

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 1, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by Director Gardner and upon roll call, the following members were present: Freeholder Jason Sarnoski, Freeholder James Kern, III and Freeholder Richard Gardner. Also attending were County Administrator Alex Lazorisak and County CFO Kim Francisco.

Following the flag salute, Mr. Gardner read the following OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT statement: “ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING *OF FEBRUARY 1, 2020* 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.”

With review of the Sheriff’s Office budget being the first item on the agenda, and labor negotiations being an integral part of it, entering into Executive Session was warranted.

RESOLUTION 72-20

On motion by Mr. Sarnoski, seconded by Mr. Kern, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING EXECUTIVE SESSION OF THE WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS PROVIDING FOR A MEETING NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE NEW JERSEY OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT, N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 at 9:02 a.m.

Recorded vote: Mr. Sarnoski yes, Mr. Kern yes, Mr. Gardner yes.

On motion by Mr. Sarnoski, seconded by Mr. Kern, the Board adjourned Executive Session and returned to Open Session at 9:38 a.m.

Mr. Gardner said while it may help the bottom line, all the revenue coming in from the Sheriff sales is not a great thing. “From the cultural standpoint of the county, it’s an awful thing,” Mr. Gardner said. Sheriff McDonald concurred, saying it was even worse because many of these houses would in turn become Section 8 rental properties. The Sheriff said he thought Washington Borough was now 63 percent rentals versus owner-occupied homes.

Moving on to the general budget, motor pool requests were reviewed. Mr. Francisco said there were fewer requests than usual this year. They were discussing cars, as opposed to specialty vehicles submitted under the capital improvement program. Numbers of vehicles requested by department: Prosecutor (three), Environmental Health (two), Sheriff (one), Public Works (one; a Ford Escape 4WD for the motor pool), and Engineer (one). Instead of a new vehicle, the Engineer’s Office would be getting a good used car from the motor pool. The total of these requests was \$224,000, and Mr. Francisco said we normally budget \$280,000 for vehicles each year. It was advised to keep some extra money in there (\$30,000) in case something goes wrong, including accidents.

Mr. Kern asked if the county purchased all Fords. Generally speaking, the answer was affirmative. Police vehicles are now SUVs, which are more expensive than sedans. Mr. Kern thought purchasing those vehicles under the capital program would be more expensive, but they would also last longer. Mr. Francisco said they try to keep it under OE. Mr. Lazorisak said we have been purchasing the police package-type, which are built much better. Regarding SUVs versus sedans, there was also an impact of increased fuel costs.

Mr. Francisco highlighted one budget-neutral update to the Sheriff’s Office line in the budget, as well as having amended the title of the Traffic Impact Study line in the Capital Improvement Program (“Traffic Impact Study - Hope Center, Strykers Road, etc.”) per Mr. Sarnoski’s request.

It was recently revealed that the building near the Technical School - which is home to the Superintendent of Schools - will be needing a new roof soon. Mr. Francisco asked if he should insert an additional \$40,000 for this purpose, or try to fund it out of the general Roof/Door/Window Reserves line. Mr. Sarnoski asked when we would be getting rid of this building. Since the Tech School wanted to demolish it and rebuild it, the issue was where to relocate the education office. “The whole building is shot,” Mr. Lazorisak said. With the Warren County Special Services School District office being housed in a building on the Health Department campus in Oxford,

discussion ensued regarding the possibility of moving SSSD to the Phillipsburg area, which is where many of the students reside, and where a special services program was already functioning. If there was no room there, Mr. Gardner wondered about finding space in one of the Community College buildings in Phillipsburg. As liaison to education, Mr. Sarnoski planned to speak with WC SSSD Superintendent Joe Flynn in the coming week and would report back. It was decided not to budget any additional money for the new roof.

Moving on to personnel requests, Mr. Sarnoski said he had spoken to Mr. Lazorisak and had obtained answers to his questions. He requested department heads be apprised of the civil service rules, since there were a substantial number of requests for raises/promotions that could not be granted by law. Mr. Lazorisak said he intended to address it with department heads, and Mr. Francisco said next year there would be some additional information in the budget packets to encourage management to check with Personnel ahead of time. Regarding unclassified personnel, two percent increases were currently built into the budget, and Mr. Lazorisak would go over that list in more detail with the Board at a future date.

Mr. Gardner again raised the topic of the surplus, having done more research on how much surplus the county has carried over the years. He said in 2004 it was around \$3.5 million; in 2012 it was about \$8.3 million; in 2014 it was \$9 million. "We've steadily built the surplus up over the years," Mr. Gardner said. He contended that if there was no harm to the bond status, he didn't think the county needed to keep that much of the public's money. He advocated for reducing the amount to be raised by taxation by one percent (equal to \$700,000).

Mr. Sarnoski said unfortunately, he didn't think there was room to cut anything this year in the budget, even using the surplus. He said the prior years Mr. Gardner pointed out (2004, 2012 and 2014), the Freeholders hadn't yet passed the resolution for no bonding without voter approval. "Now we're a pay-as-you-go county, we really need to continue to be a save-as-you-go county," Mr. Sarnoski said. Two years ago, former Freeholder Ed Smith and Mr. Gardner wanted to cut \$1.5 million. Mr. Sarnoski said he wasn't comfortable with it at the time, and had argued to cut no more than \$1 million. That year, including Open Space, the Board cut taxes by more than \$2.25 million. "I said it was way too much, but I was overruled," Mr. Sarnoski said. Last year, we were much more moderate. Currently, we are facing some matters that are concerning, that we can only talk about in Executive Session. Mr. Sarnoski thought a flat budget this year would be the best policy.

