

The Seneca Falls Town Board held a Budget Workshop on Wednesday, October 11, 2023 in the Town Hall Meeting Room, 130 Ovid Street, Seneca Falls.

Present were Supervisor Michael Ferrara; Councilpersons Dawn Dyson, Kaitlyn Laskoski, Frank Sinicropi and Steven Churchill. Also present were Peter Soscia, town Manager; Joe Tullo, Chief WWTP Operator; James Varricchio, WTP Operator and Jeremy Wendt, Interim Highway Superintendent.

Supervisor Ferrara opened the Budget Workshop at 6:00 P.M. A roll call of Board Members was taken and all were present; the Pledge of Allegiance followed.

Mr. Ferrara stated that he and Mr. Soscia collaborated to present a Tentative Budget; now it's in the Board's hands as to how they want to progress – what stays in, what comes out, and how you want to fund it. He gave some highlights of the Budget:

- Spending is up 10.6%. Part of that is \$2.2 million was put in the Budget for the Safe Routes to School Project. The entire cost of the Project has to be put in the Budget; the Town's share is \$420,000, but we still have to allocate the money.
- 5% increase for all employees, except Police, which is about \$120,000.
- \$40,000 for IT data Service to move all applications to the cloud.
- \$65,000 to start a program to replace our decorative poles (about 200 poles).
- \$110,000 to update the fountain in Academy Square which needs major renovations.
- The Gould Hotel was eligible for \$420,000 in DRI grant funding. They are turning it back. The word he is getting is that they are looking to close the end of the year; that is not definite. Mrs. Laskoski asked if there was an explanation for the Gould. Mr. Ferrara replied he guesses from lack of business; the hotel is fine, but the food and beverage is not doing well. He set up a meeting with the Owner to see if there is anything the Town can do. Mrs. Dyson asked if there is any business downtown that is eligible to get the money they turned down. Mr. Ferrara said he thinks the Department of State will want to reform the Committee to come up with ideas for use of the money. Brief discussion followed.
- Kabari was awarded money to put apartments on the second floor of the old St. Patrick's School. He is not doing that project. The word on the street is he is not going to be here much longer either.
- \$177,000 for North Seneca Ambulance to be discussed tonight. They are looking for the northern towns to start contributing as they are on the verge of bankruptcy. Mr. Ferrara said Seneca Falls is the biggest user of the ambulance so it's based on that.
- \$500,000 is coming out of accounts F and G for water and wastewater improvements. These are funds that are not designated for anything.
- The tax levy that has to be raised is \$4.532 million.
- Based on the Auditors, the Landfill projected revenue is in the Budget, which is about \$3.2 – 3.3 million.
- The retirement tax bill between the Police Department and employees is \$760,000 for 2024. Mr. Soscia said it's not in the budget because it came after the budget was done.
- Workers Compensation bill from the County is \$175,000.
- On the Revenue side, we have a tax relief fund. This Budget does not reflect anything coming from that. That fund is about \$1.8 million. Money can be taken from this fund to lower the tax rate.

Mr. Sinicropi referred to the \$500,000 from the F and G funds, and said that could be used for the generator. He said Waterloo has a Generac generator, and asked Mr. Varricchio to stop and look at it to see how big it is. Brief discussion followed.

Mr. Ferrara stated tonight, the discussion will be about Water, Sewer, Highway and some other business. On October 19th, it will be Police, Recreation, Courts, Assessor, and others. He will not be here on the 19th, so Mrs. Laskoski will run the Meeting. Brief discussion followed relative to the procedure and timeline.

Mr. Ferrara referred to North Seneca Ambulance and said they are looking for a contribution of \$177,000. He mentioned that 42% of their calls come from Seneca Falls based on their data. He asked them what would happen if Seneca Falls decided not to fund the \$177,000, and the answer was North Seneca Ambulance would become bankrupt. He said nothing has been decided from the County level. The Supervisors from the south end of the County don't care because they contribute to South Seneca Ambulance. The north side hasn't made any contributions at all. Mr. Ferrara stated their operating budget is \$1.86 million. They have 38 full time employees, all trained – there are no volunteers. Mrs. Laskoski referred to the study that is being done, and asked when will it be completed; Mr. Ferrara replied it's in the final stages. She asked if Mr. Ferrara could get that information by the 19th; Mr. Ferrara replied he will try to get an answer when the audit is done, and he will reach out to the northern towns. Brief discussion followed.

