

These minutes were approved by the Board of County Commissioners on April 12, 2023. Full texts of resolutions appear 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 7, 2023 at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Director Ciesla and upon roll call, the following members were present: Commissioner Jason Sarnoski, Commissioner Deputy Director James Kern and Commissioner Director Lori Ciesla. Also attending were County Administrator Alex Lazorisak, County CFO Kim Francisco, Public Works Director Emily Hammer and Deputy Commissioner Clerk Tracy Matlock.

After leading the flag salute, Director Ciesla confirmed with the County Administrator that the meeting notice was in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975.

County CFO Kim Francisco started by addressing Mr. Sarnoski's concerns regarding Environmental Health Salaries going up a little bit. That is because of contracts. Both unions are getting a step this year and we did make an adjustment to the epidemiologist's salary.

Mr. Francisco moved on to changes in Capital Expense due to a request from Buildings and Grounds for HVAC controls systems in approximately six buildings. That will cost about \$207,000.00. This will be taken out of the American Rescue Funds, resulting in no effect on the bottom line of the budget. Buildings and Grounds also requested a walk-behind lawn mower which will also come from the American Rescue funds.

Mr. Francisco then turned to the operating budget, aide to volunteer fire training. He mentioned he was talking with County Administrator and we put \$50,000.00 in the account to cover EMT training. County Administrator said that will need to be bumped up to \$60,000.00. It was brought up about what to do about the lack of EMS commitment within the municipalities. He explained the State of New Jersey will reimburse an individual for training costs to become an EMT if you are part of a squad that does not bill an insurance company. If you bill an insurance company, the State will not reimburse you. Out of about 20 EMS, all but three bill. The thought is to do something similar like we have with the fire academy. If we are instructing our fire department people, from the municipalities, do the same

premise. Dennis Riley did do a prep-type course with Atlantic. It worked well. We want to provide, get these individuals trained. We'll discuss this further next weekend, when Public Safety is here. Individuals will be trained in-county and not have to travel for the training. We will have to do some type of MOU with the municipalities and the individuals. We don't want to spend this kind of money on an individual, only to have them walk out the door, six months down the road. It is foreseen as being a long term program.

The next item Mr. Francisco discussed was the Buildings and Ground's budget – when it came in, he explained he bumped it up five percent last time. As he mentioned at the last meeting, everything is going up, toilet paper, paper towels, copy paper, postage, etc.

Electric – Utilities was kept the same, but with charging stations and EV vehicles and additional buildings coming on, Mr. Francisco asked the Commissioners if they would want to bump up the utilities. He wanted to point out that the County will have more electrical needs in the future.

Mr. Francisco pointed out the increase in capital expenses didn't really affect the budget that much. The levy is the same, the surplus use went up just a little as of right now. With Mr. Francisco being finished with his portion of the meeting, he turned to the first department to present their budget which was Warren County Community College.

Dr. Will Austin addressed the Board and introduced Yvonne Reitemeyer, Board Chair. He outlined his presentation as being part budget presentation as well as answering some of the questions the Commissioners posed about the education world.

Dr. Austin said he usually addressed efficiency and effectiveness. This year he's adding reason and objectivity.

He discussed the College in comparison to tuition and fee charges of surrounding community colleges. We maintain our lowest level of costs to our residents in comparison. In Sussex if you want to take a full load, which he defined at fifteen credits, that would be about \$3,300.00, Raritan Valley it would be about \$3,300.00, Morris would be about \$3,000.00. Warren County would be about \$2,700.00 that would also include your books. For the other colleges, depending on what the major is, about \$800.00-\$1,200.00 more for books. We remain very much cost effective.

Dr. Austin went over a brief history of the College's budget from when he first started to now. When he started the College's budget was at \$2 million. What they are looking for this year is to run the College at \$9.6 to \$9.7 million. Twenty-six percent which would come from County support, twenty-eight percent from the State, we anticipate about thirty-nine percent to come from tuition and fees and seven percent from other income.

