

These minutes were approved by the Board of County Commissioners on May 10, 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 14, 2023 at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was called to order at 9:01 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 said the only change made this week was that \$16,000.00 was added to the Election Board salary and wages for two new part-time Election Board Commissioners. That's all the County CFO had for now so the meeting turned to the first department budget meeting.

Ms. Ciesla introduced James Pfeiffer, County Prosecutor. Mr. Pfeiffer said 2022 was another interesting year and described it as another year of "COVID catchup." Courts are back and things are moving. There is still a major backlog of pre-indictment cases that are pending. He is hoping to be caught up in June. Once caught up with pre-indictments, they will have a backlog with post-indictments. This is due to the fact there is only one judge. He's hoping next year to have another judge confirmed to aid in the backlog. He is predicting the need for more space in the future for the possibility of two full-time criminal judges.

Mr. Pfeiffer turned his attention to over-all crime in the County and cited that it has returned to pre-pandemic levels. There are major issues with drugs, guns and sex-offenses. More arrests are being made based on the money put into their programs. He thanked the Board for that. He hopes to spend more time on child predators and noted there were more arrests in 2022 than 2021. Mr. Francisco highlighted the Prosecutor's Office is asking for an additional \$5,000.00 for cyber expenses. Mr. Pfeiffer said everything is driven by cyber, computers, phones, etc. He explained this is how law enforcement is able to track various things and he said

this is our society and his office needs to keep up with it. This unfortunately means his department's budget needs to increase in order to keep up.

Mr. Francisco noted the Prosecutor's office submitted some potential future increases for cyber. Currently, they have a grant that pays \$50,000.00 for software and will be ending, but the work is State mandated. If this money goes away, Mr. Francisco suggests trying to shift other expenses, but the department could have some serious cyber expenses in the future. He said Mr. Pfeiffer has a two percent cap and has been doing a great job when he is staffed. With expenses and PBA contracts going up, he has been able to keep the cap.

Mr. Francisco mentioned the Prosecutor did put in one capital expense for portable radios at a cost of \$98,400.00 which could come out of the American Rescue funds. These are radios for the whole unit. The current radios were bought back in 2009 and some don't charge any longer, so they need to be replaced. They always request for vehicle replacements. This year the department is asking for three vehicles: 2 Explorers and an Expedition.

Mr. Kern commented the Prosecutor always does a good job. The County Administrator always speaks highly of the relationship with the department. He appreciates that. His only question is how else can the County help him? Mr. Kern commended Mr. Pfeiffer for doing a great job with what he has. Mr. Pfeiffer said unfortunately it's always about the money. It's about staff, and we've been trying to attract and retain the best staff, this is really hard to do. Mr. Pfeiffer made the Board aware that it's his understanding, sometime in the future, the Prosecutor's Office may be removed or eliminated from the two percent CAP and that would allow the department to receive more funding. He expressed his appreciation and support his office has received from the Commissioners. This concludes the Prosecutor's presentation.

Mr. Lazorisak said another non-funded State mandate is body worn cameras. He is working with John Donnadio with New Jersey Association of Counties (NJAC) in regard to this issue.

Next, Mr. Lazorisak jumped back to the funding we are going to lose with the grant the CFO talked about earlier. Mr. Francisco said there are two grants we are going to lose. The VOCA grant and the Homeland Security Grant that we get through Public Safety, which pays \$60,000.00 for InfoShare to all the police departments in the County. This also includes the towns, our Prosecutor, Sheriff, and Jail. That's \$60,000.00 the State isn't going to pay for anymore. Mr. Lazorisak asked Mr. Pfeiffer to talk to his counterparts and get numbers together about how it will impact

their departments as well as ours. Mr. Lazorisak will discuss with John Donnadio, and fight against the loss of funds.

