

*\*These minutes were approved by the Warren County Board of Commissioners on February 10, 2021. Full text of the resolution appears at the end of this document.*

The Board of County Commissioners of the County of Warren met in Budget Session in its offices in the Wayne Dumont, Jr. Administration Building, Belvidere, New Jersey on January 16, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

Due to social distancing directives, this meeting was conducted without any members of the public in attendance. The public had the opportunity to listen to the meeting, and participate if they chose, via telephone.

The meeting was called to order by Director Kern and upon roll call, the following participants were present: Commissioner Lori Ciesla, Commissioner Deputy Director Jason Sarnoski, Commissioner Director James Kern III, County Administrator Alex Lazorisak, County CFO Kim Francisco and Deputy Commissioner Clerk Holly Luberto.

After Director Kern led the flag salute, he confirmed with the County Administrator that the meeting notice complied with the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975 and all amendments thereto.

County CFO Kim Francisco provided updated budget forms and pointed out changes since the board's last meeting. In the Human Services budget, legal fees were adjusted downward \$8,000 in the County Adjuster line, because the prior version had factored in the partner rate, rather than the associate rate.

John Daly had provided final insurance numbers.

Mr. Francisco and Mr. Lazorisak had met during the week with two department heads regarding capital requests, and they were very cooperative and understanding, agreeing to reduce and defer a few items. "Mr. Lazorisak is a good negotiator," he said. So far, these reductions totaled \$1.8 million, and more would be on the table today in Public Safety's budget. Further, with more than \$20 million in prior year capital currently on the books, some prior appropriations were being canceled to be put toward the current year. "A combination of current year cuts, prior year cuts... it's more manageable," said Mr. Francisco.

Motor pool vehicle replacement requests were reviewed, involving the following departments: Prosecutor, Environmental Health, Corrections and Public Works. Mr. Francisco recommended keeping the total motor pool budget for the year

at \$280,000 even though requests totaled \$195,881 because he wanted “wobble room” for accidents and replacements. Mr. Sarnoski thought that might be excessive wobble room to revisit later. Mr. Sarnoski said a much better system was in place now; it was out of control for many years. Cooperation from the Prosecutor helped. Mr. Lazorisak agreed, saying it was a matter of accountability and responsibility. The county’s motor pool was now in a good, manageable position of replacing a few vehicles every year.

The Correctional Center’s budget increased \$25,000 due to the fugitive transport program, which was taken over from the Prosecutor. Aside from that, OE was the same. Warden Ken McCarthy was on the phone, as he was in quarantine out of an abundance of caution. He began with a couple of positive notes. He said the shared services agreement with Hunterdon County was working very well, averaging to about 35 inmates per day. Hunterdon was billed a total of \$919,530 from February through the end of the year. He was pleased to report that considering COVID-19 and being a 24-hour facility, the jail reduced its overtime by another 500 hours over last year.

Mr. McCarthy explained the reason for the increase in fugitive transports was that some trips were outside of our capabilities (requiring airplane travel, for example) and there seemed to be some price gouging due to COVID. In addition to one unmarked SUV motor pool request already discussed, the Warden sought a Ford F150 pickup truck through capital improvement - a special vehicle paid for mostly with Clean Communities grant funds. (Total cost: \$49,316; grant: \$32,439; cost to county: \$16,900.)

Another approved capital request was for the video surveillance system (DVRs and eight cameras). Mr. Lazorisak noted they decided to hold off on the interior door lock replacement project, and an air-handling unit in the kitchen. With a design for the air handler ready to go, maybe we could go out for bid at the end of this year.

With respect to COVID, Warden McCarthy said 11 officers had tested positive to date, and 29 had gone out due to close contact, but there has not been a single COVID-positive inmate. “We’re kind of proud of that,” he said.

Mr. Kern thanked Mr. McCarthy for that, and thanked Mr. Sarnoski as well, for the Hunterdon agreement. Warden McCarthy signed off at 9:20 a.m.

Back to a budget overview, Mr. Francisco pointed out changes since the first draft at the beginning of the process:

- A substantial decrease to total capital improvements (about \$3.5 million)
- A two percent increase to the amount to be raised by taxation

- Taking less from surplus (\$9.6 million instead of \$14.5 million)

“It’s getting more manageable,” Mr. Francisco said, and went over the savings achievements in the capital fund. The fund was being drawn down, but the county could still fund its projects and protect its surplus.

