

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BUDGET WORKSHOP MEETING
OCTOBER 28, 2010

The Board of Supervisors of Upper Merion Township met for a Budget Workshop Meeting on Thursday, October 28, 2009, in the Township Building. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

Supervisors present were: Greg Waks, Bill Jenaway, Joseph Bartlett, and Edward McBride. Also present were: Ronald Wagenmann, Township Manager; Judith A. Vicchio, Assistant Township Manager; Nick Hiriak, Director of Finance, Ron Fonock, Chief of Police, Lt. Tom Nolan, Brenda Logan, Secretary. Supervisor Spott was absent.

POLICE OPERATING AND CAPITAL BUDGET

Ron Fonock, Chief of Police, discussed the operating budget and reported that the cumulative total increase in the budget is 2.3%.

Chief Fonock stated that 2011 is a catch up year for salaries. He noted that the total does not include an animal control officer and special officer position. While Chief Fonock was discussing tuition reimbursement, Mr. Waks asked if the formula is grade based. Mr. Wagenmann responded that the township uses an average of the tuitions of Penn State, Temple and West Chester University in determining the rates for a credit hour that will reimburse the township personnel. He noted that personnel have to meet the requirements for passing the course and in the Masters Program they have to maintain their B average.

Chief Fonock stated that the vacation payback was cut from the budget. Other savings have occurred since the institution of the rank of corporal in 2006. He explained that when a sergeant is off duty, a corporal is already getting paid and is running the shift. It is rare for both officers to be off, but if so a patrolman would move up and be the acting corporal so he would get a corporal salary versus a sergeant's salary.

With regard to holiday pay, 11 officers accepted a new provision of the contract where instead of getting 80 hours of holiday pay they can opt for cash for up to 40 hours of pay and 40 hours of personal time that they could use. Chief Fonock explained the reason for putting in the maximum number and the significant jump from the previous amount. He then discussed the one third furlough buy back.

With regard to fuel and oil, Chief Fonock noted that gasoline has gone up 20 cents in the last four weeks. Mr. Hiriak explained that the figures are obtained by looking at the average on the system that tracks the gas and then estimating use.

Mr. Wagenmann pointed out that the police are the most difficult to cut back on given fuel uses because of the 24/7 patrol. Others are able to cut back on some of the mileage by doing things differently.

A brief discussion ensued regarding hybrids for police cars and Mr. Wagenmann pointed out that the electrical system cannot support the equipment that goes into police vehicles since there is too much of a draw for a hybrid system.

Chief Fonock noted that the uniforms are at zero percent which is due to the purchase of good quality uniforms that wear well and look professional.

A successful effort was made to hold the Community Relations and professional services categories to zero. There was a slight increase in telephone equipment charges.

Chief Fonock discussed the radio maintenance contingency fund that has remained at \$10,000 for the last couple of years. Portables and mobiles are now out of warranty and older and for this reason the fund has been increased to \$15,000.

Chief Fonock discussed the issues raised by the self dispatch chiefs with the county and pointed out that there are technological alternatives to what the county wanted.

Mr. Waks asked the reason for the increase in overtime from \$67,000 in 2009 to almost \$91,000. Chief Fonock explained that the "wild card" is always homicides and there were two this year. The cases were solved, but it cost money. Chief Fonock noted some of the steps taken in the township to reduce crime include such things as hotel checks for drugs and surveillance. He pointed out that the county foots the bill for forensics and the township benefits from the shared resources and excellent relationship and team effort.

Mr. Wagenmann provided an update on the ongoing transition and stated that Lt. Martin is at the FBI Academy and three lieutenants are scheduled for a Management Training Program at the University of Virginia.

Chief Fonock discussed the prioritization of capital projects and noted that the communication equipment has been bumped for several years. He pointed out that right now it is imminent that the township can get a PennDOT traffic cam live in the Communications Center and funds are budgeted in order to obtain monitors. Also, an evidence locker/refrigeration system would help in evidence processing.

Chief Fonock discussed a \$10,000 priority one item for an eventual substation at the Village at Valley Forge similar to the one at the Plaza.

