

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

**November 4, 2023 – 9:00 a.m.**

West Reading Borough Council held a Budget Workshop and Council Meeting at Borough Hall on Saturday, November 4, 2023 with the following persons present: Council President Ryan Lineaweaver; Council Vice President Philip Wert; Council Pro-Tem Christopher Lincoln; Council Member Jennifer Bressler; Public Works Director Kerry Grassley; Chief of Police Richard Tornielli; Recreation Director Michael Esterly; Borough Manager Dean Murray; Treasurer Jeanette Rentschler; Assistant Treasurer Helen Moyer; Public Works Member Michael Jacko; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira. Council Members Denise Drobnick, Patrick Kaag, and Zachary Shaver, and Mayor Samantha Kaag were unable to attend.

**VISITORS:**

Maureen Hasty, Resident

**1. CALL TO ORDER:**

Council President Ryan Lineaweaver called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m., which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call.

**2. AGENDA AMENDMENTS:** Mr. Lineaweaver reported that an executive session was not held prior to this meeting and there were no amendments to the agenda.

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT:**

There were no public comments.

**4. BOROUGH MANAGER:**

- a. **Variance Application** – The engineer review of two zoning variance requests pertaining to 400 Walnut Street that request relief from the minimum lot area and rear yard setback to convert the existing vacant lot to two semi-detached dwellings was discussed. It was noted that a minimum of 6,000 square feet would be required to support two dwellings and the lot size is 4,200 square feet. The proposed access to two driveways would be from Olive Street and would require the removal of on-street parking spaces. A subdivision application would be required to properly divide the parcel. The lot size is best suited to supporting a single-family dwelling fronting Walnut Street.

Motion to issue a letter of concern to the Zoning Hearing Board of the requested zoning relief for 400 Walnut Street. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 4-0.**

- b. **Lease Agreement** – Mr. Murray requested consideration to enter into a lease agreement with the school district for use of the baseball field for their junior high program. Mr. Lineaweaver noted that their old ballfield located at Wyomissing Hills is unusable due to construction activities at the school. Maintenance responsibilities of the ballfield would be divided between the school and the Borough. A fee of \$100 per game would be assessed, which would include use of the field for weekday practices, as well as a \$25 per game fee to mop bathroom floors. Mr. Esterly indicated that concession stand sales would be offered by the Recreation Commission during the games.

Motion to enter into a lease agreement with the Wyomissing Area School District Junior High Baseball Program to use the West Reading Pavilion and Field. **Moved** by Mr. Wert and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 4-0.**

- c. **Audit Engagement Request** – Mrs. Rentschler noted an increase in fees over the course of three years with an initial year increase of roughly \$2,000. It was unclear as to why the drastic increase in 2023 with \$500 increases to the two following years. Mrs. Rentschler will inquire as to the increases and potentially shop around for cost savings. This action item was tabled.

5. **OVERALL BUDGET:**

Mr. Murray shared that the 2023 budget was adopted with a budgeted deficit of \$359,489 and is projected to end the year with a surplus of \$423,810. A request was made from all department leaders to reduce their individual budgets 10% to lessen the currently budgeted deficit of \$732,057.

Mrs. Rentschler reviewed the following changes that were made to the 2024 budget:

- **01-310-840 Business Privilege Tax, Business Privilege License, and Court Fees from District Justice** – A new general ledger code was created to capture revenues Berkheimer Tax Innovations is pursuing of more than 400 unpaid business privilege taxes. An amount of \$1,000 was entered for a current year end estimate and \$40,000 was proposed for the 2024 budget. These funds would be comprised of taxes that are past due and reimbursement of filing fees. It was recommended to ask the District Justice office to provide a clearer breakdown of taxes and fines to better understand the revenues conveyed by their office.
- **01-391-410 Sale of Police Vehicles** – The amount of \$1,000 was added to the 2023-year end estimate.
- **01-391-411 Sale of Fire Company Vehicles** – The estimated revenue of \$30,000 for the sale of the old engine was moved from 2023 to 2024 due to a lack of interest shown in bidding on this vehicle.
- **01-391-430 Sale of Public Works Vehicles** – The actual sale price of the 2008 GMC work truck of \$6,850 was reflected in the 2023-year end estimate.
- **01-400-121 Manager's Salary** – An increase in salary of 5.5% during the course of three years, as recommended by the Personnel Committee was reflected.
- **01-400-311 Auditing Services** – The rate increases provided by Maillie, LLC were reflected for the years 2024, 2025, and 2026 in the respective amounts of \$18,000, \$18,500, and \$19,000.
- **01-400-314 Legal Services** – Mrs. Rentschler inquired as to who would represent the Borough at the District Justice office for delinquent business privilege taxes. It was thought that staff could handle this task. It was noted that legal service fees were reduced from \$85,000 to \$75,000 in 2024.
- **01-400-337 Vehicle Maintenance and Repair** – The proposed 2024 budget was reduced from \$4,000 to \$3,000. Mr. Murray indicated that the Administration vehicle has been running well and believes that expenses should be less in the coming year.
- **01-400-373 Equipment Maintenance and Repair** – The proposed 2024 budget was lowered from \$5,500 to \$4,500.
- **01-403-353 Court Fees** – This new general ledger code would capture the expenses associated with the new revenue code relating to business privilege taxes. The conservative amounts proposed at year end for fifty cases was \$5,000 and the amount proposed for 2024 was \$10,000 for 100 cases.
- **01-410-174 Special Event Overtime** – Chief Tornielli noted a decrease in hours associated with special events and decreased the proposed 2024 budget from \$25,355 to \$20,000.