Mr. Ferrara stated the Town Clerk's Office has three part-time Clerks. They would like to move one of those to

the Finance Office – it's not an increase in money and it's not creating another position. What that person would be doing in the Finance Office is what the Town Clerk has been doing. Every invoice that comes in goes through the Town Clerk's desk. The Clerk has to go through and separate them, allocate them, and then create vouchers and abstracts. One of those Clerks would be moved to the Finance Office and take that responsibility off the Town Clerk's desk.

Mr. Sinicropi referred to the line item for Deputy Tax Receiver and said that goes from \$10,091 to zero. If you want to move tax collection to a bank, there are two problems. The first problem is we are going to have a new Town Clerk. The second problem is we still need somebody in the Town that is experienced with taxes. When he was Treasurer in the County, they have to balance the books from every town. Mr. Sinicropi said if it goes to the bank, all the stuff has to come back to the town and it has to be recorded. All the telephone calls between January 1st and March 31st (about 300–400) comes to the Town. He suggested keeping that Clerk in there until the books are balanced in April – the cost is \$11,000. Mr. Ferrara said it's only \$4,200 under the new system. Mr. Sinicropi was referring to the \$11,000 for the Deputy Tax Clerk. He added this will let the new Town Clerk learn how to collect the money and balance the books for 2024. Mr. Sinicropi stated Mrs. Wadhams who collects School Taxes works full time, and she has an army of clerks helping. He thinks it would be prudent to keep the \$11,000 in the budget for the Deputy Tax Collector so that she can train the new Town Clerk – just for one year.

Mr. Ferrara said the Auditors strongly recommend that we don't collect money here because there isn't any checks and balances in place. Mrs. Laskoski asked why we don't have checks and balances in place. Mr. Ferrara explained the process if taxes are collected by a bank. Mr. Sinicropi said all he is saying is it would be prudent to have someone in the Office to collect taxes for one year. He added every night, the taxes collected has to be recorded – a bank is not going to be doing that. The Town Clerk said all the bills (3800), whether collected here at with a bank, has to be put into the computer. Mr. Soscia said the way to put it into the computer is to write the program and take the file that comes from the bank and load it into the computer. The Town Clerk stated we can't do that – we use the County Tax Program that is free. She said the Town Clerk is not going to have time to input all the tax bills, answer all the calls, and send out corrected tax bills. The Town Clerk is new, and she is not going to have time to do all of that and her other work, too. Mr. Ferrara said the new person will take some of the work off the Town Clerk's plate.

After further discussion, Mr. Ferrara said, just to be clear, you want to keep the Tax Collector and keep the Deputy Tax Collector in place. Keep in mind it may not be Mrs. Marzan. Mr. Sinicropi said Mrs. Marzan said she would stay on and retire after taxes. Mr. Ferrara asked if the Board wanted to keep the Deputy Tax Collector in the Budget. The Board agreed to keep it in the Budget. Mr. Ferrara told Mr. Soscia to add it back into the Budget.

The Town Clerk said Mr. Ferrara mentioned to her that the new Finance person is going to be coding all the Bills instead of the Town Clerk. She said the bills are already coded by each department head. She codes just the General Fund bills; that person can code all the General Fund bills in about two hours. She asked what the purpose is for this new person other than coding. Mr. Ferrara said coding and she would be able to help out in Water. He said the Clerk has three part-time Deputy Clerks; the County Clerk has one full time person – we have one-half person more here than the County who handles much more than the town. The Town Clerk explained she has two part-time deputies that is equal to one full time person. The third Clerk works only 1 ½ hours under Town Clerk and 1 ½ hours for zoning, which means she has 1 ½ hours more than the County. Mr. Ferrara said it's still more.

