

TOWN OF NEW BALTIMORE
COUNTY OF GREENE
PUBLIC HEARING ON 2015 BUDGET
November 10, 2014 - Page 1

Draft 12/2/14
Approved 1/12/15

Supervisor Dellisanti opened the Public Hearing at 6 PM and read:

"Notice is hereby given that the Town Board of the Town of New Baltimore will hold a Public Hearing on Monday, November 10, 2014 at 6 PM at Town Hall, 3809 County Route 51, Hannacroix, NY to hear those members of the public who wish to be heard regarding the 2015 Preliminary Budget. The Regular Board Meeting will be held at 7 PM. A copy of the proposed budget is available for public inspection in the Town Clerk's office of the Town of New Baltimore, 3809 County Route 51, Hannacroix, NY 12087. Proposed salary figures of elected officials are as follows: Town Council (4) \$4,100, Town Justice (2) \$10,610, Town Supervisor \$7,925, Tax Collector \$6,430, Town Clerk \$29,136, Superintendent of Highways \$53,530. By Order of the Town Board, Barbara M. Finke, Town Clerk"

Supervisor Dellisanti stated the only thing I do ask of any of the speakers tonight to please go to the podium so we get all the records on the tape machines because we have been missing a few coming from the audience. So the first person to speak is Ellie.

Ellie Alfeld said there are a couple of things first of all that I would like to discuss about the budget. I saw a listing for the Confidential Secretary for the Supervisor. However, in past times the name of that Confidential Secretary was listed and it was omitted in this one. Do we have a person by name?

Supervisor Dellisanti answered we do not at this time.

Ellie Alfeld continued so we are holding that operation open.

Supervisor Dellisanti answered correct.

Ellie Alfeld responded thank you. When figuring the budget for revenue, has the Board taken into consideration that we have lost almost 200 acres or more of taxable property within the Town, that is the Armstrong property, the Brundage property, and I believe there's even more than, I'm not completely sure of, but I do know that it was discussed. And I understand that these properties are again Scenic Hudson. We are losing our Town to Scenic Hudson. As it stands now, the Brundage property was an ideal location if we were ever to get a residential development near the Hamlet because of its proximity to the sewer district. We have lost that, I understand the complete and total package which is at least 100 acres, the Armstrong property was another 80 acres +/-, and I believe like I said there are others. If in fact Scenic Hudson is going to be taking us over, are they going to be paying any taxes? I understood or was told that they are tax-exempt. If that is the case, I would like to know that I am not welcoming Scenic Hudson because I am going to be paying for them to sit on property in my Town that we have no availability of. So can anybody tell me?

Councilman Ruso replied I can answer some of this. First and foremost you are absolutely correct, they are tax-exempt organizations. As such, they don't get taxed, property taxes or otherwise. The Town Budget doesn't give any consideration to, the Town Budget is based upon the needs of the Town. What happens when a Town property becomes tax-exempt, the burden that was otherwise paid by that property now is shared equally based upon your assessment to all the taxpayers in the Town. Now, the Armstrong property alone was \$19,000 that is no longer, that the Town taxpayers must make up because they're tax-exempt. The Brundage property, I don't recall what that assessment is, I don't think it was as much as the Armstrong property. The list goes on, I know there were other properties down on River Road, some smaller parcels that have also gone there. I understand they have their sights on additional properties as well and every time a taxable property is purchased by a tax-exempt, it costs the Town taxpayers.

Ellie Alfeld added it costs you, me, and everybody in this room.

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Councilman Ruso continued in essence, for the Armstrong property, that cost the Town taxpayers \$20,000 a year for that walking trail, that parcel. And again the Brundage, I don't know, Diane do you know what the property value is on that offhand?

Tax Collector Jordan answered no.

Councilman Ruso pointed out I looked it up and I don't remember.

Ellie Alfeld remarked I understand you not being able to answer that, but I want to make the public aware that we in fact are funneling our tax dollars to support the takeovers of Scenic Hudson. We in fact have enough tax burden as it is and every time they come in to buy another piece of property, what you people have to do is figure out how you are going to spread all the expenses over less and less people who have to pay more and more.

Councilman Ruso replied correct 100% and we don't get informed of this and of course if you are a property owner, and you are trying to sell your property, and you sell it to the highest bidder one would think typically, at least I would, and we can't tell them that they can't bid on a property.

Ellie Alfeld said but also be aware of the fact that if you or Chris or Nick or I choose to start to sell our property here in New Baltimore, we are going to have more and more difficulty doing it because now our taxes are going up to cover these people who have come in. And it would behoove us to know what are they going to do with the Brundage property.

Councilman Ruso stated don't know.

