

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
BOROUGH COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP
OCTOBER 3, 2015**

West Reading Borough Council held a budget workshop at Borough Hall on Saturday, October 3, 2015 with the following persons present: Council President Philip C. Wert; Council Vice-President Carl Garman; Council Members Suzanne Thompson, Elizabeth Heckler, Nathalie Kulesa, and Grace Craze; Mayor Valentin Rodriguez, Jr.; Borough Manager Richard Sichler; Dan Becker, Solicitor; Treasurer Jeanette Rentschler; Police Chief Stephen Powell; Public Works Director Dean Murray; Administrative Assistant Cathy Hoffman.

Visitors Present: Oswald Herbert and James T. Rogers

Council President Phil Wert called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and roll call.

PUBLIC COMMENT

James T. Rogers asked about censorship concerning an article in the upcoming Courier. This initiated an hour long discussion concerning the events that had transpired over the past two weeks where Ms. Thompsons' Council Corner article was edited and a concern was raised regarding the content as it pertains to the upcoming election. Mr. Sichler indicated that the newsletter article was edited for length in order to fit in a predetermined amount of space however Ms. Thompson felt that it was edited as a form of censorship.

There was also some concern regarding a portion of the newsletter article that might conflict with state ethics requirements as it pertains to publications within 60 days of an election. Mr. Becker reviewed sections of 65 PA CS §1103 concerning the Ethics Act and much discussion ensued. It was decided that the article would be published in its entirety with the exception of the portion that possibly may not be in compliance with the Ethics Act.

Moved by Mr. Garman and seconded by Mrs. Kulesa to publish Suzanne Thompson's article in the West Reading Courier as initially written with the deletion of the sentence "My appointment ends in December, but because I would love to continue on the West Reading Borough Council, I am competing in the November 3rd election for a Council position beginning January, 2016." **Motion carried unanimously.**

Mr. Becker then left the meeting. (10:07 a.m.)

PETITION TO REAPPORTION THE WASD

Mayor Rodriguez updated Council concerning the petitioning of the Court of Common Pleas of Berks County for the reapportioning of the Wyomissing Area School District from an "at large" electoral voting scheme to three regions. This would enable each region to elect three directors which would allow equal representation for all residents of the District. Mayor Rodriguez said that it is his duty to advocate on behalf of the residents of the Borough and referred to the petition that was signed by 820 qualified electors who are seeking legal redress to obtain a proportional share of representation for the taxes they pay to the Wyomissing Area School District. He noted that at the September 15th Council meeting, the

legal counsel who is representing the petitioners in this action apprised Council on the matter and after some deliberation, Council decided to consider the matter for a vote at a subsequent public meeting of Council.

As a result, the following motion was brought forward at this meeting:

Moved by Ms. Thompson and seconded by Mr. Garman to sustain Resolution 2014-9, which was unanimously passed on August 19, 2014 by the Council of the Borough of West Reading with funding not to exceed the amount of \$3,000. (Three thousand dollars) for attorney fees to re-file election matter: *IN RE: PETITION TO REAPPORTION THE WYOMISSING AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT FROM AT LARGE TO THREE (3) REGIONS FOR THE ELECTION OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS.*

Much discussion followed concerning possible action that the School District might take, the cost involved and whether the Borough Code empowers Council to take this action.

Motion carried unanimously.

2016 BUDGET

Mr. Sichler referred to the budget document which provided a break down showing previous years, current year, estimated year end, and budgeted amounts for 2016. He noted that the expenditures for the 2015 budget was set at \$5,300,000 however revenue was set at only \$4,600,00 which is a structural deficit, and reserve funds were used for the shortfall. He said that 2016 will be a very tight budget year.

Some of the items discussed are as follows:

- The current PILOT with the Reading Hospital is for 2015, 2016, and 2017 therefore negotiations should begin next year.
- Raising taxes a small amount was discussed briefly however it was noted that the revenue received from an entire mill is only \$170,000 therefore ¼ mill would be insignificant comparatively speaking.
- Chief Powell said that he would like to approach the Hospital regarding the possible purchase of equipment such as vests, a vehicle etc. on an annual basis. He noted that 12 – 15% of the Borough's police calls are in response to situations at the Hospital, therefore they may be willing to make these purchases. Mayor Rodriguez said that he has an upcoming meeting scheduled with Hospital representatives that the Chief will be attending as well.
- Digging Permit fees were discussed and it was noted that when utility companies dig up Borough streets, outside contractors are used to do the street remediation. After some discussion it was decided that these fees should be increased, which will be done when the fee schedule is revised for 2016.
- The reimbursement amount from PennDOT for the plowing of Penn Avenue was discussed. Mr. Sichler said he will be meeting with a regional contact in the coming week and will discuss the matter with him to obtain more information.
- Liquid Fuels funds have traditionally been used for street lighting because it is easy on the administrative side and for auditing purposes, however Mr. Sichler believes that it can be used for salt purchases and will be investigating to see what is required.
- Under line item 01-392-009 **Transfer from Refuse Fund**, \$30,000 has been budgeted to repave alleys because trash and recycling trucks create a lot of wear on the asphalt.

- 'Legal Services' was discussed and Mr. Sichler was asked to provide a breakdown of those fees.
- 'Communication Expense' was discussed and Mr. Sichler related some issues that have been recently experienced. He recommended that all phone lines should be reviewed completely including existing service and what future needs are expected to be.

*Mr. Murray and Mayor Rodriguez had other commitments and left the meeting at 1:00 p.m.
Ms. Craze and Mrs. Heckler left the meeting at 2:00 p.m.*

NEXT BUDGET MEETING:

Due to the other agenda items being discussed, Council did not review as much of the budget as had been anticipated therefore it was decided that an additional budget workshop would be scheduled for the second Council meeting date of October 27th at 7:00 p.m. The goal is to have the budget process completed by the end of the November 7th workshop and be ready for advertising.

ADJOURNMENT:

Moved by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Garman to adjourn the meeting at 2:30 p.m. **Motion carried.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy Hoffman
Administrative Assistant