The revenue assumptions for the year. County is about \$2.5 million, about a two percent increase. He is going to assume the State support is going to remain level this year. He is anticipating about the same/stable enrollment. He said they need to do some sort of realignment of non-credit. The non-credit workforce will have to be looked at in the coming years. The workforce has completely and drastically changed.

The expense assumptions – COVID subsidies that were given to cover their non-revenue that happened during COVID, those have gone away. Dr. Austin, continued, he knows there is going to be inflationary cost increases, just like people's households. He knows the health benefits will increase. Support of robotics, leverage of external grants. He expects a major grant from the State to redo the entire infrastructure at the College but that will require some costs. Vacant positions will need to be filled this year as well.

They are well underway in precision agriculture. The equipment has all arrived. They're implementing that. They're working well with local farmers and also with Rutgers Co-Operative Extension Center and their farm in Hunterdon County to test some of the equipment before they put it on local farms. There are a couple of other grants in for a couple of million dollars.

They added two programs that will come this fall. People will be able to get degrees in precision agriculture and commercial space operations (think robotic on the moon).

A brief film was presented about the type of education students will receive from WCCC and how forward-looking the college has become with offering degrees in up and coming fields such as drones and precision agriculture. This will eventually be distributed nationally. They see this as a great revenue generator for the College. One example is they are basically now the trainer in all of this for New Jersey Transit. They will be flying to Oklahoma to set up a women's detention center using drones to track escapees. One of the things they are very excited about is they will partner with Bucks Community College. Bucks will take the five counties and

Philadelphia that will be their service area, under our umbrella. They will teach our curriculum, work with our staff, and we will get that toll service area that they will market and we'll profit share. We know that no one else can figure out how to set these programs up.

He explained the reason why Bucks is coming to WCCC is because they can't get the staff to teach the program because the requirements are to teach on a different schedule than what the instructional staff is used to. The traditional teacher model won't work with this type of schedule. The College's teacher-administrator model does work.

With the New Jersey Transit job, at the Penn Station/Newark train station. There are the New Jersey Transit police officers in charge of the drones. We take thousands of pictures and recreate the Newark train station. This is a job a student would never be able to be on other than here because it's illegal to fly there, because it's right next to the airport and you have to have all types of licenses and permissions. This was a tremendous learning opportunity for the students. There is no way this could take place in the classroom environment. It would take a whole semester. These are all things the students are doing outside of class. That's why it's difficult to do something like this in other degrees.

This leads us to an even more exciting announcement – The FAA holds a couple of regional conferences a year called, *Droning On* and they will be holding it at Warren this April 27, 28, and 29. This will literally fill all of the area hotels and bring about 1,000 people a day, to the college, from all over.

Another highlight is with the bicentennial coming up, to rename the robotics center after Dr. Joseph Warren, the namesake of the County. Dr. Austin commented we need to think more like Dr. Warren and ask, did I act worthy of myself? Was I able to move others further than what they would have moved on their own? If not, have I changed what they thought about or tried to put my thoughts on to them, but let them grow into their own ways of being? Dr. Warren also warned when people take all of this away from you, and they tell you what you have to think, what you have to believe, who you have to be, and they strip you of your individuality.

Community Colleges are not mechanisms of equality. They are mechanisms of opportunity. We are getting more and more of this from the State and it sounds good, but it's such a bad idea. When we get a grant for \$250,000.00 to put in programs for the severely mentally disabled, on the surface, it's a good idea, but without any operational around the State, it's \$250,000.00 to each community

college to do whatever they wanted to do with it. Do you know what it would cost Warren, and we're one of the smallest counties, to do that properly? It would cost well over \$2.5 million. I would need to build an infrastructure and train everyone because it's a population that colleges didn't envision to be the mainstay of their operation. We went to the people who know how to do this work and have done it well for years. We went to Abilities and I said there is \$250,000.00 here. If I take it, it will be a complete waste. By the time I hire bureaucrats to do all the work, no human will see any benefits. Colleges educate people who will get a job. We partnered with abilities and we gave them the entire \$250,000.00. We brought them into the college and said you know how to do this work. Let's partner. Take this money and help the people. We'll stay out of that fund pocket because we don't belong there.