Chief Fonock then talked about the patrol car equipment (tag scanners) which is able to scan hundreds of tags in multi seconds. The State Police bring these scanners in from time to time. While this equipment has been budgeted at \$20,000 it keeps getting pushed back since this equipment is getting cheaper as time goes on. In response to questions, Chief Fonock explained how the tag scanner operates. Mr. Wagenmann pointed out that PennDOT has just developed a grant program and it is opening up statewide. It might be possible to pursue this option for funding.

Chief Fonock discussed equipment that is available through the grant process and is now being pursued. Additional equipment replacement in the capital budget if required are \$9,000 for video arraignment system, \$13,000 to replace DVR's for two of the three building camera systems, \$10,000 for vehicle changeovers, \$32,000 for in car cameras. Chief Fonock noted that the in car cameras are part of the township's buffer zone protection plan grant now awaiting approval. He also pointed out that since the mall is considered a critical spot for terrorism approximately \$180,000 would be available in grant funds from the Federal Government and this is awaiting final approval. In the vehicle replacement category, two marked and two unmarked units which were scheduled for replacement last year were bumped to 2011 and will come in for approximately \$119,000 which is well below the total budget of \$155,000.

Chief Fonock discussed the pistol range which was built in 1983. He noted that the toilet system needs replacement and research is underway to resolve the issue. Full replacement of both pumps would be in the range of \$7,500, but only one pump needs to be replaced.

Mr. Waks commented that the only glaring item was the overtime. Chief Fonock responded that a lot of the reimbursable overtime for the Upper Merion system was paid for by the mall. He also said that the overtime pay is tight and if he has a \$100,000 overtime budget, neighboring police departments often have as high as \$300,000 to \$400,000.

Mr. Wagenmann commented that under the second class township code it is not mandated to have a police department. During discussions at PSATS some of the debates have been about some of the state legislation to start charging townships for the state police that patrol their communities. He emphasized that once a decision is made to have your own police department it really becomes important and you cannot shirk that responsibility.

A discussion followed about some regionalization around the country, the majority of which has been unsuccessful. It was pointed out that some of the major issues involve who is in charge, the consolidations and pension costs.

PARK & RECREATION OPERATING AND CAPITAL BUDGET

Mr. Dan Russell, Director, Park & Recreation, introduced Sudha Suryadevara, Recreation Director, Heather Melck, Program Coordinator, and highlighted a few items in the operating budget. He stated there is a decrease of 6.6% in the 2011 operating budget.

The first item he highlighted was the salary and wages for clerical and other staff. He said that line is for permanent part-time employees who work in the office and there is a slight increase in that account to cover some additional hours for the program coordinator, Emily DeVuono. However, there is a corresponding decrease in the seasonal salaries line item.

Mr. Russell discussed operating supplies; and there is a decrease of \$9,000 in that account due to credit card fees. He noted that 60% to 70% of Park and Recreation's registration is done on the website with credit cards. Currently the credit card information is collected and staff physically keys in the credit information on the credit card machine. The township is looking to replace the current credit card system with a system that passes the cost to the user. Mr. Russell pointed out that this will reduce the credit card fees that the township now pays.

Mr. McBride asked about the time limit in getting the new credit card system up and running. Mr. Hiriak responded that it is down to two vendors who can do the work. There are a few more follow up questions to ask the vendor with regard to the paperwork involved. As soon as the vendor is selected it will take between 60-75 days to have it operational on the website. It would be in the January 2011 time frame. Mr. Russell commented that staff will be looking to purchase recreational software that would link into that to allow true live online registration. Mr. Wagenmann pointed out that now that the law is changed the fee can be passed on to the people who use the cards.

Mr. Russell discussed the Miscellaneous Account and explained that this was started in 2009 to cover background checks on seasonal employees who work with children. For the past two years the township has been paying for these background checks. In his discussions with colleagues in the recreation field the industry standard is for the employee to pay for their own background check which amounts to approximately \$20 per employee.

Mr. McBride asked who does the background checks. Mr. Russell responded that it is the state police and there is also an FBI background which is required.

Mr. Russell discussed the accounts directly related to Recreational Programs. He said there is a small reduction in the school bus use. In reviewing the actual use of the past couple of years and with the numbers in the camp program and the amount of trips taken, it has been determined that \$28,500 is not really needed. A tighter job has also been done in obtaining a more competitive rate during the bid process.