Mr. Ferrara stated in the Tentative Budget, there is the Confidential Secretary to the Supervisor who is going from one-half time to full time to handle some of the different responsibilities out there. He listed all the things she does currently. Mr. Ferrara stated based on emails he received, the Board is not interested in that. Mrs. Laskoski said we are creating more positions, and giving employees 5%. She doesn't understand why we are creating more positions when we have employees leaving because we don't pay enough. Mr. Churchill stated the Confidential Secretary is the choice of the Supervisor; if you make it a full time position and assign other duties, it's not the Confidential Secretary. Mr. Sinicropi added it's up to the Supervisor to fill it - as far as full time and becoming Civil Service, it can never become Civil Service because under the Law, the Town Supervisor is allowed to have a secretary that's exempt. After further discussion, Mr. Ferrara told Mr. Soscia to take it out of the Budget.

Mr. Churchill referred to the line item for Equipment A1220.200, and said there is a 275% increase. Mr. Soscia said every computer they have is at end of life and unsupportable. It's to replace some of the antiquated equipment. Mr. Ferrara asked if Mr. Churchill would be willing to meet with Mr. Soscia to discuss IT equipment; Mr. Churchill replied he would do that.

Highway

Mr. Churchill referred to line item DA5130.205 and said it went from \$40,000 to \$65,000. Mr. Wendt said prices have gone up; it's for a truck. Mrs. Laskoski asked if he had a truck to give to Parks & Recreation. Mr. Ferrara replied he thinks Water & Sewer is giving them a truck. Mr. Sinicropi agreed and said Water & Sewer have the better trucks.

Mr. Soscia said there are two things he suggested in the Budget for the Board to consider. The first one is \$100,000.00 in the Contingency line for the Highway Department because there is no place in the Budget to take when a lightpole breaks, etc. There are no discretionary funds in the Budget. He said the other thing to consider is the cost and the salary adjustments for MEOs (Mr. Tullo will be talking about that also). Mr. Soscia stated with the MEO Lights and MEOs, the Town is not very competitive with other municipalities, even with a 5% increase. Mr. Ferrara stated there is a matrix and there is room in the matrix to move people up if the Board chooses to do that. He added this would be above and beyond the 5% across the board. Mr. Churchill stated there is a problem because if you do it for one department you have to be prepared to do it for anyone. He added the Board needs to look at it and do it for everyone. Mr. Ferrara said he agrees that it should be looked at, but he doesn't think it should be opened up to everyone. Mr. Soscia said money can be put in the Contingency line and work on what the Board wants to do. He added just because it's in the Budget, it doesn't have to be spent.

After further discussion, Mr. Ferrara suggested that Mr. Sinicropi and Mrs. Laskoski meet with Mr. Soscia and start working on the examination of the matrix. Mr. Soscia stated what he is hearing is the Board would like to consider a proposed contingency fund for the matrix. The Board was in agreement with this. Mr. Soscia added then the Board can decide how much they want to put in this fund.

Mr. Ferrara stated we are at the end of the first year of the Police contract; they are at 3% for the next two years. He said be careful what you wish for – at the end of two years, they will come back looking for more money.

Water

Mr. Varricchio gave the Board a copy of the 2024 Purification Budget Summary. Mr. Ferrara said he put together a summary of what is above and beyond normal expenditures. Mr. Ferrara noted when he and Mr. Varricchio discussed the budget, the Low Lift Replacement (F8330.206) and the Sedimentation Improvements (F8330.208) were taken out of the Budget.

Mr. Soscia stated the way this budget is presented – any deficit in existence is being financed by the unencumbered fund balance. This money is in the bank but not earmarked for anything. Mr. Ferrara said in both Water & Sewer, there is \$2 million. He mentioned that over the years, Mrs. Warfel had this money (probably landfill money) and put some in different accounts and that's where it went. Mr. Soscia stated there are things that we have called reserve funds that have no legal documentation. Twelve reserve accounts have been created over time; in ten of those twelve, we cannot find any legal documentation of them being created. Mr. Soscia stated what we have to do is take that \$13 million in reserve and create cash flow statements, after that, he can start doing an analysis. Mr. Churchill offers to the Board to hire a financial advisor to tell us what we need to do – this is what we need to do now. After brief discussion, Mr. Ferrara said there will be only two Board Members here, so we have to make sure this gets done for the benefit of the people.

