

ULSTER TOWN BOARD WORKSHOP
NOVEMBER 6, 2008 AT 7:00 PM

CALLED TO ORDER BY SUPERVISOR WOERNER, CHAIRMAN

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

ROLL CALL BY CLERK

TOWN COUNCILMAN DAVID BRINK
TOWN COUNCILMAN JOEL B. BRINK
TOWN COUNCILMAN ERIC KITCHEN
TOWN COUNCILMAN ROCCO SECRETO
SUPERVISOR NICKY B. WOERNER

PUBLIC COMMENT

Robert Barton inquired about the PILOT agreement for the Chambers Phase II project and if the public and assessor are involved in it. He expressed concern about the town losing funding from the negotiations in reducing the PILOT.

Councilman Joel B. Brink reported that the assessor will be involved and at this time, only he and David Brink have been involved. A copy of the proposed PILOT may be available for review (if the Town's Special Council deems it a public document). A discussion followed explaining that the Town Board agreed to a reduction to the funding for the Chambers Housing project at its October 25, 2008 meeting, as advised

Dr. John Cranston is not in favor of a developer getting a \$30,000 tax decrease (due to Real Property Law 481-a) while the rest of the residents' tax rates are dramatically increasing.

Supervisor Woerner opened the public hearing on the 2009 Town Budget at 7:22 PM

Mr. Robert Barton inquired about the details of the Chamber Senior Housing Project PILOT and requested the same tax reduction they received. He suggested that the parks fees be raised to cover the cost of running and maintaining the town parks. A discussion followed about the fund balance, transfer station, Police Department and the Town Justice Court revenues and expenses. He further inquired about the status of the HAVA and home relief expenses that are being charged to the Town.

Supervisor Woerner anticipates the cash on hand to be \$1,009,597.50 as of December 1, 2008. The HAVA has been reduced but he believes those expenses will be handled by the county as well as home relief. Home relief is the cost that the town has to pay back to the county for entitlement services. The recent closure of the Kings Inn in Kingston has spread clients to the township.

Mr. Larry Decker requested that the Town Board limit the speaker's time to ensure that all people in the audience can ask their questions without monopolizing the floor. He feels the Town Board should be ashamed to present such a high budget to the people.

Mr. Robert Crane, representing the conservative party, presented a revised budget to the Town Board for review that represents a 5% tax decrease. None of the revisions result in cutting salaries. He suggested that the current Police Commission be dissolved and the Town Board

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assume control as the Police Commission. He expressed concern regarding the current level of management and requested that the current deputy chief of police be returned to his previous position as Sergeant (detective). Further, he requested that "take home cars" be limited to the Chief, the lieutenant, and one off duty detective. He asked that the Chief have the supervisor's lights and sirens removed from the Town Supervisor's car. He expressed concern about the Highway Reserve Fund being spent as the department is in need of vehicles.

Cris Hendrick reviewed the conservative budget proposals. She expressed concern about the need for updating the Highway Department's equipment. A discussion occurred about the taxation and bonding for equipment, as well as the cost of overtime for police in the township. Supervisor Woerner stated that he can not cut back overtime for the police during investigations or when they need to fill out a roster for shifts. A discussion followed about leasing vehicles for the police department versus purchasing vehicles. Leased vehicles were preferred by the town as a cost savings. Insurance rates were discussed. She expressed that union and appointed officials should not receive more than a 3% raise and the elected officials should not receive any raise due to the budget increase. General supplies and expenses can be cut back on. She suggested holding off on installing the handicap fishing pier. The technology line pertaining to the Police Department and training should remain the same and not be increased. The home relief line should be decreased. She suggested the Town Board cut back the taxes as much as possible.

Tony Pumilia was not in favor of a tax increase. He inquired about how bad the economy has to be before the Town Board takes actions in capping salaries, freezing benefits etc., etc. He suggested that the Town lay off people like the private sector s doing if the Town is unable keep the budget in place.

Supervisor Woerner stated that the town has contracts that it must follow. Layoffs could be implemented but it would affect service.

John Crispell asked if the Town is over budget for 2008.

Supervisor Woerner stated the town is not over budget for 2008.

Don Wise feels that the Town Board has traditionally overspent on the police department as the numbers reported exceed what is allotted in the budget. He inquired if the Town Board has budgeted enough money for the Police Department or will the Town Board have to go through the budget modification process to offset the difference. His opinion is the Town Board has spent a considerable sum from the general and highway fund on the police department. He suggested that the Town Board abolish the Police Commission and put that power back in the Town Board's hands.

Supervisor Woerner stated that the money taken from the Highway Fund be used to offset the Highway District taxes. The overages are reflective of items that the town gets reimbursed for grants and paybacks from other sources.

Walter Hendrick suggested that the Town save money by having the police launder their own clothes.

Supervisor Woerner stated that the laundering of uniforms is contractual.

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George Lucente inquired why the County's Budget is set at a 3% increase and the town is near 23%. He inquired if Supervisor Woerner has lights and sirens on his personal vehicle. Supervisor Woerner explained that he has lights on his personal vehicle for personal purposes which he uses for town business such as when the town had a flood alert. There is no siren installed and they are not used for police purposes.

Stephanie Kovarnik inquired why the proposed taxes are going up 30% when the state aid is only reduced by \$100K. She is not in favor of the senior center being built at this time due to the economy. A discussion followed about the senior center and the cost of it. How many police officers take cars home? She feels the Town Board can make a better contract. Supervisor Woerner reported that there are many reasons for the tax increase; reduction in aid, increase in election costs, safety net costs, fuel costs, etc. There are about eight take home vehicles for the police department and they are all contractually negotiated.