Mr. Sarnoski asked about capital projects on the horizon (other than the CDH Library branch) that were not funded so far. Mr. Lazorisak mentioned the relocation of the Prosecutor’s MTF unit to their facility in Oxford; and potentially moving the Land Preservation Department to the Administration Building in the future, after Division of Aging moves to the enhanced Human Services complex. Both were renovation projects that would cost tens of thousands - not millions - of dollars. “Capital-wise, we’re caught up,” Mr. Lazorisak said, having reached that 10-year cycle and moved out of rental units. It was time to start budgeting a couple million dollars a year to build up that fund for mechanical equipment, roofs, etc.

Mr. Kern asked about Spring Valley Road. The matter would be discussed in more detail on January 20 with County Engineer Bill Gleba, but the overview was that permitting would take a long time, even prior to COVID, and would require working closely with the DEP. The temporary design was working with no complaints in more than a year. Potentially design this year, construction in 2022.

The group took a five-minute break at 9:28 a.m.

Upon return, County Prosecutor James Pfeiffer came before the board. Mr. Francisco reminded the commissioners of Constitutional Officers’ two percent cap. He said every year we take them up to the maximum cap (S&W and OE) as a base. There was no increase to OE this year. There were a couple of capital requests (including body cameras), but they were being funded out of last year’s operating money.

Mr. Pfeiffer said they had been planning to purchase body cameras before a law came out requiring them, so they were a step ahead. There was supposed to be legislation for some reimbursement, but that remained to be seen.

A continuing struggle for the department was salaries. Two contracts were up (administrative staff and detectives). “Our pay structure is far below what other places are,” he said. Mr. Pfeiffer just lost one of his sexual assault prosecutors, who went from making \$80,000 here to \$102,000 working for the state. She had 15 years of experience and the loss was dramatic. He was concerned this would cause a cascade of employee departures. Mr. Lazorisak said over the years, money for salaries went to detectives

through mediation. He said the average detective makes \$109,000 per year and the attorneys are grossly underpaid.

The unbalanced salary structure was a detriment to the overall operation of the office, Mr. Pfeiffer said. He needed detectives, but he had to take a hard line with them. Competency was essential, particularly in the sexual crimes unit. He said we couldn't have a first year lawyer making \$65,000 a year trying a case involving a child victim of sexual assault, and risk losing the case. The Prosecutor said the matter was very troubling, and the department's biggest problem. "We have to focus on it," he said.

With so much to do, including supervising municipal police departments and implementing bail reform, Mr. Pfeiffer was asking for an additional prosecutor. He said the backlog due to COVID was incredible and he wasn't sure how they were going to dig out of it. "We missed a year of jury trials," he said. There were 432 cases backlogged, an 80 percent increase. They were going to have to prioritize the sexual assault cases and others will have to be pled out. "It's troubling to be in this situation," Prosecutor Pfeiffer said, being reactive rather than proactive. Sexual violence was a tremendous problem in Warren County. There were 123 sex-related investigations just last year, on top of what they already had and were preparing for trial.

The Prosecutor talked about a "catch a pedo" online endeavor that local teenagers engaged in, where they lured alleged predators to a Walmart. This could lead to dangerous situations for the public at large. And yet, this led to five prosecutions. "Kids were able to do this," Mr. Pfeiffer said, and it should have come from our office. Mr. Sarnoski asked what the commissioners could do today to help. The Prosecutor said the answer was money, and money was always a problem.

The agent hired the prior year had been a big help, as all crimes involve computerized devices these days. The department had obtained software that could detect and download pornographic material from devices. Previously, a person would have to manually search through each photo on a device, so this saved a significant amount of time.

Ms. Ciesla asked how much local police departments could help. Mr. Pfeiffer said it all came to his office; it was expensive and the local units didn't have the resources. They use local detectives for a narcotics task force, but special training is required to investigate sexual predators. The State Police help in municipalities that do not have police departments, but most sexual assault investigation work comes from the County Prosecutor's office. Mr. Pfeiffer said it would be "awesome" to have one person dedicated to going after pedophiles on the internet. Getting some headlines out

there, that they are actively being pursued, could have a dramatic impact.

Overdoses were a big problem, with two just the prior day and one a week before. “We had like 18 for the year in 2019; we’re already up to 26,” Mr. Pfeiffer said, “We’re doing the best we can.” Mr. Sarnoski noted the Prosecutor was a member of the overdose fatality review team under the purview of the Addiction Awareness Task Force, and that was going to be a good way to learn from our mistakes. We received some grant money from the state to keep pursuing this. COVID exacerbated the problem. Mr. Pfeiffer said his office had secured grants for public awareness advertising for services available with respect to drug abuse and domestic violence.

The Prosecutor was proud of another grant relative to insurance fraud. In the past he had gotten \$109,000 for one detective, this year they were getting \$189,000 to put toward salaries. Mr. Francisco said they would charge some other people to the grant (partial), freeing up money for the new person, with fringe. Mr. Kern wondered if there were more grants available by banding together with local police departments. With COVID, Mr. Pfeiffer predicted grants would start drying up.

