

**MINUTES OF THE BUDGET WORKSHOP OF
THE TOWN BOARD OF
THE TOWN OF NEW LEBANON
HELD ON OCTOBER 21, 2021**

Present: Tistrya Houghtling, Supervisor
Jesse Newton, Councilmember
Norman Rasmussen, Councilmember
Deborah Gordon, Councilmember
John Trainor, Councilmember

Recording Secretary: Marsha “Marcie” Robertson, Town Clerk

Others Present: Jeffrey Winestock, Highway Superintendent

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 6:32p.m. by Supervisor Houghtling.

HIGHWAY BUDGET REVIEW:

Supervisor Houghtling stated that in the Tentative Budget for Highway she included everything that Highway Superintendent Winestock requested with two exceptions. One was the four pieces of equipment; she did not enter the entire \$580,000 into the budget because that would have significantly raised taxes.

Highway Superintendent Winestock responded that he didn't put that equipment in his budget request to ask for that this year. He put that in his budget request so that the board would be aware of what was needed in the near future. Some of the items should already have been purchased but he did not intend to ask the board for \$580,000 worth of equipment for this budget.

Supervisor Houghtling asked Highway Superintendent Winestock to please clarify what his request is for this year's budget regarding equipment.

Highway Superintendent Winestock responded that he would like to replace the backhoe.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that what she did in the Tentative Budget was she put in two continuing loans, just like there have always been the three. Two of those have been paid off. She left both the interest payment and the principal payment in the budget, which would leave room for two potential equipment purchases in 2022. Even if the board budgets for it, they still need to approve the purchases.

Highway Superintendent Winestock stated that it could be years before you are able to get equipment with everything going on now and he would like the board to keep that in mind.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that the budget does allow for up to two purchases. She asked Highway Superintendent Winestock where they were at with the board getting the mileage and hours of his equipment and the replacement plan that he promised at the September meeting to have for the board.

Highway Superintendent Winestock responded that he has been really busy and he hasn't gotten to it yet. He then mentioned how cold it is in the highway garage without a working furnace.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that for her the potential of approval for highway equipment is waiting on the Highway Superintendent to provide the documentation the board has been asking for.

The Highway Superintendent and the Town Board held further discussion regarding the highway replacement plan and the future of highway equipment purchasing.

Councilmember Newton commented that the Highway Superintendent's communication with the board is here at meetings. With regard to the backhoe and when he was looking to trade it in, there were things that he didn't want to say because it may have reflected on what the trade in value was going to be. Discussion continued.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that with regard to the highway department, she often feels unprepared and without knowledge and is uncomfortable making decisions without information. She has put in for two loan payments in the budget but personally she feels that until she has information that she feels she needs to be a part of the decision-making process along with the knowledge that Highway Superintendent Winestock has, she is not comfortable making those decisions. Supervisor Houghtling stated that she is also not comfortable not purchasing highway equipment that the town should be purchasing on an annual basis to make sure they have what they need to keep up the roads.

Highway Superintendent Winestock replied that he will have the hours and mileage that the board is requesting by next week, weather permitting.

Councilmember Trainor commented that the highway departments priority right now is a backhoe. He asked Highway Superintendent Winestock what he recommends the town purchasing over the next couple of years?

Highway Superintendent Winestock replied that he would like to replace the little trucks over the next couple of years. He commented that the town should be setting aside money for the loader that will need to be replaced soon.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that the town should be setting aside money every year towards all future highway equipment purchases. There are many towns that do that now, that is part of the reason why the board has been asking for the highway equipment information to develop a highway equipment asset management plan. Supervisor Houghtling stated that they need Highway Superintendent Winestock to participate and be a part of this process to develop a plan.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that she included in the budget for the potential of two highway equipment purchases to be determined by next years board. She stated that she will feel comfortable come January advocating for those purchases based on Highway's input, receipt of mileage and hours and working together with the board.

Supervisor Houghtling reported that other than the equipment and the other caveat for the .1's, she did do an increase like Highway Superintendent Winestock requested. Hopefully they will have a union contract before the final budget so those .1's might need modification. She also increased all of the benefits for the highway employees to allow for four full time employees if Highway Superintendent Winestock chooses to hire them.

Councilmember Newton stated that he is concerned with the **DA-5130.4** at \$80,000 because the actuals have been really close to that in the years past and with the increased cost of everything, they might want to consider increasing it.

It was agreed to increase **DA-5130.4** to \$95,000 because the cost of fuel along with other expenses has gone up considerably.

.1 DISCUSSION AND ELECTED OFFICIALS:

Supervisor Houghtling stated that the board has gone through the Compensation Plan and compared through all of Columbia County at what all the town employees made compared to other towns. Highway department pay rates will be set by the union negotiations. The clerical staff was adjusted based on town comparisons. Those employees' rates that were not adjusted by the town-by-town comparison (Compensation Plan) and were given evaluations were scored and given raises based on that scoring. The board decided against a COLA because it would skew all of raises put into place by the Compensation Plan. This excluded elected officials who do not get evaluations.

Highway Superintendent Winestock stated that he put in for a 6% pay raise. School taxes have gone up, gas has gone up and he feels that anybody should get a cost-of-living raise.

Town Clerk Robertson stated that the thirty-five to forty hours budgeted a week to do her job is enough. Since taking office in 2020, there hasn't been a normal working condition in her office due to having to train a deputy and then being partially shut down due to COVID and having to work remotely. Town Clerk Robertson stated that she has times when she works over the forty hours a week to make sure the work in her office gets done and then

there are times that it is closer to thirty-five, she feels that it probably balances out over the year. She stated that she has had to do both roles as Town Clerk and the Deputy duties due to circumstances out of her control. Since her deputy has been given a \$2.00 an hour raise, it is not much less than that of the Town Clerk position which carries much more responsibility and duties to perform.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that the current starting salary for Town Clerk is based on the average of thirty-five hours a week, which she agrees is average. She stated that after being in that office she agrees that there are some weeks that you will have to work more but there are others that are less and it averages out to the thirty-five hours. She stated if you do an hourly rate with the current salary at thirty-five hours, it is \$19.25 an hour and the deputy is at \$16.00 an hour.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that she thought their intention with the Compensation Plan was \$20.00 an hour for the Town Clerk position.

Councilmember Rasmussen stated that he doesn't have a specific recollection but he would be surprised if they put it at less than \$20.00 an hour.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that she did think it was \$20.00 an hour. If you have \$20.00 an hour at thirty-five hours a week for fifty-two weeks, you get \$36,400 as a starting salary. She stated that she personally is comfortable and thinks that \$20.00 an hour is fair as a starting rate for the Town Clerk position with the amount of work and responsibility on that position.

Councilmember Trainor stated that he agrees.

Councilmember Newton stated that he agrees that \$36,400 is a fair starting rate for last year. He stated that after almost two years on the job they should consider either a 2% increase on that or an actual number figure, cents per hour.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that she thinks they as a board aren't doing raises for elected officials. She thinks these are two different conversations. She thinks a \$1,400 increase is a good increase, it's more than a COLA would be.

Highway Superintendent Winestock commented that they keep saying starting pay. Marcie was here for a long time as Deputy before Town Clerk, it isn't like she came in blind.

Supervisor Houghtling commented that going to \$36,400 is a 4% increase and she feels that is a good increase. She stated that all of the others in the Compensation Plan that went up because they adjusted the starting rate, you don't then get a raise on top of that. If that is going to change it has to be changed across the board. It can't just be for one or two positions.

Councilmember Newton stated that they have been working through this Compensation Plan for a couple of seasons now and he remembers discussing merit-based raises as well as COLAs at the time. He thinks three years ago they didn't go with that and he understands this Compensation package is still getting worked out. He doesn't necessarily think it's a bad thing but he is fine with some recognition of that department either way.