Dr. Austin switched topics and talked about things they are going to be changing at the college in the coming year. We are going to redirect the President's activities a bit. As you know, you have committed \$187,000.00 to this project. We have two projects one for the aviation field, and one for this, that we are working on. The aviation one we are working for an act of Congress to make us a UAS test site, so we're getting community colleges around the nation together and lobbyist to work on this. Tom Kean can help us with having Warren designated as UAS test site. What that means is we can test everybody's equipment. This means all these empty store fronts will fill with startups. If we can get that moved through Congress, that would be a dramatically, positive effect on our offices and our rentals in this community. These are all good jobs, good pay, high tech, low emissions and good companies. My goal is for this coming year is to fund these two projects. Dr. Austin will get back to the Board on these two projects.

To summarize our budget requests, we are asking for \$2,505,082.00 to continue on this journey. It's \$49,000.00 more this year, it's two percent. We are asking that you break it up like we had to protect that dual enrollment fund. \$2,305,082.00 with operations and \$200,000.00 for dual enrollment.

The Board thanked Dr. Austin for his presentation. Some great things presented today. Mr. Sarnoski and his colleagues looks forward to working with the college and the new drone program. This portion of the meeting concluded at 10:03 a.m.

The meeting reconvened at 10:13 a.m., Warren County Technical School is next on the agenda. Derrick Forsythe, Superintendent, Amy Barkman, Business Administrator/Board Secretary and Dr. Lori Austin, Board President were in

attendance to present the budget requests.

Mr. Forsythe shared a PowerPoint presentation with the Board. There are 400+ students in grades 9 -12 with full-day instruction, 12 different career programs, clubs and organizations, sports teams, an active Parent Teacher Student Association and Career Advisory Groups along with a newly formed Alumni Association.

Mr. Forsythe thanked the Board for their assistance with the comprehensive needs assessment done in the spring of 2022. Findings of the assessment included:

- Update of Door Keying System
- Upgrade of Sidewalks/Curbing
- Replacement of Dust Collection System
- Replacement of Welding Ventilation System
- Replacement of Walk-in Freezer
- Repairs of Main Entrance/Driveway Repairs off of Route 57
- New Message Sign in front of school

Discussion took place regarding the main entrance/driveway repairs. Mr. Sarnoski and Mr. Lazorisak suggested putting the state on notice and get them involved with the issue, since Route 57 is a state road and the water runoff is causing the issue. The state may be responsible to fix and repair the issues on their road.

Mr. Forsythe turned the presentation over to Ms. Barkman, Business Administrator/Board Secretary at this time. Ms. Barkman thanked the Board for hearing the proposed budget. Currently the budget is \$12 million. We are asking for 3%, increase is due to health benefit increases; salary increases; loss of federal grants; loss of revenue for employee contribution toward health benefits younger staff is choosing lesser plan; need to add full-time social worker; outsourcing lawn maintenance; transportation increases.

Mr. Sarnoski pointed out, “The cost to educate a student at the Vo-tech school is less than the cost of the student at their own district.”

Ms. Barkman presented budget request of 3% over 2%, along with minimum of \$500,000.00 capital funds. Current projects coming up for bid are the HVAC system and ventilation system. Last year the project was put out to bid, we did not receive any bids. For the walk-through only one contractor for the dust collector and one contractor for the walk-in freezer, this does not mean they are going to bid. If no bids received, we will have to come to the Commissioners for a waiver on this

work. We need to get this work done, remarked Ms. Barkman. Additional capital projects include the remaining 6 roof top units need to be done this year. We broke up the project for the future, did not want the units to go down all at the same time. Currently, all the pumps in the boilers are in need of replacement. Using fund balance to off-set the budget due to the shortage of tuition funds needing to be repaid back to districts for the certified tuition rate.

