

*\*These minutes were approved by the Board of County Commissioners on May 08, 2024. 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 27, 2024 at 9:00 a.m.

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

After leading the flag salute, Director Kern confirmed with the County Administrator that the meeting notice complied with the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975. He then turned to County CFO Kim Francisco for an initial overview of 2024 budget ordinances and proposals.

## MEETINGS

### 1. OVERVIEW of '24 Budget Proposals by CFO.

Mr. Francisco reserved his comments to the end, he requested to move forward with the first speaker since the agenda is lengthy.

### 2. REVIEW of '24 Budget Proposals:

First presenter is Brian Schilling, Director of Rutgers Cooperative Extension. Mr. Francisco reviewed the budget request with the Board. The 2024 budget request is \$202,366.00 increase of \$6,233.00, equals a 3.08% increase. This is per the increase in the agreement with Rutgers for salaries of the Rutgers faculty and staff.

Mr. Schilling thanked the Board for allowing him time on the agenda. Mr. Schilling is present with Nicholas Polanin, Department Chair of Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Alayne Torretta, County Extension Department Head.

Mr. Schilling thanked County Administrator Alex Lazorisak and Commissioner Ciesla for preliminary meeting to discuss the agreement between the two agencies. Mr. Schilling spoke more of the 2023 agreement totaling a little under \$187,000.00, costs covering county share of Rutgers faculty and staff. The 2024 agreement will come in less due to the county contribution. The salary agreements have two parts, first part covers the agreed upon percentages of salary that Rutgers and the county will pay for faculty and staff through Rutgers University. Second component is the county decision regarding county staff assigned to the county office. Most counties have deploy county staff, there are one or two counties that do not deploy county staff.

Mr. Schilling spoke regarding the county contribution to salaries for Rutgers faculty and staff. In 2023, total was \$186,875.00, constitutes support for two (2) faculty; one (1) in 4-H and one (1) in

Family & Community Health Sciences, as well as one (1) Program Associate that supports 4-H. The agreed upon number in the salary agreement also included a contribution, which Mr. Schilling is asking to be lowered on the counties, for a vacated position to support ag and natural resources. Rutgers does not bill against vacant positions. The 2024 ask is for county contribution for faculty and staff is \$186,695.00. The difference is some of the cost of inflation at the university, along with contract negotiations for faculty and staff. Mr. Schilling proposed to the county, rather than paying the 59% of the, presently vacated Ag and Natural Resource Agent, the county pay 50% and share the salary equally with Rutgers. The reason it was 59% for 2023 the position was a staff member and the county was picking up 75% of that position, with Rutgers paying 25%, which was in the agreement that predated him in this roll. He has a general understanding of the history. Mr. Schilling explain he took the dollar amount and applied it to the agent position salary that is a faculty position which is a higher salary. He continued he does not need 59%, he only needs 50%. The change in the agreement needs to be approved by the chancellor at the college. Mr. Sarnoski asked, "What the dollar amount of the agent position would be?" Mr. Schilling replied, \$45,211.50, with Rutgers picking up 100% of the fringe. The fringe rate is approximately 71.6%.

Mr. Lazorisak briefed the Board regarding the preliminary meeting with Mr. Schilling to discuss the 2023 agreement that was received in November. The salaries of the Ag Agent Department Head and FCS Educator at Rutgers were increased by approximately 8% due to the contract increases that were given by Governor Murphy. With this proposal the monies were taken from the vacant Ag Agent position, lowered the salary of the position to increase the Department Head and FCS Educator positions. This raised red flags, due to monies were taken from a vacant position and we did not have a person providing services. Monies cannot be taken out of a line item and given to other department heads. Mr. Lazorisak and Mr. Schilling sat down and worked out the numbers for the vacant Ag Agent salary, with a split of 50-50 for the 2024 agreement. Further discussion took place regarding the percentages of the salary split over the past couple of agreements.

Mr. Schilling proposed a flat request of \$186,695.00 for 2024 budget. Mr. Francisco will reduce the budget request for 2024 and the budgeted amount will remain the same as 2023. Mr. Schilling thanked the Board for the department Operating Budget, which he does not see.

Ms. Ciesla reminded everyone that Warren County works on a calendar year and Rutgers works on July through June.