The request for "Concerts Under the Stars" will be decreased by \$30,000 due mainly to the economy. Mr. Russell noted that the concerts for the past five to six years have been struggling not only in attendance but also sponsorship. The idea is being explored at not just having "concerts under the stars" but having "entertainment under the stars" similar to the successful first movie night which was sponsored by the Upper Merion Farmers Market.

Mr. McBride asked about the cost of sponsorship. Mr. Russell responded that the movie cost about \$350.

Mr. McBride asked if large screens were provided. Mr. Russell responded in the affirmative. He explained that there are two fees, a fee for the company to come in and set up the screen as well as a movie license fee that is flexible depending on the time of year and the type of movie.

Mr. McBride asked about attendance. Mr. Russell responded that very minimal advertising was done and there were about 100-125 people in attendance.

Mr. Waks asked for more information about the modification to the under the stars program. Mr. Russell responded that it is still in the planning stages on how to move forward. One option is to have more of a one time Upper Merion summer festival with several bands playing and different events such as movies, comedy nights and more of an "arts under the stars."

Mr. Bartlett commented about the hot weather during these events. Mr. Russell responded that the concerts have always been weather dependent.

Mr. Russell discussed the day camp line and noted that typically the day camp line funded the adventure day camp program. In 2011 the Adventure day camp will be combined with the camp beach tree program under one account and managed similarly. Money will be switched out of the programs instructional classes and the instructional classes account will be reduced by a total of \$58,000. Another reduction will be in the excursions line with a reduction of \$12,000 achieved by cutting back on the number of excursions. A new excursion is being explored and considered possibly to the Colorado Rockies.

Mr. Russell discussed the grant contributions to volunteer sports organizations in the community. The grant applications were due back from the sports organizations to the Park and Recreation Department the week of October 10. All applications have been received except one for the Upper Merion Music Boosters. Mr. Russell noted a new group, the Upper Merion Spring which is a group for children with disabilities and autism.

Mr. Russell noted that the capital budget took a large hit from the recent storms in the township. One was the washout of the playground at Walker Park and currently under reconstruction. The rubberized surface will be replaced with a wood carpet which would allow for another washout to be less expensive. In addition there was one very large sinkhole at Walker Park on the outfield #1 and another incident at Swedeland Park. Mr. Wagenmann explained that the issue at Swedeland Park was originally thought to be a sinkhole, but is actually the collapse of a deteriorated pipe.

Mr. Russell commented that these type events are unplanned and when they occur they are costly and take away from the budget. He said it is estimated that there will be approximately \$70,000 left in the capital budget for allocation for 2011 and this is being split into two accounts – park equipment and park design account. It should be moved forward with any of the trail designs or any other projects deemed important.

Mr. Russell stated that the plan is to maintain the infrastructure currently in place and not move forward with any new ventures.

Mr. Bartlett asked about the \$45,000 figure for park equipment. Mr. Russell responded that is a generalized number that is used to replace items such as playground equipment, swings or landscape improvements that might be needed. Mr. Wagenmann noted that this is not spent unless it is needed.

Mr. Russell distributed some handouts that detail a breakout of the major accounts in the 2011 budget and how the money is allocated toward each recreational program.

Mr. Wagenmann pointed out that if Mr. Russell wants to run a new program if he can demonstrate a budget showing that the fees and charges will pay for that program, including direct and indirect overhead, and he is given the go ahead and does not have to wait. It would be a self sustaining program.

Mr. Russell discussed his second memo about the importance of parks and recreation to a community and he noted the benefits to health, wellbeing, youth safety, senior activities and property values. A goal established for the Parks and Recreation Department is to create more programs and activities for all ages and abilities, especially people with special needs.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30.m.

RONALD G. WAGENMANN
SECRETARY-TREASURER/
TOWNSHIP MANAGER

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Minutes Approved:

Minutes Entered:

The entire proceedings of the business transacted at this Informational Meeting were fully recorded on audio tape, and all documents submitted in connection thereto are on file and available for public inspection. This is not a verbatim account of the meeting, as the tape is the official record and is available for that purpose.