

**TOWN OF WEST SENECA
1300 Union Road
West Seneca, NY 14224**

**CITIZEN BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Minutes #2019-04
September 16, 2019**

Councilman Eugene Hart called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M. followed by a moment of silent prayer. Joseph Celeste led the Pledge of Allegiance. Councilman Hart explained the emergency procedures.

ROLL CALL: Members Present – Town Councilman Eugene Hart
Town Attorney Tina Hawthorne
William Cleary
Christopher Skalski
Maria Klaskala
Stephen Stachowski
Barbara Lipiew
David Kims
David Rogers
Joseph Celeste
Michael Yost

Not Present – Suellen McAneney
Scott Dobe
Mark Koller
Joan Lillis
Edward Lalley
Kimberly Walkow
William Josefiak

COMMUNICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Mr. Kims distributed a copy of the Cheektowaga “Supervisor’s Budget Advisory Committee” PowerPoint Presentation.

Councilman Hart said he is hoping to have a copy of the West Seneca Supervisor’s Budget by early next month.

Discussion took place about whether or not an individual can serve on the Citizen Budget Advisory Committee if they are not a citizen of West Seneca.

- Town Attorney Hawthorne said it is her opinion that a member of the committee should be a resident of West Seneca. She also mentioned that it is more important to have an organizational discussion about who on the committee has the authority to add new members to the committee.

- Councilman Hart mentioned that the Citizen Budget Advisory Committee is currently comprised of everyone who volunteered to be on the committee.

Councilman Hart also distributed a packet of expenditure budgets from different department heads. He explained that the supervisor will use these to create a Supervisor's Budget.

Mr. Celeste inquired about overtime. Councilman Hart explained that the police can usually control their overtime, but a department like Highway cannot. The Finance Department knows what the grand total of overtime was last year and will probably increase this by 5%. This does not mean that it will all be spent. It all depends on the weather.

Mr. Kims suggested that the Committee obtain or develop a worksheet similar to the worksheet created by the Town of Cheektowaga that lists overtime for each department over the past few years.

Mr. Cleary asked Mr. Kims about the effectiveness of the Cheektowaga Budget Committee Recommendation.

- Mr. Kims replied that last year, the Cheektowaga Committee made recommendations of \$2,500,000 worth of reductions and the Cheektowaga Town Board accepted \$500,000 worth of those reduction recommendations.
- Mr. Cleary mentioned that the effective results of the Committee's recommendations is reliant upon the assumption that the Cheektowaga Town Board would not have made the reductions without the committee's recommendation.

Mr. Cleary asked Councilman Hart, "In 2018, at the end of the physical year, did the Town of West Seneca end in the "black" or in the "red"? And, by how much?"

- Councilman Hart replied that he cannot remember well off the top of his head, but they did end in the black. Therefore, the Town did not over-expend their budget. The Town is making a concerted effort to reduce costs in order to replenish their fund balance. When the budget concludes on the 31st, surplus funds go into a fund balance. However, this can be wiped completely with a snow storm.

Mr. Celeste asked if the fund balance reduces the following year's tax burden.

- Councilman Hart reminded the group that years ago there was criticism against the town for using the fund balance to smooth over the tax burden because the fund balance was getting too low. Within the rules of the State Comptroller's Office, the Town still had an 11% fund balance. (That is 11% of the upcoming year's budget).
- Councilman Hart continued to say that some fund balance is restricted because it is reserved for specific expenditures. Then, there is an unappropriated fund

balance. A government can appropriate fund balance to reduce taxes if they have it. In the Town's case, they want to protect their power to borrow at lower rates so they are going through a process to build fund balance up. The Town has been successful in the past couple of years in doing so.

- The goal of their current finance director is to eliminate reliance on fund balance completely. In the Supervisor's Proposed Budget, there will only be \$250,000 allocated in the general fund to reduce taxes, which is rather low. If we continue on this path, we will eliminate the reliance altogether.
- The town also needs money for unexpected events, which are completely outside of the budget. This comes from the fund balance. To be fiscally conservative, the town is trying to build up the budget.
- Councilman Hart explained to the Committee that they will see total expenditures for the budget, revenues from other sources (like sales tax), appropriated fund balance and then taxes to be raised. That is divided out for the tax rate. The committee will see a very little appropriated fund balance compared to past years because the town is trying to build it up and create a sound balance moving forward.

Mr. Stachowski brought up the topic of setting goals for the town verses practically applying a goal, while considering the state of affairs for the town.

- Councilman Hart referenced the multiple, unpredicted floods in the town. He said it is good to set goals and they may be achievable. However, if you do not budget enough, you run the risk of a budget deficit and have to dip into savings and fund balance.
- When emergencies are declared, labor costs go up because the employees are given double time. The budget gets used very quickly during emergencies for this reason.

Councilman Hart explained that the state comptroller has a measure of financial stress. If a fund balance for a municipality got to 5% or below, the Town is in "financial stress". If it is at 25% or more of your next year's appropriation, the State Comptroller's Office wants you to spend that money in order to reduce taxes. The Town of West Seneca is about in the middle at this time.

Mr. Kims asked when "double time" goes into effect.

- Councilman Hart replied that this happens the hour that an emergency is declared.
- Mr. Kims asked why the Town would ever declare an emergency.
- Councilman Hart replied that the town rarely ever does, and it is usually the Governor or the County Executive that declares the emergency.

Mr. Kims asked what the Town Board can do when a Department Head is not doing a good enough job.

