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2nd BUDGET HEARING

NOVEMBER 17th, 2021

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MINUTES FOR 2ND BUDGET HEARING ON NOVEMBER 17, 2021

The video of this meeting can be viewed in its entirety on youtube.com/upperdarby.org

Opening of Meeting

Council President Wentz announced that the first Budget Hearing preceded this meeting.

Roll Call

Hafiz Tunis Jr. (HT), Michelle Billups (MB), Robert S. Gwin Jr., (RG), Matt Silva (MS), Danyelle Blackwell (DB), Brian K. Burke (BB), Sheikh Siddique (SS), Lisa Faraglia (LF), Donald P. Bonnet (DPB), Thomas P. Wagner (TW), Laura A. Wentz (LW)

Present at the Meeting

Barbarann Keffer, Mayor
Vincent A. Rongione Esq., CAO
Sean P. Kilkenny, Esquire
Courtney N. Richardson, Esquire
Alison Dobbins, Deputy CAO
Alexis Cicchitti, Chief Municipal Clerk
David Haman, Township Treasurer

Rules for Meeting Decorum

“Upper Darby Township Council and Residents will maintain professional respect for each other. Council encourages free speech, however, civility is required which would prohibit threats, profanity, scandalous, impertinent and redundant comment or any comment the discernible purpose of which is to disrupt or prevent the conduct of the business of the meeting”

A Public Hearing was convened.

Public Comment

John McDevitt, 449 Hampshire Road, wanted to clarify some of the discussion from last week regarding semantics of how to refer to fire fighters. He explained the difference between full time paid career firefighters and volunteers and how they are paid. He also spoke of the value and importance of volunteer firefighters.

Mr. McDevitt also referred to the portion of the budget relating to fire protection. He referred to the discussion from last week’s Budget Hearing and made further comparisons to other municipalities’ budgets for firefighters. Mr. McDevitt stated that our budget for fire protection is exorbitant compared to the other municipalities.

In response to Mr. McDevitt’s question, CAO Rongione stated that the budget is posted online and that he will make sure that Mr. McDevitt knows where to find it to see a line by line breakdown. The CAO added that through this hearing process and with additional input from Council, an updated version of the budget was created and that there will be more discussion about it this evening at this Hearing. He further stated that there is now an established line item for the junior firefighter program. CAO Rongione added that Council and the Administration heard Mr. McDevitt’s comments and the comments from the volunteers loud and clear, and changes were made.

CAO Rongione explained some of the differences between the fire departments of Upper Darby, Haverford and Springfield.

Mr. McDevitt again stated that our budget for fire protection is exorbitant compared to the other municipalities.

LW stated that Upper Darby Township is the 6th largest municipality in Pennsylvania. There have actually been some conversations as to whether or not we have enough fire houses to accommodate the size of the Township. There are many factors considered in the budget including salaries, health insurance, life insurance, clothing allowance, etc.

Mr. McDevitt reiterated that he still finds it hard to accept that the budget is this high and that we should utilize volunteer firefighters more.

LW stated that the new budget numbers reflect many positive changes.

Kyle McIntyre, 1040 Drexel Avenue, asked questions about what is and isn't included in the budget and asked about GFOA. Regarding GFOA recommendations, he asked if the current budget included funding of a division, budgeting or auditing and if there was anything in the budget to expand the role of the finance department to ensure financial accountability.

Deputy CAO Dobbins stated that the auditors are budgeted for, which is a significant expense. The auditors do make recommendations and Upper Darby is still wrapping up the production of the 2020 audit and are working carefully to follow the suggestions and recommendations of the auditors.

Council President Wentz stated that some of what Mr. McIntyre is looking for is in the Comprehensive Plan and the Mayor will also be updating that with her vision.

Mr. McIntyre asked how the current budget includes performance measurements into departmental programs and services.

CAO Rongione attempted to answer but was cut off.

Mr. McIntyre asked how spending on new or existing programs are evaluated compared to prior years.

Deputy CAO Dobbins stated that it varies department by department and the Township has a focus on developing metrics and evaluating how the programs are, and certainly when it comes to the budget, it is a lot of looking at budget actuals and how things are working from a fiscal standpoint.

Mr. McIntyre asked if the Township has any plans to make metrics when it comes to evaluating performances for programs public like other municipalities and cities do of equal or greater size than Upper Darby.

Deputy CAO Dobbins stated that as the staffing expands, things like that will be worked on.

Mr. McIntyre asked if departmental goals were included in the budget.

Deputy CAO Dobbins stated that there are extensive talks at department head meetings regarding the Mayor's overall goals and individual departmental goals and this is throughout the year.

Mr. McIntyre stated that a 12 page line item budget is all that's available for the budget and that is atypical for a municipality of this size. He also asked several questions pertaining to personnel classifications in the budget and also asked if the Capital budget has been approved and if it is accessible.

Deputy CAO Dobbins stated that last year Council passed a 5-year Capital Budget so a new one is not being passed, as the Capital budget is not passed every year. There are often 5-year plans regarding Capital Budgets.