Mr. Schilling also discussed the vacated Agriculture Keyboarding Clerk due to retirement. Mr. Schilling briefed the Board on how the Extension staff should not be in the offices too much, if they are then they are not out in the community doing what they are supposed to be doing. County staff are in the offices assisting the visitors/farmers with farm certificates, water certificates, along with administrative duties completed.

Mr. Schilling spoke regarding the vacant Ag Agent position, we are currently searching for livestock needs for Warren County at this time. The job description many need to be reposted with livestock along with agronomy to not be so narrow.

Mr. Lazorisak discussed the vacant Keyboarding Clerk position. At no point the Commissioners or he dissolved the position. Mr. Lazorisak discussed some of the correspondence that has been received in his office. The position has been held in abeyance due to the vacancy of the

Ag Agent position.

Mr. Schillinger spoke regarding the salary agreements. The agreements will get done earlier in the calendar.

Going forward the county and Extension officials will sit down quarterly and work out other issues. Communication will be worked on for the future.

At this time, the Board took a short recess at 9:45 a.m. and reconvened at 9:51 a.m.

Mr. Francisco continued on with the agenda and the Election Board. The Election Board has an opportunity, with a \$50,000 grant, to provide on-line election worker training. This will supplement the in-person training. It's an optional training, not mandatory. However, the grant money will not cover everything. It will require \$2,000 of county funds for 2024. In 2025 and 2026, costs will rise to \$7,200 each year. It's a three-year contract. This \$50,000 grant will require \$16,400 from the County over the next three years. A discussion took place as to what the training curriculum would look like and whether or not the County should participate. It was explained that poll workers are required to go through training which is provided by the County Election Board. The grant would cover training for poll workers who want to go on-line and take a refresher course. The issue was tabled until further information is received.

Next Mr. Francisco turned to Capital items:

Open Space Trust Fund:

- Morris Canal Plane Nine parking bridge permit mitigation fee.
- Project Management for the Morris Canal Trail construction
- Environmental Education Center at Bread Lock Park – architectural and engineering fees, \$380,000
- Courthouse streetscape continues with the light and sidewalk project - \$120,000.
- Faster charger for Bread Lock Park, a fifty-fifty grant match to install a charger at the park
- Purchase of a new SUV for the Land Preservation Administrator

The total from Open Space Fund for capital items is \$350,000. All items are permitted by the fund.

Warren County Library Trust Fund:

- Solar panels at the new Catherine Dickson Hofman (CDH) branch - It was explained the location for the panels would be in the back of the building based from a feasibility study. It was asked that communication take place with the town about what the County's expectation is, what it would look like and it should be explained this is a concept, with the town's support. It will enhance the feasibility of the library. It needs to be with the town's support. The cost of the study is \$90,000. We'll keep it in for now. The money is in the Library Trust Fund.

Grant Funds from the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT):

- There are two annual grants from DOT – resurfacing of over \$4 million and a bridge of \$1.5 million.

Capital Improvement Fund: because we are a “pay as you go” county, these funds are already in the Capital Improvement fund:

- Replace fire alarm at the Communication Center - \$168,000
- Replace the overhead doors at the Alpha Garage - \$45,000
- Replace the roof on the bank building - \$131,500
- Paint and repair the Commissioners Building at the Warren County Fairgrounds - \$32,000. A brief discussion took place about possibly replacing the fence in time for the County’s bicentennial next year.
- Work at the jail – grease interceptor, kitchen piping and plumbing upgrades and electrical upgrades - \$50,000 each for a total cost of \$150,000. There is money from prior jail account.
- Existing improvements in the Human Services building - \$15,000
- Replacement of generator on a hazmat vehicle for the Health Department - \$18,000

Total for these project is \$7 million. Most of it is from grants.

