

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
MAYOR & COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

FEBRUARY 15, 2024

MAYOR’S STATEMENT: Mayor Ronald Jubin called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and made the following statement: *“This meeting is being held in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act. Under the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., notice of the time and place of this meeting was given by way of the Special Meeting Notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, the Star Ledger, posted at Borough Hall and on the Borough’s website.”*

**SALUTE TO THE FLAG and MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN,
SERVING HOME AND ABROAD**

ROLL CALL

Ead [P] Dahl [P] Fischer [Absent] Marano [P] Abi- Habib [Absent] Gibbs [P]

DISCUSSIONS

Review of the 2024 Budget Requests:

- ❖ Library Advisory Committee – Catherine Leigh, Chair of the Committee was present before the Mayor and Council and informed Council this was her first year.

Chief Financial Officer Bill Hance explained that technically the Library Committee didn’t have a budget, they only had the minor expenses for the facility.

Mayor Jubin thanked Chairwoman Leigh for being present and did note that later on during the regular meeting, the borough was scheduled to give a presentation on the proposed library renovations.

- ❖ Police Department – Chief Anderle and Brian Townley were present before the Mayor and Council to present their department budget. Chief Anderle spoke on the departments budget requests and elaborated on the budget increases.

Councilwoman Abi-Habib joined the meeting at approximately 5:37 P.M.

Mr. Townley noted that the body cam expenses were represented on the budget figures this year, however all authorizations were obtained last year. He noted that the department was behind two years on replacing vehicles because there are delays from the manufactures.

Councilman Marano asked the department to elaborate on the cameras replaced.

Council President Ead asked the department to speak on the benefit of partnering with Somerset County and the grants they receive for recruitment purposes. Chief Anderle explained that the Prosecutors office handles recruitment directly; there are mandates they follow from the State and then they share candidates with Watchung. Per Chief Anderle, the partnership with the County has benefited significantly when hiring directly those that have gone through the county’s system.

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- ❖ Fire Department – Chief Al DeSandolo was present before Council and explained that their budget overall stayed the same. Any increases mainly occurred on their communications line for antennas that need to be completed and their uniform line. This comes at a time where the death of their Plainfield Officer occurred and the department saw a need to outfit everyone safely. Their capital line has increases for their apparatus; costs have significantly increased since the last time quotes were obtained.

Council President Ead inquired on the difference of the uniforms and the Fire Chief explained that not everyone had a class A uniform; members are typically outfitted with basic level gear and once a commitment level has been determined, their gears are upgraded. Currently there are about 20 uniforms that need to be ordered.

Councilman Dahl asked the Chief to elaborate on the apparatus, how old was it, etc. The Chief explained that the apparatus is from 1996 with about \$20,000 worth of needed repairs. The one that is on reserve and kept on standby is from 2003 and it has kept with maintenance. If something were to be ordered today, they would get it in about 3 years. The department is looking for grant funding, however, certain grants require dedicated staff and as volunteers their time is limited.

Council President Ead noted she had attended a FEMA webinar and informed the Chief that each year that nothing is received, the department would qualify to obtain certain points. She suggested this was something they could look into.

- ❖ Fire Prevention – Fire Official Thomas McNulty was present and informed the Governing Body that he kept the same budget as the prior year. CFO Hance and Mr. McNulty gave an overview of anticipated collections, approximately \$35,000.

Councilman Gibbs asked the CFO to elaborate on the salary & wage line, CFO Hance explained that the switch was made from salary (prior Fire Official) to hourly for Mr. McNulty.

- ❖ Construction Department – Construction Official Robert LaCosta, was present before Council and explained that the departments budget remained flat for the most part, the biggest expense being SDL software. Mr. LaCosta proceeded to speak on the department's revenue and the electronic plan overview requirements coming from the State.

Councilmembers made inquiries on the number of permits and on the process of the electronic permitting system that have to be put in place.

- ❖ Finance Department – Chief Financial Officer Hance summarized over the remaining areas of the budget and went over those primarily with increases, in his dept. mostly because of computer item purchases.
- ❖ Tax Assessor – The increase primarily here was in the salaries and wages line, the part-time assistant to the Tax Assessor has put in more hours assisting the Assessor on some inspections, versus paying a consultant.

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- ❖ Tax Collector – Primary increase in the training line to allow his Assistant to take on the Tax Collector classes.
- ❖ Administration, Mayor/Council, and Clerk Budgets – CFO Hance concluded by provided an overview and noted that these budgets remained relatively flat, primary increases are on the salaries and wages line and the computer line in order to comply with cyber security guidelines. In the Clerk's budget, an increase was advocated for the training line so that other members of the office could also take advantage.
- ❖ Election – This budget was adjusted for this year since it is a Presidential election, primarily for postage and security expenses.

Mayor Jubin inquired on the process of establishing a new polling site and if this would alleviate the traffic control expenses. Clerk Gil advised that as long as a place was ADA compliant and ample enough, it would be something that the Board of Elections would approve.

PUBLIC PORTION

No one appeared

ADJOURNMENT

Upon there being no further business, the meeting ended at 6:27 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next scheduled regular meeting of the Mayor and Council will follow at 7:30 P.M., February 15th.

Respectfully Submitted,

Edith G. Gil
Borough Clerk

Approved: May 2, 2023