

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
BOROUGH COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP / COUNCIL MEETING**

September 28, 2021 – 7:00 p.m.

West Reading Borough Council held a Budget Workshop and Council Meeting at Borough Hall on Tuesday, September 28, 2021 with the following persons present: Council President Jack Gombach; Council Vice President Philip Wert; Council Pro-Tem Christopher Lincoln; Council Members Jennifer Bressler, Patrick Kaag, Samantha Kaag, and Ryan Lineaweaver; Mayor Andrew Kearney; Chief of Police Glenn Granitz, Jr.; Sergeant Ryan Phillips; Treasurer Jeanette Rentschler; Borough Manager Dean Murray; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira.

VISITORS:

Carl Garman, Resident	Zachary Shaver, Resident
Denise Drobnick, Resident	Mark Schuster, Turnkey Taxes

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Council President Jack Gombach called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call. A moment of silence was observed.
2. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**
Mayor Kearney encouraged Council to request the West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation to fund police services for their large events that costs the Borough roughly \$9,000 in overtime wages. Council was also encouraged to return the playground and park area into a non-alcoholic area by not allowing alcohol to be served during public events.
3. **TURNKEY TAXES:**
Mark Schuster introduced himself as the CEO of Turnkey Taxes and provided an overview of his professional background. The goal of Turnkey Taxes is to assist municipalities by increasing revenue without raising taxes. The foundation is a database compiled of properties that are classified as owner occupied or rental while building out the individual addresses to track residents/businesses to ensure that tax dollars are being collected and allocated correctly. It was recommended to post the Borough's unique six-digit PSD code to alert and educate residents to verify that their tax dollars are benefiting the municipality where they live.

Currently the focus for West Reading Borough is on business privilege and mercantile taxes. Information has been gathered from Berks EIT that illustrates 725 businesses with a number of gaps in payments. He encouraged educating businesses and residents via the Borough's website and/or social media since it is usually found that a failure to pay was a result of the unfamiliarity of the tax.

Mr. Gombach requested that Mr. Schuster share the difficulties he has been experiencing in gathering the information requested from Berks EIT in a suitable format and his experience with alternate tax collectors. Mr. Schuster noted that it is essential to capture data in excel format for complete accuracy during the transfer of data. Mr. Gombach noted that the customer service aspect of Berks EIT is holding up progress, and their rates are high in comparison to the services that are being received, delinquent notices are not provided, and they do not respond well to right-to-know requests. The Borough does not have a contract in place with Berks EIT and would be interested in shopping for an alternate tax collection agency. Mr. Schuster indicated that there is better technology available out there.

Police Chief Granitz and Sergeant Ryan Phillips joined the meeting and Mr. Schuster departed the meeting at 7:33 p.m.

4. POLICE DEPARTMENT:

Georgetown University ABLE “Train the Trainer” Program – Chief Granitz reported that he is currently one of three Chief’s statewide that has been selected to serve on a committee to advise the Governor. He is excited to be a part of an open minded, forward thinking, outside of the normal law enforcement training that focuses on the well-being of people. Chief Granitz thanked Council in advance for their support of his participation in this program.

Motion to authorize the Council President to sign a letter of support for the West Reading Police Department to participate in the Georgetown University ABLE “Train the Trainer” program.

Moved by Ms. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Lineaweaver. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Budget – Chief Granitz was impressed with the budget process this year and noted some concern surrounding increased overtime expenses associated with the return to court following the pandemic. Another major budget concern is infrastructure as it relates to IT in order to stay on the cutting edge of technology.

- **01-361-100 Public Safety Police Services** – This number is underbudget and corrections have been made to account for additional revenue. This information will be reexamined to ensure charges for police service includes the services rendered that are approved by Council during the permit approval process. Chief Granitz will advise Council as to what he feels would be a required amount of police coverage for a particular event to allow Council to determine a course of action.
- **01-410-123 Sergeant’s Wages** – This was not budgeted for the current capacity of three Sergeants and will show a 33% overage. Looking ahead to 2022 it will provide an initial appearance of increasing our budget by almost \$100,000.
- **01-410-138 Officer in Charge** – This line item is showing an approximate \$6,000 overage for 2021. This anomaly came from having a Sergeant in charge for the first six months of the year.
- **01-410-193 Hiring Cost for Police Chief** – This is also an anomaly. Chief Granitz likes it here and he hopes everyone likes him too.
- **01-410-315 Arbitration Fees** – It appears the Borough budgeted for possible arbitration regarding the Collective Bargaining Agreement, however kudos to everyone involved, this can be reduced to \$1,000.
- **01-410-460 Education & Training** – This line item is being used less now that the West Reading Police Department (WRPD) personnel are being certified as instructors where applicable to reduce the cost of training. The conference room has been upgraded to allow for virtual training and a workspace has been added for solo virtual trainings and court appearances in an attempt to reduce costs of ongoing training and travel in the future.
- **01-387-410 Donations (K9 Program et al)** – Chief Granitz noted that offerings of support generally benefit the initiatives of the K9 Unit. Therefore, the WRPD has begun a non-profit that will be completely handled by the Berks County Community Foundation. Funds were recently donated through the National Coffee with a Cop event and a

resident led sale of pumpkins at the corner of Seventh Avenue and Franklin Street. Going forward with the help of our business owners and residents the Chief hopes to remove all K9 funding from the budget process. All veterinary care for Zea is being donated by PA Humane in exchange for social media time with Zea.