Ellie Alfeld asked so do we have availability of its use or does Scenic Hudson tell us we can't go on it?

Councilman Ruso noted they claim that all their lands are open to the public. Nevertheless, they have the right to say no if they want to as the property owner.

Ellie Alfeld added and the only reason I will pick on you for this thing, Jeff, they may say that we have the availability of going on that land, but there was nothing heard in this room about the purchase of the property, nothing has been said. And if people didn't whisper in my ear a lot of things, I would not have known it had been sold. I knew about the other property down on 61 that was possibly being looked at and being taken over.

Councilman Ruso clarified if I could add a point. Most of Scenic Hudson's monies are provided by tax dollars from grants from the state and the federal government. So in essence your tax dollars are being used to buy property that is now tax-exempt.

Ellie Alfeld continued and Scenic Hudson five years from now can sell that property to the State of New York for a bundle of money and walk around again with a handful of money to be used to acquire more property, but I just want to get it out so everybody knows. The Brundage property is gone. We have no more forward look to ever developing in that area and it's a shame, it really was. The thing I was asking about our being able to be using this Brundage property, many people may not realize that at one point in time, that was our Town Park. It was under the understanding by Mrs. Brundage that our kids could use that Park. We had steak roasts there by the Fire Company, we had playground equipment there, the parents supervised it, the kids did the painting, repairing, the raking, the shoveling. They took care of the whole Park. What I am suggesting is this. If in fact they are going to be taking over this land, I think we should ask for the right to be using it as a Park and maybe be able to sell District 1 Park so that we can regain some monies back to us that we are losing out on.

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Councilman Ruso remarked well just to add a third point to this, I know that you have heard it before, forgive me it may be Open Space instead of Scenic Hudson, but we lease property to them for \$1 a year down on the River in addition to that. I don't know if you knew that.

Ellie Alfeld answered I did. I'm just at a loss that you guys are going to be sitting up there wanting a paycheck and there's not going to be enough of us out here to be able to afford to give it to you at the rate that our lands are being taken over. But that was a point and thank you very much for that. The other thing that I wanted to bring to your attention I want to question is this. I questioned a member of the Board about a cut in hours for some of the Clerks and the Code Enforcement Officer. I was told at the time that the hours had not been cut, that it was a matter of the budget and the gas mileage in that capacity. I'm not questioning the answer I got, however, if we do not enforce the Codes that we have on the books, we don't need any more Codes, we've got to enforce the ones that we've got. We can't afford to cut back on the Code Enforcement to the degree that the Town goes to hell in a handbag. It has some issues as it is now based on the laws that are on our books that are not being addressed. He can't do it if he can't get out there and drive. Also, he is the Building Inspector. We want to get taxes, we've got to have building and in order to do that we want to keep our assessment rolls to the best capacity they can be and, therefore, I think that it might be like cutting off your nose to spite your face by cutting back on his mileage. But at the same time I question the idea about the lunch hours. You have the Handbook coming up I know. It's my understanding that the lunch hours are now going to be without pay. If that is the case, then we are in fact cutting the income for our Clerks. Our Clerks now that I am aware of do at least two and sometimes three jobs. If these Clerks leave you, each one will tell you without a moment of doubt that it takes a good memory and history to do the job. They have to know what went before them, is in front of them, and to look forward to what's coming. If we can't keep staff, we are going to be in a pickle so I really don't think, if you are going to have no pay lunches, I understand that, but then give them a half-hour, start at 8:30 instead of 9 or give them a 4:30 instead of 4 to make up that difference in money. I don't know if that happened to the Highway gentlemen, but if it is I would expect that we did the same thing for them. You are cutting their pay one way or another because it's not what you say, it's what's goes in my pocket when I go home. So I would ask that you consider that thought again not that you do away with your unpaid lunch, give them that extra half hour in their workday. And finally I wanted to mention to you that I think congratulations are in order from this Board when it comes to Lisa Fisher who is from New Baltimore and now is the Judge here for this area, 4-5 counties that are in?

Supervisor Dellisanti and Councilman Ruso responded 7.

Ellie Alfeld asked is it 7? But she did fantastic. I checked with Board of Election and she got twice the votes that her opponent did so I think she did very well. And that's it for the budget.

Supervisor Dellisanti responded thank you and introduced Mr. Kemnah.

Kevin Kemnah asked on the second page of your budget under A2705, Donations and Gifts, I see zeros. I was just wondering what happened to the \$10,000 gift from Mr. and Mrs. Loux?

Councilman Ruso replied Bonnie must have put it someplace else.

Supervisor Dellisanti remarked I can assure you it was deposited, that I can tell you.

