

November 12, 2009

The Town Board of the Town of Warwick held a continuation of a Public Hearing for the 2010 Preliminary Budget. Said public hearing was held on Thursday, November 12, 2009 at the Town Hall, 132 Kings Highway, Town of Warwick. Supervisor Sweeton opened the public hearing at 7:15 p.m.

ATTENDANCE: Supervisor Michael Sweeton
Councilman Floyd DeAngelo
Councilman Leonard DeBuck
Councilman James Gerstner – Arrived at 7:30 p.m.
Councilman Mickey Shuback

Steven Brown, Auditor
Town Attorney, John Hicks

LEGAL NOTICE: The Clerk read the legal notice, which was duly published in the Warwick Valley Dispatch on October 28, 2009. (Copy of this legal notice is printed at the end of these minutes.)

Supervisor Sweeton – These are hard times for all of us including local government. We understand our obligation to minimize your property tax burden while still providing the essential services that add value to your home investment. It is with this in mind that the Town Board reduced all costs within our control line by line. All of our non-union management personnel, appointed and elected officials have readily offered a salary freeze for 2010. Working with each department, the Town Board has cut \$1.7 million from the budget. We continue our discussions with both our unions to seek monetary savings that can provide further tax relief for our residents. The preliminary budget as presented shows the town wide rate, which is paid by Village residents, is increased by 12 cents per thousand, which equates to approximately \$6.14 to the average assessed house. For Town residents the rate decreased 10 cents per thousand or about \$4.89 for the average house. The increase in the town wide Budget was due primarily to contractual salary increases for union Town workers and reduced revenue projections for NYS mortgage tax, which was down approximately \$265,000. The assessed value of the Town also declined by \$6.9 million. A hiring freeze has been instituted for 2009 and will continue for 2010. I would like to personally thank all the dedicated Department Heads and our employees who work hard to deliver essential services at the least possible cost. I also want to thank the Town Board and our budget advisor Steve Brown for their hard work and advice. The budget as presented is an austerity budget which reflects the severe economic conditions we find ourselves in, however, we firmly believe that we have maintained the essential services that residents expect from their Town.

Edward Mullins – Police Officer, Town of Warwick Police Department – I would like to know if the budget contains provisions to maintain the minimum staffing that was suggested in 2009?

Supervisor Sweeton – The minimum staffing is determined by the Town and the Chief. I believe today it remains at the level it is today. However, the Chief with consultation with the Town Board, will give us suggestions for saving money for the Town because we have to. The budgets are lean. The police budget did not escape cuts. We worked as hard as we could to protect the jobs and personnel and we succeeded. We will continue to do that, but we will be running lean and mean this year. I fully expect that the Chief will staff to maintain the level of public safety that people have come to expect in the Town.

Edward Mullins – First part of my job as a union president is to protect jobs and wages. The second part is to make sure that public safety and officer safety is observed. My concern is that minimum staffing gets cut and officers are racing from one end of Town to the other to provide essential services. My concern is an older person lying on the floor looking for help having to wait 30 minutes for a police officer to show up. My concern is a person involved in an auto accident spending an extra 10 minutes bleeding waiting for an officer to show up.

Supervisor Sweeton – Well those are all hypothetical's that you put out. What I'm saying to you is the minimum staffing level that remains today as it is today.

Edward Mullins – Will it remain in 2010?

Supervisor Sweeton – It is budgeted to remain with the same number of personnel as exists today, so the staffing will be the same. That's what I just said to you.

Maryann Peters – Resident, Village of Warwick – So your saying with this new budget you're going to have the same amount of police and patrol cars on duty on a daily basis as we have in 2009.

Supervisor Sweeton – What I'm saying is our minimum staffing level in 2010 remains the same as 2009. Now how those assets are allocated is up to the Chief of police and his staff.

Maryann Peters- You're not answering the question.

Supervisor Sweeton – I just answered your question. If there are four officers on in 2009 there will be four officers on in 2010.

Maryann Peters – So your saying the same amount of police that are out there today will be out there in two months when its 2010.

Supervisor Sweeton – We haven't eliminated any police officers. That's correct.

