

TOWNSHIP OF PEMBERTON

SPECIAL MEETING

MARCH 8, 2011

6:30 P.M.

Council President Cartier announced that notice of this meeting was given in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act and led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by roll call.

PRESENT

Jason Allen
Ken Cartier
Richard Prickett
Sherry Scull
Diane Stinney

ABSENT

Also Present: Mayor David Patriarca, Business Administrator Chris Vaz, Chief Financial Officer Robert Benick, Township Clerk Mary Ann Finlay

Chairman Cartier called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR FORMAL ACTION, AS ADVERTISED: For the purpose of discussing the 2011 Municipal Budget as presented by the Mayor. Formal action may be taken.

Council President Cartier noted that with Council's he wanted to allow the Mayor to make some opening remarks and then have Council discussion until 7:50, then take a break and come back and go straight into public comment, have further Council discussion if time allows and then break at 10:00 p.m. and resume discussion tomorrow. Council was in general agreement with this schedule.

MAYOR DAVID PATRIARCA:

Mayor Patriarca noted that as required by law he has submitted a balanced budget to Council, noting that it was the most difficult budget he has had to prepare. He advised that he had prepared a written statement which has been provided to the Public and Council. Mayor Patriarca gave an overview of the budget situation noting there was a \$320,000.00 short fall in revenues that they had to make up for and the 2% cap presented a challenge. Last year there were significant spending cuts made, approximately \$600,000.00 and this year they made an additional \$250,000.00 in spending cuts but that appropriations could not be cut any further without affecting operations so the budget included a reduction in workforce. He relayed that there have been meetings with the unions and they are hopeful to come to some solutions to help save positions. Mayor Patriarca explained that some of the issues with the budget were items they have no control over such as increased pension costs and increased health care costs, demands of service and union contracts. He explained he does not disagree with unions being able to negotiate a fair contract, he has done it before from the other side of the table and he also believes residents have a right to ask for services, but the Township can not provide what they can not afford. He advised Council that the budget reflects what he feels the township can operate as they are expected to and if Council chooses to change that budget they will operate within that budget accordingly. The Mayor informed that the budget currently is at 6.7 cent increase which is below their allowable 2% cap, noting that 9 cents would be at their cap. Mayor Patriarca expressed that the taxpayers should not have to bear the full burden of the 2% cap and that is why he brought it down to 6.7 cents.

BUDGET REVIEW BY COUNCIL:

Council President Cartier asked what a penny equaled in the budget and was advised that it was approximately \$87,700.00. Further, Council President Cartier asked what a 6.7 cent tax increase would be based on a \$100,000 home. Mayor Patriarca noted that it represented a \$66.95 increase for the year.

Council President Cartier relayed that he had requested Council to do their review of the budget and be prepared to begin discussions of this budget right away and at this time asked Council where they would like to begin.

RECREATION SERVICES 370

Councilwoman Stinney had requested some research on the Teen Center and its usage and in response the Mayor had the Recreation Director prepare a detailed report which Council now has. The report indicated that there is an average of 12 kids that use the Teen Center daily and the expenses for the year were \$15,389.00 in staff and another \$2,500 in other expenses. Councilwoman Scull noted that some of those expenses are sponsored by TAG and the Mayor further noted that the Teen Center also does some fundraising events, however the program does not support itself. Councilman Prickett asked about the renovations of the BMIA building and where the Teen Center would be temporarily located and asked about the time frame for getting the building done. The Mayor advised that the Recreation Director was working on a plan for the temporary relocation and that it may take until August because of the reduced work force. Councilwoman Stinney asked for an explanation of the field trips at a cost of \$14,925.53. Mayor Patriarca noted that those are the trips done after the Summer Recreation Program. Discussion ensued regarding the amounts charged for the trip and what that covers. Council President Cartier noted that the information that the Mayor was giving was in response to questions on a resolution discussed at a previous Council meeting regarding the establishment of Recreation program fees. Councilwoman Scull asked if the funds put in the 2010 budget can be cancelled and put into this year's budget. Mr. Benick, the Chief Financial Officer, advised that if the money is not expended it can be cancelled without having to go back to the State to revise the budget.