Ellie Alfeld added you also have a donation from the Fire Company.

Supervisor Dellisanti continued it is not going to go in the building area. I don't know where the bookkeeper put it, but it is in there. I know it was deposited because I did it personally myself.

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Kevin Kemnah asked can you find out?

Supervisor Dellisanti suggested I will get back to you on that, not a problem.

Kevin Kemnah said my second question is, they mentioned it at one of the previous meetings about the Town Highway Department plowing the Cornell Fire Department. 1. Tonight I asked you and you all told me that the fire departments own their own property, the building, and all the equipment, so, therefore, to me essentially that's private property. I as a taxpayer do not want to see my taxes paid to a Highway Department going on private property unless they are ready to plow my driveway and every other resident's driveway in the Town for the same thing that we are paying taxes for. Cornell's budget is more than twice Medway's. Medway can afford to hire a plow coming in and taking care of their driveway. Therefore, I would say Cornell can more than afford, especially known that they just purchased a \$600,000 truck, and if any damage occurs, then the Town is going to be responsible for the liability because you are on private property. So I would like to see that the Highway Department is not going to plow the other fire departments.

Supervisor Dellisanti explained as of right now we have an Intermunicipal Agreement with the Fire Department and we will be plowing. They don't have the money in their budget for plowing this year and we are not double taxing the residents to do that. The Governor and the Comptroller have asked us to do and also comply with Intermunicipal Agreements to divert double taxation and that's what we've been trying to do. We are also going to be doing another Intermunicipal Agreement with the Village and Town of Coxsackie later on in 2015 with an Animal Control Officer so we can have an Animal Control Officer in all three areas when someone is not available to take care of the situation. This is what the government in Albany is asking us to do and this is what we are doing.

Kevin Kemnah stated first of all I really don't care what Andrew Cuomo asks anybody, number one. Number two, I pay taxes along with 909 other taxpayers who are in the Medway-Grapeville District. Now all special districts --fire, the lighting, the sewer -- have to pay, the people in those areas have to pay for their special districts. So can you tell me how my tax dollars that I am paying are not going to be used for Mr. Jordan and his crew to plow that department? And if so, what possibly are they going to do for us that they aren't already doing for this Agreement?

Supervisor Dellisanti pointed out your tax dollars are also plowing the parking lot for the Conservancy as well that we take care of. Isn't that correct Denis?

Highway Superintendent Jordan responded yes.

Superintendent Dellisanti agreed that's correct.

Councilwoman Benway explained I think what Mr. Kemnah is saying though is if you are living in Medway's District on your tax bill is the Medway Fire Department tax and if you are living so technically if you are in Medway's District, it does feel like you are getting taxed for both fire departments to be plowed.

Councilman Ruso noted I wasn't involved, but I know that Medway was offered the same Intermunicipal Agreement.

Councilwoman Benway replied and I believe they turned it down.

Councilman Ruso added they decided otherwise.

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Supervisor Dellisanti advised they haven't responded.

Councilman Ruso commented I wasn't there when they decided, but I believe so. The other part about being on private property, it's not the same unfortunately as you or I. It is a taxable organization, a fire department, so it is considered a municipal, that's not the right word, but it is a government agency that has public hearings just like we have and so it's not quite the same as private ownership. They own the property that is correct, but it's not private ownership as your property or my own property.

Kevin Kemnah continued okay but that still doesn't show the fact that my tax dollars that I am paying to the Town for the Highway Department to take care of my roads is now being used for something that I have nothing to do with.

Councilman Ruso replied I know and I am aware of it.

Kevin Kemnah said I would like to see that that does not happen.

Supervisor Dellisanti responded thanks for your comment, I appreciate it and called on Mr. Jenny.

Nicholas Jenny stated I just wanted to come and talk a little about the budget, not too much, there's not much to say because I've always when somebody first asks me about the budget, I'm like well they don't do anything in this budget so there's not a whole lot to say. Basically they take care of the highways and... I do have a few comments. A lot of it is sort of presentational so you can take it or leave that, but there are a few things. One is you are showing the use of unexpended fund balance which I think is fine. What you don't show here is how much fund balance you have and I think it would just be useful in this document or someplace to have that information. I happen to know that it is ample, so again I don't think this is a problem as long as you don't run it down too much, using fund balance in the budget is fine. And there is some other things, I just think the overall look of this could probably be improved and actually and I don't know if anybody is interested in working on that. I know this has been sort of the format that has been used for a very long time now. But I think it could be made clearer in some ways. It happens that in my job I do a lot of Excel stuff and if anybody wants assistance with that, I would be perfectly happy to do it, you know give you a little free time as a taxpayer, make it look a little bit better and clearer. And otherwise I think I would second the idea that we should make sure we pay our Clerks enough. I think that's important. It's a hard job. I've only interacted with the people in the Town a few times, for a few things, but they are here and they work hard and it's not a job where you get a lot of thanks, so at least make sure they are paid decently and somewhat in line with what similar people are being paid in other places. And other than that, I was looking at some of the, probably more in the Highway Fund area, I was noticing there were some cuts. One of them was snow removal contractual which actually concerned me at first because I'm like 'well you never know how much it is going to snow,' but then I'm also seeing that we were way below last year and last year was kind of a snowy year so it seems like the estimate was too high before.

