



**MAYOR & COUNCIL  
THE BOROUGH OF PEAPACK & GLADSTONE,  
BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES  
SPECIAL BUDGET MEETING MARCH 20, 2024**

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The special budget meeting of the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Peapack & Gladstone was held on Wednesday, March 20, 2024 virtually via the Go To Meeting Conferencing System and began at 6:07 p.m.

Mayor Corigliano called the meeting to order. Borough Clerk Nancy A. Bretzger read the Sunshine Notice "Pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, Adequate notice of this meeting was published in the Courier News and Bernardsville News on March 7, 2024 and posted at the Municipal Complex and the Borough Library. Action may be taken."

Mayor Corigliano led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call indicated the following present:

Present: Councilwoman Murphy, Councilman Quartello, Councilman Silva, Councilwoman Sueta, Council President Sweeney, Councilwoman Weible, Mayor Corigliano

Also present were: Olu Ochei, CFO, Police Chief Steve Ferrante, Brad Fagen, DPW Director, Ed Badger, Fire Chief

**PUBLIC COMMENTS – 5 MINUTES PER PERSON – NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

No one came forward.

**Opening Comments**

Mayor Corigliano stated Councilman Quartello will be taking over some of the meeting tonight. This will be good training for him to know the process. Mayor Corigliano gave a brief recap of the Budget process for Councilman Silva and Councilwoman Sueta. The budgets to be reviewed include Municipal Operations, Sewer Utility Operations, Recreation (Trust Fund), a new component, Capital Expenditures and Salaries. These budgets were established by the Department heads and the Finance Committee.

**Appropriations**

There was discussion on the Records Retention line item under the Clerk's office. Nancy Bretzger explained that it is for a new program she is considering for storing some of our documents off site. This would be a service when we needed a document they would pull it and scan it to us. They would pull the document and scan per request. The cost would be prohibitive to have all archive files scanned in advance. After the initial fee, the annual fees would be approximately \$10,000 a year. After discussion, it was decided to remove this from the budget and revisit in a year.

**General Administration**

Councilwoman Sueta asked about the actual vs. the requested for Affordable Housing and the large disparity.

Mayor Corigliano stated there is a disparity because we do not know what to expect with Affordable Housing. The \$20,000 was used in the past and we might get hit again this year. He said with round four coming this year we may be in litigation especially with what was passed yesterday by the State and he feels this is a conservation number.

Councilwoman Murphy asked about the line item Professional Services. The disparity is due to the hiring of a temporary employee at the beginning of 2023.



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**Other Departments**

Councilman Sweeney asked if it makes more sense to move the purchase of new vehicles for the police department to capital. They don't purchase one every year and it would keep their operating budget from fluctuating. Mayor Corigliano feels it makes more sense to keep it in the operating budget.

Mayor Council President Sweeney asked about the large number for stormwater regulation. Brad Fagen, Director of DPW said this is for professional services to go out to have all the storm water pipes mapped on GIS. This is a State mandate.

The increase for Public Buildings and Grounds is for professional services for the architecture at the Park House and the elevator at the municipal building.

Councilwoman Sueta asked about the tree Service and beautification and wanted to know if it relates to Liberty Park? Mayor Corigliano explained it is for the cost to handle trees that have to be cut down. We need to hire a contractor to come in and take trees down mostly around the roadways. Councilwoman Sueta asked if JCP&L can come out and help with tree maintenance. It was stated that they usually only come out when the branches are hanging over the wires. Brad Fagan stated that a lot of it has to do with the Ash trees coming down.

Councilwoman Sueta asked about the natural gas cost and the large disparity from last year. Mayor Corigliano explained that in prior years the costs were in the \$20,000 range which is lower than last year but we do not know what the gas markets will do this year. It was decided to cut a little bit from the \$25,000 to \$20,000.

Waste Disposal it was decided to bump it to \$85,000. Nancy Bretzger stated that we are going out to bid so we won't know what the numbers are going to be going forward.

The total Appropriations is \$7,333,586.33.

Mayor Corigliano said that this amount is more than last year and that is because last year we received approximately \$270,000 from the American Recovery Act which went towards buying the new rescue truck. If you take the one-time grant out of our budgeted appropriations, our budget last year is \$6.95million this year we are at \$7.33million. Overall our expenses went up roughly \$300,000 this year.