Jerry Zimmerman – Resident, Town of Warwick – There was a story in the paper that might be possible to achieve some savings is either of cost of police if the Town would consider re-evaluating the way the scheduling is done. According to the story in the paper for whatever reason the Town had decided not to revisit the issue. As a taxpayer and a resident it's hard for me, and for other people I've spoken to, to understand why you wouldn't entertain changing the scheduling system if it would either save money potentially or have us wind up with better police force.

Supervisor Sweeton – Let me clarify for you. The Town did not say it would not revisit or study that situation. We approached both of our unions with a request to freeze their salaries for 2010 in an effort to keep a flat budget for our residents considering the economic times. They were not obligated to do it and for their reasons they chose not to, which is fine. One of the unions, the police presented some alternatives I don't want to get into particulars, but one was the shift issue and I had a conversation with the PBA president who's in the room and told him I would get educated on the issue and that we would explore the ramifications on it. The Town Board was not prepared in a two week window that we had to put a budget before the voters or before you the public to institute that system without knowing that in fact we had an opportunity to save some real money. I did pledge to the PBA president that I will get educated and the Board will get educated on that issue and we will discuss that for this 2010 year. Does that answer your question?

Jerry Zimmerman – I appreciate the fact that you're willing to get educated on it, but that doesn't say that after you're familiar with the advantages and disadvantages or all the asterisks involved that you will sit down and try to determine if there are some potential savings there.

Supervisor Sweeton – I think that's implied, we certainly will. If there's clear advantages why would we not, but it's not clear that there are clear advantages, that's what I'm saying.

Jerry Zimmerman – Are you telling me that you already feel like you are an expert with the advantages and disadvantages.

Supervisor Sweeton – No, not at all.

Jerry Zimmerman – Not at all, so there's no way to know from your point of view or from the Town's point of view if it would be a benefit.

Supervisor Sweeton – That's correct.

Jerry Zimmerman – I understand that, but I'm trying to understand if there's a commitment to make a change. I'm thinking and this has nothing to do with Warwick, but the great irony is that this is suddenly on network television because the city now is grappling with the downside of the police ending one shift at 11 at night and having to start another shift at 7 in the morning. I'm not suggesting that

has anything to do with what's going on here, but they're making a connection between the effectiveness of their police force and their current scheduling or their current shift schedules, so they now have committed to sitting down to consider making some serious changes. I'm just wondering if there is something good that can come out of this.

Supervisor Sweeton – We agree with you. If there are good solutions we would love to have the good solutions. We just need to be convinced as representatives that watch not only the effectiveness of the services that we give you, but also your dollars to whether there is an overall positive benefit. Certainly if it's a clear positive benefit I think all of us, but I'm not going to speak for them, but we're open to making positive changes.

Jerry Zimmerman – We want to have the best police force to protect us that we can have.

Supervisor Sweeton – We certainly do. They work a four two shift, so that means they work four days normally and then they are off two days, which in theory gives them time to adjust. There's no question that shift work is probably very difficult. I don't question that.

Jerry Zimmerman – The way it is now some of them are required to do night work whether they prefer that or not and others who might prefer to do a night shift don't necessarily get the night shift when they want it.

Supervisor Sweeton – I don't know if that's the case, Chief?

Police Chief McGovern – Individuals have the preference, but when they took the job they knew what they were getting into.

Jerry Zimmerman – I understand that.

Police Chief McGovern – You understand a lot, but I'm explaining to you when you sign up for that kind of work that's what the work involves. You have to take that as part of the job. If in fact when a different schedule is negotiated that's all well and good, but as it stands right now that's the way it works.

Jerry Zimmerman – That's what I was getting at; they possibly could do better if there were a different system.

Supervisor Sweeton – That's one of the things we will explore. I sat down across my desk from the PBA President and told him that I certainly will learn everything I can learn about that and how it's worked and not worked in different places and we certainly will discuss that with them.