Mr. Sarnoski expressed he also thinks the Prosecutor is doing a great job. We've seen a lot of changes in the County and we've seen a lot of come out of your office that we haven't seen in the past. I think that's due to your cooperation and how well you have been working in the office. You mentioned the criminal courtrooms. Which courtrooms are usable for criminal trials right now? Prosecutor Pfeiffer responded, Courtroom 1 has been renovated, Courtroom 3, which is tight, Courtroom 2 is being used for family and juveniles, and it's a non-jury courtroom. Courtroom 2 and 5 could be used for civil trials. Both family and juvenile is used every day.

The Prosecutor said our numbers on the criminal side are starting to exceed Somerset County's numbers. They have anywhere between 2-4 judges assigned to criminal at any given time. We have one judge. It's completely unfair and that has to change. The problem with the small courtroom is that it is too small. There are mostly sexual assault trials, which are highly charged situation, going on there. The spacing makes it difficult to keep the victim's family and the defendants separated. It is a safety issue. The separation from the gallery to the defendant is so minimal. With bigger trials, you have more people attending it becomes a security issue for everyone in that room, especially the highly charged, sexual assault cases. We could do other types of cases that would not have as many people show up to attend. Unfortunately, that's not the type of case we have backlogged. When you look at all cases that are backlogged, they are all sexual assault cases.

Mr. Sarnoski brought up gun crime. Prosecutor Pfeiffer mentioned it earlier. Do you have anything to do with permitting? At this time, permitting is all going to be handled at the police departments. If the carry permit is denied, that is the only time our office, along with the courts, will be involved. There would have to be a hearing to determine whether or not the denial was appropriate. There is a stay on the new law that went into effect in terms with carry permit that has been stayed and the court has made it clear that we're not going to be involved in the actual issuance of the gun permits. Mr. Sarnoski asked for an understanding of the types of crime you are seeing. The Prosecutor replied, "The guns are mostly related to drugs and armed robberies. There has been a rash of burglaries that have been taking place. There were 30+ guns stolen from the gun store that are out there on the streets. We've recovered about six of those guns. Five were recovered in the Bronx, in New York City. The other one was recovered in the Lehigh Valley and was used to commit a crime there. We are actively working that case." Mr. Sarnoski pointed out these are

not legal gun owners that are doing bad things with guns. These are criminals who are utilizing guns in their crimes. Prosecutor agreed.

The last thing Mr. Sarnoski wanted to address was the two percent CAP. You're 2.04. That .04 is \$2,000.00. Is there \$2,000.00 in this OE in the surplus? Mr. Francisco said yes because we do get revenue from the State reimbursing us his salary. Revenue reduces the expenses for the calculations. The CAP will be okay. So we're not two percent over his constitutional CAP. The Prosecutor pointed out they have cut down on their overtime. That's hard to control for us because crime happens. We've instituted some programs to look at what we can do in terms of reducing overtime and have been very successful this year.

Commissioner Ciesla also expressed she thinks the Prosecutor is doing a great job and made mention of the fact that the difference in your operational budget is only \$5,000.00 with inflation, that's good. She asked regarding drugs, are you seeing more minor dealers or major dealers, is it increasing? The Prosecutor responded overall, drugs have continued to be a problem. We see the problem being mostly on the opioid side and meth is another problem. We have our pockets of areas where it tends to be. We have been pretty aggressive in working Phillipsburg. We are successful, unfortunately, because we are next to Pennsylvania, it bleeds from the Lehigh Valley overall to Warren County. We have our drug task force working with Phillipsburg and we have been successful with a number of arrests. We suffer here in Warren County. We continue to suffer with mental health issues, which then leads to drug use, which leads to crime and use of guns, etc. It's throughout our society. There's always the mental health component that drives the self-medication which we suffer with. We're doing the best we can, with what we have and will continue to move forward. We've been lucky trying to keep guns and everything under control. In Phillipsburg, we had the big arrest where we were able to take a number of guns off the streets. We're working with Easton and the other departments within the Lehigh Valley to try to get control of this. During the pandemic, people moved west and found Phillipsburg more affordable to live there. Those home are now occupied and our population has gone up and that will drive activity.