**Sewer Utility**

It was explained that this budget is not taxpayer dollars but are dollars that are collected only from the sewer users.

Mayor Corigliano stated in order to make the sewer balance this year he had to take out a contribution to the sewer capital fund and his recommendation is to skip putting money in there for this year only. There is about north of \$700,000 in there and we are going to be spending a chunk of that this year. He did this primarily to have the budget balance. He recommended that there be an ordinance to increase base fees for both residential and business use effective next year.

**Recreation Trust Fund**

This year the Finance Committee along with the Finance Director created a recreation budget.

Mayor Corigliano stated that recreation operates out of a trust fund and is not part of the municipal budget and because we do not have a commission any longer we now have a recreation committee and he and Councilman Quartello sat down with the Recreation Director and they created a budget. Finance will be tracking it to ensure conformity but it is not a typical budget like the others. It is good housekeeping to do this. Currently there will be a deficit if all the activities occur but it will be funded by the Recreation Trust Fund. Currently there is about \$80,000 in the Recreation Trust Fund.





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**Salary and Wages**

Mayor Corigliano said that the existing salaries for 2023 are what they are. The decisions the Council has to make is how much and what kind of percentage of raise do you want to give to our employees. In the past this was dependent upon a review but this process stopped a few years back and need to be reinstated. The other decision is to approve an increase in the base range for the laborers in DPW from \$40,000 to \$41,000.

It was agreed by Council to give a 4% increase across the board. They feel that this is appropriate for 2024 and there has been less turnover and salaries are more competitive than in past years.

John Sweeney spoke on the salary for the Police Chief position. He would like to see the base salary go up from \$138,000 to \$158,000 so we can be competitive with surrounding towns. He prepared a spreadsheet and compared adding 2.5% for 5 years to \$138,000 and 2.5% to 158,000 for 5 years and the differential was \$40,000.

Mayor Corigliano said since they just approved the 4% increase across the board which would bring the Chief's salary up to \$144,400 including longevity, he suggested they take some time to discuss this and if we feel this is the right thing to do it can be approved after the budget is approved. He also said he would like to see comparisons with other towns that have similar populations to Peapack & Gladstone.

Councilman Quartello suggested an increase in the stipend that DPW employees who respond to EMT calls get. Currently they get \$500. Which is a flat amount. It has not been raised since 1994. He would like to see it increased to \$750.00. Council agree to raising it to the \$750.00.

**Capital Budget**

**General Capital**

\$160,000 phase one roof overlay that would cover the library only. It is an overlay on the current roof system and it will extend the longevity of the roof. It was asked if this overlay would hold solar panels as discussed.

Council President Sweeney said that a few years back we had looked into this with the County and it turned out that the little amount of tile we could get on the roof was not going to generate a significant amount of electricity.

Councilman Quartello stated knowing what our electrical costs are and the cost to install and maintain the solar panels, we probably wouldn't see any saving for about 20 years. If we had the on and off-peak pricing such as California, it might make sense but, in this area, it is a flat kilowatt rate which doesn't make sense.

It was agreed to complete phase one of the roofing project for this year.

**Upgrading the server**

The current server for Municipal and the Police Department is coming to its end of life and therefore we need to budget for an upgrade. Its estimated around \$20,500. He and Nancy do not feel this is our best option and are now looking into a full cloud service or cloud-based server and cloud-based storage and we can switch over to a full one drive storage system for our productivity files. The price will be close to the \$20,500 but we need to budget for it. This is more secure than locally based equipment. We could get one more year but the bottom line is we do need to upgrade our technology. This move includes cybersecurity upgrades as well. If we make this move, we will not ever need another server. Currently there are 3 towns in the County that are on the cloud and a couple of other towns are looking into it. Council agrees to budget for this.

**Emergency Services equipment**



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Councilman Corigliano explained the County wants us to upgrade from one band of radios for our fire department to another band. The cost is approximately \$600,000. There has been pushback on this from him and some other Mayors and they feel the county should contribute. He had a conversation with one of the County Commissioners and she was not aware of it and promised him she would take action and get back to him. He also had a conversation with five other mayors in Somerset Hills and they are having the same issue with spending this type of money. This is an unfunded mandate, but acknowledged that we will need to pay for something. Further, we are looking at a fire truck four years from now at a million plus dollars so his plan is to set aside \$250,000 a year over the next four years to pay for the fire truck. But in that line item have the flexible that if we do need to lay out money for the radio upgrade we can take it from this line item.

