

MINUTES

The Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren met in Budget Session in its offices in the Wayne Dumont, Jr. Administration Building, Belvidere, New Jersey on January 14, 2006 at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was called to order at 9:08 a.m. by Director Chamberlain and upon roll call, the following members were present: Freeholder Everett Chamberlain, Freeholder John DiMaio and Freeholder Richard Gardner. Also attending were CFO Charles Houck, Fiscal Analyst Dan Olshefski and County Administrator Steve Marvin.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Director Chamberlain.

Director Chamberlain read the following statement: **“ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING OF JANUARY 14, 2006 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-LEDGER, AND DAILY RECORD 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. Chamberlain requested the meeting conclude by 11:30 am due to another obligation.

As an introductory overview, Mr. Olshefski summarized the following:

- Although unofficial, the increase in ratables is expected to be the same as last year.
- The County tax rate has been reduced for the last six years and had been virtually unchanged three years prior to that.
- Towns normally get revalued every ten years, unless the equalization table fluctuates significantly. Revaluations are expected to be conducted in Blairstown, Hope and Oxford in 2006, taking effect in 2007.
- The Treasurer’s Office reduced the initial \$119,819,000 in total budget requests submitted by departments by almost \$12 million, to \$107,859,449.
- \$1.1 million is equal to one penny on the tax rate.
- The total budget is currently approximately \$2 million over last year which translates to about a \$.03 tax cut.
- There is a balance of \$500,000 in a dedicated account for library expansion.
- Under Public Safety, the 15.29% increase for the Communications Center is due largely to Phillipsburg capital projects and assumption of their call taking/dispatching.

Prior to going over the budget line by line, the Board had a few questions and comments regarding items that jumped out at them.

Mr. DiMaio singled out the Public Information & Tourism Department with a proposed increase of 32.14%, saying that was very high. It was noted that \$50,000 of the department’s operating expenses is devoted to Economic Development and is transferred to the Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce and most of the increase is due to expenses anticipated to distribute a proposed County newsletter.

Matching grant funds due in the amount of \$10,000 explained the increase for the Cultural &

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Heritage Commission.

Maintenance contracts account for the increase in the Surrogate's Office.

Mr. Gardner said the Weights & Measures Department almost pays for itself and Michael Santos is doing a great job.

Mr. Chamberlain was curious about legal costs in the Human Services Department and was told about \$50,000 to \$60,000 between TASS and the Adjuster.

An explanation of health benefits (Horizon BC/BS, Delta Dental and Express Scripts) was provided by Mr. Marvin at Mr. Chamberlain's request. Mr. Olshefski said prescription costs have been cut significantly although the following are still not contributing: retirees, CWA TASS, Sheriff's Department PBA and Corrections Officers.

Salaries and wages in the Prosecutor's Office are slated to increase more than \$200,000 partially because grant funds in some cases have completely expired. Mr. Chamberlain said he has a problem with grants growing out of hand; Mr. Marvin said other Boards had taken the position that when the grant expires, the position expires. Of the 66 employees in the Prosecutor's Office, 12 are attorneys, 12 are clerical and the rest are detectives. Mr. Chamberlain thought 66 people may be excessive. Mr. Marvin cautioned that although the Board can set an appropriation, they cannot control the positions themselves. After a bit more discussion, it was decided to ask County Prosecutor Thomas Ferguson to come before the Board for the next budget meeting.

The budget increase for the Correctional Center which employs 74 people is largely a population factor with increases in food service, medical, etc.

The prices for salt, oil and chip have gone up resulting in Public Works' budget increases.

Salaries and Wages (S.W.) are classified as Operating Expenses (O.E.) for summer help at the Mosquito Commission which is a separate entity from the County.

The Board asked Mr. Houck to update the analysis of the Shade Tree Crew (a division of the Road Department) he had compiled last year.

A significant increase in S.W. for Public Health Nursing (PHNA) was noted. The department employs 44 with one nurse vacancy. This merited further examination especially since not all counties have a PHNA Department. Hunterdon County does not; Sussex does but it is small.

Analyses were requested of PHNA, the Environmental Health Department and Warren Haven as an actual cost center (including utilities).

A possible explanation for the S.W. increase in Senior Services was an area plan grant and a transfer between TASS and Senior Services. Mr. Olshefski was going to investigate further.

Under Education, Mr. Marvin said the budget for Superintendent of Schools may decrease a bit due to the pending departure of Samantha Grape. Mr. Chamberlain wondered if at some point, Special Services could be flat-funded. Two hearings will be conducted in March-April for the Vo-Tech and Special Services budgets.

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Under Statutory Expenses, pension costs will increase 20% per year and nothing can be done about it.

The meeting recessed for a short time at 10:35 a.m.

Major Capital Improvement Projects recommended: telecommunications infrastructure upgrade; 911 system redevelopment and facilities plan. The 911 Center is technologically deficient and improvements would be on a three year schedule. It is likely that a significant portion of the \$2,000,000 will be obtained through grant funds, but we can't be certain. The telecommunications upgrade is critical because of online payments and so forth. A request of \$250,000 for annual computer/technology upgrades could be downgraded to \$100,000. Mr. Chamberlain proposed \$25,000.

Public Safety's request of \$430,000 for a 50' x 100' 4-bay garage was deemed "absurd" by Mr. Gardner. Mr. Chamberlain requested the blueprints for same.

It was decided to remove the amount budgeted for Court House windows as it was highly unlikely that the process would progress quickly enough for the actual work to commence in 2006.

The Road Department had requested \$225,000 to replace two dump trucks. It was suggested to purchase one new and possibly buy a used one from Somerset County.

Mr. Chamberlain said he would like to act as quickly as possible on the JINS Building Project. In regard to the Library's budget, he requested the funds earmarked for expansion be moved to the Capital Improvement Program.

On motion by Mr. DiMaio, seconded by Mr. Gardner, and there being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 11:36 p.m.

Recorded Vote: Mr. Gardner yes, Mr. DiMaio yes, Mr. Chamberlain yes

ATTESTED TO:

Steve Marvin, Clerk of the Board