Mr. Gardner countered by pointing out all the construction and rehabilitation projects on county properties that have been accomplished since 2006, and they weren't bonded. We have money in the capital program, are getting projects done, and continue to budget for future projects. He noted the recent land sale bringing in \$2 million, and the inmate agreement with Hunterdon that will generate money. Mr. Gardner reiterated that our bond status is fine. If we can cut one percent off of the budget with no harm, he asked, "Why would you not want to give that back to the taxpayer and let the taxpayer keep it in his pocket?" He agreed it was necessary to save for the rainy day, but said we have been doing that successfully.

Speaking of surplus, the Open Space budget had nearly \$30 million on hand. While the Board had previously expressed discomfort with taking from Open Space with all the warehousing potentially coming in and accompanying traffic, Mr. Sarnoski thought some tax relief could be provided by taking something out of that surplus. Mr. Gardner was willing to take a little from each, to make a one percent cut.

Mr. Sarnoski didn't agree with a one percent cut; maybe half a percent.

Mr. Kern said both of his colleagues made very good points. This year, he said, we are going to see an influx of some larger things that we will be addressing in the budget next year. Considering all the concerning matters we have been discussing in Executive Session, plus all the warehousing expected to come to our area, "I am not comfortable cutting Open Space at all, because I think it sends a very bad message."

Alluding to what Mr. Sarnoski said about the cuts made two years ago, Mr. Kern said, "You're going to give the money back, just to ask for it in two years, and that's the concern I have with that." In his opinion, it was better to be conservative this year.

Mr. Sarnoski proposed taking \$225,000 from Open Space, and \$275,000 from the main budget surplus, to cut the levy by \$500,000. Mr. Kern repeated he was not in favor of taking anything from Open Space. Discussion continued.

"Is this an exercise to cut to cut?" Mr. Kern asked.

"How much do you want to keep of the public's money in surplus, if it's there on a static level?" asked Mr. Gardner.

"I think if we cut less two years ago – and we can't go back - we would have been in a great position to cut today," Mr. Sarnoski said.

Each Freeholder continued to state his position and voice his concerns.

While the decision was up to the Freeholders, Mr. Lazorisak shared his own opinion. If we cut the budget, with the future unknowns – referring to matters being discussed in Executive Session – “If it turns out for the worse, we’re going to be in trouble next year,” he said.

The matter would not be settled by the end of this meeting. Regardless, Mr. Sarnoski complimented Mr. Gardner on his guidance, and for presiding over a very positive budget process. “We’re arguing about how good we’re going to be to the taxpayers,” he laughed. “That’s right,” said Mr. Gardner. All agreed it was an enviable position to be in.

The Freeholders expressed appreciation to the County CFO and all department heads for a great budget. Mr. Francisco said he wanted to introduce the budget at the second meeting in February. It could be pushed to early March, but he preferred to get it done. He hoped to have a final decision by the first meeting in February.

Mr. Lazorisak pointed out that no matter how much the county may or may not cut, the municipalities see that and raise their budgets correspondingly. All agreed. Mr. Sarnoski said he has already been getting the question from some towns, asking how much the county was going to cut, so they can plug their budget holes.

Mr. Lazorisak issued a reminder about the Board of School Estimate meeting scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on February 11.

In closing, Mr. Lazorisak expressed appreciation to Mr. Francisco and his department, as well as Personnel Director Scott Burd. “This has been a long month for us... a lot of hours went into this budget,” he said. Mr. Francisco said Mr. Lazorisak also did a great job. This was his first budget and he was on top of it, he said.

This being Mr. Gardner’s 18th and final year as Freeholder, Mr. Kern noted that this budget was to be almost identical to his first year. “Pretty remarkable,” Mr. Kern said.

On motion by Mr. Kern, seconded by Mr. Sarnoski, and there being no further business before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 10:11 a.m.

**THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS
OF THE COUNTY OF WARREN**
Wayne Dumont, Jr. Administration Building
165 County Route 519 South
Belvidere, NJ 07823

RESOLUTION 72-20

On motion by **Mr. Sarnoski**, seconded by **Mr. Kern**, the following resolution was unanimously adopted by the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren at a meeting held on February 1, 2020.

**A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING EXECUTIVE SESSION OF
THE WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS
PROVIDING FOR A MEETING NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC IN
ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF
THE NEW JERSEY OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT, N.J.S.A. 10:4-12**

WHEREAS, the Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders is subject to certain requirements of the *Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6*, et seq., and

WHEREAS, the *Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-12*, provides that an Executive Session, not open to the public, may be held for certain specified purposes when authorized by Resolution, and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Board hereby excludes the public in order to discuss such matters. The general nature of the subjects to be discussed are as follows:

(1) *Matters Relating to Collective Bargaining*: Items to be discussed include: PBA Local 280 – Sheriff’s Officers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board shall disclose to the public, as soon as practicable, the contents of the discussions after the final disposition of the matters discussed.

RECORDED VOTE: Mr. Sarnoski yes, Mr. Kern yes, Mr. Gardner yes

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.

_____, Clerk
Alex J. Lazorisak