Board agreed that there would not be any consideration at this time for the \$5.1 Capital Improvement to build another Library. Mr. Olshefski concluded that the Library Tax for 2003 would have a .9¢ reduction based on the new levy.

Mr. Doherty asked for an overview from the past meeting relating to the surplus options. Mr. Olshefski prepared a new report with three options. He explained that option A would have \$5 million in surplus as suggested, option B would have \$6.4 million generated because of changes and option C would have \$8.6 million in surplus now that the projected tax has been certified by the County Tax Administrator. He further suggested that the Board look at how each option will affect the 2004 tax rate. He explained that if the ratables reduce, they would have to plan for the long term affects.

Mr. DiMaio asked what the tax rate reduction was for each option. Mr. Olshefski explained that option A reduces the tax rate 4¢, option B reduces the tax rate 5.8¢, and option C reduces the tax rate 8.4¢.

Mr. Gardner thanked Mr. Olshefski for all the work preparing these options for the Board, and he noted that if option C was selected now there is potential that the 2004 tax rate would need to be increased in order to maintain the current

services or the Board would have to reduce services, so he would not favor that option.

Mr. DiMaio stated that he would like to see option B considered as this would keep the needed services, plan for future tax adjustment and maintain the potential to avoid any tax increases for a while.

Mr. Doherty commented that the options presented are based on information right now however; the surplus can increase throughout the year as funds are awarded. He sees that somewhere between Option B and C would allow us to maintain services, and it would be fair to the taxpayers. He stated that the State tax is sensitive to the income tax structure, while the County Tax is totally guaranteed from property tax. He believes that with the increased volume of properties, the equalized tax will allow for stability in 2004 instead of having to make any cuts.

Mr. Gardner responded that he agrees that the State level of aid is constantly decreasing and he would like to see some stability. He does not believe in keeping excess public funds, which could be considered by some as a profit being made.

Mr. DiMaio stated that in 2001 we provided a 3¢ reduction, in 2002, we were able to have a 5.5¢ decrease and with option B in 2003 there is potential for another 6¢ reduction which is excellent. He stated that Warren County couldn't have its services suffer because the State didn't manage their budget. We cannot fix all the State budget problems and he doesn't remember the last time the county residents were able to see a combined reduction in their tax of 14¢ over three years.

The Board had a long discussion over the amount of surplus for the 2003 budget, relating to anticipated awards that would increase the surplus throughout the year. After all the

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Board concerns were addressed Mr. Marvin asked Fiscal Analyst Dan Olshefski to revise the surplus options in \$ ½ million increments for the Boards final review at the January 18th meeting.

Mr. Doherty asked what the total appropriation is. Mr. Olshefski said right now it is \$79,044,023, which includes some grants, and that equates to approximately 56¢ to be raised by taxes.

Under closing public questions or comments, Laura Beall of Belvidere asked the Board to consider changing the training attendant position title at the Division of Long Term Care facility. She shared her experiences as a fulltime attendant that would confirm Mr. Coyle's report regarding the excessive workers

compensation claims and termination proceeding costs. She explained that she loves working at the facility and it is hard to see that these circumstances occur so often. Mr. Doherty thanked her.

Cathy Wojtowicz of Washington Boro also asked the Board to consider the Seasonal Attendant position for the Division of Long Term Care facility. She explained that the idea of subcontracting the services out would not be the solution to this problem. She thanked the Board for their consideration.

On motion by Mr. DiMaio, seconded by Mr. Gardner, and there being no further official business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Mr. DiMaio yes, Mr. Gardner yes, Mr. Doherty yes

ATTESTED TO:

Tammy M. Lynn, Deputy Clerk