Mr. Kim turned his attention to the American Rescue Funds. He explained funds must be allocated which means a signed contract and a purchase order needs to be completed by the end of the year. Some highlighted areas:

- Spring Valley Road – two years ago we had appropriated \$350,000. That will go out to bid soon and do the work this year.
- GIS software and equipment for the Planning Department – it hasn’t been purchased yet, but there is a plan to do so.
- Courthouse asbestos abatement – \$750,000 was budgeted, \$558,000 has been spent, leaving a balance of \$191,000. These funds will be reallocated.
- Wayne Dumont Administration Building exterior repairs – we budgeted \$700,000. The bids came in higher. We’re not going to do that this year. This will get put back into the general funds and be reallocated.
- Tech upgrades for the Commissioners meeting room - that’s going back into general funds.
- Knowlton Township reverse osmosis filtration – we’re going to help them.
- Technology upgrades for the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) – Last year we gave them \$500,000. They have \$97,000 left which they will use.
- Clerk’s Office asbestos removal and renovations – The asbestos was recovered. There is \$480,000 left in the appropriation and it will be repurposed.
- Conversion to gas at Warren Acres in the Health Department – in progress.
- EV Charging Stations, design and construction – A few charging stations will be placed at various buildings (Roads, Health Department) for use for future County fleet vehicles.
- Improvements to the Superintendent of Schools Office -\$120,000
- HVAC controls upgrades at various buildings -\$207,000 – this money will be taken back.
- Purchase of EV Vehicles – We haven’t been able to get them. This money will be put back into the budget. A brief discussion took place about what can be done with the EV charging stations if we aren’t able to purchase EV vehicles. They can be used for hybrid vehicles and if need be, they can be converted for use of a credit card and be

used by county employees and/or the public if they are coming to the property to conduct business.

- County multi-functional building design – we talked about design for a potential new building. That money will be taken out.

Mr. Francisco referred to a handout that includes a list of Accounts to reallocate. These funds will be repurposed for this year. We had up to \$2 million. Recently one of our basic dump trucks was in an accident. We ordered a new one. We're using this money. We have \$1.9 million of money to reallocate for capital. It's already budgeted to allocate to American Rescue Funds.

Next Mr. Francisco went down a list of capital improvement projects for this year:

- Resurfacing – Engineering is requesting \$625,000 to go with the \$4 million grant
- Road and Drainage Improvements:
  - Money was put aside for guiderail replacements
  - Asset Inventory Management
  - Signage Replacement
  - Drainage Intersection Improvements
  - Micro Resurfacing
  - Pavement Markings
  - Road Designs, materials and installation
  - Right-of-Way/Easement Acquisitions
  - Rte 662 (Hutchison Station Rd) Retaining Wall Partial-money for construction
  - Storm Water Inventory – Outsourcing so that we can do our inventory ball of the storm water systems. It is working with GPI to complement our in-house gathering data. It will complete the inventory process.
  - Spring Valley Road Construction – This is to supplement the \$350,000. That means only \$850,000 is available which is what County Engineer thinks will take to complete the job.
- Bridge Improvements – These are for projects we put aside for bridges:
  - Bridge #02004 and Alpha - design
  - Culvert #08014 East Avenue Hackettstown – Removal and construction
  - Bridge #13013 Station Road, Knowlton Timber Deck Replacement
  - General Reserves for minor bridge design and material maintenance

This totals a \$1 million which is standard of what we do every year.

- Next Mr. Francisco discussed Equipment and Furnishings:
    - Voting Machine Replacement - \$200,000
    - Annual Technology Upgrades - \$150,000
    - Network Replacement - \$40,000
    - Phone Upgrades - \$45,000
    - Technology Upgrades to OEM - \$500,000
    - Special Technology Upgrades - \$5.2 million
- Total of \$6,159,000

- Buildings & Grounds Improvements:
  - Tree Planting - \$3,000
  - Replace Roof at Hope Garage - \$400,000
  - Facility Security Improvements - \$100,000
  - Courthouse Annex Exterior Repairs and Waterproofing - \$60,000
  - Fleet Electrification, fast chargers for light duty trucks – Not funded for this year. Public Works Director Hammer explained this funding was for medium duty vehicles which would include two flatbed trucks. At this time, these vehicles are not available. Fire Academy Turnout Storage Expansion - \$50,000
  - Fire Academy Tower #2 Roof Replacement & Repairs - \$25,000
  - Roof, Window and Door Reserves - \$125,000
  - Carpet and Flooring Reserves - \$50,000
  - HVAC Reserves - \$200,000
  - Feasibilities Studies/Schematic Designs- \$50,000