- Councilman Hart said the Town Board can make a change and usually that Department Head is moved back into their civil service position and another employee is put in their place.
- Councilman Hart emphasized that once the Highway Department is given their budget, the Highway Superintendent has full control of it.
- Town Attorney Hawthorne pointed out that some department heads are union, so you would have to follow the disciplinary procedures set forth in their contract before you ever could get to termination.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMITTEE

Councilman Hart explained that it is the choice of the committee who will be the Chair of the Citizen Budget Advisory Committee. Councilman Hart said he will serve as long as the group would like him to, but he can probably only be present until December. He strongly recommended the Committee select a member to be the Chair. He asked if there were any comments, input or a nomination.

Mr. Rogers did not feel there were enough people to select a chairperson.

- Town Attorney Hawthorne said everyone was put on notice that the selection of a chairperson was going to be put on the agenda.
- Councilman Hart said that there are nine (9) people present out of sixteen (16), so the committee has a quorum.
- Town Attorney Hawthorne asked how many people were present at the last meeting.
- Secretary Greenan clarified that there were also nine (9) people present at the last meeting.

Town Attorney Hawthorne suggested the committee might want to consider an interim chairperson for Councilman Hart until December 31st.

Mr. Cleary is wondering what recommended the Citizen Budget Advisory Committee can make that the residents of West Seneca will accept for a reduction in services. He wants to look at the budget from a different perspective to see what can be done to make reductions.

Councilman Hart passed around an example of an account: the "Automobile Parts in the Highway Department". The document includes the detail that makes up a singular line item in the budget.

Councilman Hart explained that the Committee will have a better understanding when they see the Supervisor's Report in a few weeks. The committee can compare what was recommended and come up with what they may think is a better alternative. For example, the committee can discuss whether the town should purchase or lease police cars.

Cleary asked if the West Seneca Police Department is proactive or reactive, in terms of response to crime.

- Councilman Hart said sometimes crime happens and the police have to react to it, but he believes the police are constantly being trained in proactive policing.
- Mr. Cleary asked if we want all the cars patrolling, or do we want them to sit in a location unknown to the public so that they can respond from certain areas of the town.
- Mr. Celeste said we want just enough, and it's hard to know what enough is. He said it is not our role to decide that. He said it is the role of the committee to determine the best way to purchase the cars that the Department Head thinks he needs, and if it is at all possible, save any money in the process.

Mr. Skalski suggested bringing an individual in from Enterprise from the county to see what is being done.

- Town Attorney Hawthorne reported that this has already been done. The town has also spoken with DeLacy to compare their pricing with Enterprise Leasing.
- Mr. Celeste asked what other communities are doing.
- Tina replied that Erie County is using Fleet Management.
- Mr. Skalski asked how it was concluded.
- Tina explained how it was tabled because there needed to be additional research and they did not want to tie a future board into a long-term program.
- Mr. Skalski asked if the Committee can extend an invitation to someone from Enterprise to continue the discussion. (Town Attorney Hawthorne and Councilman Hart said yes and that Mr. Jaworski would probably be happy to come in.)

Mr. Stachowski said he thinks there is still a disconnect within the committee regarding the purpose of the committee.

- Councilman Hart mentioned that he has created a proposed mission which is also an agenda item.
- Town Attorney Hawthorne said that a mission may be different than a strategic plan, which she believes to be what Mr. Stachowski is referring.

Councilman Hart said it sounds like the committee will not be selecting a new chair at tonight's meeting. He asked Mr. Cleary if he can lead a subcommittee to work on developing a mission or vision using his experience in the federal government to decide what is appropriate for the group.

Mr. Celeste pointed out that the role of the Committee is to be advisory to the Town Board.

Mr. Cleary asked who is willing to work with him to develop a mission statement and vision statement for the next meeting. Town Attorney Hawthorne reminded the group

that there needs to be less than nine (9) people on the sub-committee. Mr. Stachoski, Mr. Skalski, Mr. Cleary, and Mr. Rogers will be members of the subcommittee.

Mr. Stachoski said if the mission and vision are defined by next meeting, hopefully the committee can then better define the specific goals of the committee.

Mr. Celeste asked the Committee if they want Councilman Hart to lead the group until December 31st.

- Councilman Hart said his hope was that the committee would select a new chairperson, but that he is happy to help lead for a couple more meetings if the group wants him to. He would still be present at most of the meetings as a Liaison to the Town Board. He added that the Town Attorney will probably not be present at upcoming meetings, unless there is a legal issue.
- Mr. Cleary said the committee needs to select a chairman at the next meeting. Mr. Cleary added that the subcommittee will also create a list of proposed duties for the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson.

Mr. Skalski asked Councilman Hart for the contact information of Mr. Joworski.

COMMENTS OF THE PUBLIC

A Resident pointed out that the Cheektowaga Budget Advisory Committee meets with the Supervisor before she creates her proposed budget.

- Town Attorney Hawthorne said she does not think this committee feels ready to do that at this time, but they certainly can, if they would like to.
- The resident suggested the committee might even give the Supervisor areas to look at as she is working on the budget.
- Tina Hawthorne said their Budget Director that leads the Cheektowaga Committee might be a good contact for which the committee to connect.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr. Yost, seconded by Mr. Cleary to adjourn the meeting at 8:57 p.m.

Ayes: All

Noes: None

Motion Carried



Amelia S. Greenan

Secretary to the Citizen Budget Advisory Committee