Regarding body cams, Mr. Sarnoski asked Mr. Pfeiffer if he thought the Sheriff’s Office needed them, and if so, could he administer that program. The Prosecutor had not had the opportunity to look into it yet, but said he would have an answer on January 26. He thought as law enforcement, it was probably going to be required for the Sheriff. He and Mr. Lazorisak thought as the chief law enforcement officer, the Prosecutor would probably obtain software and administer the program, as they oversee municipal police departments. The cameras already purchased were for exclusive use of the Prosecutor’s Office, however. Mr. Pfeiffer thought the implementation of cameras was the best thing for everyone, and would answer many questions. Mr. Lazorisak thought it would help with insurance premiums as well.

Regarding any potential unrest on January 20, the Prosecutor said other than the FBI warning to be on alert January 18-20, there were no specific threats. One person in the Independence area did make the FBI list for some tweets. The Sheriff’s entire department was going to be working that day. He did not anticipate anything, but plans were in place.

Mr. Kern thanked Mr. Pfeiffer and his staff for the entire year, with COVID, political unrest, calls from businesses, etc. “You and your entire office have just been so helpful to us,” he said. Mr. Pfeiffer said Office Manager Wendy Riley does a great job and worked hard on the budget.

Mr. Sarnoski echoed Mr. Kern's comments, saying the Prosecutor was doing an excellent job. He was very happy and hoped he would stay on for a long time. Mr. Lazorisak said finally, the Prosecutor's Office and this administration was working together hand in hand, and he was very appreciative. "You and your staff have all been excellent," he said, adding that there was a level of communication we've never had before. "It is a great relationship," said Mr. Pfeiffer, "It's nice to have a good working relationship." Ms. Ciesla thanked him for everything, and hoped to try to help him get his office settled.

This portion of the meeting concluded at 10:11 a.m. followed by a short break.

The meeting reconvened at 10:16 a.m. with Public Safety Director Frank Wheatley. Mr. Francisco said Public Safety was somewhat complicated, with four different budgets: the Communications Center, Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Public Safety Administration & the Fire Marshal's Office, and the Fire Academy. There were also capital requests.

Mr. Wheatley began with Communications, saying there were currently 32 full time telecommunicators/dispatchers, and three vacancies. Four individuals were currently in training, and three of those would assume full time positions at the end of April. There were 24 part time dispatcher slots - of which no more than 15 were normally filled - and usually only around eight, because it's hard to give them time on the floor when the center is fully staffed. Mr. Sarnoski thought it sounded as if we could find some savings here, between the staffing situation and unexpended OE from last year. Mr. Wheatley said many OE expenditures were for contracted services. After a historical review, Mr. Lazorisak suggested considering keeping the budget flat from last year rather than cutting it. This resulted in a \$13,000 reduction to Mr. Wheatley's OE request, which he said he would try to manage.

Budgets for the other divisions were flat, except for the Fire Academy, which prompted discussion, since it had \$17,000 unspent from last year, and Mr. Wheatley said they were trying to make of for years of keeping it flat not asking for anything. A retired chief had taken over budgeting last year. An inspection budgeted last year (\$12,500) required once every five years was delayed due to COVID, so that was going to come out of last year's unspent balance. The Fire Academy only had an OE line - salaries were not a factor because they were paid by the Community College - so Mr. Lazorisak and Mr. Francisco thought that budget could remain flat and they would still be ahead.

The IT unit and Office of the Fire Marshal within Public Safety Administration remained flat. The largest increases were in contracted equipment, which Mr. Wheatley said was subject to fluctuation each year. Thanks to the efforts Captain Tarsi leveraging technology contracts, the department was projected to save \$8,900 per month in rentals of T1 lines, resulting in an annual savings of \$106,000 in OE in the future.

Mr. Sarnoski asked about emergency response blind spot issues. Mr. Wheatley said the LMR system was up and running, though there was not a lot of buy-in yet, mostly because of resistance from users not wanting to carry an extra device. The Jonestown tower in Oxford was not yet online, but when that project is complete, that will enhance the central part of the county. Agencies buying in included Knowlton Fire, Blairstown Fire, Washington Fire and Police. Mr. Kern asked for a detailed list of agencies that were and were not participating. "It's a significant resource that we're investing in," he said. Mr. Sarnoski noted the persistent complaint of Hackettstown Police, that their building was impervious, "I think the LMR system is the answer to that," said Mr. Sarnoski. Mr. Wheatley agreed, noting Blairstown, the County Prosecutor and Corrections were all very happy with the system.