Mr. Lazorisak asked, if anyone in the Prosecutor's Office works with opioid situations within the County. Prosecutor said they have the Helping Hands Program, funded through the State. People are out there making contact with individuals. Any time there is an overdose, we have a follow-up, then Helping Hands will go out and try to meet with that person and get them into treatment. We work with a number of organizations, there's the Cares program for Warren County which is working directly with people with opioid addiction. Parent-To-Parent is another organization we work with constantly. Yes, we have these organizations that are outside of our

office but have our Helping Hands Team dealing directly with those outside organizations and trying to get those people into treatment. We spend a lot of time on the Helping Hands program, following up on opioid overdoses, knocking on doors and saying we're not here to arrest you, we're here to help you. We've put a lot of energy into the program, going to various community functions to be there as a visibility. People are reluctant to come up and speak to us at these events because they are drug related situations.

Mr. Francisco thanked Mrs. Riley for all her help through the years. We talk every week and she keeps the budget in-line. Prosecutor said he has to give Wendy so much credit. "She works hard with the budget and makes his job so much easier because she does such an excellent job."

This ends the Prosecutor's Department presentation. The Board took a short break at 9:37 a.m. and returned at 9:44 a.m.

The next speaker is Frank Wheatley, Public Safety Director/OEM Coordinator. Mr. Wheatley thanked the Board for their support for Public Safety. He received a letter from Homeland Security stating they should start to reduce the yearly maintenance agreements and they have started to do that. They are reducing it from 60, 40, to 20. The cost, unfortunately, has to be bore by the municipalities. With these reductions, there isn't any impact on the County.

Commissioner Kern asked what the Sheriff's office would use the InfoShare for in their current function? Mr. Lazorisak replied, they use it for picking people up for arrests for lack of child support and records management system. Dennis Riley, commented the InfoShare replaced the Cody Systems approximately in 2013- 2015. The goal was so each municipality would be able to share records. The Sheriff's office could tap in and share that they are looking for someone. If there is a need to upgrade the server, the Sheriff's office will have to pay their fair share, along with Corrections and the Prosecutor's Office. The idea of the server upgrade is out there, but Mr. Wheatley doubts it will be done in 2023.

Mr. Wheatley turned his attention over to the Operations portion of his budget. They are pretty much status quo. We are asking for \$39,500.00 increase. Right now we have four tele communicators in training. The Department is down twelve tele communicators. We have a tele communicators who has left us for the Prosecutor's Office, but is now coming back to us, bringing our total vacancies down to eleven as of February 2, 2023. The biggest obstacle to getting tele communicators is monetary. Seven out of our eight part-timers were full-timers and they have gone to other employment due to increased benefits or monetary reasons. The starting salary

is \$17.00 per hour. They make the jump to \$19.00 or \$20.00 per hour. We're losing them to municipalities and courts. The issue is industry-wide. Mr. Lazorisak said he's talked to Mr. Wheatley and Mr. Riley about making some changes structurally and create steps in between in an effort to keep employees. Mr. Wheatley expressed the part-timers have been helpful in the Department by filling in on nights and weekends. It was discussed that the County may want to increase the part-timers salaries, this may help in getting additional part-timers. The Department has seen a decrease in the number of job applications they receive.

The change in the operating budget is six percent which Mr. Wheatley said is beyond their control. Security had to be increased on the fire wall for the criminal justice information systems. The rest is Q&D TuWay Maintenance, TuWay Microwave Maintenance, and an increase in Verizon. The large increase for telephone charges due to the fact they are still in the process of replacing RT&A which saves the County a considerable amount of money, this is approximately \$8,000.00 a month. We've moved the RT&A from Hackettstown and replaced it with a more reliable e-line service. We also have a custom fail-safe. If our communications center goes down, from one trunk, it loops around and goes in the other and keeps things running. That's part of the increase. The increase is \$48,000.00. Mr. Lazorisak asked if any of the upgrades can be part of Capital, are they hard-type upgrades? Is this a maintenance fee? Mr. Wheatley's response is that it's more a monthly maintenance fee. You see the \$45,000.00, but we are saving \$8,000.00 a month for the IT Department, from using RT&A which is totally unreliable.