Councilwoman Scull commented on the recreation programs, noting that the Summer Recreation program is a great thing to offer to the residents but she does not think they can afford to absorb the loss and that the price of the program needs to come up or the program needs to be cut. Councilwoman Scull reflected that they are funding the program by \$44,000.00. Council President Cartier noted that if the program was to be self supporting the fees would have to be raised to \$355 per child. Discussion ensued regarding the Recreation Trust fund and what that supports. Mr. Vaz advised that as of December 31st, 2010 the trust fund had \$51,000.00. Councilwoman Scull asked if that money could be used to offset the summer program costs. Mr. Benick advised that those funds could be brought in as revenue. Councilwoman Stinney and Councilman Prickett questioned how the trust fund would regenerate for next year. Mr. Vaz advised that any profits brought in from programs that are above the cost of the programs the monies are placed in the trust fund but it was unknown as to how long it would take to get it back to its current level of funding. Councilwoman Stinney commented that everyone knows she would be the last person to cut programs from the children but reiterated that they are in a very tough time and they all have to do more with less. She expressed that the community needs to come together and they could get together with the churches to come up with solutions regarding the loss of programs for the children.

Councilwoman Scull advised that she does have some suggestions for cuts and noted that in Recreation she would suggest that if they are not using Country Lakes Beach they could cut \$14,000.00 for the lifeguards there, but noted it was not broken down in the budget and she would like to see a more detailed budget on that. Mr. Vaz advised that a more detailed budget would be available to them at the next meeting noting that they have never reviewed Recreation at the first meeting. Councilman Prickett advised that he has suggestions for cuts that would not affect public safety such as not having a lifeguard. Councilman Prickett suggested the following lines in the Recreation Budget be reduced such as line 2-04100 Conferences and Meetings; line 2-05700 Furniture and 2-20400 Misc. Expenses.

Motion by Prickett and Stinney to reduce line 2-20400 by \$600.00 to \$0. Prickett, yes; Stinney, yes; Scull, yes; Allen, yes; Cartier, yes. Motion carried.

Motion by Prickett and Scull to reduce line 2-04100 by \$900 to \$0. Prickett, yes; Scull, yes; Allen, yes; Stinney, yes; Cartier, yes. Motion carried.

Motion by Prickett and Stinney to reduce line 2-05700 by \$2,000.00 to \$0. Prickett, yes; Stinney, yes; Scull, yes; Allen, yes; Cartier, yes. Motion carried.

Motion by Scull and Stinney to reduce line 2-06602 by \$2,000.00 to \$0. Scull, yes; Stinney, yes; Prickett, yes; Allen, yes; Cartier, yes. Motion carried

Discussion ensued regarding the need for the after school programs and the Teen Center and Councilwoman Stinney and Councilwoman Scull both agreed that the school should step up to offer programs.

Council discussed the different Recreation Programs that were offered at no fee and the participation involved versus the cost. Mayor Patriarca advised he would provide them with a more detailed breakdown of costs, including Police and Public Works overtime for the next meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Council President Cartier opened the meeting to public comments. Those indicating a desire to be heard were: **Claire Wadsworth**, noted that she was in agreement with the Mayor regarding the fireworks, they bring people to their town and they spend money. Ms. Wadsworth went on to suggest the following cuts based on last year's expenditures: page 56, Utility Department - \$7,000.00; take out \$115,000 Dump Truck, purchase 2 Half Ton Tahoes instead of 2 One Ton Tahoes; page 9, Department of Tax Collection - \$3,000.00; page 14, Legal and Engineering Tax Appeals- \$15,000.00; page 22, Insurance Department Administrative Fees - \$20,000; page 22, Insurance Department Prescription Claims - \$20,000.00; page 24, Police Holiday Pay - \$10,000.00; page 35, Public Works Other Pay - \$1,000.00; page 45, Animal Control Overtime - \$1,000.00; page 47, Environmental Commission Misc. - \$1,500.00; page 48, Recreation Contract Services - \$2,000.00; page 59, Utilities Natural Gas - \$5,000.00. In addition Ms. Wadsworth questioned the over expenditure in the Solid Waste Department in 2010 and was advised by Council President Cartier that could be due to tipping fee charges which is based on the amount collected and is an unknown amount each year. **Eva Cornish**, noted that she has been a resident here for 16 years and she has three children that she does things with as part of her responsibility. She suggested that they could get more people to volunteer by giving them something like a ticket to Great Adventure which would be a lot less than paying an employee for the day. Ms. Cornish also noted she would like to see the Teen Center remain so her children would have a place to go, but to use volunteers. **Dean Nicholas**, advised he is a resident and tax payer and also the President of Local 2783 AFSCME. He reported that their union is taking the hardest hit with these layoffs and feels it is their responsibility to provide a service to the residents but the cuts are going to make it difficult to do that. Mr. Nicholas stated that the Union is working hard to make some concessions and would like them to take into consideration the employees being demoted after many years of service and how that is affecting them. They do not think that is the way an employee should be treated. He advised that Council should look at the fact that they are laying off 2 Animal Control Officers and overtime is already being budgeted. Mr. Nicholas assured that the Union is committed to doing their part as soon as they have final numbers so they can see what concessions they need to meet those goals. **Rich Koster**, commented on the debt growing from \$24,000,000.00 to \$25,000,000.00 from last year. He read a letter reflecting the role of government and that it has presently gone beyond the limit of the defined role in the United States Constitution. He expressed belief it is his duty as a citizen to urge the Council to send the budget back to the Mayor to have the Police and Public Safety line items reinstated and the Recreation and Senior Citizen line items removed completely. **John Shaw**, commented that expressed belief that Recreation is an important thing in this town and does not believe any of it should be cut. He questioned the travel expense in the Administration budget, who would be doing the traveling and the increase in the Appraisal line. He noted that expenses could be cut by modifying the leaf pick up which would also cut down on worker's compensation claims. He asked about the older vehicles parked out in the field noting that money can be saved if routine vehicle maintenance was done. He offered to help raise money for the fireworks if they are taken out of the budget. **George Petronis**, noted that after listening to the Union representative he wanted to give a balancing view and commented that in the past 5 years he has lost two employees to local township positions because he could not compete with their wages and benefits, yet as a business owner he is expected to pay the taxes to support compensation that he could not afford to pay. He agreed that he would like to see the fireworks continue and feels fundraising efforts could be used to achieve that. He thanked Council for this forum so people

