

**MINUTES OF THE BUDGET WORKSHOP OF  
THE TOWN BOARD OF THE TOWN OF NEW LEBANON  
HELD ON OCTOBER 19, 2020**

**Present:** Tistrya Houghtling, Supervisor  
Jesse Newton, Councilmember  
Norman Rasmussen, Councilmember (online)  
Deborah Gordon, Councilmember (online)  
John Trainor, Councilmember

**Recording Secretary:** Marsha “Marcie” Robertson, Town Clerk

**Others Present:** None

**CALL TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Supervisor Houghtling.

**MISCELLANEOUS BUDGET ITEMS:**

Supervisor Houghtling stated that tonight’s Budget Workshop is to discuss .1 accounts, for anyone listening in .1 accounts are salaries and pay.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that before they get into .1 accounts, she has some follow-up answers from questions from the last Budget Workshop meeting.

The mortgage tax that Holly Tanner had emailed in the amount of \$32,313, that is for six months mortgage tax from April through October 2020.

The Town Board agreed to change:

- Page 20, Mortgage Tax – Change A-3005 from \$35,000 to \$48,000

Supervisor Houghtling stated that Mary Defreest from the Lebanon Valley Seniors will be coming on 10/28/20 at 6:30pm and Ted Salem from the Comp Plan will be coming on 10/28/20 at 6:00pm to talk with the Town Board. They were they only two departments that wanted to talk more to regarding their .2 and .4 accounts.

Supervisor Houghtling stated regarding the speed signs, that she did speak with Sergeant Stroble with the NYS Police, it is what she thought. If the Town had a local Town Police, they could probably issue tickets off of a speed sign that the Town owned that could take pictures of plate numbers and record speeds but the State Police and Sheriffs Office cannot issue tickets based on a piece of property the Town owns. Supervisor Houghtling stated

that when she called and spoke to Sergeant Stroble to ask if he could help with the speed complaints, he strongly suggested to get speed signs, he said just the presence of them significantly reduces peoples speed. Supervisor Houghtling stated that her argument of investing the \$6,000 is investing in public safety, which she feels is a good investment of taxpayer dollars. Supervisor Houghtling stated that the amount of people that have put in complaints to her about speed to her being one of their large concerns, she feels that it is a drop in the bucket. Supervisor Houghtling stated that she does understand the budget position that they are going into, she understands that they need to be on a shoe string budget but her argument is that the \$6,000 is a drop in the hat in the overall if you are going to affect a problem that many residents are encountering. She feels that the experiment that was done when the town borrowed the signs from Chatham, showed that the signs were effective and in her conversation with both the State Police and Sheriffs Office, they both strongly advocated for them to reduce the speeding issues that we are having.

Councilmember Gordon stated that if she is claiming that it is a public safety issue have there been occasions in the recent past on the streets where speeding is considered by the residents to be the problem, have there been accidents, people or animals getting hit?

Supervisor Houghtling stated that she cannot speak to any specific incidents or people or animals getting hit. Supervisor Houghtling stated that from personal experience, the road she lives on, cars go very fast by her house. She feels it would be a shame for a person or a child to get hit before declaring this an issue. She thinks it is more of a proactive safety measure that you take.

Councilmember Newton stated that in his opinion once they work out the .1 accounts, they can revisit the speed signs.

Councilmember Rasmussen agreed.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that she did some number crunching and at some point, they will enter an executive session to discuss evaluation scores which may or may not base some performance raises.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that in our General .1 Accounts from 2020 is \$425,848 and our Highway .1 Accounts from 2020 is \$148,320. Supervisor Houghtling stated that she doesn't think they will be doing across the boards raises but just to give an idea of what the costs would be she gave examples of across the board increases in both general and highway .1 accounts:

3% - total increase of \$17,225.04

2% - total increase of \$11,483.36

1% - total increase of \$5,741.68

Supervisor Houghtling stated that this is a tough one because many departments have

worked harder than ever due to COVID conditions and she thinks it is important that they recognize and acknowledge that hard work. Obviously with the projected decrease in revenues, they are working on a shoe string budget. Supervisor Houghtling stated that even on a County level they are not giving raises. Supervisor Houghtling stated that it is very important to her that we not lay people off or cut employees hours. She would love to do raises but doesn't think that it is fiscally responsible thing to do looking at the numbers in our budget.

Councilmember Rasmussen asked Supervisor Houghtling if she was able to find out if they can-do one-time bonuses.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that Councilmember Rasmussen had a great idea to acknowledge the hard work that departments have done during COVID with a one-time bonus. Supervisor Houghtling stated that per the Town Attorney, unfortunately they are not allowed to give a one-time bonus, in this instance it is considered an unconstitutional gift of municipal property.

Councilmember Newton stated as he said before, if they are going to invest in anything this year, it would be their employees.

Councilmember Rasmussen stated that he is disappointed that they cannot do bonuses because that would have taken the edge off some of the monetary issues. He stated that he agrees that they should recognize what their employees do. He stated that 2% for someone making \$14.00 per hour is \$.25 an hour and his experience in the past is that if someone quits over \$.25 an hour then there are other issues as well. He would like to find a way of recognizing those that have gone above and beyond but he's really still very focused on keeping this an austerity budget, there are just too many unknowns right now. It's not going to be an easy decision.

Councilmember Newton stated that he agrees that a \$.25 an hour raise is kind of a joke.

Councilmember Rasmussen stated that it is going to be hard to give anybody an amount of money that makes all of the extra work worth doing and at the same time they have a responsibility to the residents to make sure they are being as cheap as they can with the budget.