Before moving on to capital, Mr. Francisco confirmed that OE for both the Communications Center and Fire Academy would revert to last year's funding levels. Mr. Lazorisak had conversed with Mr. Wheatley the prior day regarding potential cuts to his original list of \$400,000 in capital requests, and he was amenable to deferring more than \$156,000 in projects to next year.

Mr. Sarnoski thanked the Public Safety team for severely cutting their budget; it was a big help. "I really appreciate that," he said, adding that the county would continue to fight against the diversion of 911 fees to other areas. "We're the worst state in the nation for diverting 911 fees," he said, and we should have that money for improving our public safety facilities. NJAC was working on it, but Mr. Lazorisak thought relief would have to come from the federal level.

"Thanks to Frank, Bill and their whole team," Mr. Lazorisak said, for really stepping up and doing a great job all year. Mr. Francisco agreed, noting they were very helpful with requests to FEMA and DCA for reimbursements. Ms. Ciesla thanked them as well, and asked about where 911 calls made from cell phones go. Mr. Wheatley said it was based on the nearest tower. Sometimes calls made from Pennsylvania will get the Warren County Communications Center because the Knowlton tower picked it up. "That's just the nature of the beast," he said, but expected things to continue to improve as technology advanced.

“Thank you and your entire department for everything you’ve done in handling this unprecedented year,” Mr. Kern said. Mr. Wheatley said he appreciated the support of the commissioners as well.

The group took a break at 10:49 a.m. and returned to Open Session at 11:00 a.m.

Next up for discussion was the Sheriff’s Office budget, and the commissioners were joined by James McDonald and Undersheriff Scott Marinelli. Mr. Francisco reiterated that as a Constitutional Officer, this office was capped at two percent increases each year. We take them up to the maximum every year. “This year I held the OE at \$105,000 and the balance will go to salaries,” Mr. Francisco said. Sheriff McDonald said while he wasn’t asking for anything additional, he was under the impression his OE had been \$110,000 in the past. “We cut it to \$105,000,” Mr. Francisco said, adding the Sheriff did not request any capital this year. “Jim, the security upgrade – that was approved last year, so you’re good to go with that,” Mr. Francisco said. “With what, the cameras?” asked Mr. McDonald. “The \$110,000, so it’s budgeted, so it’s good,” Mr. Francisco answered. The Sheriff said the ones they had were terrible.

Mr. Sarnoski asked why they hadn’t been replaced yet. The Sheriff said they were still waiting to go out to bid; they only had one quote so far. Mr. Lazorisak said he thought they were a state contract. “Yeah, but I couldn’t just go ahead with that without approval from the board,” said the Sheriff. Mr. Lazorisak said he just had to send over a resolution. Mr. Francisco said he would give him the account number again to for the resolution. “Let’s get it done,” said Mr. Sarnoski, particularly now with so few people in the courthouse due to COVID.

Continuing with the overview, Mr. Francisco said there were no vehicle requests this year. “I think the issue is, of course, the unsettled contract,” Mr. Francisco continued, “We have to settle the contract to make sure it works within our cap.” Mr. McDonald said, “I think we’re very close to that, as far as the salaries go - ” Mr. Lazorisak cut him off, saying the group should enter Executive Session if they wanted to delve into this now.

### **RESOLUTION 53-21**

On motion by Ms. Ciesla, seconded by Mr. Sarnoski, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING EXECUTIVE SESSION OF THE WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS 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, Matters Relating to



Collective Bargaining Agreements, at 11:03 a.m.

Recorded vote: Ms. Ciesla yes, Mr. Sarnoski yes, Mr. Kern yes

On motion by Ms. Ciesla, seconded by Mr. Sarnoski, the Board adjourned Executive Session and returned to Open Session at 11:25 a.m.

Recorded vote: Ms. Ciesla yes, Mr. Sarnoski yes, Mr. Kern yes

The Sheriff said he has always been frugal, noting he had a secretary who was making \$31,000 after working for the county for 15 years. Mr. Kern said the Prosecutor has one making \$33,000 after 30 years. "But I've also seen the Prosecutor's Office hire a secretary and pay her \$50,000," said Mr. McDonald. "No," said Mr. Lazorisak, it was outside the pay scale.

"I just don't think the Sheriff's Officers or staff are being overpaid," the Sheriff said. Mr. Sarnoski said, "I don't think we said anything about being overpaid; we talked about the future of contractual salaries is what we have to manage within our budget." He said future contractual salaries had to be managed, and we are only talking about expenses. Revenues cannot offset the expenses on county budgets. "If we can't manage future expenses within our two percent cap, that's where we're going to have to find other ways to do that. Whether it be cutting OE, or cutting salaries and wages somewhere," said Mr. Sarnoski, "And with the increases we've seen I think that's what we're talking about here."