- **01-410-252 Technology Fees** – The proposed 2024 budget was decreased from \$110,000 to \$100,000. The proposed 2025 budget was lowered to \$105,000.
- **01-410-336 Police Vehicle Replacements** – Chief Tornielli noted favorable financing terms that were found lowering the proposed 2024 budget from \$84,170 to \$66,167.
- **01-410-740 Major Equipment Purchases** – The proposed 2024 budget was decreased from \$15,000 to \$12,000 in part due to the purchase of replacement radios.
- **01-430-130 Public Works Director Salary** – An increase in salary of 5.5% during the course of three years, as recommended by the Personnel Committee was reflected.
- **01-430-173 Part-Time Help** – The proposed 2024 budget was decreased from \$35,000 to \$28,000. This would remove the seasonal summer position and fund the proposed full-time / part-time annual position. Mr. Grassley noted difficulties over the years with accidents and time-off requests that make it difficult to plan or carry out tasks.
- **01-430-740 Major Equipment Purchases** – Mr. Grassley noted plans to delay the purchase of a brush hog next year, lowering the 2024 budget from \$28,000 to \$20,000.
- **01-438-375 Cloverleaf Mowing** – The hired contractor consistently maintained the cloverleaf very well throughout the summer. The year end estimates that included services provided earlier this week was \$4,275.
- **01-481-860 Capital Fund Build-Up** – Mrs. Rentschler reported a change in the proposed 2024 budget to \$466,000 for the Capital Fund to pay General Fund capital expenses.

Mrs. Rentschler noted that there were no reductions to the Fire and Code Department budgets. The increase in Code Department fees and revenues were thought to already provide a 10% reduction to expenses. The following were individual recommendations made by Borough Council on how to reduce the remaining deficit of \$715,049:

- **01-310-500 Local Services Tax** – Mr. Wert noted the conservatively proposed 2024 budget of \$401,448 as recommended by Berks Earned Income Tax. Based on a history of increased revenues each year the proposed budget was increased to \$407,500.
- **01-310-800 Business Privilege Tax Current Year** – The conservatively proposed 2024 budget of \$240,000 as recommended by Berkheimer Tax Innovation that is appropriately pursuing compliance was increased to \$260,000.
- **06-481-800 Capital Water Project** – Mr. Grassley proposed to make improvements to the Sixth Avenue water lines in-house to potentially lower this expense from \$100,000 to \$25,000.
- **08-481-800 Capital Sewer Project** – Mr. Grassley recommended the consideration of purchasing a camera system for videoing sewer mains. A portable system that can be mounted on a truck was estimated to cost roughly \$60,000. It was noted that \$50,000 is budgeted each year to televise and jet sewer mains. Mr. Lincoln expressed a concern of running out of manpower to perform multiple new tasks in-house. It was decided to fund the purchase of a camera system that would video sewer and storm sewer lines next year, lowering the proposed 2024 budget from \$100,000 to \$70,000.
- **30-411-00 Fire Capital Expense** – Mr. Grassley reported that the replacement garage door is scheduled to arrive at the end of January and requested that the budgeted funds be carried out to 2024. The proposed 2024 budget of \$95,000 included a portion of the first door and the purchase of a second door. Mr. Lineaweaver noted that Western Berks Ambulance offered to pay a portion of the replacement door. The proposed 2024 budget was decreased to \$70,000.