can see where the money is going. **Scott Hamilton**, agreed with Councilwoman Stinney that people need to step up. He commented on the fees spent on developing the triangle area in town and pondered that after all the expenses how much it would cost to rent or purchase a business space. He commented on the monies being taken from the Water Department surplus and being requested from the MUA surplus, expressing concern that money will not be there in the future for projects. He agreed with Mr. Koster and it is not morally right to take money from someone else's pocket to entertain someone else and questioned the criteria being used for the layoffs. **Chuck Fisher**, questioned what management would do to help save jobs noting he has not heard any of them say they would help. **Steve Fitzgerald**, advised he is the coordinator for the Teen Center. He explained that the 12.5 teens served daily are not always the same teens and there is a barrier because of transportation and their location. He relayed that he has been in the community for 10 years and there is nothing for the teenagers to do. He expressed that the Teen Center has a lot of positive events going on that at times serves over 80 teens. Mr. Fitzgerald expressed hope that they do not decide to close the center because it is not always about the numbers. Councilman Prickett noted that he has seen Mr. Fitzgerald work with the teens and it would be a tragedy to lose that for the kids in their town. Councilwoman Stinney suggested that they can possibly get the schools to provide transportation. **Bobbie Downs**, advised she is the Assistant Coordinator of the Teen Center and also a former teacher in the school system but currently teaches at the Burlington County Alternative High School with the at risk population and is a youth coordinator at one of the churches. She commented on that call to get parents to step up and help noting this is an uphill battle and nationwide trend but does not think asking the community to step up is an excuse for inaction. Ms. Downs gave an overview of the teens she has worked with in town and how it has been a benefit to them to have the programs available. She outlined how the programs are supplementing what they are getting at the schools and keeping kids off the streets and is currently teaching a class on the juvenile justice system where crime statistics are directly related to the time the kids spend on the streets. She expressed that a family is not going to want to move to a community with no programs for the children.

There being no additional members of the public indicating a desire to be heard, Council President Cartier closed the meeting to public comments.

BUDGET REVIEW BY COUNCIL (contd')

Councilwoman Scull commented on the use of surplus noting that they have less surplus this year and if all lines are cut to the bare bottom so there is no tax increase this year, it will put the Township in a worse position for next year because there will be no surplus to pull from. Mayor Patriarca added that there will not be a lot of the revenues they used this year available to use next year. Councilwoman Scull further commented that it is not a popular thing to raise taxes but a Police Force and other programs can not continue if taxes are raised. She noted that they are discussing a \$6 a month increase on a home assessed at \$100,000.00 and they could continue to cut money this year so there are no layoffs but then they would be looking at instead of 16 layoffs possibly 25 layoffs next year. Councilwoman Scull expressed that this budget problem was not created here but in Trenton and Washington. Councilwoman Scull relayed that she disagrees with Mr. Koster and explained that she was taught in one of her English classes at Pemberton High School that a civilization is judged on how well they treat their senior citizens and children. Councilwoman Scull voiced that she would not vote to cut one more penny from the budget unless it was going to save the job of a township resident. Councilman Prickett comment that they can't save the jobs unless they make cuts in the budget and then put the money to fund the positions such as in the police line. Councilwoman Scull expressed that she does not think there is enough money in the budget that could be cut to save jobs and Councilman Prickett countered that they don't know that until they look through the lines. Mayor Patriarca remarked that they have only cut \$5,500.00 from a \$23,000,000.00 budget and advised there was a \$260,000.00 gap that they had to close just to be at the 9 cent tax increase within the cap and cut further to get it down to the 6. 7 cents, but noted Council spent all that time to come up with \$5,500.00 in cuts and welcomed Councilman Prickett to find the \$250,000.00 because he prefers not to lay anyone off. Councilwoman Scull noted that 3 cents would be over \$200,000.00 and that could save some positions and that is an option to raise the tax to 9 cents.