Steve Gross – Resident, Village of Warwick – I came because Jerry and I had talked about this very issue ahead of time. Since we're on the topic I thought I'd stand up and offer my personal experience in this because as soon as I learned that there are these rotating shifts once a week. It amazed me that was going on and that is the way that it is. It only makes common sense in my mind to have everyone assigned to one time of day and stick to that one time of day. I have a personal experience in this because shortly after college I had to take a job other than what we wanted and I worked at a sewer treatment plant and had the midnight shift. I worked from midnight to 10:00 a.m. four days a week. We had four days on and three days off, so I worked Monday thru Thursday all the time, but I knew what to expect, I knew what days and my body clock adjusted to doing that schedule. If I had to work four days midnight, then the next week four days daytime and then the next week work four days the night time shift I can't imagine that I would be completely discombobulated. I know just from working the midnight shift I would have not been efficient and I would have not been effective. All I was doing was operating a sewer treatment plant, but a police officer I want whoever is protecting me to be as sharp as they can be. If we're setting them up in this schedule and I appreciate your answer Michael. The answer I just heard from the Police Chief, well when they signed up they knew what they were getting into. I don't appreciate an answer like that because if it doesn't work, if it's not the best for us as citizens then it should be changed whether they signed up for it or not. I really think that it makes sense for people to know that they have the same schedule all the time, even the four days on and two days off means that they are going to be working a different four days every week. I liked what I had four days on and three days off so I had the same four days. I could plan around that and I knew that I was going to get the same sleeping hours everyday because I kept the same schedule for the three days to. I felt alert, I felt healthy and I felt able to do my job and that's the way I want our police officers to be. If it also means, by the way, instead of having the same group of guys going through these three different shifts, if it means that we assign a greater number of guys during the shifts that need more people and a lesser number during the shifts that don't need as many people, I would imagine overnight doesn't need as many as daytime or overnight may not need as many people as the weekend.

Supervisor Sweeton – It's complicated by fact that we have a contract with the Village of Warwick, which requires us to staff two people in the Village 24/7. If they choose that they want to reconfigure that's fine, but that does complicate your theory a little bit, but we're open to discussing lots of options. In the past in negotiations we have offered different scenarios that we could not come to a meeting of the minds on, perhaps now we will. I will say to you that I think we have a tremendous police department that gives our residents terrific service and I believe they are alert when they're on duty and very quick to respond to most every incident and if we can approve upon that that's certainly the goal of the Town Board, the Chief and his staff.

Steve Gross – If in the end it also means that it's more efficient money wise and if we can reallocate resources to where they're needed more if it does work that way then

I think it benefits the whole picture. My immediate reaction when I heard they are changing every week that made no sense to me and based on my own personal experience I couldn't imagine that.

David Serviss – Police Officer, Town of Warwick Police Department – At the Village Board meeting about a week and a half ago The Village Board hadn't really stated to us whether or not they were going to continue the contract that they are currently in with the Town and I was just wondering if they made a decision and if that contract would stay?

Supervisor Sweeton – The contract automatically renews October 1st unless an affirmative action of either Board occurs and neither affirmative action of either Board occurred, so that contract is in effect from October 1st for the next year. I'm not going to get into particulars with the Village because they are considering a contract discussion, but I don't think they've hid their desire to have the police cost to them be less. The Town's position is that we provide them the service they request and it is the cost of the policing. We don't charge them extra things. We don't even charge them for the space the police occupy here at Town Hall. We simply charge them for the cost of having that extra officer in their Village and as I think has been reported that cost is less then three other Villages in Orange County. I think they are getting true value for what we provide, certainly because they also do get extra service and there's no begrudging that when there's an incident our officers respond because that's what they are trained to do and that's what they should do. I think Village residents are getting a great value and is it expensive yes, but it is the cost and it is less than other municipalities. However we will attempt to do what we can to pass on savings as we did cutting other items. The Chief worked hard to cut other items in his budget, so that the budget for the police that we are presenting this year is actually less than last years budget and the Village of Warwick will be a benefit of that. They will get a portion of that savings that they can then hopefully return to their Village residents, so that's where that stands and our intention is to live up to our end of that contract and I fully expect that they will live up to theirs.

