

MINUTES

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SWATARA TOWNSHIP

BUDGET MEETING

OCTOBER 17, 2022

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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1. **Call to Order**: President Zubeck called the Budget Meeting of the Swatara Township Board of Commissioners to order at 6:02 p.m., Monday, October 17, 2022. The meeting was held at the Swatara Township Municipal Building, 599 Eisenhower Boulevard, Harrisburg, PA.
2. **Roll Call**: Commissioners Christine Zubeck, Michael Tuckey, Shaela Ellis and Jeff Varner were present. Commissioner Boudier arrived at 6:06 p.m. Also present: Township Manager Jim Fosselman, Fire Chief Mike Ibberson, Director of Public Safety Darrell Reider, Deputy Chief Tom Stauffer, and Secretary Karen Alleman.
3. **Visitors Requests and Comments**: None at this time.
4. **Discussion of Funds**
  - A. **Fire Services Budget**: Fire Chief Ibberson presented his budget to the Board. Station 91 received renovations to the day room, bunk rooms and kitchen areas this year. There were major impacts to the fire budget during the past eight years: fire department support, health and safety/wellness, apparatus replacement, incentive program, part-time firefighters, station renovations and grants. Notable budget changes in 2023 are part-time fire fighters, insurance, online training platform, turnout gear, replacement of 2001 utility and replacement of 1 EMA portable radio. The purpose of part-time firefighter positions is to provide consistent fire protection to citizens, businesses, and visitors of the township during peak times based on data and statistics. Three positions would be hired, each position would cover 10 hours per day, 5 days a week, 260 days a year. Positions will be part-time, requiring an employment pool of approximately 15 firefighters. Pay will be \$20 per hour. Capital outlay projects include replacement of gear lockers, training props for training grounds, HVAC unit (Station 91 dispatch room), plymovent repairs and upgrades, apparatus bay floors and rescue tool replacement. Future purchases include apparatus replacements and radio replacement. Inflation has taken a toll on the budget. The cost of fire apparatus has increased by 63%. Radio prices have increased by 6% in one year. In 2024 the bond will be paid off. There is also a higher demand for service. President Zubeck spoke highly of the online training platform for volunteers. She asked Chief Ibberson to discuss the renovations at Station 91. The kitchen was never renovated, and the cupboards were rotted. New flooring and plumbing were installed. The bunk room was originally pieced together and is now much brighter and a better place to be. A new fire pad was installed at the compost facility. Future amenities include a roof simulator, Conex boxes and an area to cut apart vehicles to train.

MINUTES

---

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---

Last year a new website was designed to make it easier to fill out an application to apply as a volunteer at a fire company. About 95% of interests come through the website or Facebook page.

Commissioner Tuckey asked how the regional grant was being used. The regional grant will pay for new volunteer training, a physical and half of a set of turn out gear which is about \$2,500. A portion is also for tuition reimbursement.

Commissioner Tuckey asked what piece was next to be replaced. The heavy rescue is the next piece to be replaced in 2028. With inflation that item will have to be revisited. Each piece of equipment lasts an average of 20 years. Commissioner Tuckey would like a break down of vehicles and a replacement schedule.

Commissioner Ellis asked for a timeline for part-time firefighters. If the Board approves to go forward, advertisement of positions would have to be done in February for about a month. Then a written test would have to be administered in the spring or fall. She would like to see this become a reality. President Zubeck said it will be on an as needed basis, based on need and number of volunteers.

President Zubeck noted the current 2022 ambulance fund was underfunded by \$20,000 and therefore there is no carryover, the carryover was drained for this year. Also, the expense in the fire fund was lowered by \$150,000 for fire and hydrant service and it was moved to water expense in the general fund, which is a concern.

Mr. Fosselman said in last year's budget, the line item for fire hydrant service was not included in the fire fund, it was included in the water fund in the general fund. It's not really a transfer of funds, its just budgeted for this year out of the general fund instead of the fire fund.

Regarding the ambulance fund, the millage rate was dropped in 2022. The ending balance for 2022 is \$146.00. Millage was increased for 2023 to receive \$101,840.00 versus \$99,000 in expenses. There will be a balance of almost \$3,000 at the end of 2023.

President Zubeck expressed concerns regarding the Benecon rebate of \$400,000, which was \$200,000 less than last year. On top of that the \$150,000 taken from the general fund, plus the \$20,000 that was underfunded from the ambulance fund. At the beginning of this year there was a \$270,000 deficit that had to be made up in the general fund. It is a concerning pattern. When you take money from one fund, you have zero carry-over. This will not be done again, we will only work off of current numbers.

Commissioner Ellis asked for an explanation of the \$150,000 President Zubeck mentioned. Mr. Fosselman said under the general fund, building, water and sewer, the budget was increased by

MINUTES

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---

\$150,000. \$150,000 was added to the fire budget, it was changed at that time to allow for part time paid drivers. There was a line item added in the fire fund for part time drivers in the amount of \$150,000. There was actually no transfer of funds, one budget was reduced, the other budget was increased. The budget that was reduced was replaced by part time firefighters. The general fund had to pay \$150,000 more for water service than it had to in previous years. There was a budget revision to make repairs to the fire station in the amount of \$150,000. There was a budget revision done to remove it from part time firefighters to do the capital improvements at Ober Street.

President Zubeck noted that when money is taken from a fund and moving it into another fund, there's the chance you have to increase the millage rate in that fund. Mr. Fosselman said that is correct. You have to increase the millage rate when you deplete a fund because there is no money in that fund. She wanted to point this out because it has been done in the past, she has no desire to continue doing that.