Supervisor Dellisanti added I'm glad you picked that up.

Nicholas Jenny observed so that was interesting and actually I was you know at first I was like well wait a minute what are they doing then I was like okay well that kind of makes sense. So I think otherwise the smaller funds, there's not very much that goes on there. That's all I really have to say.

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Supervisor Dellisanti noted thank you very much. I would be remiss if I didn't say this. I want to thank the entire Board for all their efforts in putting this budget together. There were numerous hours that took place and I think you can see just how difficult it was with all the mandates that took place. Special thanks to Mr. Ruso and Mr. Norris for their expertise and the extra hours that they put in and the calculations on every line that was in this budget and it was truly a team effort and I appreciate it personally. So thank you all very much.

Betty Kemnah said I have a couple questions.

Councilman Ruso responded come on up.

Supervisor Dellisanti observed I didn't see you on my list, I apologize.

Betty Kemnah replied I didn't put it on the list. Can you explain what the employee health and dental reimbursement is?

Councilman Ruso asked what line item are you talking about?

Betty Kemnah answered A2771.

Councilman Ruso responded yes, that is monies received from both employees and/or retirees for their portion of the health and dental.

Betty Kemnah replied okay so it is like them paying part of the premium?

Councilman Ruso explained well, we have one person who is on COBRA right now and that pays the entire premium as well as there are a few members of the Town, Town employees, who pay a portion as well and some retirees pay a portion as well, actually spouses of retirees, I believe we have two that I can think of offhand, are paying some into that so they have to send a check each month.

Betty Kemnah said thank you. Under contractual expenses, does that line item mean dues, meetings, classes, mileage, and hotels and dinners, it just seems to be a catch-all.

Supervisor Dellisanti asked which one are you looking at?

Betty Kemnah answered it's under a whole bunch of them.

Councilman Ruso clarified well, it varies, it's basically nonpersonnel cost. So when it says Buildings, as a point, Contractual, that includes the heat, the lights, and of the like. It's non-personnel related, it's not quite we all get to go to parties or anything that resembles that. It is nonpersonnel like salt and diesel fuel are under contractual expenses.

Councilman Norris explained what it costs to operate that department.

Councilman Ruso added aside from personnel.

Betty Kemnah asked your unallocated insurance for \$28,000, is that for A1910.4? It's under your General Fund.

Councilman Ruso answered yes, that is our Town liability insurance.

Supervisor Dellisanti pointed out that's Trident.

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Betty Kemnah commented well usually unallocated means it's just sitting there waiting for somebody to do something with.

Councilman Ruso answered I know, government terminology, sorry about that.

Betty Kemnah replied that's okay. Your Safety Inspection Personal Services. Is that actually a person?

Councilmen Ruso and Norris responded yes.

Betty Kemnah asked is it the Code Enforcer, the Building Inspector, or all that rolled up in one.

Many responded yes.

Betty Kemnah continued your Hospital Medical Insurance, your General Fund says it is \$80,000 and your Highway Fund is \$112,000. Last year, I know Susan and Lisa both worked on it and they said that they were starting a townwide thing that you were moving toward a higher deductible plan.

Many responded we did that already.

Betty Kemnah asked you did, to lower your annual premiums. Last year it was \$36,000, is it being used again this year?

Councilman Ruso answered roughly the same plan

Betty Kemnah questioned is it saving us about the same dollar amount?

Supervisor Dellisanti noted it is the same plan.

Councilwoman Benway explained the same plan as last year. The Affordable Care Act has, we had said at the one meeting, our health insurance where I work went up 140% because we actually got hit with two rate increases from when we renew and the Town only got hit with one of them.

Betty Kemnah said now we have our insurance through CDPHP. Didn't they just approve them for a way lower premium increase than they were requesting?

Councilwoman Benway answered that I don't know the answer; I would have to ask Erin.

Councilman Ruso stated I don't know.

Betty Kemnah suggested well every year, Lisa can help out being in the Insurance industry...

