

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

August 29, 2023 – 7:00 p.m.

West Reading Borough Council held a Budget Workshop and Council Meeting at Borough Hall on Tuesday, August 29, 2023 with the following persons present: Council President Ryan Lineaweaver; Council Pro-Tem Christopher Lincoln; Council Members Jennifer Bressler, Patrick Kaag, and Denise Drobnick; Mayor Samantha Kaag; Fire Chief Chad Moyer; Public Works Director Kerry Grassley; Borough Manager Dean Murray; Treasurer Jeanette Rentschler; Assistant Treasurer Helen Moyer; Fire Marshal Mark Burkholder; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira. Council Vice President Philip Wert and Council Member Zachary Shaver were unable to attend.

VISITORS:

James Rogers, Resident

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Council President Ryan Lineaweaver called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call.

2. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Mr. Lineaweaver reported that no executive session was held this evening.

3. AGENDA AMENDMENTS:

There were no amendments to the agenda.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Rogers spoke of an emergency generator that has been running for a number of days near the Fourth and Reading Avenue intersection to power Comcast service lines. He reported on Sunday afternoon the generator had stopped running which suspended internet and cable services and the ability to report an emergency via telephone.

Secondly Mr. Rogers spoke of a Porta Potty located within the 700 block of Penn Avenue that may be associated with a construction project in that area.

Lastly, Mr. Rogers reported on Saturday evening, while his windows were open, he could hear music emanating from the Motor Club until 11:53 p.m. Mr. Lineaweaver noted that there is not a defined timeframe for noise violations, these violations can be reported and enforced at any time by calling the non-emergency line.

As a former Fire Chief, Mr. Burkholder shared his thoughts and recommendations following the R.M. Palmer incident earlier this year. He provided a background of the history between himself and Fire Chief Chad Moyer noting the development of a friendship throughout the years and the natural progression of Mr. Moyer from Deputy Fire Chief to Fire Chief when Mr. Burkholder stepped down from that role. He knew he was leaving the department in good hands with Chief Moyer who would continue to grow the seeds that Mr. Burkholder planted. Managing a volunteer fire department is not an easy task. While at the R.M. Palmer scene Mr. Burkholder recognized the demands and time required to fully manage the department and was grateful that Chief Moyer was in charge. Chief Moyer was afforded the flexibility to manage his full-time Code Department Manager position and full-time Fire Chief position duties. Mr. Burkholder recommended Borough Council to consider the pursuit of funding a full-time paid Fire Chief to administer the fire department. This individual would manage the maintenance of the millions of dollars of

equipment, the volunteers, including the very successful staffing program, and the calls that are received 24/7. A strong leadership system within the department would allow the department to continue to grow and provide the fire and rescue services to the residents that they have come to expect. It was not that he felt the department was failing in this mission, but with the unknown future that is trending in a bad direction Mr. Burkholder recommended taking steps now to strengthen the department before it begins to fail. The hiring of staff was the only viable option. He appreciated this opportunity to share his thoughts.

5. **ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:**

- a. **Resolution 2023-19 Fee Schedule Amendment** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted an inquiry earlier this week regarding service fees. Mrs. Rentschler provided a schedule of rates assessed for the administration, police, and public works services. A breakdown of the various department overtime rates, FICA, pension, and workers' compensation costs are factored into these fees that are additional costs incurred by the Borough for time associated with providing coverage of events. The rates assessed for public works and police services included administration, vehicle, and gasoline hourly charges. It was thought that these types of services should be factored on an ala carte basis per event. The event committee was requested to review these fees to establish pre-planning, vehicle, and gasoline rates and to draft preliminary assessments of all fees per event. The administration fee was removed from all three service rates, and vehicles and gasoline fees removed from the police and public works service rates. The Administration rate was lowered from \$60 to \$45 per hour, the police rate was lowered from \$130 to \$100 per hour, and the public works rate was lowered from \$90 to \$60 per hour.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2023-19 Fee Schedule Amendment to amend the hourly fees for Administration, Police, and Public Works services. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 5-0.**

Mr. Burkholder departed the meeting at 7:29 p.m.

6. **PUBLIC WORKS:**

Mr. Grassley requested consideration to extend one part-time seasonal Public Works position to assist in completing multiple ongoing summer projects such as improvements to the Pavilion, an addition to the Borough Garage at a cost savings by performing in-house, stormwater control of the memorial garden area near the pedestrian bridge and begin curb improvements for next years' paving projects. The remaining funds within the budget for part-time help would fund roughly one additional month of 24 hours per week.

