

WEST SENECA TOWN OFFICES
1250 Union Road
West Seneca, NY 14224

TOWN BOARD PROCEEDINGS
2018 Special Districts & Preliminary
Budget - October 30, 2017

The meeting was held at West Seneca West Senior High School, 3330 Seneca Street and called to order by Supervisor Sheila Meegan at 6:00 P.M. with 30 seconds of silent prayer followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Town Attorney John Fenz.

ROLL CALL: Present - Sheila M. Meegan Supervisor
Eugene P. Hart Councilman
William P. Hanley Jr. Councilman
Jacqueline A. Felser Town Clerk
John J. Fenz Town Attorney
Matthew D. English Highway Sup't.
Daniel M. Denz Chief of Police
Megan Wnek Finance Director
Luke Malecki Drescher & Malecki LLP
Mary Josefiak Sr. Rec. Therapist of Sr. Services
Lauren Masset Youth Service Coordinator
Kandace Wittmeyer Town Assessor

Supervisor Meegan dedicated the meeting to all men and women that have served the country and those who continue to serve.

BENEFIT BASIS & PRELIMINARY BUDGET

Motion by Supervisor Meegan, seconded by Councilman Hart, to open the public hearing.

Ayes: All

Noes: None

Motion Carried

Andrew Ciepiela stated he would like an ordinance passed that would require employees making over \$70,000 per year to pay their own health insurance and further questioned the need for consultation services.

Richard Zmuda questioned if the town received a rebate for switching to LED street lights and who the contractor was. He further expressed concern over some lights not functioning properly. Councilman Hanley stated the contractor for the project was South Buffalo Electric and NYSEG lights were changed to LED at a cost savings of approximately \$220,000 per year. Any rebate received would have gone into the General Fund. Councilman Hanley asked Mr. Zmuda to provide him with a list of lights he came across that are not working so they can be addressed.

Julie Gorecki asked if the board members had found ways to save on the budget since the previous meeting.

Councilman Hart responded he will be presenting some ideas at the next budget meeting (i.e. closing Veterans Park pool, eliminating weekend leaf collection, eliminating open skate programs). Councilman Hart also proposed instituting a Citizens Budget Review Board.

Councilman Hanley commented on the cost of operating Veterans Park pool and stated he also looked at costs associated with the ice rink facility, freezing all non-emergency overtime, requiring leaf pick-up to be completed during normal business hours and turning over the town's sewer service to Erie County.

Supervisor Meegan stated the Town Board has a full platter of inherited projects that were neglected and getting the town where it should be comes at a cost. The town is under a \$70 million consent order that previous Town Boards did not act upon and every neighborhood has had sewer, water and street lighting upgrades. Every town building was neglected and needed upgrades and the Kiwanis building had to be demolished. Supervisor Meegan noted the general fund and highway fund are the only two lines on the town/county tax bill that are affected by the 12 percent. She further stated there is a \$200,000 savings with labor management and removing that from the budget will save approximately one percent.

Joe Naumovski suggested board members stop spending on the library project and cut their salaries. Councilman Hanley stated he has cut his salary over the past three years in the amount of 6.75 percent.

Christopher Kotowski stated he looked at other surrounding municipalities and the number of West Seneca employees per 1000 residents is 5.19 which is higher than the surrounding areas. Mr. Kotowski stated he compared the median salaries of those municipalities' employees and West Seneca employees are above the average. Councilman Hart explained that some contracts have allowances for minimum staffing and they are looking at that. The white collar unit has been cut to a minimum with only 39 employees.

A resident commented on the proposal to close the pool and questioned if the ice rink could be privatized as well as the café in the community center. Councilman Hart responded privatizing the ice rink can be looked at and the café will be privatized with the company paying the town for use of the space.

Pat Smith understood the difficulty involved in developing budgets and suggested additional research be done.

Joseph Delmonte commented on the amount of overtime in the sewer department. Councilman Hanley responded he is contacting Erie County with regard to taking over the sewers.

Michelle Jeziorowski suggested raising revenues instead of making cuts (i.e. charging non-residents more to use the ice rink and pool).

A resident commented on the Taylor Law and union contracts and understood these issues could not be fixed overnight, but questioned why the Town Board wasn't more prepared for this. Councilman Hart stated the current Town Board is trying to make changes, but the contracts were in place long before they were board members and change is sometimes slow and difficult. Concessions were made by the white collar and police and negotiations are underway with the blue collar. Under the Taylor Law, the town must honor the contracts until they are renegotiated.

Betty Reidy questioned how much her taxes will increase because of the new Union Fire Hall. Councilman Hart stated the town taxes have nothing to do with Union Fire Hall and suggested she speak with their Board of Fire Commissioners.

Karl Spencer stated as a volunteer member of the Environmental Commission he knows that the Town Board supports key issues that are good for West Seneca. He sees the board working during the day and evening and believes they are dedicated servants to the community. Mr. Spencer further noted some items in the budget are state mandates and contractual by the union and cannot be changed overnight.

Dorie Sajdak stated since 2012 her tax bill has increased \$712. The town and highway tax only increased \$36 per year over 5 years, but she felt a 12 percent increase is too much at once. Mrs. Sajdak commented on the number of higher rank positions on the police force and questioned if it was necessary. She further suggested reopening contract negotiations.

Jeanmarie Cieslica stated there are many new builds that were supposed to help with taxes and asked if there was a plan to bring business to West Seneca to shift the tax burden from the residents. Councilman Hart responded the Town Board is being proactive to attract business to West Seneca and referred to the new design standards and commercial tax incentives. He further stated the town does not own the Seneca Mall property, but they would welcome the right project.

Blaine Steczkowski expressed his opposition to the proposed tax increase.