Mrs. Laskoski referred to Deputy Chief Operator, (F8330.104) and asked what is the \$3120 for. Mr. Tullo said that was for the Deputy's pay; there is no more Deputy. That line item was zeroed out. Mrs. Laskoski said there is \$22,000 in training; what do we need to do this year in comparison to \$10,000. Mr. Tullo replied they need to get two guys trained in water treatment which costs at least \$6,000-\$8,000. Discussion was had regarding the Low Lift Replacement and the Sedimentation Improvements. Mr. Ferrara stated it was agreed in Committee to take them out of the Budget and use the \$2 million sitting there to do these things. Mr. Soscia stated it has to be in the Budget as these are appropriations. He referred to the appropriated fund balance of \$867,908 and said that's the money that comes out of the F bank account to finance the projects. Mr. Sinicropi referred to the Landfill money and said his idea of spending Landfill money is on purchases that you only need to make one time.

Mr. Churchill referred to all the projects that were listed on the Budget Summary, and said are we going to do all these project- are we going to get these projects done next year. Mr. Varricchio replied he really believes they are going to get them done. Mr. Churchill said get all of them done in 2024? Mr. Tullo replied all will get done. Mr. Ferrara said he has full confidence they will get done. Discussion followed.

Mr. Soscia asked if the Board had any objections to opening an account with T-Mobile for the antenna (water meter project to send the data; he also needs to buy a cell phone contract. There were no objections.

Mr. Ferrara referred to the DRI north side project and said NYSEG tentatively gave their approval. Even though

the engineers would come through LaBella, NYSEG wants \$300,000 to \$800,000 to review the engineering. He added whatever the Town has to pay to NYSEG, will come out of the project.

Sewer

Mr. Tullo said the biggest item is the generator (G8130.204) that is being handled by the EPA. Mr. Sinicropi mentioned that Waterloo has a generac generator – he can call to see how big it is. Mr. Varricchio said the engineers will do a study and figure out what size is needed. Mr. Ferrara stated his guess is that the generator won't be in in 2024. Mr. Tullo responded they can get the job done. Brief discussion followed.

Mr. Churchill asked about the Skid Steer (G8120.205). Mr. Tullo replied they are trading one in. He said they talked about getting on the same program as the Highway. Mr. Churchill asked if it's something they use every day; Mr. Tullo replied every day; Oak Street – three days. Mr. Sinicropi asked - instead of Mr. Wendt getting four, can he get six and give two to Sewer. Mr. Tullo said it was suggested that he trade this one in and get on the program; it would be \$41,000. After discussion, Mr. Ferrara suggested making a call to see if we would get a better deal if we buy six vs. four or two. He asked Mr. Tullo to make a call to find out.

Mr. Churchill referred to Soil Containment (G8130.205) and asked if that is going to get done. Mr. Tullo replied yes, definitely. Mr. Sinicropi asked Mr. Tullo to come back with a list of what they can get done next year. Mr. Churchill said let's not put in what we can't get done. Discussion followed.

Mr. Soscia commented that some of the expenditures for personnel are going to get moved around a little bit in the right places, and it's likely the numbers are going to come down. The distribution and operators are going to be in a different line and it will probably be less money. Mr. Soscia said when we publish the budget for the public, we should be publishing it on the higher level so that we don't have to do so many budget transfers in the course of the year.

Mr. Ferrara asked if the Board is okay with 5% for employees. The Board agreed to 5% increase for employees. Mr. Ferrara stated the Board has to figure out what that means for elected officials. Mr. Churchill asked what other municipalities are doing. Mr. Ferrara replied he hasn't heard, but he will check it out.

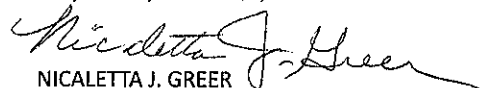
Mr. Ferrara stated right now, this represents a 6.7% tax rate for this Budget, primarily due to the reassessment. We are going from a 10.14 tax rate to 6.7. He asked the Board to think about if they want to add more appropriations into the Budget to lower taxes. Mrs. Laskoski asked if they can give the Board some numbers with appropriations to see what it will look like.

Mr. Ferrara said after October 19th, another night might be needed. Mr. Sinicropi suggested that a tentative budget meeting could be scheduled for October 26th if needed. The Board was in agreement.

Being there was no further business, a motion was made by Kaitlyn Laskoski and seconded by Dawn Dyson to adjourn the Budget Workshop. No questions. Motion carried 5 ayes, 0 naves.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,



NICALETTA J. GREER

Town Clerk

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