Motion to extend one part-time seasonal Public Works position not to exceed the budgeted amount through October 2023. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Ms. Drobnick. **Motion carried 5-0.**

7. **BOROUGH MANAGER:**

- a. **Summit Street Closure Request** – Mr. Murray requested consideration to close Summit Street from Third Avenue to Fourth Avenue for an annual community block party event on Saturday, September 23, 2023. Mr. Lineaweaver noted the list of signatures obtained from a majority of residents that reside within that block.

Motion to authorize the closure of Summit Street from Third Avenue to Fourth Avenue for a community block party event on Saturday, September 23, 2023. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 5-0.**

- b. **Wyomissing Area School District Homecoming Parade** – Mr. Murray requested consideration to approve the annual homecoming parade and bonfire on Friday, October 13, 2023. The parade route remains the same and the fire company will oversee the bonfire.

Motion to approve the Wyomissing Area School District Homecoming Parade and Bonfire event on Friday, October 13, 2023. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 5-0.**

8. **FIRE DEPARTMENT BUDGET:**

Chief Moyer provided an overview of the 2024 budget noting the following:

Fire Company Revenues

- **01-301-150 Real Estate Taxes Fire Current** – Based on 2.85 mils the proposed 2024 budget totaled \$477,000.
- **01-301-350 Real Estate Taxes Fire Delinquent** – Based on the prior year delinquent fire taxes the proposed 2024 budget totaled \$12,000.
- **01-355-130 Foreign Fire Insurance** – The allocation for volunteer firefighters' relief remained at \$24,000 as set by the insurance company.
- **01-389-411 Fire Vehicle Claims** – There were zero funds allocated towards 2024 fire vehicle claims.
- **01-391-411 Sale of Fire Company Vehicles** – The sale of the old engine proposed to be received in 2023 was \$45,000. Chief Moyer noted two inquiries that have not yet resulted in a bid. Bids may be submitted until September 15th, which could be acted upon by Borough Council on September 19th.
- **30-392-060 Transfer from Special Reserve** – Chief Moyer recapped the reconfiguration of bonds that resulted in a savings of \$113,000 that was placed into the Special Reserve Fund. A portion of these funds, \$80,000, is earmarked for the replacement of a Utility truck in 2025. The remaining \$33,000 is earmarked for a bay door replacement in 2024. Chief Moyer noted Paul Janssen of the Center for Excellence in Local Government's advice to refrain from saving money in a Capital Reserve Fund that is paid by taxpayers that may not enjoy these benefits in ten-years. Therefore, when the current bond is paid in full, the tax revenue contributions will be free to apply towards another bond to purchase a ladder truck funded within a ten-year period.

Fire Company Expenses

- **New General Ledger Code: Fire Police** – Chief Moyer spoke of a history of issues staffing non-emergency events and a program to incentivize Fire Police assistance. As a trial basis during the recent Art on the Avenue event Fire Police were staffed during the initial four-hour shut down phase and once the event was secure the Officer-in-Charge was comfortable with their manpower controlling the scene. The trial ran well with a sufficient number of Fire Police, a second trial run will be observed during the upcoming Fall Fest event. Chief Moyer was unsure if this expense would be allocated within the police or fire budget and noted, similar to the daytime staffing program, a rate of \$15 per hour that was provided for four hours times four Fire Police totaling a cost of \$250. It was unclear how the new Chief of Police would view this program, therefore \$1,000 was proposed for the 2024 budget.