The Vo-tech has seen an increase in applications to apply, there are typically 120-130 seats available. We have to turn students away. Our school has a better reputation and things are changing.

Mr. Sarnoski confirmed the percentage of 3% for last year with Mr. Francisco, with no capital. The county participated in the needs assessment plan with the Vo-Tech. This will in essence save the county monies in the upgrades. This provided a better plan and understanding of the 5-year plan. Mr. Sarnoski asked, "What is the 4-year plan looks like?" Ms. Barkman replied, "Contractors are telling them it could be 30% increase from last year."

Mr. Lazorisak, suggested if unsuccessful with the two bids, the state has made some changes, the school can do a design build type of contract. Can hire an engineer and hire a contractor that work together, this will help control costs.

Mr. Sarnoski agreed to the numbers. He would like to see the design build and see what the 5-year capital looks like. Mr. Sarnoski requested Public Works Director Emily Hammer to work with the Vo-Tech to get this projection together.

Mr. Sarnoski asked Mr. Francisco "If any of the American Rescue monies could be used for the capital projects? Just a thought." Mr. Francisco replied, "Yes, it could."

Mr. Sarnoski asked what next year is looking like, could we hold at 2%. Ms. Barkman would like to hold at 2%, "If we can, we will."

Mr. Lazorisak requested Dr. Austin and Ms. Barkman submit the Stop Loss Reports. Mr. Kern and Mr. Lazorisak have been working with the municipalities and school districts to help create a Health Insurance Fund. Need 500 participants, hope is to save everyone monies.

Ms. Ciesla questioned, "What capital projects do you want to get completed if the bids come in?" Ms. Barkman answered, "The roof tops, ventilation system

and the walk-in freezer.” Ms. Barkman would also like to see the keying system get done too. This has many benefits.

Liza Thomas, Liberty Township, asked about the additional social worker position. Mr. Forsythe addressed Ms. Thomas question. This position is in addition to the guidance counselor and physiologist. This position will assist with mental health issues we are seeing among our students.

Mr. Forsythe discussed the available resources that are currently being used within the Vo-Tech to assist with the student’s needs. There is an uptick in the number is cases we are seeing.

The Board took a break at 11:04 a.m. and reconvened at 11:12 a.m.

The next department to present their budget was the Library. Mr. Francisco commented the Library had a good year and did have some vacancies, so their salaries were down. They are good financially. Ms. Wilkinson said currently the library has twenty-three student assistant position vacancies. The following vacancies positions have been eliminated: a part-time driver position, a principal library assistant, four, full-time library assistant positions, The Department is looking at adding some part-time positions as library assistants (front line service and desk). She gave a brief overview of the library system, pointing out they are a sixty-hours per week operation. Most days they have to run two shifts, so the part-time workers are needed to cover morning and evenings when they need extra staff. It has been a challenge this year with staff. We’ve had to juggle people between locations. We’ve had to shift schedules on a regular basis. We’ve taken to managing on-line scheduling of staff so that we can tell where we have bodies and we can pull where we need to. This is an awkward way to work on a daily basis, but we do need to do that.

The problem we have had with hiring, and I’ve spoken to Personnel about this, is the fact that we were expecting front line people to do a lot of higher skilled jobs that they weren’t being paid for. The salary rate, prior to the increase, for library assistant being hired was \$13.60 so now they are getting a little over \$14 with the increase. But we are paying at minimum wage, so we are looking at the basic library assistant position as a more of an enhanced student assistant, which is why we eliminated those positions. We are giving them more responsibility to do all the shelving, things like that. It’s going to make it easier to hire. We are looking at some higher-level positions library associate/librarian1 position that pay better and we will be able to hire and get other work done. People that we have had in the past that were doing some of those jobs, they leave because we are not paying them enough and

rightly so. They are getting the same amount as those just working at the desk. This has been a problem. Personnel has talked about promoting people. The Civil Service System is a bit of a challenge in not necessarily getting the right people for the position. The library associate and the librarian1 position are non-competitive positions. You can hire from within or outside of the system. So that's part of the strategy we are going with right now.