Dale Clarke commented on full-time positions created (i.e. housing inspector, electrical inspector, director of finance and recreation director) and political appointments.

Maureen O'Malley suggested the Town Board choose a more affordable health care package to offer employees.

Mike Jaworski commented the proposed increase is too high and the board should have been more prepared.

James Randolph commented employee benefits and wages are almost double compared to the private industry and suggested privatizing some services. Supervisor Meegan responded engineering was outsourced and it has saved approximately \$300,000 per year.

Jeff Piekarec suggested cuts be made beginning at the top.

John Clouden commented the upgrades in town will contribute to future debt and asked the Town Board to look forward.

Dave Monopolous commented the way to stop raising taxes is to stop spending money.

A resident questioned the goal of the library project. Supervisor Meegan responded the library is 40 percent of the project with the remainder being a community center. With the loss of the Kiwanis and Burchfield buildings, the Recreation and Finance Departments and Town Attorney's office will be brought over. The building will also have meeting rooms, an office for the Chamber of Commerce and a gymnasium. Councilman Hanley noted that other than the downtown Buffalo Library, the West Seneca Library is the most visited in all of Erie County.

Keith Ambrose questioned when the union contracts expire and if there are any grants that could help with the highway fund. Councilman Hart responded the blue collar contract expired 22 months ago. Highway Sup't. Matthew English stated he is in the process of obtaining a multi-modal grant from Assemblyman Kearns office along with the Community Development Block Grant funds. They also received Pave NY and Extreme Winter Recovery funds in 2017 for a total of \$440,000.

Cindy Harris questioned if the board members looked into outsourcing or consolidating the police force with another town and if all employees could be covered under one union contract. Supervisor Meegan stated if the police department is eliminated, those services would automatically go to the Erie County Sheriff's Department.

Joe Harris thanked the Police Department for the work they do and commented on Union Fire District's budget, noting their meeting is November 2nd.

Chris Martinez supported establishing a Citizens Review Budget Committee and volunteered to serve on it. Councilman Hart asked Ms. Martinez to call or email him directly.

Frank Boncore questioned if the public voted on the library expansion project. Supervisor Meegan responded under municipal law the community center & library expansion did not go to a vote.

A resident commented on the salaries of certain employees (i.e. assistant building inspectors, electrical inspector and housing inspector) and suggested a zero increase in salaries and elimination of all overtime.

Mary Montgomery thanked the police and did not want to see that department cut.

Keith Halas stated people did not receive the robo call for the meeting and questioned if it went out. Supervisor Meegan stated the Assistant Chief of Police put out the Code Red message and will look into why everyone did not receive it.

Sue Rathmann questioned if recycling collection could be bi-weekly and if the board would consider outsourcing some jobs (i.e. tree removal). Councilman Hanley stated they received a quote on bi-weekly recycling which would have saved the town \$55,000 but residents in attendance at that Town Board meeting were against it. Mr. English stated some tree removal is done by town employees and those jobs that cannot be done in-house are put out for bid.

Maureen Barbary asked the Town Board to stop spending money.

A student commented the proposed increase is high and expressed concerns that he will not be able to stay in West Seneca in the future.

Richard Miles stated his daughter and her family moved to West Seneca but may have to sell their home because of the taxes. Mr. Miles also thanked the Highway and Police Departments for their work and asked the Town Board to stop spending money.

Larry Cannan asked if the completed contracts could be viewed by the public and where he could find the minutes to the last budget meeting online. Supervisor Meegan stated when the contracts are received from labor counsel they will be posted online. Councilman Hanley stated the unapproved minutes are on the home page under the Ad Valorem budget section and also linked to the October 30, 2017 Town Board agenda. Mr. Cannan questioned the salary increase for the Secretary to the Supervisor. Supervisor Meegan responded that position followed the increase approved in the white collar contract.

A resident asked if white collar employees are unionized and how many secretaries Supervisor Meegan has. Supervisor Meegan responded the white collar employees are unionized and she has one secretary.

Jeffrey Wick commented on the amount of time it is taking to settle the blue collar contract. Councilman Hart stated the contract is in arbitration. Mr. Wick questioned why the police department has a drone and what the cost was to train the officers. Chief Denz responded the drone was purchased with a grant from Senator Gallivan's Office and three officers attended free training from the FAA.

A resident commented her combined taxes are higher than her mortgage payment and questioned how often union contract negotiation meetings are held. Supervisor Meegan stated the Town Board is meeting regularly with the union to come to a resolve.

Maryann O'Rourke asked if the town profits from the soccer field. Supervisor Meegan stated organized teams pay for use of the soccer fields and the town receives some revenue from rental of the concession stand.

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Susan Kims questioned what will happen at the next budget meeting. Councilman Hanley responded each council person will continue to review the budget and propose cuts. Supervisor Meegan stated tonight's public hearing will be closed, the councilmen will bring their ideas of change, the changes will be made and announced and the Town Board will then vote on the budget.

Frank Russo stated he felt employee contributions to their health care were too low, salaries were too high and longevity should be eliminated from the contracts. He also suggested eliminating department head raises, revamping the Planning & Zoning Boards, eliminating the human resources department and instituting a hiring freeze. Mr. Russo questioned if anything has been done to cut overtime. Supervisor Meegan stated controls have been put in place and specifically referred to sewer department callouts. Mr. Russo questioned if concessions were made with the white collar and police union contracts. Supervisor Meegan responded concessions were made by both unions and specifically referred to healthcare contributions.

Motion by Supervisor Meegan, seconded by Councilman Hart, to close the public hearing at 9:35 P.M.

Ayes: All

Noes: None

Motion Carried

JACQUELINE A FELSER
TOWN CLERK