Nancy Bretzger stated that she did have a municipal managers' meeting today with the County Administrator who came right out and said the County will not be funding any of the radios. But they are looking to a combined bond which the county would buy all the radio for everybody and then for everyone who needs them lease it back to us. The County Administrator will be getting all the information and sending it out. They have to reach \$5 million in order to get the bond.

Nancy Bretzger stated the issue with this is that by 2026 the 500 MHZ radios will no longer have any maintenance on them so that is why the County has to go to 700 MHZ.

Mayor Corigliano stated that this matter is not yet settled but either way in terms of capital allocation for this year we are going to try to keep this line it flexible which give flexibility for the future.

**DPW Roads and Street**

There is a truck that needs the bed replace. Instead of doing a full replacement of the truck costing \$220,000, it was decided to extend the life of it by 10 to 15 years and just replace the bed that is corroded Council approved this.

Council approves DPW Paving projects. Main Street Crosswalk and bump out at Willow was also approved

**Sewer**

Brad Fagan explained the 4-1 bucket as an attachment that is able to open up instead of being a fixed bucket. You are able to put the bucket towards the ground and scoop it up and the bucket works in conjunction with the excavator. Council approves this.

Manhole and pipelining. This has to deal with infiltration of ground water into our system and this is to stop and lower our cost of treating water. By doing this we stop the infiltration of ground water in certain areas which means less cost of treatment.

Next discussed with the Treatment Facility Upgrade. We have a grant but now we need to pay a portion. Bedminster and Far Hills have a share as well.

**Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund**

The tennis courts, geese remediation and Highland Avenue trail engineering were discussed. Funding would come from the Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund. Council approved.

**Revenues and the Projected Tax Rate**

**Sewer**

With all that being discussed, the numbers are based on actual for sewer so these are revenues from sewer and they are projecting \$1.01 million in revenues from sewer fees. They are expecting some money on interest on back bills, miscellaneous revenue, and pulling \$360,000 from the fund balance for a total of \$1.34 million which is very close to the appropriations that have been approved earlier.





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On the Municipal side, there are different revenues that come from alcohol beverage fees, miscellaneous fees collected, the police department, zoning and construction. The switching to First Bank last year has really paid off in increased interest earned. We get a grant from the state for the Energy Tax receipts, a small amount from miscellaneous revenues, anticipating collecting \$100,000 in taxes that people defaulted on in the past and pulling the same amount of last year of \$1.7 million. Taking the number from the municipal side and subtracting it from the total appropriations we are looking at a tax levy for municipal purposes of \$4.65 million dollars. We need to raise taxes \$4.6 million.

Mayor Corigliano said that our total tax levy is determined from collecting taxes in six areas. They are Municipal Purposes, Municipal Open Space, Regional School District, County purpose, County Library and County Open Space. We collect money to operate these. These numbers are an estimate based on last year's actual. He is projecting a total tax levy of \$14.97 million dollars or a tax rate of 1.72.

Our assessor provided him with 2024 assessment numbers and this year we are assessing our taxable renewables at \$860 million. These numbers include the recent settlement with Pfizer. The average residential property to assess in this town is \$875,000. Last year was \$827,000 which indicates a substantial increase in the value of properties in the Borough.

For the total tax cost, the average house paid \$14,710 in total taxes last year; this year it is expected it will be \$15,069. There will be a tax increase of approximately \$300 on an average household of \$875,000.

**Final Comments** – Mayor Corigliano and Councilman Quartello thanked staff members, Borough Clerk/Administration Nancy Bretzger and CFO Olu Ochei for their efforts in putting the budget together, keeping things running smoothly, and keeping taxes down.

No public comment on the budget.

There being no other matters to be addressed by the Governing Body at this time, a motion was made by Council President Sweeney, seconded by Councilwoman Murphy, that this meeting be adjourned at 8:00p.m. This motion was carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy A. Bretzger, Borough Clerk