Total is \$1,088,000

- Special Vehicles and Equipment:
  - Para Transit Vehicles for Human Services Transportation – They requested two, one is recommended - \$133,000
  - Portable Traffic Signal System - \$65,000
  - John Deere Track Loader - \$122,000
  - Ford Transport Van with Inmate Compartment - \$110,000
  - Swap Loader Truck - \$376,000
  - Mower with Max Boom – 271,000
  - Eager Beaver Wood Chipper - \$70,000
  - Limb Shear Attachment for Gradeall Excavator - \$24,000
  - Two Stainless Steel Dump Bodies - \$120,000
  - Survey Equipment for Engineers Office - \$18,000
  - Five Attenuators for Roadside Work – 5 of them for \$40,000 each for a total of \$200,000

Total is \$1.5 Million

When you add up all the categories in the budget, there is \$10.7 million. We have \$2.1 million we're going to cancel from older accounts. This money will go back into the capital fund account. We can use this to allocate this money for something else. The \$1.9 million for American Rescue Funds which was already budgeted that we can apply for that. The net budget appropriation for capital this year is \$6,697,000. A brief discussion took place about how much the County allocated last year compared to the \$6,697,000 for this year. Last year we allocated \$4.5 million. It was explained the cost of inflation, i.e., equipment, vehicles, dump trucks and construction costs are part of the increase. Also, the one line-item alone, the 9-1-1 Communication upgrade, we have a \$5.2 million request for this year.

Mr. Kern discussed the issue of communication between first responders and the 9-1-1 center that are based upon just the topography of the county. He explained when he was Mayor of Pohatcong

Township, he saw this issue firsthand. It's one of the seriously affected areas for law enforcement. There are parts of the County where first responders cannot communicate with one another. The County had tried to do small band aid fixes that he thinks might have saved money. Thankfully they never had an event happen. Officers and first responders carry two cell phones, multiple pieces of equipment while trying to do their job. This is a serious issue. Every time we do a simulation, communication is always the number one critique that comes out of it. When a real life situation happens, communications always is the number one thing that comes out of it. He thanked Public Safety Director Dennis Riley, County Administrator Alex Lazorisak and the whole public safety team for getting this done quickly.

County Administrator Lazorisak gave a presentation regarding the existing infrastructure and referred to a map that was displayed. He explained all the little green dots are existing towers. We've been functioning with analog. The new technology today is IP 25 based. A lot of the up-front money this year is to go to all those little green dots and start upgrading the infrastructure to turn it into an IP based system. The update with IP will be clearer and quicker. He met with OEM, and they started to look at problem areas. They will start at the top to the left, blue shaded area, along the Delaware River. Referring back to the map, he said the black dot is called Fox Town Tower, which is owned and operated by Monroe County. Discussions have been had with them and they are willing to allow us put an antenna and our infrastructure on their existing OEM tower. That will fill in a lot of that blue area on the map. Exactly how much of that area, we won't know until that gets done and we run a test. As Mr. Kern said, some of the issues are all these little gaps and valleys. Overall, Two Way is telling us that should really resolve ninety percent of that issue. He explained it will be both analog and IP because most agencies are still running analog.

He referred back to the map and the next blue area, which is Hope Township. There is an agreement with State Police so we'll have to work out a Memorandum of Understanding. We will put an infrastructure on their tower at the Hope Barracks. This is budgeted for this year.

Going back to the map and the Hackettstown area, Mr. Lazorisak explained about the issue of our equipment being on a water tower in Washington Township, Morris County. This is a Memorandum of Understanding and there's been issues with them allowing us to update our stuff because they're going to redo this tower. Commissioners Kern and Sarnoski have been looking at additional water towers in Independence. He's hoping we can jump on one of the MUAs towers to get our information there. This should be better than what we had in Morris County. This is all budgeted for this year.

Oxford Township was the next area Mr. Lazorisak discussed. One of the ideas Two Way came up with to improve Oxford and Belvidere is to put a tower up on the landfill property. Hopefully this will update that area. This is for next year's project.

Next area for discussion in the presentation is Pohatcong Township. They've isolated the best area which is at an existing Pohatcong park. We need to get a tower on top of that mountain. It's a land preservation. Approval from the State will be needed. Land Preservation Administrator Corey Tierney has been working on this with all of us as well as Ryan Conklin in the Planning Department. This is the hardest hit area. There is nothing we can do to satisfy these little gaps. Everyone is very confident, looking at the studies, we get this tower up at that site, and it's going to fix a lot. It will take a little time and a little bit more money. This is for next year's project.