Mr. McIntyre inquired as to whether or not the current budget includes a capital debt service plan and if it is accessible for the public to view. CAO Rongione stated that it is in the budget under debt service under the line item for debt service and the sinking fund. Mr. McIntyre also asked if the current budget includes any information to the public to provide transparency on the process.

LW stated that the resident's involvement is at the 2 Public Hearings for the budget.

CAO Rongione stated that many of the things that Mr. McIntyre mentioned are included in the budget narrative, and most other places do have an accompanying narrative. It is an aspiration of the Administration to provide a budget narrative along with the line item. At this time, a lot of the top line goals and metrics are included in the Mayor's address and over time, there will be a more robust presentation.

Mr. McIntyre stated that currently the 2020 Budget is not on the website and it should be for comparison. Deputy CAO Dobbins stated that the previous budget was approved by the former Administration and should be available online. She added that the website is HTML so she will check to see what happened. Also, the 2020 audit has not been completed.

Council Comments

TW asked why there is not an audit yet.

CAO Rongione replied that the 2020 audit is actually ahead of the scheduling pace of the 2019 audit, so progress is being made in the timeline and the ability to deliver the audit. There are still legacy technology issues but there is continued effort to move forward.

TW expressed his concerns about voting on the budget without a completed audit and CAO Rongione stated that last year's budget was acted on prior to the audit being complete. He added that the audit is a measure of how the numbers were produced NOT what the numbers are. The Budget is an exercise of what the numbers are, and the audit is an exercise of how the numbers were arrived at. Regarding the AS400, there are a limited number of programmers who are able to extract the data and it comes out in formats that are not perfectly clean. Also, the previous auditors were doing their own journal entries and that is a process that this Administration has endeavored to correct.

Treasurer Haman further explained the steps of the audit and the purpose of the audit.

In response to TW's concerns, CAO Rongione again stated that the Administration is following recommendations from the auditors and appreciates the auditors keeping a watchful eye and keeping the Administration accountable. The Administration is in communication with DCED to set the deadlines for the budget. DCED is comfortable with the timeline that has been set.

TW asked when Council would be getting the updated amendments to the budget.

DB asked for the name of the auditors and the CAO told her that the Township has retained a firm called Maille LLP.

DPB stated that some comments from the auditors would be necessary for him to be able to vote on the budget. He acknowledged that improvement of technology is a costly endeavor. He also asked if an annual report has been filed through DCED yet and the CAO told him that it has not been filed yet but that they are in regular communication with DCED about their requirements and DCED is on board with the schedule.

DPB asked if we have any written documents such as memos or comments from the auditors about the 2021 audit. CAO Rongione stated that we have not and explained what the Township has done thus far. The CAO also reminded DPB that the server crashed last year and that pushed back last year's audit, which then pushed back this year's audit but the goal is for more timely audits in the future. DPB asked how individual council members could communicate with the auditors with any questions and wish to follow through with a direct line of communication. CAO Rongione stated that he is not aware of any procedure that would require or forbid or facilitate that type of communication.

Solicitor Kilkenny stated that he is not aware of that happening but is aware that council members can ask questions when the auditor makes a presentation.

Gary Merron, 1114 Wilde Avenue, former Finance Director, stated that the audit letter is literally written to the Township Council. Therefore, the legal relationship is with the Township Council. The mechanism for communication is up to Council to decide. He further stated that it is important not to confuse an audit with a budget and explained the difference and further explained the issues with the current database.

Mayor Keffer added that although Mr. Merron is no longer the Finance Director, he is still very involved with the audit.

Olivia Taylor, 204 Kent Road, asked what happened to the capital gains project for the improvement of the 2nd Ward Playground.

Mayor Keffer replied that there is money set aside in the capital improvement budget for the 2nd Ward Playground improvements. Mayor Keffer also stated that a grant was submitted and clarified that the capital improvement budget is different from the operational budget.

Ms. Taylor asked if there were any plans for the Summer of 2022, when hopefully COVID will be over.

Deputy CAO Dobbins stated that she and CAO Rongione spoke of plans to have a more robust Tot Lot program and hopefully the Township will be able to move past a lot of the COVID restrictions.

BB asked if the volunteer fire company compensation was diminished in the 2022 budget by \$110,000.

CAO Rongione stated that the amount of money distributed to the volunteers will be the same but the 2021 budget showed more money than the Township actually sends to the volunteers, but that was corrected so that the 2022 budget reflects the accurate numbers. Therefore, it does not reflect a reduction but rather a correction.

LW confirmed that the Township is taking care of the cost of the apparatus repair rather than the individual firehouses.

CAO Rongione stated that the Township is also being more aggressive with regard to repairs.

LF asked if money was taken away from UDPD for overtime and CAO Rongione stated that the Superintendent has changed the way that court is being staffed by having a dedicated court officer, which lessens the need for overtime. The improvement in schedules has reduced the amount of overtime. Also, there is an effort to get people off of IOD status. He added that a few cases have been settled and meetings continue to achieve reasonable settlements.

Motion to adjourn: RG/MB All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexis Cicchitti

Chief Municipal Clerk

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