- **01-391-410 Sale of Police Vehicles** – The Borough Mechanic and the Chief have reviewed the vehicle replacement schedule and it appears that two vehicles are scheduled to be replaced in 2022. Vehicle 38-1 which is a Sergeant's vehicle and 38-5 which is a supervisor's vehicle are both in need of replacement. The option to lease was discussed, and has been found to be a savings up front, however the condition of the vehicle at the end of the lease is a concern. A number of repairs were needed to the used K9 vehicle purchased from the Township of Spring. K9 Grant monies helped to offset these expenses.
- **01-410-134 Parking Enforcement Wages** – Chief Granitz urged Council to review these numbers. The junior officer salaries are behind what other municipalities are offering in the area. Although he is unsure of what the difference in benefits may be that contribute to the overall salary. Chief Granitz feels these positions are an asset to the Borough and plans to look into increasing productivity and an assessment of the overall performance of the program next year. The program currently appears to fund itself.
- **01-410-135 Shift Differential / FTO** – This line item will increase based upon the new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between the Borough and the Officers' Association.
- **01-410-137 Sick Time Payouts** – This will be ending going forward based upon the CBA reached between the Borough and the Officers' Association.
- **01-410-172 Holiday Pay** – This line will increase going forward due to the addition of a holiday as agreed upon in the new CBA.
- **01-410-173 Longevity** – There will be a one-time increase due to COVID bonuses. This will revert to annual increases in 2023.
- **01-410-174 Overtime for Special Events** – This is a new line item designed to allow the Borough to account for special event overtime. This should be helpful for budgeting perspectives in the years to come. Funds allocated toward this expense for 2022 is \$40,000. This does not create an additional burden, just ensures appropriate categorizing of overtime expenses.
- **01-410-190 Civil Service Testing / Fees** – The Civil Service Board will convene in October to work through any rule changes that are needed due to changes in Police Officer hiring practices. A new list will be advertised in January of 2022.
- **01-410-242 Ammo & Weapon Supplies** – This category has experienced enormous price increases during the past few years. However, the request for 2022 is stable due to efforts exercised in locating appropriately priced ammunition this year and also buying ahead and renewing the Department's taser inventory to avoid a significant jump to the upcoming budget. This is a credit to Sergeants Marks and Holben for staying on top of price points in this area.

- **01-410-243 COVID-19** – While in the midst of concerns related to COVID-19 Chief Granitz is satisfied with the stockpiles of PPE and related items to allow for a decrease in funding of this line item for 2022.
- **01-410-252 Technology Fees** – This covers quite a bit of infrastructure and is an area of overage in the 2021 budget. The reason for this relates to IT services outside of the current contract, including street camera repairs and the lack of an ongoing maintenance agreement related to the interview room camera/recording system. These are the reasons for increases in the coming year's budget in order to update hardware, which will allow for warranty/maintenance agreements to exist limiting repair costs. The cost of a new IT service contract may also rise dependent upon the decision of Council. A quote for a wearable camera system was received today, which is currently an option that may become a requirement in the future. It is very difficult to predict the needs of an aging infrastructure system. A decision is needed with regards to the IT contract in order to move forward with the budget process. In speaking with potential IT providers, it appears that the server capacity is currently in good shape, but overall, there are many areas of liability. A reporting system needs to be established with a new IT provider to properly plan for upgrades in technology in the future.
- **30-410-000 Police Capital Expenses (Body Camera Program)** – Approximately half of all police agencies in Berks County have a body worn camera program. The West Reading Police Officers are onboard with this needed change to increase accountability and transparency as well as to showcase the good work our men and women are doing every day. A policy would be created for Sergeant's to regularly review camera footage to correct or avoid safety or verbal issues. An overall cost of a fifteen body-worn camera system is approximately \$32,000. The Berks County District Attorney's Office has indicated that they would fund the camera hardware portion if we agree to move ahead with this program. That portion is approximately \$15,000 making the overall Borough responsibility \$17,000. Matching grant applications have been submitted to potentially lower the Borough's cost to approximately \$9,000 but the grant is not a guarantee and is very competitive. Chief Granitz requested to move forward with this program to ensure that we provide our community and department with the best services possible. It was noted that COVID funds were used to purchase enough Taser's this year for every officer to carry in their repertoire.

Mr. Gombach noted reasonable budget requests from the Police Department to keep the officers and residents safe. Technology and training are critical items to stay ahead of in the ever-changing policing and he wants to ensure that the department is well equipped.

Chief Granitz welcomed grant opportunity information to be forwarded to his attention so that he can apply.

5. **EXECUTIVE SESSION:** Mr. Gombach noted an executive session that was held at 6:30 p.m. this evening to discuss personnel matters.
6. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** There were no public comments.

7. **ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Kaag. **Motion carried 7-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary