

Borough of Tenafly

MAYOR AND COUNCIL

BUDGET MEETING MINUTES

THURSDAY, MARCH 3, 2011

7:30 P.M. – 10:00 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 7:38 P.M. with the reading of the Open Public Meetings Act statement by Mayor Rustin.

Present:	Mayor Peter S. Rustin
Council members:	Anthony Barzelatto (arrived at 8:35 p.m.), Barry Honig, Martha Kerge, Nadia LaMastra, Jon Warmis
Borough Administrator:	Jewel Thompson-Chin
Chief Financial Officer:	Gene Vinci
Chief of Police:	Michael Bruno
Director of Youth Services:	Mark Slawson
Absent:	Councilman Michael Lattif

Mayor Rustin read the following statement:

"Public Comments: A total of 15 minutes has been allocated for this purpose. Citizens are welcome to address the Mayor and Council on any governmental item of concern to them, whether or not it is scheduled on the agenda below. Citizens must give their names and addresses when recognized to speak. Large groups are urged to select someone to represent them. The public is advised that these meetings are recorded and are subject to the Open Public Records Act."

There was no public comment.

Mrs. Thompson-Chin advised that the March 7th Budget Meeting would begin with a Closed Session at 7:00 p.m. to interview for the Labor Attorney position. She discussed the schedule for the remaining budget meetings. She advised that the Library would be scheduled for March 10th and the major topic of discussion would be the \$25,000 reduction in the Borough's appropriation to the Library.

Mayor Rustin asked Mrs. Thompson-Chin to quickly run through the Assessor and Court budgets. Mrs. Thompson-Chin started with the Assessor's Office and advised that although they had requested a budget increase of \$950 over last year, their request was actually reduced by \$1,000 resulting in a decrease in their operating budget. She explained that there is expected to be an increase in the number of appeals with the volatility of the real estate market and fragile economy.

Mrs. Thompson-Chin advised that the total salary budget for the Court is \$92,691, fringe comprising \$57,000 of this amount, and other expenses total \$14,150 for a total budget of \$106,841. Mr. Vinci added that Judge Bell's fringe costs are higher than his salary. C. LaMastra questioned whether it is common practice to provide benefits for part-time judges. C. Honig expressed his opinion that the 35-hour/week threshold to be met in order for an employee to be entitled to benefits. Council asked that Mrs. Thompson-Chin investigate the situation and advise whether Council has the ability to

discontinue his coverage. Mrs. Thompson-Chin responded that whether the coverage can be terminated is dependent on how the arrangement was made. Council also asked to be provided with a list of other part-time employees receiving benefits. Mr. Vinci advised that there is only one employee in the Library who had been grandfathered in.

Youth Center – Mark Slawson, Director

Mark Slawson explained that the Youth Center services 6th – 12th grade students, with the majority of students being from the 6th – 9th grade age group. He advised that they provide tutoring services to the student and provide membership cards for a computer room so that students can do their homework. He pointed out that their computer room provides relief to the Library.

Mayor Rustin asked Mr. Slawson to provide an overview of the camp. Mr. Slawson advised that there is a total of 7 weeks offered, but students are allowed to choose which weeks to attend. He stated that non-residents are permitted to attend the camp for an increased fee and the camp is made up of approximately 60% residents and 40% non-residents. Mayor Rustin remarked that there have been behavioral issues with non-residents in the past and questioned whether the Council should change the policy of allowing non-residents to participate in the camp. Mr. Slawson responded that they have chosen not to allow problem-children to return to camp and added that the additional fee that non-residents pay makes it worthwhile to allow them to attend camp. He advised that he has already booked several trips for this summer and the money has come from monies already in the trust account. C. Honig questioned whether there was an opportunity to raise fees to which Mr. Slawson advised that they had increased the fees last year \$25 for residents and \$50 for non-residents. C. LaMastra added that they had significantly increased the fees a few years ago. Mayor Rustin explained that the Youth Services and Recreation Camps target those who cannot afford the sleep-away camps.

Council raised the issue of staffing and whether there is enough staff to handle children who choose to play outside. Mr. Slawson responded that once the children leave the Youth Center, they are no longer the Youth Center's responsibility. He advised that the only time that his staff would be responsible is when there is an activity outside in which the staff is participating. Council also questioned whether the ratio of staff to students is adequate. Mr. Slawson stated that he would like to have a female on staff as there are approximately 55 females who attend the Youth Center. Council advised that Mr. Slawson should put the additional staff member in his budget for next year and perhaps the additional salary can be accounted for by increasing the fees.

C. Honig commented that Mr. Slawson is both a teacher and a Borough employee and questioned why he elected to have insurance coverage through the Borough. Mr. Slawson explained that he is eligible for lifetime benefits much earlier through the Borough; in order to receive lifetime benefits from the school, he would need to work an additional 12 years. He stated that he would most likely retire prior to that time.

Police – Michael Bruno, Chief of Police

Mayor Rustin explained that due to retirements and resignations, the Police Department is down five officers from last year. He advised that there was a question as to whether Council had authorized the backfilling of positions due to the promotion of two Sergeants to the Captain positions. He also noted that Council would need to decide how many, if any, additional Patrol Officers to hire. Mr. Vinci advised that if Council authorized 3 hires, an additional \$97,000 would be added to this year's budget and \$182,000 to next year's budget. Chief Bruno asked whether the minutes of the meeting in which Council decided as to the backfilling of the positions were checked. Mrs. Thompson-Chin read the minutes from the December 14th Closed Session; Council authorized the 2 promotions to Captain, 2 promotions to fill the vacant Sergeant positions, and decided to hold off on filling in the vacancies in patrol until budget time.

Chief Bruno explained that due to the many vacancies, his structure is unbalanced. The current table of organization has been in place since 2002 and he commented that it is streamlined and works. He explained that the transition of the two new Captains is in process now and by not allowing him to backfill the other positions, the Council is creating a very difficult situation for his agency. He advised that his floating sergeant is retiring and although this sergeant acts as a floating supervisor and reduces the amount of overtime, he expressed his opinion that a civilian could fill this position.

In terms of filling the vacancies in patrol, C. Honig questioned whether there has been an increase in population to support the increase in the number of officers. Chief Bruno responded that although there has not been a significant increase in population, the responsibilities of the department, including State-mandated training, have dramatically increased. C. Honig acknowledged that public safety is of upmost concern, but stated that the Council needs to consider future costs and determine the minimum number of officers needed. Chief Bruno explained that the patrol division is the primary function and needs to be filled. He advised that with this staffing level, he is left with only one officer in the traffic division. C. LaMastra asked Chief Bruno to differentiate between patrol and traffic. Chief Bruno explained that traffic officers learn how to investigate crashes and determine the cause. They also handle traffic issues such as intersection flows.

Council agreed to authorize the promotions and allow Chief Bruno to maintain his table of organization. Council decided to wait to decide on the hiring of additional officers. Chief Bruno stated that he is comfortable to wait, but strongly recommended allowing him to hire at least 3 additional officers as his traffic and detective divisions have been depleted. Mrs. Thompson-Chin expressed her concern about the timing of the decision to hire additional officers as the budget introduction is scheduled for the March 22nd Public Meeting. Chief Bruno advised that he could inform Council, with certainty, who will be promoted to Lieutenant. He also offered to provide the 2 highest salaries out of the potential candidates for Sergeant in order to provide the highest estimate of cost. Council agreed to have Chief Bruno attend the March 15th Budget Meeting to further discuss the additional hires. Chief Bruno would be scheduled to begin at 7:30, the Capital Budget portion of the meeting would begin at 8:00 p.m. and the review of the revisions would start at 9:00 p.m.

Council proceeded to review the remainder of the Police Department budget. C. Honig questioned the number of police vehicles and Chief Bruno advised that there are 23 police vehicles, 2 motorcycles, a traffic maintenance vehicle, and a trailer. He explained that there are usually 5 to 12 vehicles on the road at one time, but because of fleet management policies, vehicles need to sit for a shift. C. Honig also questioned why DPW does not perform the maintenance for the vehicles as they had in the past. Chief Bruno responded that the arrangement did not work as sometimes the vehicles would not be looked at for several weeks. With the current contract, the cars can be looked at right away. C. Kerge asked about whether a location for the Traffic Maintenance employee had been found. Chief Bruno advised that he has a temporary location, but he will need to find him an OSHA-acceptable location for him to work.

Chief Bruno ended by explaining that he looked at the tax breakdown for a resident paying \$20,000 in taxes. He advised that approximately \$1,100 of the \$20,000 is applied to the Police, Fire, and Ambulance budgets. He explained that hiring additional officers would result in an increase of approximately \$68 to that number.

ADJOURNMENT

As there was no further business to come before the Council, on a motion by C. Kerge, second by C. Honig, and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned at 9:59 p.m.