Mr. Vaz wanted to stress his concerns regarding the amounts used from areas of the budget to keep within the allowable 2% cap. Mr. Vaz advised that funds were pulled from areas of the budget that put them at certain risks regarding possible insurance payments, in addition, that money will not be available to pull from next year. He emphasized that the problem with the

budget is not on the spending side since that has been cut from previous years, but rather the revenues are not there to support it. Mr. Vaz asked the Council to look ahead so that they are not in a worse situation next year. Mr. Vaz reported that they had already received the PERS and PFRS pension payment amounts for next year and they are over \$200,000.00 more than they are this year. Councilwoman Scull noted that Mr. Vaz convinced her they are not being responsible to the community if they don't raise it to the full 2% cap to prepare for next year.

Councilwoman Stinney commented on the possibility of losing the UEZ and suggested they get together with Mt. Holly again and lobby to save the program.

Council President Carter noted on Councilwoman Scull's suggestion to put money back into the budget and cautioned that although they can do it, they can not make the Mayor spend the money.

ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

Motion by Prickett to reduce line 2-04500, Travel by \$2,000 to \$300. Motion failed for lack of second.

COUNCIL DEPARTMENT

No suggested changes made.

MUNICIPAL CLERK DEPARTMENT

No suggested changes made.

FINANCE AUDIT & ADMINISTRATION

Motion by Prickett to reduce line 2-05700, Furniture by \$1,500 to \$0. Motion failed for lack of second.

Council President Cartier advised that he had questioned Administration about this line yesterday and was advised that the funds had already been spent on a desk for the new Chief Financial Officer.

AUDIT SERVICES

No suggested changes made.

LIQUIDATION OF TAX LIENS

Motion by Prickett to reduce line 2-04700, Fees & Permits by \$3,000 to \$2,500. Motion fails for lack of second.

Council President Cartier advised that he had asked this question as well of Administration and it was explained that these costs were located in another line that shows a \$6,000.00 over expenditure last year.

REVENUE ADMINISTRATION TAX COLLECTOR

No suggested changes made.

SOLID WASTE

No suggested changes made.

OFFICE OF PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENT

No suggested changes made.

LEGAL SERVICES

Motion by Prickett to reduce line 2-02706, Appraiser Tax Appeals by \$5,000 to make it \$20,000.00. Motion fails for lack of second.

Councilwoman Scull asked why there was an increase in that line. Mayor Patriarca noted there is a pending appraisal that is expected to be in the area of \$20,000.00 and there is some additional appraisal work that may come up throughout the year to account for the additional \$5,000.00

Motion by Prickett to reduce line 2-29200, Special Attorney Fees by \$5,000 to \$25,000.00. Motion fails for lack of second.

Councilman Allen thanked Mayor Patriarca for answering his questions in advance about items that were put in the budget. Councilman Prickett thanked Mr. Vaz for answering his questions as well.

Council President Cartier asked if any other Council members besides Councilman Prickett had any suggestions for cuts, noting that it is not productive to continue to have Councilman Prickett make motions with no seconds. Council President Cartier advised that he does not disagree with the motions Councilman Prickett is making, however he can not second motions.

Council discussed the manner in which they wanted to continue and Councilwoman Stinney noted she would first like to see what concessions the unions are offering.

Motion by Scull and Stinney to adjourn. Scull, yes; Stinney, yes; Prickett, yes; Allen, yes; Cartier, no. Motion carried.

Council President Cartier announced that Council will resume budget hearing the following evening at 6:30 p.m. and expressed that hopefully they will get something accomplished.

Meeting ended approximately 10:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Ann Finlay, MMC
Township Clerk