Mr. Francisco turned to worksheets he had presented. Emergency Management is going down \$250,000.00. This is where he had the COVID money, for the past couple of years, also where we would spend money for FEMA advancement and get reimbursed and put it in there. The Fire Academy, we're going to add \$60,000.00 for Ambulance as a separate line for EMS training. The big increase is for the phone. Mr. Wheatley said he is hoping to be copied on the phone bills in 2023 to make sure they are correct and there are not any deficiencies.

Mr. Francisco stated, regarding the Fire Academy, even though the Fire Academy is flat, there are quite a bit of savings in how we are restructuring, and what he is going to do with the additional classes, Firefighter II. Mr. Riley commented, at the end of 2022 there is one Coordinator and three Deputy Coordinators. It was restructured to 1 Coordinator and 1 Deputy Coordinator we did away with the other two positions and put them back in as instructors, subsequently, they resigned. By doing so and getting through this year, with the budgeted salaries we have, we were able to save approximately \$79,000.00 in salaries this past year. I

left it there in this budget because the State of New Jersey changed the training requirements for Firefighter I. They are now allowing Junior Firefighters to take Firefighter I, so that's 16 and 17 year olds, if they want to attend the fire academy, they can. When they turn 18, they automatically become certified firemen. We've received quite a bit of influx on applications so we are looking at possibly having to run two Firefighter I academies this year and the potential to run Firefighter II. That's why I kept the money there and at the end of this year we can re-evaluate again in the Salaries and Wages to see what we need. I didn't want to trim the Salaries and Wages in this year and go over budget and possibly close the academy. That's why I stayed flat in salary and wages. Other things with the Fire Academy 3 year plan, we were able to accomplish our gas training field due to our cooperation with our Department of Public Works, Bridges and Roads Division and with Elizabethtown Gas. We are able to expand that by fifty percent, at no charge to the County. The burn tower is complete. After a five-year inspection, we have packed everything in there and it's fixed. Additionally, we were able to paint our storage box. Mr. Lazorisak asked with the expansion of this gas training, are we going to be able to make some income? Mr. Riley replied, we are finalizing it with Elizabethtown Gas. All of it, with the exception of the gas grill, which they are making for us at no cost, all the training props are in the field. All the gas lines are run and ready to go. The liquefied, natural gas (L&G) pit, we have to do some modifications on that. As soon as we get that finished, we're going to have a fee. It's going to be open to any gas companies from any state. This is a state-of-the-art training field. There is not one in this region, so we're hoping this is going to draw other gas companies from Pennsylvania and New York. We've had interest from fire companies to come up and train outside of Warren County, which would incur a fee. A fee structure has not been developed yet because we need to meet with Elizabethtown Gas. If we are using the L&G pit, that's put out with a tower-type substance, we would have to figure out what Elizabethtown Gas is going to charge and we have to get our instructors trained on that field. Once that is done, we can factor in our instructors costs, any materials cost, and we'll come up with a fee. Elizabethtown Gas gives us the gas for free. The question was asked, if we bring in outside agencies from out of state, will they still give us the gas for free? Mr. Riley responded, that is correct. The only thing we need to pay for is the L&G materials to utilize in the natural gas training. If Elizabethtown Gas brings their employees to be training, we're not going to charge them.

Mr. Riley turned his attention to the fire truck and thanked the Board for the fire truck. The one we got last year worked out very well and will add to what we are doing. Part of the three-year plan was to start replacing the turnout gear, worn by the instructors. We were able to do that from our regular budget so there was no capital request. We were able to buy three sets of gear, head to toe. We plan on

continuing to do that so it staggers the expiration dates. He hopes to continue with not asking for a capital expense for this item.