David Serviss – When I worked for the Sherriff's Office in Goshen and through my years there I worked with every agency in Orange County in some capacity and I just wanted to let the residents know what a deal they get here and how active this agency is. The reason why the crime levels stay where they are is because there's roaming patrol more than any other Town because we are out there all the time. We are not here, we are not hiding we are out in the public eye. Aggressive enforcement of vehicle in traffic and just police presence has kept the levels where they are. I just want the residents to be aware that you read the paper everyday and the crime rate is up all over the County. There's been a lot of violent crimes recently, but for the most part it's avoiding Warwick and I don't think that's an accident.

Supervisor Sweeton – Thank you and again I think we as a Board fully respect the job that we do and we tell residents all the time that we have a very safe community and that is due in large part to the job that the police department does, so we certainly appreciate that.

Marcella Gross – I do want to thank the police department for the work that they do. I remember when we had a Village police force and a Town police force and that goes back a couple of years now and the police force does a wonderful job, but I also want to make sure the citizens are well protected and the police officers are alert and well protected when they are going out with the shift changes and everything that they're body clock and everything that they need for protection of us and themselves is well protected. I hope you consider that as an issue and maybe do a different shift rotation or whatever it is that we're all protected, the police officer that's on duty and the citizen.

Peter O'Connor – Resident, Town of Warwick – I'm on the fire department in Pine Island and in my home I have a scanner with police frequencies and on many occasions I've actually heard more police dispatched to a call before my pager even goes off. More often than not they are on scene before we're even out of our bays with our trucks. That said is a benefit with the current staffing that they have with the dispatcher that they have they're capable of dispatching sooner than we are actually dispatched. When they are on scene they have the instruction of saying we need an ambulance or we need a helicopter. The average helicopter is 15 or 20 minutes to actually get there and that's again before we're even out of our bays and on the road. What Sergeant Mullins was saying the instances that he brought up are not theoretical they are actual and in one instance there was a fatal accident on County 1 in which involved two cars and the gasoline leaking from one vehicle was going down the slope toward the second vehicle and the first vehicle was on fire and the officer who was on scene was able to use his fire extinguisher from his vehicle to keep the fire at bay until Warwick and Pine Island could respond. In my opinion the kind of staffing that we have for the Warwick Police is a very efficient one and not to say that Orange 911 is not they provide a very good service, but I also think it's a benefit to have the current dispatchers that we have and the current staffing that we have because it's a very effective use.

Supervisor Sweeton – As I mentioned and I don't want to belabor the dispatching issue again, when we had to approach our unions it was facing a 30% tax increase for our residents. We worked hard and there was discussions of examining all aspects of how we do and deliver service here, but the Town Board worked very hard with the department heads to cut every nonessential dollar that they could find, so that we could preserve the jobs of the people that work here and we were successful in doing that. The issue of the dispatch is secure for the moment. It doesn't mean that you don't continually examine the cost of running government because quite frankly people are tapped out and it behooves us to do that, but we recognize the additional benefit that occurs from having that service. We are all aware of that and I thank you for your input.

Brendan Medican – Police Officer, Town of Warwick Police Department – Is the DARE Program going to stay intact for 2010 or has that been cut?

Supervisor Sweeton – I believe it's been cut.

Councilman Shuback – We are all talking about police service. We are going to have a big cut in your highway maintenance because we are not putting too much money into oil and chipping. I just hope it's a mild winter so we have money left over that we could devote to oil and chipping. We are not cutting any police service or dispatching, but we'll see what next year brings because I think we're in for a rough five years.

Lisa Pierce – I was one of the dreaded newcomers that came to Warwick about nine years ago and when we moved here one of the first things I noticed and I told everyone that unless you can hold your breath for 17 minutes you better know first aid and CPR because everybody up here is volunteer. Our first responders are the police department in Warwick and we are civilian and our issues are very real. Whether it's drug overdoses or cars in ditches we have a lot of stuff going on in this little Town. I completely appreciate the job these officers do everyday. I work prevention ed at Doc Fry and I run my own business my perspective is a little different, but the line in the sand has to be direct services to you constituents because they do a heck of a job.

ADJOURN PUBLIC HEARING: Motion Councilman Shuback, seconded Councilman Gerstner that the public hearing be closed. Motion Carried (5 ayes, 0 nays) 7:41 p.m. 11-12-09 cp.

Marjorie Quackenbush, Town Clerk