- **01-411-120 Daytime Staffing** – The 2023 budget is projected to be under budget due to the inability to fill all shifts. A 3.25% hourly increase was proposed for a fully staffed program in 2024 totaling \$65,723.
- **01-411-121 Chiefs, Captain, and Lieutenants Salaries** – A 3.25% salary increase was proposed for the 2024 budget totaling \$8,621.
- **01-411-220 Fire Administrative Expenses** – It was noted that \$9,000 had been budgeted for 2023 due to uncertainty surrounding the reporting program. The state brought stabilization to the emergency reporting program that reduced the projected 2023 expense to \$6,448. Based on this information the proposed 2024 budget totals \$6,500.
- **01-411-242 Turnout Gear** – Chief Moyer noted the amount budgeted for 2023 of \$12,000 and a proposed increase to the 2024 budget of \$14,000 to cover increased expenses necessary to maintain and purchase three sets of code compliant gear.
- **01-411-300 General Expenses** – The 2023 budget was projected to be below budget, however the standard \$10,000 was proposed for the 2024 budget. Chief Moyer indicated that additional 2023 expenses will be added for grant writer fees that will bring the 2023 expenses up to \$9,000.
- **01-411-314 Legal Services** – Chief Moyer proposed 2024 legal fee expenses to remain at \$1,000 noting that there were no expenses projected for the year 2023.
- **01-411-329 Communication** – A proposed increase of \$800 was projected for the 2024 budget to compensate an increase in county dispatching fees, the amount budgeted was \$24,000.
- **01-411-337 Vehicle Maintenance and Repair** – Vehicle maintenance expenses for 2023 are projected to end the year at \$10,000 over budget due to a delay in the new engine arriving and a number of brake issues that were experienced on the old engine. The amount of \$20,000 that was proposed for the 2024 budget is a decrease from expenses that were incurred during 2021 and 2022 based on a reduction in the number of apparatuses to maintain and a warranty on the new engine.
- **01-411-338 Gasoline** – The 2023 gasoline budget was projected to end the year over budget. As a result, the amount of \$11,000 was proposed for the 2024 budget.
- **01-411-351 Vehicle Insurance** – An estimated 8% increase has been proposed in 2024 totaling \$7,716.
- **01-411-352 Vehicle Claim Repairs** – Chief Moyer noted an incident on Elm Street where the ladder truck bumper was damaged causing the year-end estimate to exceed the 2023 budget. The \$1,000 proposed 2024 budget would cover a deductible of one claim.
- **01-411-360 Utilities** – Due to the number of lengthy power outages this past year causing the use of generators the projected 2023 budget has been exceeded. The proposed 2024 budget was increased 11% to \$20,000.
- **01-411-373 Building Maintenance and Repairs** – Chief Moyer indicated that besides the bay doors malfunctioning this year the building is in good condition. The projected year-end estimate was \$11,000 below budget. Due to an aging HVAC system, the projected 2024 budget was \$24,000.
- **01-411-750 Minor Equipment Purchases** – The proposed 2024 budget remained at \$7,500.
- **01-471-411 Principal Payments/Fire Station** – The annual \$10,705 principal payments for the fire station are payable through October 2026.
- **01-472-600 Interest Expense on Loan** – The annual \$1,436 interest payments for the fire station are payable through October 2026.

- **30-411-000 Fire Capital Expense** – The \$26,280 projected 2023 year-end budget was calculated by entering a \$57,000 expense to replace the one bay door that is currently out of service and applying a \$30,000 credit from the delay in delivering the pre-paid fire/rescue engine. Chief Moyer indicated that Western Berks Ambulance may fund a portion of the replacement bay door. The 2024 proposed budget was \$59,000 to replace a second bay door. Chief Moyer noted that a grant application has been submitted to the Office of the State Fire Commissioner to potentially offset this expense. The proposed 2025 budget of \$80,000 was to replace the Utility truck. The proposed 2026 budget of \$62,000 was to replace the final bay door. A proposed 2027 budget of \$50,000 was to replace an HVAC unit and repair and recoat the deteriorating concrete engine room floor.
- **01-481-800 Transfer Fire Tax to Capital** – The fire department transfer portion of \$275,409 to the Capital Fund is planned in 2024 to pay for the General Obligation Bond.
- **01-492-061 State Aid/Relief Association Transfer** – The Foreign Fire Insurance funding of \$24,000 provided to the Fireman's Relief Association is used to purchase an additional insurance policy, funds all training and maintenance of self-contained breathing apparatus.

Chief Moyer indicated a minimal change each year in fire department funding that is primarily used to fund Capital items. The 2023 budget was passed with a \$31,968 deficit that is projected to end the year with a \$21,305 deficit.

Mr. Lincoln requested Chief Moyer's feedback on Mr. Burkholder's comments earlier this evening. Chief Moyer shared the most difficult aspect of managing a volunteer fire company as manpower, noting that in a perfect world the whole program would be funded. Chief Moyer is currently comfortable in his position, in part due to the paid daytime staffing program. He noted that volunteer service is dwindling across the state and country. Chief Moyer recommended Borough Council to be open to future discussions of mergers. West Reading Fire Department is better than most as far as volunteer manpower. Chief Moyer recommended the consideration of extending the paid staffing program by an additional eight-hour period to guarantee coverage. Merging fire departments would be more costly than maintaining a volunteer fire department.

8. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Mr. Rogers noted the addition of 147 new Business Privilege Tax accounts based in part on information that he provided to Berkheimer Tax Innovations. He hopes this will help the budget process next year and into the future.

9. **ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:17 p.m. **Moved** by Ms. Drobnick and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 5-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary