

**MINUTES****FEBRUARY 2, 2008**

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 February 2, 2008 at 9:09 a.m.

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

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Director DiMaio.

Director DiMaio read the following statement: **“ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING OF FEBRUARY 2, 2008 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. Houck began by saying the CAP information arrived from the State just yesterday and the news was not good. Changes have been made to the way the CAP is calculated. Basically, \$1.7 million has to be cut within the CAP in the County's Budget to keep growth under 4 percent. The CAP used to be 5 percent which was more realistic, according to Mr. Houck. Capital Improvements are not inside the CAP. There remains \$617,603 in the 2006 CAP Bank which could be used now.

At 9:20 a.m., Public Safety Director Dave Gallant and Emergency Management Coordinator Frank Wheatley were invited to approach the Board to discuss their budget requests. Mr. Gallant explained that the Communications Center is the lifeblood of the County, enabling police, fire and EMS squads to respond in a timely and efficient manner. Phases II and III of the 911 upgrade are near completion and it looks as if Phase IV will be entered with an unexpended surplus. Mr. Gallant said he and his department have done everything they can to offset the expense with grants and other revenue.

Mr. Chamberlain asked what would happen if the upgrades did not go forward. Mr. Gallant described how Fire and EMS are currently on low band, the lowest radio frequency in existence. Compatible equipment is being phased out and becoming difficult to replace. Phase IV is the creation of a new police network and frequency range and Phase V will create a Fire and EMS high bank network that will make communication more efficient. A significant improvement in interoperability between Fire, Police and EMS will be achieved. Presently, there is no interoperability between

fire and police. Communication is patched through indirectly. Once complete, Mr. Gallant estimated the technology would remain current for about 10-15 years.

**MINUTES****FEBRUARY 2, 2008**

Mr. Chamberlain asked if the State Police were included in the communications. In the past, an incident could be underway in Washington Borough and the State Police would not be aware of it unless someone called them. Mr. Gallant said that has been accomplished along the way. A radio with Hope and Washington frequencies was installed in the Communications Center. It's not a perfect situation, but we do have communication with Troopers, said Mr. Gallant.

Mr. DiMaio said he firmly believed the County should fund all the equipment. "This is important," he said. He cited a recent fire where two volunteer firefighters fell through the floor and were trapped in the basement. Their mayday communication was so faint that it was barely audible and could have resulted in tragedy. Mr. Chamberlain said the responsibility and the liability do belong to the County and he told Mr. Gallant and Mr. Wheatley that he was appreciative of the grant money obtained to offset expenses.

Mr. Gardner asked how things were melding with Phillipsburg. Another project of consolidation/integration had recently taken place with Phillipsburg, now two years into the County Communication System. Things are going "okay", according to Mr. Gallant. A significant savings in phone bills is being realized.

The discussion then turned to personnel issues. Mr. Gallant requested an increase in hours for Fire Academy Coordinator Joe Fox, from 20 to 32 hours per week. This would give him more time to devote to administration and he would not receive benefits. Mr. Fox, who came on board in 2007, was described as enthusiastic, bringing in \$3,000 in fees last year. It was estimated he could double that revenue if given the extra hours. Pay raises were requested for all other fire instructors in the amount of \$1.50 per hour, in which case they would still be getting paid less than in other counties.

Mr. Gallant was also seeking to retain the services of a Domestic Preparedness Planner – a position the State will cease funding – as a County employee. This individual earns \$48,000/year and does not seek benefits. He has served as an assistant to the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and has played an integral role in obtaining grant funds. He has been involved in NIMS (National Incident Management System), COOP & COG (Continuity of Operations and Continuity of Government) and served on public health task forces. The person had been paid out of a \$148,000 grant that is now being decreased to \$98,000 and if he leaves, funding may be a problem in some areas. Mr. Marvin explained that the State is now focusing on UASI (Urban Area Security Initiative) so what grant funds can be used for is narrowing.

Citing the public health connection, Mr. Chamberlain thought perhaps certain grants could be better coordinated between departments. The Environmental Health

Department administers a Bioterrorism Preparedness Grant that allows for an epidemiologist and clerical staff so Mr. Chamberlain wondered if there may be some duplication there. Having administered a lot of grants, Mr. Chamberlain said we have to look at how they are being managed.

Mr. Wheatley said their office was given the highest possible rating when evaluated by the State. He implied that rating may be in jeopardy if the department had to endure cutbacks. The Board thought the rating was great.