By the end of 2025, most of our coverage issues will have been dealt with. It was mentioned there will not be one hundred percent coverage due to the county's geography and topography, but we will do the best we can with what we have.

It was asked what else needs to go into this project to make it complete. Mr. Lazorisak explained after all of the towers are set up, ideally the goal is for everyone to get up to IP based radios. This would include all local police, fire and rescue. State Police are already on their own system. Costs of radios range from \$5,000 - \$8,000 depending on the radio. Mr. Riley ran through a list of some of the responses he received from local law enforcement. There are two different types of radios, mobile which is in the car and portable which is on their body. The mobiles are already P 25 compliant. He referred to the presentation slide and identified the green area as being already compliant radios. They already have in pocket compliant radios. People in these areas have been proactive in doing what we're doing. There are also some partial compliant radios in the County. He pointed out the radios most fire departments have were acquired in in the original grant back twenty years ago. Given the age of these radios, they can't get replacement parts for them and probably won't get a key to make them P 25 compliant.

A discussion took place about the difficulties of being able to use the radios in big, brick buildings such as a warehouse or school. It was pointed out this type of issue is up to local zoning. Municipalities are going to have to make an investment in the radios. Some responsibilities have to be taken on by the municipalities. The County is doing what is within our power to improve our system. We need to start communicating with the municipalities now so they can budget for it. We have been working with the Chief of Police Association. They have been asked to take the lead with their municipalities.

Mr. Lazorisak thanked Mr. Riley, Mr. Tarsi, and Mr. Petrizzellis for all their hard work. The Public Safety Department has been revamped. These individuals are doing things that division has never done. They are working hard. They have great ideas, put in a lot of time, energy and thought into this.

Lisa Thomas, a resident from Liberty Township, had concerns about whether or not the State Police system is IP based and would be able to communicate with the County's system. She was reassured yes, the State Police system would be compatible and the ability will be there for the local law enforcement, police and fire. It was also discussed how the IP based system is not only countywide but nationwide system.

#### Personnel Requests

Mr. Lazorisak reminded the Board names are not discussed, only titles and departments. The requests do not include unclassified titles at this time. Mr. Lazorisak and Mr. Francisco reviewed the recommendations and reviewed the union guidelines. Nothing out of the ordinary. Further discussion took place in reference to the following Departments and/or positions.

- Personnel – one unclassified, non-bargaining position
- Library – discussion took place regarding lower salaried titles in AFSCME 3287
- Land Preservation – discussion took place regarding creating a position/change title and being paid out of Open Space



- Public Information – The cleaning up of abolishing a Confidential Aide position that was on the books and not filled for quite some time.
- Mr. Lazorisak asked the Board if they would like to increase the hours for position in Public Information, from 35 hours to 40 hours. Discussion took place at this time regarding the increase of hours, what will this do for the department.
- Public Works Bridge Division – discussion took place about the creation of a guide rail crew and not make a whole new department.

The Board will review the requests in more detail and forward recommendations to Mr. Lazorisak.

Personnel budget requests concluded at 11:06 a.m.

CLOSING PUBLIC COMMENTS

Liza Thomas, resident of Liberty Township, addressed the Board regarding solar panels at the Catherine Dickson Hofman Library Branch. She questioned why the solar panels were put into the plan. A history of how discussions started was explained. It was noted there is no natural gas as the site and it was determined that electric power would be best. The solar panels would resupply power to the building and help with the County’s energy costs. It was stated there would only be a few solar panels, not be a big field of them. Mr. Sarnoski will reach out to the municipality to look at all options and receive feedback.

In closing the budget has been reviewed. Mr. Francisco anticipates introducing the 2024 Budget on February 28, 2024 with an adoption date of March 27, 2024.

The Board would like to consider reviewing the 2025 budget in two full Saturday’s. Mr. Lazorisak reminded the Board all departments will need to submit budgets on time.

PRESS COMMENTS & QUESTIONS

None.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

**RESOLUTION 69-24**

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 at 11:12 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 11:46 a.m.

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

ADJOURNMENT

On motion by Mr. Sarnoski, seconded by Ms. Ciesla, and there being no further business before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 11:49 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 69-24**

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 27, 2024.

**A MOTION AUTHORIZING EXECUTIVE SESSION 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 Litigation, Negotiations and Attorney-Client Privilege*: Items to be discussed include:  
Status of various litigation: Bullock.

**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