Councilmember Newton stated that like Councilmember Rasmussen said, a \$.25 raise amounts to really nothing with the exception that it is showing the people that have been there that know the type of budget they have to deal with that even though it is not much it is a small way of showing that they are trying to think of the employees.

Councilmember Trainor stated that it is a token but it is a recognition, he agrees with Councilmember Newton. Whether it is one percent or two percent, they are not being stingy, this is an exceptional case.

Supervisor Houghtling stated she agrees with Councilmember Newton, they can talk in executive session, but she doesn't think it should be a blanket two percent across the board, that they should look at it position by position, the evaluations and what has COVID changed.

Councilmember Gordon stated that one of her concerns is that if they offer raises this year, they have no way to know what next year will bring. By raising the pay this year it raises the base of what is being paid out in salaries, it is unfair for the town to balance its budget on the backs of its employees. Councilmember Gordon stated it is not an easy call.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that is a really valid point, there are a lot of unknowns.

Councilmember Newton stated that these are municipal jobs, they don't have a great retirement, they don't have fantastic health care, the pay rates are incredibly low. We have starting positions that are going to be less than the new minimum wage in January. The only perk of working here is that you are serving your community.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that is a very valid point. That was why the compensation plan was developed to try to balance out the pay rates. There is one position, the park maintenance superintendent position that regardless of what they do for specific individuals and the job they've done, that position is being paid the starting rate ten years into the position. If they do do raises, that position needs to come up first and then be applied a raise. If they don't do raises, she still thinks that position needs to come from the starting position to something that reflects someone that's been in that position for ten years.

#### **EXECUTIVE SESSION:**

Supervisor Houghtling made a motion to enter into an executive session at 7:25 pm to discuss the medical, financial, credit or employment history of a particular person, corporation or matters leading to said dismissal, removal, promotion, appointment, employment, discipline, demotion or suspension. Councilmember Trainor seconded that motion.

#### Roll Call Vote:

Councilmember Rasmussen -	Aye
Councilmember Gordon -	Aye
Supervisor Houghtling -	Aye
Councilmember Newton -	Aye
Councilmember Trainor -	Aye

Supervisor Houghtling made a motion to exit the executive session at 8:31 pm. Councilmember Newton seconded that motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Councilmember Rasmussen -	Aye
Councilmember Gordon -	Aye
Supervisor Houghtling -	Aye
Councilmember Newton -	Aye
Councilmember Trainor -	Aye

Supervisor Houghtling stated that they reviewed evaluations, had some general discussion about different positions and .1 accounts and the Town Board came to the difficult agreement that 2021 needs to be treated as a complete austerity budget, unfortunately leaving no room for .1 increases whether based on a COLA or based on evaluation scores. There are two exceptions, one has to do with a position that in the compensation plan is a starting rate of \$15.00 per hour and that is the Park Maintenance Superintendent, the person who has been in that position for a very long time is making the starting rate and so they would like to adjust his rate.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that the Park Maintenance Staff starting rate at \$12.00 an hour is soon going to be surpassed by minimum wage and we all felt it was fair to bring that to the same starting rate of basic clerical which is \$13.00 an hour.

Supervisor Houghtling made a motion on Page 27 of the budget to increase Park Grounds Building Maintenance Superintendent to \$16.00 an hour and Park Maintenance Staff to \$13.00 an hour. Councilmember Trainor seconded that motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Councilmember Rasmussen -	Aye
Councilmember Gordon -	Aye
Supervisor Houghtling -	Aye
Councilmember Newton -	Aye
Councilmember Trainor -	Aye

Supervisor Houghtling stated that she wanted to acknowledge that it was a very difficult conversation for the Town Board because they all recognize how hard their employees work and have been working especially during COVID and they all acknowledge that they wanted to give significant raises to people for that extra work but they just don't have the budget that allows it this year. Unfortunately, they can't do bonuses like they had hoped, but she would like to put on the November agenda some sort of employee recognition.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that in line with that austerity budget, the speed limit signs, as much as she would like to see them happen in the town, she's just not sure it's the year to put another \$6,000 in the budget so if no one is opposed she would recommend removing the \$6,000 for traffic control from page eight in the budget. No one was opposed.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that on Thursday we have a Public Hearing at 6:55pm on the Chatham Rescue Squad and then the Budget Workshop at 7:00pm and that was another .1 discussion. She would like to propose, because it is odd having budget workshops without the town employees here, that she emails all town employees explaining that due to this austerity budget they are unable to give any .1 raises and to invite any employees to attend with safety plan in effect. All of the Town Board agreed.

**MISCELLANEOUS BUDGET ITEMS:**

The following changes to the tentative budget were agreed to by all Town Board members present:

- Page 5, A-1620.1 from \$3,900 to \$4,160
- Page 8, A-3310.2, remove \$6,000 for traffic control (remove entire line)
- Page 11, A-7110.1 from \$17,160 to \$18,304
- Page 20, Mortgage Tax – Change A-3005 from \$35,000 to \$48,000
- Page 27 add – Total with staff
- Page 27 of the budget to increase Park Grounds Building Maintenance Superintendent to \$16.00 and Park Maintenance Staff to \$13.00 an hour.

It was agreed that the following items would be re-visited at future budget workshops:

- Any further discussion on .1 accounts on 10/22/20 that might happen with the employees or department heads
- On 10/28/20, the Comp Plan and LV Seniors
- Fire Safety Inspection fees revenues
- Engineering (A-1440,4) is \$15,000 sufficient
- Supervisor Houghtling to update year end fund balance projection worksheet with November and December's ballpark expenditures and revenues

**ADJOURNMENT:**

A motion was made by Supervisor Houghtling and seconded by Councilmember Newton to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcie Robertson  
New Lebanon Town Clerk