Mr. Sarnoski sought clarification on how Sheriff's Sales were being conducted, confirming that a Sheriff's Sale could commence if a property was vacant. He said real estate was really moving right now, and some properties were selling within a day. Undersheriff Marinelli said some homes that end up in Sheriff's Sales may have been in foreclosure for two or three years, and the residents leave without telling anyone. A house left vacant without heat and water deteriorates rapidly and is no longer worth market value. If a buyer can invest \$50,000 - \$60,000 and flip it, that's the Sheriff's Sale market. Mr. Sarnoski said he understood that, but questioned if there were many "flipper" houses still out there. Mr. Marinelli said there were; they conducted maybe an average of three sales every other week. Mr. Sarnoski asked about COVID restrictions. Mr. Marinelli said people used to be allowed to observe but now only those who have signed up and have checks in hand are allowed to attend, and they social distance just like everywhere else.

Mr. Francisco asked what percentage of Sheriff's Sales were being conducted now, as compared to before COVID. "A lot less," said Mr. Marinelli. They used to process 30 sales each time. Currently, due to COVID, people cannot be evicted and

some were living in homes for free. Mr. Marinelli and Mr. McDonald thought there would be a huge rebound in Sheriff's Sales once that restriction was lifted.

"I guess my message is... we've got a two percent cap, and philosophically, I will not go above that cap," said Mr. Sarnoski. Based on prior conversations, it sounded as if the Sheriff was close on contracts, which was good, "But managing budget going forward, we need to understand... we need to be cognizant of what the effects of our contracts do to our budget," Mr. Sarnoski said. "We don't offset expenses with revenues in our departments." Mr. Francisco said the funding was part of the cap calculation, but while the Sheriff's Office had some great years in terms of revenue, "I can't see that happening forever."

"I think we're in a conservative place. If the revenue comes in under, then we're bad," Mr. Francisco said. "So it doesn't help if it's over, but if it's under it kills us," Mr. McDonald said. "Yeah, that's the way it works," Mr. Francisco said, "We don't make the cap calculation, believe me."

As an example, Mr. Sarnoski said if something were to happen to Sheriff McDonald and we had a different Sheriff who didn't believe in Sheriff's Sales, "What happens to this county if we've considered all the revenue from Sheriff's Sales to maintain the Sheriff's Office, and the new Sheriff – because there's no constitutional obligation to keep up the Sheriff's Sales... let's say this Sheriff decides to stop it and there's no revenue there – what happens to this budget?" Mr. Sarnoski said. "We can't look at that revenue, which is not guaranteed, as a guaranteed revenue year over year. I need you to understand that," Mr. Sarnoski said to Sheriff McDonald.

"It doesn't go directly in there anyway, correct?" Ms. Ciesla asked. "Any excess goes to surplus," Mr. Francisco said. "More like MRNA," Ms. Ciesla said. "Yes, yes, exactly," Mr. Francisco said. Sheriff McDonald asked, "When you say the excess, you mean over -" "Over the \$255,000," Mr. Francisco said, "We budget \$255,000. That's what we use for cap calculations."

"So the Sheriff's Sales do help to offset the budget, that's my point," said Mr. McDonald. "Well, yeah, but we can't be saying, 'Oh, we have \$200,000 extra, let's give \$200,000'," Mr. Francisco said. "That's not what I meant," Sheriff McDonald said. "We recognize that as revenue," Mr. Lazorisak said.

"And as far as the Sheriff ever saying he won't do it, that's part of the job, you gotta do it," Sheriff McDonald said about Sheriff's Sales. Mr. Francisco said, "Yeah.

With the strong housing market, it seems that houses won't go to sale - it would be easier to sell on a regular market, rather than go to Sheriff Sale, but it's not that way?" Mr. Lazorisak said, "If people walk away, they walk away." Mr. Francisco said, "Yeah, but you'd think the bank would be able to sell it..." He was told some homes were in such disrepair, the bank would prefer to take the loss. Undersheriff Marinelli recalled an instance when people lived free in a house for seven years.

Mr. Sarnoski said, "Quite honestly, I'm very shocked and in disbelief that it's still this strong. There's got to be cliff somewhere, that this is just going to fall off if these houses are no longer available."

"I agree," said Mr. Kern. "I think a couple things: One, with the housing, I think we will go back to, like you said, when things open back up, there'll be that push for you to do more sales; and I also think that the market - there's going to be such a pressure to open everything back up that the work from home, the work remote, is not going to be - we're not changing to that - I don't think that, and the Warren County market will pop and it will pop pretty hard, and the whole housing market, I think." The Sheriff said, "I think there's a lot of businesses aren't going to return." Mr. Kern and Ms. Ciesla agreed. "But I think places that... people who have to commute into the city are not going to want to do that. One day a week is one thing, but three or four is different," said Mr. Kern.