A couple of things in the capital budget that are important this year. Last year we repaired the two doors in the fire tower. It was a temporary fix. We need to replace those doors and that is reflecting in the budget request. Part of the training, we teach our fire fighters how to forcefully enter a facility. We currently use a forcible entry door in another fire company right now. He would like to get away from that practice. If we are using their door and we break it, now we have to replace it. The last item is a gear washer and dryer. We send our gear out to be cleaned at an expense. If we have a gear washer and dryer on site, we can keep them cleaner and get more life out of them. By keeping them cleaner, we are reducing the exposure of carcinogens, thus keeping the instructors safer. They would be housed in the fire academy office, near the bathroom because there is a water line there. We're also looking to provide shelter, just a roof, to get the students out of the weather. For future plans in the three-year plan, are Scott bottle replacements because we have to do that and potentially the expansion of our instructor garage because we are out of room. We were just notified of a possible donation of a large diameter fire hose from a fire company to the fire academy so if we can acquire that for free that will come off the list.

Mr. Sarnoski asked if we were able to get anywhere with leasing tower space? Mr. Lazorisak replied, he has been in touch with a contracted service and getting feelers out.

Mr. Wheatley said the only other thing he wanted to discuss was the extraordinary expense and that's for the tower inspections. They need to occur every 5-6 years. They were not completed during COVID. They should have been done during 2021-2022. Cost of that is \$11,500.00.

Mr. Sarnoski said for the capital we have \$500,000.00 requested here. According to Mr. Francisco, there was \$108.00 left over from an old account. \$95,000.00 from a 2010 account and \$89,000.00 from 2021. \$185,000.00 and you add that \$500,000.00 that gives them \$685,000.00. Then you add the three requests in:

- Dennis took care of request #2 all the fire academy requests.
- Upgrade the microwave path at the Communication Center, to Jonestown Tower, and Montana Mountain - \$349,000.00.
- Warren County Police Department Radio upgrade. This is to replace the CAP channel. We're not going to be able to complete that project in 2023 because we won't have enough funding. We're going to be

\$61,000.00 short and push the remaining over to 2024 to complete that project. \$310,000.00 for this year and \$61,000.00 for next year.

Mr. Lazorisak summed it up by saying future capital projects just under \$1.1million spread over five years.

Mr. Sarnoski said we should look at American Rescue Funds for some of this. Mr. Francisco will put a spreadsheet together of American Rescue money. It was commented this money should be used for one-time expenses and will impact everyone.

Mr. Riley had a question about the contracted services for EMT training, and asked if it could be a little more generic? He's concerned about it only being able to be used for EMT training. He explained certain municipalities, because of their structure, have the ability to train the EMT and get their money back from the State. Some rescue squads don't have that ability. In order to keep this equitable and fair for everyone, could it be EMT/EMS training? The Board expressed agreement with Mr. Riley. It was noted Mansfield Township will be serviced by Independence Township. It was asked that Mr. Riley get an updated list of active municipal EMS. Mr. Wheatley said the only municipalities who don't have an EMS squad is Lopatcong and Mansfield Townships.

Mr. Kern asked what the volume of calls at the 911 Communications Center last year. Mr. Wheatley responded he believes there was an increase and he will gather that information and get it out.

With the Department of Public Safety being complete with their presentation at 10:28 a.m.

At this time the Board moved to the budget of the Corrections Center. Mr. Francisco went over a brief summary of their budget, noting it has been flat except one line item that had a big increase and that was for inmate medical care. The contract went up \$366,000.00.

Warden McCarthy commented he always likes to start with the positives fiscal impact issues:

- Shared services contract with Hunterdon County – The third year is finishing up. There is a two-year extension available and the Corrections Center will be negotiating that soon. The rate has gone up to \$93.64 per day for this past year and next year it will go up to \$95.51 per day/inmate (according to current

contract). The average daily population for Hunterdon County inmates is about 28. Since the beginning of this year, we've been 30 and above. We took in \$951,101.68 from Hunterdon County for 2022.