Councilmember Rasmussen stated that he thinks 4% is fair.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that she thinks 4% is a decent increase.

Councilmember Gordon and Councilmember Trainor agreed.

Councilmember Rasmussen asked Highway Superintendent Winestock if he would be okay with a 4% raise.

Councilmember Newton commented that Highway Superintendent Winestock doesn't have to be a working supervisor in that elected position. There other towns that it is a supervisor position. He stated that he compared a local town with similar mileage and they have a Highway Superintendent and a Deputy Highway Superintendent, between the two it is \$149,000 and change. They didn't break it down by position but that town is almost the same size as New Lebanon in miles of road. Councilmember Newton stated that if Highway Superintendent Winestock works forty hours his pay is \$31.17 an hour or \$24.93 an hour if he works fifty hours, which Councilmember Newton thinks is more realistic. He stated that is very cheap for a CDL licensed, multiple equipment operator with three and a half decades on the job.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that a 4% increase on Highway Superintendents salary would be an increase of \$2,593.60, bringing his salary to \$67,433.60.

Supervisor Houghtling stated that she did crunch the numbers on the four evaluated positions that they discussed earlier. The Assessor got a 5% increase, which is a total of a \$1,378.90 increase; the CEO got a 3% increase which is \$25.75 an hour, \$780.00 annual increase; ZEO and Building Department administrator got 3% increase which is \$1,606.80; and DCO got a 2% increase which is \$70.00 a year. Supervisor Houghtling stated that all together, the ballpark on the .1 increases is \$30,000. They are still comfortably under the \$40,000 that was set aside for pay increases in the 2022 budget. Supervisor Houghtling stated that for the next meeting, she will have all of the adjustments in the budget with the exception of the highway .1, unless union negotiations are completed by then.

Supervisor Houghtling asked the rest of the board if they are with her that the tax rate is going to stay at zero, no increase or decrease. The board agreed.

MISCELLANEOUS BUDGET ITEMS:

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

- Change DA-5130.4 (Machinery) from \$80,000 to \$95,000
- Change A-1410.1 (Town Clerk Salary) from \$35,000 to \$36,400
- Change DA-5110.1 (Highway Super Salary) from \$64,840 to \$67,433
- Change A-1355.1 (Assessor Salary) from \$27,578 to \$28,957
- Change A-8664.1 (ZEO/Bldg Admin) from \$53,560 to \$55,167
- Change A-8664.12 (CEO) from \$26,000 to \$26,780
- Change A-3510.1 (DCO) from \$3,500 to \$3,640

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICES:

A motion was made by Supervisor Houghtling, seconded by Councilmember Newton and approved unanimously to set three Public Hearings for November 4th, 2021: Chatham Rescue Contract for 2022 at 6:55pm; LVPA 2022 Budget at 7:00pm; and 2022 Town Budget at 7:15pm and one Public Hearing for November 9th, 2021 for the Comprehensive Plan Update at 6:30pm at the New Lebanon Town Hall.

There is also a Special Meeting on November 9th, 2021 at 6:00pm for interviews for SYP Director applicants.

JUDGES AND TAX COLLECTOR SALARY DISCUSSION:

Supervisor Houghtling stated that Judge Byrne requested the board set a time to meet and discuss Judge and Tax Collector salaries after the election.

A motion was made by Supervisor Houghtling, seconded by Councilmember Newton and approved unanimously to hold a Special Meeting on Wednesday, December 8th, 2021 at 6:00pm to discuss Judges and Tax Collector salaries.

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made by Councilmember Newton and seconded by Councilmember Trainor to adjourn the meeting at 7:31pm.

Roll Call Vote:

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

Respectfully submitted,

Marcie Robertson
New Lebanon Town Clerk