Returning to the topic of the bargaining unit, Mr. Kern said he thought the news of the contract was a good sign, "But I think we are at an inflection point where what we saw with the Prosecutor is where we could be in five, six, seven years. So I think it's important that we're taking these steps, we're aware of it, we're going to monitor it, because we can't get to where the Prosecutor - it's just, it's not sustainable," Mr. Kern said. He didn't blame this Sheriff for the first contract with those steps, "I think that's been on the books for a while, so it is what it is and we have to deal with it now," said Mr. Kern. "And the cap," said Ms. Ciesla, "We can't get around that cap, correct?" Mr. Francisco said, "Yeah, that's relatively new."

Mr. Kern said the governor and the legislature allowed the interest arbitration cap to expire without even acknowledging it, but held the county and municipal property taxes. "It's just insane. Either let both go, or have both. You can't take away from operating expenses to pay for salaries, it's just not sustainable," said Mr. Kern. "If you end up negotiating like a four percent raise and we have a two percent cap, like where does it come from? The math doesn't work," Mr. Ciesla said, "That's the problem."

Mr. Lazorisak said we have to make contributions to these officers. “There are large chunks all the way across the board, not just out of his budget but out of our budget too,” Mr. Lazorisak said. Mr. Ciesla mentioned the rising pension costs per the state. “There you go, we’re up a half a million just like that,” Mr. Lazorisak said, “And the majority of that is the law enforcement end of our retirements.”

Mr. Sarnoski didn’t want the Sheriff to feel singled out. “We just nickel dined Public Safety for 20 grand out of their O&E. We’re nickel diming everybody,” he said. “When we look at your budget, we don’t look at it as the Sheriff’s budget, we look at it how it plays with every other contract negotiation and budget within this county and how that works together, because that’s the job of this commission. It’s not just to look at the Sheriff’s Office; we have to look at how the Sheriff’s Office relates to every other department. And that’s why, you know, we’re not trying to just be hard on you. Being conservative with contracts with the Sheriff also translates to the Prosecutor’s Office, Corrections and every other department in negotiation that we have to manage, so it’s across the board,” Mr. Sarnoski said.

Ms. Ciesla asked, “Is the budget for this year okay? Like, are we good this year with his budget?” Mr. Francisco said, “Oh yeah, yeah, and with the contract negotiations in, it’ll work, yeah.” Ms. Ciesla said, “It’s just in the future years that we might have to look at the, the O&E - ” Mr. Francisco said, “You have to be careful. If you get four, six percent raises forever, you know.” Mr. Sarnoski said, “And then listen: my philosophy isn’t because you can go two percent, you go two percent, my philosophy is you look at what you need and you go to that. But at this point with the contract being up in the air, we’re going to two percent, but I’d like to get the future where we’re saying, ‘Okay, you know, I only need this much this year, it’s one and half percent, wow, we don’t have to go two percent,’ but right now we don’t know where that is.” Sheriff McDonald asked, “Two percent of my budget is equal to how much?” “Well not much, that’s the problem,” Mr. Francisco said. “Yeah, it’s not much,” Ms. Ciesla said. “I can keep my O&E the same forever, but just the contractual raises alone...” Mr. Sarnoski said, “And that’s our point - it’s got to come somewhere!”

Mr. Lazorisak said, “You have to realize - and this board was very good to you. Starting off, you got a \$45,000 increase in your O&E, they gave you an extra Undersheriff, then what I was saying with McQuaid’s hit, you had a lot of front end that was given to you, and it’s slowly starting to catch up.”

Sheriff McDonald said, “That extra Undersheriff cost the Sheriff’s Office a Sheriff’s Officer. The full staff of the Sheriff’s Office was 16 officers. We gave back

a Sheriff's Officer to hire an additional Undersheriff, because then you didn't have to worry about pension, you didn't have to worry about insurance, you didn't have to worry about the contractual increases. That was negotiated between Mr. Smith and the previous County Administrator."

"Okay, so there was a little savings," said Mr. Lazorisak, "It's still part of administration, but I'm just saying, I mean, this board was very good in the beginning, and what you just said – your budget is small, so a little percent like that affects you a lot. That's the issue here." Ms. Ciesla said, "It's hard to cut when you don't have a lot in there."