- New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) Housing Reimbursement – Whenever we have State inmates become State sentence at the jail, for the first 15 days, we carry them like any other inmate. On the 16th day, NJDOC starts paying us for their housing. Prior to this past year and twenty-years prior, we received \$62.00 a day from the State. On the new rate, starting 2022 it went up to \$146.08. That was across the board for the whole state. Several counties got together and Mr. Lazorisak was instrumental in this also. There were about 3-4 counties getting paid at that premium rate and the rest of us were getting \$62.00. Actually some counties were only getting in the \$50.00's range. After going back and forth with NJDOC, they decided to make it the same for everybody. John Donnadio was very instrumental in all of this. The average guest count in the whole facility in 2022 was approximately 100. Of that count, about 25 are from Hunterdon County. The State fluctuates too much. They just made a pickup in December, where they picked up 17 inmates. We've had anywhere between a handful of inmates to mid-twenties that may be there for months. Full occupancy is 181. That's with not social distancing. When cases are backlogged and they are not being heard, we are spending a lot of money to house them until they get their due process and get shipped out. In 2022, the figure the Warden has for the month of December is pro-rated based on the last three months. With NJDOC we are usually months behind. They never pay on-time. We'll get six months at a time. We just received from July to the end of the year, within the last month or so. He has a figure of \$625,563.48 for 2022 for the DOC payment. The next figure he has is for SCAAP (State Criminal Alien Assistance Program). We received payments for the last two years because they were lacking. The 2020 payment \$102,326.00 and for 2021 \$152,783.00 for a total of \$255,109.00.
- The different types of co-pays the inmates have – one is a medical co-pay 2022 we took in \$4,495.86, CLAP program which includes a \$25.00 administrative fee, the participant is charged \$8.00 per day they are sentenced by the court. For that we took in \$4,135.42. The last fee we collect is a processing fee. We took in \$24,614.56. The total brought in for these three programs for 2022 is \$33,245.84. Total revenue is \$1,865,019.90.

The Warden next turned to what they are asking for in their budget. This year is the fourth year they have been working on their video system. Back in 2019, they had an estimate done and was told it would cost \$279,500.00. The cost was split out over the past four years. To save money, our Buildings and Grounds people have been running cables. They are down to 49 cameras and 1 DVR needed. There is now

audio in the isolation cells. This is where they have their suicide watches, intake areas. To complete the entire project, he is asking for \$125,858.00. By spreading this out over four years, we saved \$43,934.00 from the initial estimate we received.

The next item they are asking for is in the booking area, an officer's management system. That's where everything is entered into when inmates come in and they go through the process and everything that goes on in the jail. The initial booking process involves a photograph. We found a camera that is compatible with our OMS system. It's a digital camera that has software that connects right to our system. It's a booking system for \$22,000.00.

The other increase, is for healthcare management services, which was discussed earlier in the meeting. The Warden gave the figure of \$367,603.00 increase. CFG we've had for years and we're very satisfied with them. Their Healthcare Services Administrator (HAS) is a local RN. She does a phenomenal job since she took over about two years ago.

Fugitive Recovery Unit – this is the second year we've had them. No increase is being asked for. We have been able to manage any long-distance pickups on that budget.

The capital improvement budget with Buildings and Grounds – we're starting a new lock project with one door being done at a time. Operations at the jail will run smoothly as the lock project is going on.

Mr. Lazorisak informed the Board he has met with Human Services and Corrections about a new Re-entry position. The new position will be added to the salary and wage table of Corrections. They will be an employee of Corrections but will be setup over in Human Services. There are two grant avenues to pay for this position. It should not cost us any additional money. It's a State mandate that we are able to pay for out of State funding, as long as the funds are available. The funding will come from the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) grant, which they have had for years, and the DOC grant, where most of the money will come from, specifically for this position. Money should be coming sometime in the spring.

This ends the budget presentation for Corrections.

The Board took a short break at 10:46 a.m. and reconvened at 10:53 a.m.

CFO Francisco went over rates. They came out Thursday afternoon. These are preliminary numbers which are good. The rates will have gone up in Warren

County over ten percent. During the housing boom, the prices went up, the towns' ratios were lower. Warren County is an attractive place to live.

There was no Public Comment.

There was no need for Executive Session.

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 10:59 a.m.