- **30-430-000 Highways Capital Expense** – Mr. Lincoln requested that we ensure UGI Utilities, Inc. does not have any projects planned along Fifth Avenue that would interfere with the scheduled paving project between Oak Terrace and Penn Avenue. It was decided to delay the Park Alley paving project one year to save \$74,000. The proposed 2024 budget was decreased from \$359,000 to \$285,000.
- **30-409-000 Capital Fund Building Expenditure** – Mrs. Rentschler inquired as to the proposed \$30,000 budget to replace windows at Borough Hall. Casement window replacement was decreased to \$20,000.
- **30-410-000 Police Capital Expense** – The amount of \$42,000 was lowered to \$38,000 based on a buyback estimate received for rifles.
- **30-400-313 Engineering Capital Expense** – This figure is automatically calculated at a cost of 7% of projects. The removal of a paving project brought the proposed 2024 budget down from \$25,130 to \$19,950.
- **30-470-100 Land Purchase** – Mrs. Rentschler noted that the lowest financing amount has been proposed in 2024 at a total of \$112,633.

It was noted that the Recreation budget has increased revenue and cut spending. The changes that were made are projected to decrease the pool deficit from \$77,910.50 to \$69,915. The playground program is projected to provide revenue in 2024 as opposed to the deficit that was realized in 2023. The overall result of these changes is projected to reduce the amount needed to fund the Recreation programs by roughly \$20,000 in 2024. Based on Clover transactions it was thought that the concession stand could close during twilight hours while allowing visitors to bring their own food and beverages at that time. Mr. Grassley intends to research the conversion from a chlorine system to a saltwater system next year for future cost savings.

- **09-363-300 Resident Disposal Fees** – Mrs. Rentschler indicated that the quarterly trash rate would not need to increase \$20 to \$120 per quarter as previously proposed due to the reduced cost of \$75,000 to pave alleys in 2023 as opposed to the budgeted amount of \$150,000. Based on the new waste collection contract increase of roughly \$248,000 it was recommended to increase \$10 per quarter to avoid a drastic increase in resident fees in 2025. The proposed 2024 budgeted revenues were reduced from \$781,725 to \$730,863. With this change the Sanitation Fund balance dropped from \$243,000 to \$168,000 at the end of 2024. Changes to the bulk collection policy to a ticketed type of program should help offset collection and disposal expenses.
- **06-400-366 Water Purchase** – It was noted that Western Berks Water Authority has established a 12% increase in their rates in 2024. Mrs. Rentschler proposed a 15% increase in water rates in 2024.
- **01-410-131 Patrolmen Wages** – Mr. Lineaweaver recommended reducing the number of patrolmen hires in 2024 from two to one. It was noted that an officer in the DROP program has a little more than two years until retirement and this would allow a replacement patrolman to be hired and trained. It was noted that a one-mil tax increase is needed to fund one officer for a year. The civil service process was recommended to begin in January to hire by July 1<sup>st</sup> to be eligible for state aid. The proposed 2024 budget was reduced from \$320,000 to \$172,800. Chief Tornielli shared that hiring two officers would even out the squads and provide a plus one to operate the community impact car with the primary purpose of responding to calls for service. Chief Tornielli shared that the Department of Justice announced yesterday a Nationwide Public

Safety grant that could fund a fixed number of years for the hiring of an entry-level law enforcement officer.

- **01-410-135 Shift Differential for Field Training Officer** – Based on the reduction to one new hire the proposed 2024 budget was lowered from \$16,500 to \$13,000.
- **01-410-175 Overtime for Court Cases** – Mr. Lineaweaver asked about reducing overtime by scheduling cases while an officer is on duty. Chief Tornielli agreed to lower the proposed 2024 budget from \$33,000 to \$26,000.
- **90-367-815 4<sup>th</sup> of July Contributions** – Mr. Lineaweaver noted a lack of interest in volunteers for a 4<sup>th</sup> of July Ad Hoc Committee and recommended removing the \$5,000 expense for a drone show in lieu of fireworks. Should an interest in volunteering arise, donations or sponsorships could be sought at that time.

Mrs. Rentschler reported that with the noted revisions to the 2024 budget the deficit has been reduced from \$732,057 to \$398,345. It was noted that the county has not reassessed properties in thirty years and a one-mil increase would only generate \$171,308, which would offset the cost of hiring a patrolman. A one-mil increase would lower the 2024 budgeted deficit to \$228,345.

It was noted that the tax-exempt appeal status of the Masonic Lodge has not yet been determined and the tax revenue for this parcel totaling \$61,642 has not been factored into the 2024 budget.

Motion to authorize the advertisement of a proposed 2024 budget. **Moved** by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Lincoln. **Motion carried 4-0.**

Motion to authorize the advertisement of a Real Estate Tax rate increase of one-mil. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Wert. **Motion carried 4-0.**

Authorization to advertise a water rate increase was tabled to allow the Treasurer to factor in a total of 15% increase divided between commercial and residential accounts. It was noted that rates have not increased since 2020 and an 8% increase in expenses was not passed onto the residents last year.

6. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** There were no public comments.

7. **ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:52 a.m. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 4-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira  
Borough Secretary