Councilwoman Benway pointed out I don't do health insurance though.

Betty Kemnah asked but don't they request an annual premium increase and it has to be approved through New York State?

Councilman Ruso agreed that is correct.

Betty Kemnah mentioned I thought I had read somewhere that they had asked for a certain dollar amount and that was cut way back from what they asked for.

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Councilwoman Benway added then I'm excited about that, I did not hear about that.

Betty Kemnah suggested I'll have to look up the paperwork and maybe bring it into Nick

Councilwoman Benway noted but I know that the health insurance carriers are only allowed to have a certain percentage of profit. For some reason the 4% is what's in my mind for what percentage they are allowed to have for profit. Anything above that, they are supposed to refund to their customers. So maybe that would be why that New York State said well you came in at 6% instead so you cannot have the rate increase you were looking for. But like I said I have not heard anything about that.

Ellie Alfeld commented I believe it was in the *Times Union*.

Betty Kemnah responded I will have to double check on that.

Councilman Norris asked is that for 2015 or 2016?

Councilman Ruso answered if that is the issue because part of it has to do with the timing of the plan and when it starts.

Councilwoman Benway stated we renew here December 1.

Councilman Ruso added we renew December 1 so the offering that we have on December 1 that we are going to pick up on December 1 is reflective of things that happened almost a year ago. Now I think it was pointed out at the last Board meeting or the meeting last year, that we were fortunate to get in under the wire because there were a lot of changes as of January 1 and our plan starts on December 1 that we got away with. And the same thing is also true this year because there are things for 2015 if you are renewing in 2015 that won't be nice and we will have to worry about it for next December.

Supervisor Dellisanti and Councilman Norris responded for 2016.

Betty Kemnah asked how many of our employees are actually enrolled in our health insurance?

Councilwoman Benway explained we can't actually say that. Due to privacy laws, we cannot say who or what.

Betty Kemnah replied I was asking who, just a number.

Councilwoman Benway pointed out I don't even know if we really can say that either.

Councilman Ruso remarked I know the number, but I don't know if I can say. I would tell you if I can, but I can't, so I won't.

Betty Kemnah stated then you probably can't answer how many people are enrolled in retirement.

Councilwoman Benway responded the Privacy laws are extremely strict, just discussing health insurance makes me nervous because it's a very strict thing and you really can't discuss who has it and who doesn't or anything.

Betty Kemnah added I thought maybe you would be able just to give a number so that when I look at it and it says...

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Councilwoman Benway commented I don't feel comfortable doing that, that's up to you guys. I'm not sure.

Supervisor Dellisanti observed you can see how much it costs, that's the best we can do.

Betty Kemnah asked is there any way you can start reporting on the expected Fund Balances, like this gentleman back here was talking about, right along in with your budgets.

Supervisor Dellisanti commented that is a good idea.

Councilman Ruso agreed that is a good idea, we can get Bonnie to do that. We have other Fund Balances aside from that from the General Fund. There is fund balances for the sewer department, the list goes on, and it's not a bad idea so everyone knows exactly what it is or roughly what it is because it is never an exact figure, but there is nothing wrong with doing that. We can get Bonnie to do that for us, that's not a problem.

Betty Kemnah questioned the serial bonds that the Highway Department has, is that for the new truck or equipment that we purchased last year?

Councilman Ruso answered I believe that is for the truck that we purchased in 2012.

Councilman Norris added it was a five year loan.

Betty Kemnah stated thank you very much and thank you for all your work you did on the budget.

Ellie Alfeld asked could I make one suggestion? The Safety Inspector, he is the one that I believe has to go to the different businesses and inspect whether it is for fire or sprinklers or what have you, I believe that is done at no cost to the businesses. I would recommend and suggest that if you are doing business you have to pay a little bit and if it were something like even \$25 at a business and maybe \$25 per room at the motels, we could be in a heck of a lot better shape paying his salary.

Councilman Ruso remarked I'm not sure you can do that, but we can always look into that.

Ellie Alfeld stated yes we can do it. You can assess a fee just like you have hotel fees and every other thing.

Supervisor Dellisanti noted we can talk about that.

Councilman Norris mentioned it has been discussed.

Councilman Ruso suggested we can have a room tax which we are allowed to do.

Ellie Alfeld agreed that's right, I know, I pay it.

Supervisor Dellisanti asked if anybody else had a question or a comment. That being said, thank you very much this Public Hearing is over.

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Motion made by Councilwoman Benway seconded by Councilman Norris to adjourn the meeting.

AYES: Dellisanti, Ruso, Benway, Norris, VanEtten

NAYS:

ABSTAIN:

ABSENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 6:32 PM.