Mr. Richard Metzger inquired why the school does not pay for the DARE program. He also inquired about how the child safety seat program is funded. Supervisor Woerner stated that the school reimburses the Town for the DARE program. The child safety seat program is funded almost entirely by a federal grant.

John Quick expressed disappointment in the Ulster Town Board. He compared the Town of Ulster budget to the State Comptroller guidelines that report on economics of the state. He challenged the Town Board to make some hard choices to lower the cost of the budget.

John Morrow requested that the Town run their operation as a business. He inquired about what the current fund balance is. He asked the Town Board to negotiate tighter contracts. He is in favor of discontinuing the DARE program as it has been proven it does not work. Supervisor Woerner has \$1,009,000.50 in fund balance. He had received a fund balance of \$1.2M in 2006. He anticipates \$1M. A discussion followed about the proposed senior center. Police Chief Paul Watzka disagreed with Mr. Morrow about his assessment of the DARE program and has studies that show it works. He believes that the department is being managed well and that has resulted in savings. He believes Mr. Wise is not understanding how the police are funded as a department and his numbers are off. He has fought with past supervisors to maintain a level of service as they proposed using used police cars, cutting the detective division and closing the department between 12 PM and 6 AM. He thanked the Town Board for their support. He added that the Deputy Chief was able to solicit grants to offset costs. He invited people to talk to him about the police budget.

Nick Harris feels that Police Chief Watzka, Highway Superintendent Petramale and Town Clerk Cosenza are good men. He asked the Town Board to fight for the Town's fair share of sales tax money. He also requested that the Town implement a hotel tax.

Fredrick J. Wadnola, addressed some issues that the Police Chief pointed out and stated he reviewed alternatives. He implored the Town Board to look into the budget for places the Town can make cuts.

Councilman Secreto motioned to close the public hearing at 8:55 PM

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2nd by Councilman Joel B. Brink
All Ayes

A recess was taken until 9:07 PM

Payment in Lieu of Taxes Agreement for the Birches at Chambers (Phase 2) Project

Councilman Joel B. Brink reported that the town has received documentation in regard to the PILOT for Birches and negotiations are ongoing. A letter from the state was received informing the Town that a loan was given to Birches at Chambers for a 67 unit building.

Regarding the filling of a part-time vacancy at the Transfer Station.

Supervisor Woerner reported that, at the next meeting, filling a part-time position at the Town Transfer Station will be on the agenda. Applications are being reviewed.

Police Fleet Maintenance Contract

Councilman Joel B. Brink motioned for the town to go out to bid for the 2009 Town Police Fleet Maintenance Contract.

2nd by Councilman Secreto
All Ayes

Online Tax Bill Viewing and Payment Service through Munitrax

Town Clerk Cosenza explained that Munitrax is an information database service company that buys tax rolls throughout New York State. They then put this information on a server and sell the information to banks, abstract and escrow companies to access online so they don't have to contact the individual towns or schools. They offer an online service to the public, where a person can view their bill. They also offer a person the ability to pay their taxes as online through credit card or check for a convenience fee. There is no cost to the town, no maintenance agreements or quotas to make. The fee for online payment varies depending on the amount and the tender type: credit card or check. The person paying the taxes is informed of the amount due.

A discussion followed. The Town Attorney Andrew Zweben wanted to review the proposal as he had some concerns pertaining to interim holding of the money.

A discussion followed between Councilman Kitchen and Supervisor Woerner in regard to the Town Budget line items. Councilman Kitchen expressed concern about line items having overrun. The conservative party's budget was reviewed. Councilman Secreto and Kitchen reviewed the fees for the recreation and park committee. Other items were reviewed. It was suggested that health care benefits for Town Board Members be eliminated as a cost savings. Councilman David Brink and Joel Brink are willing to give up their dental benefit. Councilman Secreto donates his buyout to the Town for recreation. Councilman Kitchen is not in favor of eliminating the health benefits.

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Councilman Kitchen motioned to adjourn at 9:50 PM
No second.
Motion failed.

The floor was opened to suggestions. Town Clerk Cosenza suggested that a cap be placed on the number of children in the recreation program and shorten the length of time of the summer program to six weeks. A discussion followed about the summer camp program and its requirements of staffing. Public access has no funding in the budget. Councilman Secreto suggested cutting out the NYS Association of Towns meetings to save money. The conservative budget suggestions were reviewed. The Town Board is in favor of keeping the raise for the Highway Superintendent. A discussion followed in regard to additional stipends for an office manager for the Court Clerk's Office. Councilman Joel B. Brink feels that the Town Justices should be managing the office and not assign a person. A discussion followed about cutting the Town Attorney line; the town needs an attorney to prosecute people in the absence of the State Troopers prosecuting people. The Town Board feels that this is an area that can not be cut. The postage fees were discussed. Another discussion followed about the DARE program and the technology and efficiency of the Police Department. A discussion followed about the safety net cost, the Empire Zone, the change of politics in the country, state and county and the general economy affecting the town. A discussion occurred about the fund balance and judging what is an appropriate amount to keep on hand.

Councilman Kitchen left the meeting at 10:05 PM and returned at 10:19 PM

Councilman Joel B. Brink motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:53 PM
2nd by Councilman Secreto
All Ayes

Respectfully Submitted by
Jason Cosenza, RMC FHCO
Ulster Town Clerk