A discussion took place about a further look at the library positions, the structure and possibly an overhaul of the entire operations system and possibly get rid of some full-time positions and create part-time positions to be filled by some senior citizens who only want to work a few hours a week and possibly including students to fill part-time positions. The future goals of the library need to be looked at so these changes can be relevant in the future.

Ms. Wilkinson discussed the many changes the library has made to make things more automated. Libraries are facing a lot of challenges. The shift to digital resources. It's a different game. People may not be coming into the library, so we need to have better ways of communicating with those people because they are still our members. There is on-line registration for new cards. We're looking at ways to renew their cards after verifying they still live in our service area. We're trying to facilitate a different community of users verses the ones who come inside. The digital world means software and expensive products we are buying. They are a lot more money. Staff is expected to use a lot of software because there isn't one piece of software we use.

Mr. Francisco, surplus built in 2022 – Surplus is being fully utilized, \$1.2 million. We put another \$100,000 in surplus in 2023. The amount to be raised by taxation is flat for 2022. With the same tax rate and our ratables going up, that will generate more. We may need to drop the rate. The library system is looking at capital expenditures over the next few years. There are going to be ten-year old buildings that will need to start maintaining. We can keep the levy the same, if we lower the rate.

Mr. Lazorisak turned to the topic – CDH, Catherine Dickson Hofman Branch. He explained the project went from a \$4.5 million proposal design, now we are over \$7 million. He is proposing to put this out to bid to see where it's going to come in at. We may have to look at doing this in two phases. We are budgeting roughly \$7 million. We are looking to use \$3.5 million from the American Rescue Plan Aide and then \$3.5 million out of the Library. County Administrator expressed he's not ready to award the contract even if it comes in at \$6.5 million. This needs to be

revisited. The Commissioners expressed concern about the rising cost of the CDH Branch, noting six years ago a brand new library was built from the ground up for less than \$6 million and how now it will cost over \$7 million to do a renovation. The Board is in agreeance it should be revisited. Mr. Lazorisak would like to budget \$50,000.00 out of the library budget for a feasibility study evaluate the three libraries and make recommendation of what needs to be done.

Mr. Lazorisak discussed logistics of the Blairstown Branch of the library and whether or not it should be shut down during renovations. Ms. Wilkinson responded the library is capable of running curb-side service, which is the bare bones service they can do. A small facility would be needed along with computers. They would bring a small collection of materials; maybe the most current. They could disperse some of their collection to the other branches. Mr. Lazorisak suggested he and Mr. Sarnoski speak with the mayor of Blairstown regarding use of space of the municipal building during renovations of CDH Branch.

Next, the County Administrator turned to the topic of the Southwest Branch of the library and the vacant storage space that is available there. He is thinking of using it as flex office space, unless there has been any talk from Phillipsburg joining the County's federation. The Board expressed concerns about the amount of traffic in the area. The space could be used for any department that is in need of space and not necessarily dealing with the public, for example administration, IT, etc. Ms. Wilkinson mentioned previously there had been some discussion about needing additional space at Headquarters. She mentioned some space on the second floor that is getting little use. It's the reference center of the library. They are no longer actively collecting materials for that collection. Reference staff are being used as branch managers. This space could be converted to meeting space.

There were no public or press comments.

Mr. Lazorisak shared a few updates with the Board. He noted, added to the January 21, 2023 agenda are the Surrogate and Public Information Departments. Next Saturday, January 14th we have Public Safety, Prosecutor, and the Warden. The schedule will be as follows: 9:00 a.m. – Warden, 9:30 a.m. - Prosecutor, and 10:15 a.m. - Public Safety.

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 12:06 p.m.