Sheriff McDonald replied, "That's my point though. The guys are going to get contractual raises, I mean, I don't think at any time the PBA and this commission are going to agree – 'You know what? We're where we are, we'll stay that way forever.' If the O&E keeps getting reduced to cover that amount, where does that end? You say you want to look towards the future, well, we might not be bringing in \$400,000 a year, \$500,000 a year. Okay, I get that. What happens five years from now when the O&E is cut in half to cover salaries?"

Mr. Kern said, "Hopefully, this new table starts to overtake that – I mean, again, we're relying on the breakage, which didn't come from us." The Sheriff said, "When you say you're relying on the breakage, though, that's exactly – you are. Three years from now, you're hoping that we're not at full staff, that guys have left."

Mr. Sarnoski said, "I think the point is, Jim, those are hard decisions that are going to have to be made, and we're trying to put off those hard decisions for as long as possible. So, you're right, we're getting to a point where those hard decisions are going to be made. Do we cut Sheriff's Officers, do we cut Undersheriffs, do we cut O&E, what are those hard decisions that are going to have to be made in the future between this commission and whoever is the Sheriff at that time? We are looking to put off those hard decisions for this county for as long as possible."

Mr. Kern said, "And that's exactly what the Prosecutor is dealing with right now." "Exactly," said Mr. Sarnoski. "And I can tell you that it is so painful for him," Mr. Kern continued, "Because there are things that he cannot do - to prosecute – because of salaries. To me, it's just unconscionable that that's how we have to run government, but it is what it is."

"Well that's the point," Sheriff McDonald said, "Listen, I'm a taxpayer too. I don't like that to go on either. But at the same time, if the only way to do that is to

cut the services I'm already paying for – I don't know.”

Ms. Ciesla said, “No, I know. Well this is the position they put us in, too, with your budget being capped, that's not helping.” “We don't make the rules,” Mr. Kern said, “If we did, we could solve this.”

Mr. Lazorisak said, “Get rid of interest arbitration. You'll sustain it. At the end of the day, our biggest hit right here is the salaries and wages, across the board, with all these unions.”

Mr. Sarnoski said, “If you look at our priorities at NJAC, they directly relate to some of the problems we're seeing right now: getting the cap on the interest arbitration, Civil Service, being able to opt out of Civil Service... so these things are directly related, but until those things happen, Jim, we're where we are and we're making the hard decisions now that aren't so hard, so we don't have to make the really, really hard ones later, and that's where we are.”

Sheriff McDonald said, “I mean, ideally, the Sheriff's Office, I wish were out of Civil Service, and you could just hire a guy that's retiring from a department, who's got all that experience... you wouldn't have to pay pension, you wouldn't have to pay insurance.”

“And save a lot of money,” said Mr. Marinelli. “And save a lot of money,” Ms. Ciesla repeated.

“The first two guys at the top of the list, I wouldn't hire to mow my lawn,” Sheriff McDonald said.

Mr. Lazorisak said, “There might come a day when you can contract it out and oversee a private security contract.”

“I'm not holding my breath on Civil Service ever going anywhere,” Mr. Sarnoski said. “But I'll tell you right now: you're absolutely right, that that would be a boon to what we can do in this county.”

“I'm good this year?” Mr. McDonald asked. Mr. Francisco said, “You're good this year. Right now I have \$105,000 in there for OE and the rest is salary, and if the contract settles with the numbers we gave you, you'll be good.” “Okay, because that's key,” said Ms. Ciesla.

Mr. Kern said, "I know you were joking, but do you have candidates on the list?"

Sheriff McDonald "We have – yeah, but the first two are disabled vets, which is tough with Civil Service. They're a disaster; I'm not going to hire them."

"All right, we're still on the record," Mr. Lazorisak said.

"That's something we have to fight with," said Sheriff McDonald.

Mr. Sarnoski said, "All right, so anyway, we'll keep it where it is... if next year we tell you we've got to leave it flat, would you ever be able to do that?"

"What, the O&E?" asked the Sheriff. "No, the budget," said Mr. Sarnoski. "Well the budget, I mean, you can't," said Mr. McDonald, "But that's already been factored in, though."

Mr. Francisco said, "No, I think we would go to the two percent... my plan is to use the two percent every year... the maximum cap."

"We have to watch this," Mr. Lazorisak said, "It's very, very tight. So as he fills positions in, after we settle the contract, Kim has to run numbers so we know exactly where we are. We have to watch this - I would say on a bimonthly – as you make your O&E purchases and whatnot, we need to work with Kim to just make sure you're staying within that bubble. That's all I have to say."

"Jim, I would ask that you be tight on your O&E this year, make sure that every purchase you make is necessary, and we'll see where it really comes in next year, and what we really need as an O&E for next year," Mr. Sarnoski said, "If you could do that I would really appreciate that."