President Zubeck thanked the volunteer fire fighters in the audience and praised them for the fantastic job they did during Fire Prevention Week.

Commissioner Ellis asked if this is similar to what was done in the Recreation Department, when a salary was shifted from Recreation to Building and Maintenance. Mr. Fosselman said that was similar.

President Zubeck said the general fund is for general fund expenses, the fire fund is for fire expenses. Money wouldn't have been taken from the Recreation budget and put it into some other fund if it wasn't supposed to be there.

Mr. Fosselman reviewed the fire budget, it shows an overall increase of 4.5% over last year.

**B. Police Department Budget:** Some line items are set by the collective bargaining unit such as salaries (2.5%). Paxtang Borough does reimburse the township \$400,000 for police services. The Marshal's service and Dauphin County Drug Task Force also reimburses the township. Director Reider has not asked for any changes in discretionary items. He is asking for one new hire at \$50,000. There are no significant increases to contract services. He is asking for a new server, new body cameras and a switch from .45's to 9mm firearms through a grant from PCCD. Two cars will be purchased next year. There is an increase of 4% over last year's budget.

MINUTES

---

SWATARA TOWNSHIP

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BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

---

President Zubeck asked if the inter connectivity (radios, etc.) items would be included in the grant. Director Reider said it would. We have applied for about \$9 million in grant monies. She asked if the proposed new hire was a new position, or to fill a position that has been vacated. Director Reider said it is not a replacement, but due to promoting Lt. Stauffer to Deputy Chief, his replacement would likely be from a sergeant, then we would have to promote a sergeant, that would likely come from a corporal or patrol person, then a corporal would have to be promoted, leaving an opening in patrol.

Commissioner Ellis asked what year the body cameras were purchased. Director Reider replied about four years ago. There have been various problems with them from the very beginning. She wanted to know if there have been more advancements from four years ago. Director Reider said there has. She asked if there was an estimate on how long the body cameras last. Director Reider said a majority of the current cameras have already failed. The new cameras will be a huge improvement over what is currently being used.

5. **Visitors Requests and Comments:**

A. **Tom Connolly, 345 North Harrisburg Street:** Wanted to touch on the \$150,000. The fire budget operates on about 25% of the real estate tax millage and the general fund operates on the rest of it. It was pointed out to him by staff that the entire \$150,000 for fire hydrants was in the fire protection budget. Personally, he feels that if you are putting out a fire the water should be free, but it is an expense. There was flooding at McNaughton/Schiavoni Park and it was caked with mud and he was told that the public works and fire department could spray it off of the parking lot. The street sweeper also takes water out of the fire hydrant. Is that pro-rated or divided up if recreation needs water, or if the highway department hooked up to the fire hydrant. He was told the department heads worked it out, and that was the purpose of the transfer. The Board approved the budget unanimously last year. The new Board did not open the budget at the beginning of this year. He feels the fire money should be used for recruiting and retention of firefighters than to cover all of the water that comes out of a fire hydrant in Swatara Township. It would be better served to come out of a massive \$15 plus million-dollar pot than out of the small share that the fire department uses to protect us all. He thanked the Board for presenting the budget in public.

President Zubeck said it's not about the water, it's about where the money was taken from. If you have a department, and you have a budget, you should take from that budget for those purposes. If you are going to make changes, it should be

discussed. Last year there was very little time for discussion because there was only two days of meetings, a week after that the budget was advertised, and a week after that, the Board voted on the budget. This year things are going through line by line, questions are being asked. The past can't be changed, we change the future. She wants to make sure the public understands there's accountability in the budget. She thanked Mr. Connolly for his comments.

- B. **Tom Garlic, 6050 Hocker Drive:** He is concerned about the CARES Act money. Municipalities received money from the CARES Act, if all the numbers are going up and the money is not there anymore, where would money be coming from? Mr. Fosselman said \$1.4 million was received the first round. Almost all of the money went for stormwater projects. The second grant was \$2.6 million, which went to the Derry Street project and the Nyes/Derry Street project. \$500,000 was left, there are a number of projects, Grayson Road will be \$50-60,000; the Swatara Middle School stormwater project engineering fees are \$90,000. We are trying to obtain grants for these projects.
- Mr. Garlic asked where money for future projects would come from. He feels vehicle expenses should be broken down by vehicle. He also feels that vehicle vendors should be held accountable for the contracts that have already been signed. Commissioner Ellis said the highway projects have been on a to do list for the last 10 years, or longer. We were fortunate to receive money to make the repairs.
- C. **Mary Klaus, 447 Pritchard Court:** She suggested that presenters make more pages, "2022 budget", "2023 budget", "increases are for" so that audience members are able to see the figures. She asked for the final figure for the fire fund. President Zubeck said it was approximately \$1.5 million.
- She asked if the EMS and EMA were part of the fire budget. Mr. Fosselman said EMA is, EMS is a separate fund.

6. **Commissioners Requests and Comments:**

- A. **Commissioner Ellis:** Thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. Thanked the police and fire departments for their presentations.
- B. **Commissioner Boudier:** Thanked Director Reider and Chief Ibberson for their work on the budget.
- C. **Commissioner Tuckey:** Thanked those in attendance for coming out to the meeting.
- D. **Vice President Varner:** Thanked the department heads for their work on the budgets.

MINUTES

---

BUDGET MEETING

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---

- E. **President Zubeck**: She thanked the department heads for their time to prepare the budget.
7. **Adjournment**: The meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

  
Karen Alleman, Township Secretary