**MINUTES****FEBRUARY 2, 2008**

Mr. Gardner said he appreciated Mr. Gallant and Mr. Wheatley coming in to explain everything. He thought the requests were reasonable.

Mr. Gallant said he fully recognized that his department is spending a lot of money and he tries to do all he can to keep costs down. The State demands all these extra tasks and then pulls the rug out. He said he reduced overtime by 1,870 hours in 2007.

The Board thanked them for coming in. The Public Safety portion of the meeting concluded at 10:16 a.m. followed by a ten minute break.

County Prosecutor Scott Ferguson was next to come before the Freeholders to elucidate his budget requests. He said he tries to be sensitive to the Board's position and had narrowed his appeals to the following:

- A pay raise for the Medical Examiner
- Funds for Spanish language translation/transcription
- Increased funds for Warren County Tactical Response Team
- Funds to take over K-9 explosive detecting dog
- A new detective position
- One-time raises for seven Assistant Prosecutors
- Funds for DARE Program

Dr. Mihalakis, the Medical Examiner, does a good job and has not gotten a raise since Mr. Ferguson has been with the County. The Prosecutor's Office currently pays the doctor \$600 per month and was asking for an additional \$400/month. He also is paid by the County. Mr. Chamberlain asked how many autopsies are performed per year. Mr. Ferguson said, "A lot." Any "unintended" death, be it from car accidents or people dying in their homes, including the elderly, requires an autopsy.

Regarding the Spanish translating, the \$26,400 estimate provided was rather broad and Mr. Ferguson said he would provide Mr. Marvin with a more clearly defined number.

The requested increase for the Tactical Response Team was \$5,000 for the year, but Mr. Ferguson said he would appreciate even a 3.5-4 percent increase, or

\$1,200-\$1,300.

The bomb detecting dog belonged to Pohatcong Township, but has always been utilized more by the County. Any time there is a bomb threat at a school, we have to be vigilant. Drug sniffing dogs cannot detect explosives and vice-versa. The cost to take over the dog is \$10,723 for the year. Mr. Ferguson said he would put \$6,000 from forfeiture toward the expense one time only, bringing the request down to \$4,723.

Regarding the new detective position, the office has been down a detective since Robert Barsony left. The services of two full-time State Troopers are utilized at no cost to the County and \$15,000/year was saved in the replacement of two detectives who had left. Between a growing gang situation and a high incidence of sex crimes, Mr. Ferguson said he needs another detective to be paid at least \$65,000/year.

**MINUTES****FEBRUARY 2, 2008**

The \$5,000 DARE Program is usually paid for out of the Prosecutor's forfeiture fund, but he is no longer permitted to handle it that way since it is a recurring expense.

Mr. Ferguson left at 10:50 a.m.

Focus then shifted to the latest Budget Analysis provided by Mr. Olshefski and Mr. Houck for the purpose of finding places to cut expenses in an effort to comply with the CAP Law. Mr. Olshefski suggested closing the \$1.7 million gap by an equal combination of reducing operating costs, applying unexpended appropriations and requesting waivers.

A waiver was expected to be granted for utilities, a virtually uncontrollable expense forecast to increase by 14.3 percent. Another idea was to deny Warren County Special Services School District the \$160,000 they had requested from the County to pay their Tuition Adjustment.

Both Mr. DiMaio and Mr. Chamberlain reiterated a prior request to study a list of pending retirements. Mr. DiMaio wanted to see the Departments of Bridges, Buildings & Grounds and Roads consolidated into one department.

Mr. Marvin said we may be on a path to closing the Juvenile Detention Center. Perhaps the facility would be used to house adult female inmates in the future.

Mr. Houck said instead of raising the County Purpose Tax and applying it to the CAP, we could reduce the tax and issue notes or bonds.

Mr. Marvin said with few exceptions, the Board and individual departments have been fiscally conservative for years. He thought making cuts to discretionary programs should be considered, namely, in the Department of Human Services. A list

of discretionary programs for the Board's consideration was to be compiled. Mr. DiMaio asked for an example of an unnecessary program. Mr. Marvin thought having a tree crew in the Road Department was unwarranted.

Mr. Chamberlain suggested each Freeholder go back and study the departmental budgets in detail and discuss options during the next Budget Session.

On motion by Mr. Chamberlain, seconded by Mr. Gardner, and there being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

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

**ATTESTED TO:**

**Steve Marvin, Clerk of the Board**