"But I still think next year we take that \$14,000 and put it elsewhere," the Sheriff said.

If you show us that the O&E can be managed really tight, and then we can take that \$14,000 out of the O&E, maybe we'll do that, but... let's get this contract settled and let's see where the rest of this, you know, the O&E goes, and we're tight on the O&E and you're still maintaining a solid office... then we'll go from there, how's that." Mr. Sarnoski said.

“Thanks for everything you guys are doing,” Ms. Ciesla said, “I know it’s tough working within these ridiculous rules that don’t even make mathematical sense.”

“It is what it is,” the Sheriff said.

“Thank you, sir, thank you,” Mr. Kern said. “Is there any public comment pertaining to the Sheriff’s budget?”

Hearing no public comments, this portion of the meeting ended at 11:45 a.m.

Returning to the county budget as a whole, Mr. Sarnoski looked forward to seeing updated numbers for the board’s next meeting. “We’ve managed over the last few meetings to do a pretty good job getting us back in line and closing that \$3 million gap that we had,” he said. Mr. Francisco agreed. Mr. Sarnoski expressed gratitude to all departments for their cooperation and to finance and administration for their hard work to get to this point.

Regarding COVID expenses, there was currently a cash shortage of about \$11,000 based on what had been received and dispersed. “Which isn’t that bad,” Mr. Sarnoski said, “We still have some grants available but I’m sure they’re going to be used for other expenses, and that transportation, which we’re not sure how we’re going to use that yet.” “Yeah,” said Mr. Francisco.

Mr. Sarnoski wanted to see what we could possibly dig up for an EDC grant program for small businesses. Having met with the EDC, the committee agreed that the \$50,000 normally budgeted for them would be better put to use with a grant program. “So I’d still like to find some more money for that,” Mr. Sarnoski said.

Mr. Francisco said he had inquired whether \$900,000 potentially available through the local government emergency fund could be put toward economic grants, but the rules were not decided yet. Right now, it was for testing only. “Plus, I don’t know with Biden, if we’re going to get more... I read he’s putting a lot of money in for state and local governments,” Mr. Francisco wondered.

After some remarks about stimulus programs and where the Biden money was coming from, Mr. Sarnoski said, “Apparently there’s money out there, but it’s not going to the people who actually need it, so let’s get it to the people who need it and that’s what I’m hoping we can do.”



Mr. Francisco asked how much Mr. Sarnoski was looking for. Mr. Sarnoski hoped for between \$250,000 and \$300,000 for this program. “At least \$250,000... that’s what NORWESCAP had as a state grant. “Did that work out okay?” asked Mr. Francisco. “Yeah, they wound up getting up to \$400,000 through additional funding,” Mr. Sarnoski said.

Pending an answer regarding the rules for the local government emergency fund, Mr. Kern suggested allocating COVID money, but he was under the mistaken impression that the county already had this money. So discussion returned to where to find \$200,000 for this purpose. If it were to come out of surplus, “It will definitely be a one-time thing,” Mr. Francisco said, and hoped for reimbursement.

Mr. Sarnoski thought between the \$2.2 trillion federal relief Biden was proposing, and the state still holding on to money, that there was potential there. He wondered how much more testing was going to be needed now that the vaccine was out. “The problem is, testing is still going to go on, probably for the year,” Mr. Kern said.

Mr. Kern noted County Planner Dave Dech, who would be presenting his budget this week, requested \$200,000 for another traffic study. He also sought a four percent increase over last year, so Mr. Kern thought there could be some potential savings there to offset the cost of this economic grant.

Wrapping up, Ms. Ciesla said she liked the way this board runs the budget meetings. “Breaking it down into departments, making sure the public can hear that, because that’s not something that you necessarily hear at the municipal levels. I think it’s important for people to hear where their money is going, and why we have to do some of the things we do, like with the two percent cap that’s on one end but not the other.”

Mr. Sarnoski said municipalities don’t budget this way, and even most counties don’t look at it the way we do. He thought this way was more responsible to the taxpayers. “Definitely more transparent,” Ms. Ciesla said. “Everybody has a voice in the process,” said Mr. Kern.

On motion by Ms. Ciesla, seconded by Mr. Sarnoski, and there being no further business before the commissioners at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 11:53 a.m.

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

**RESOLUTION 53-21**

On motion by **Ms. Ciesla**, seconded by **Mr. Sarnoski**, the following resolution was unanimously adopted by the Board of County Commissioners of the County of Warren at a meeting held on January 16, 2021.

**A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING EXECUTIVE SESSION OF  
THE WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
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 County Commissioners 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: Ms. Ciesla yes, Mr. Sarnoski yes, Mr. Kern yes**

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

\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk  
Alex J. Lazorisak