

Approved: February 28, 2023

**MONTAGUE TOWNSHIP
BUDGET WORKSHOP MEETING**

FEBRUARY 02, 2023

MINUTES

Mayor Zitone called the session to order at 4:30 p.m. and stated that adequate notice has been provided to the New Jersey Herald and The Sunday New Jersey Herald for publication in which notice was given of the date, time, place and general agenda of meetings in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, P. L. 1975, c. 231.

FLAG SALUTE: All present were asked to join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL: The Deputy Municipal Clerk was then asked to call the roll.

Present were: Mr. Innella, Mr. Krumpfer, Mr. LeDonne, Mr. Merusi, and Mayor Zitone. Also present were, Deputy Municipal Clerk/Finance Clerk Dana Klinger and, CFO Sharon Yarosz.

Absent: None

2023 BUDGET WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

Mayor Zitone invited Blue Ridge Rescue Squad Lieutenant, Craig Fary, to come forward with the Rescue Squad's 2023 donation request. Lieutenant Fary said during the past year (2022) the Squad has responded approximately 900 times to the mutual territories that they have, and about a third of those calls into Montague. This year their recruitment efforts have panned out slightly and they have gained a few more members, a few of whom are Montague residents. The Squad is making efforts to be fiscally responsible and they have reduced their fleet by one ambulance, so there will only be four ambulances on the road. One will be on at the Montague location at all times possible. The Squad continues to deal with the lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, and inflation and their response calls are increasing dramatically. Turnout gear for the members needs to be purchased/replaced. The goals for this year are for Blue Ridge Rescue Squad to increase their recruitment and retention. They are looking towards completing the licensing requirements during the year to allow for soft billing. They are also planning capital improvements for the main station. Thanks to the donations received from Montague, Frankford, and Sandyston from Grant money received from the American Rescue Plan the Squad will be purchasing a refurbished ambulance, those funds will contribute to about eighty percent of those costs. The Blue Ridge Rescue Squad is asking the Committee to consider a donation of \$60,000 for 2023, which is the same amount they asked for in the last several years. Lieutenant Fary also gave a status update regarding the Squad's progress with soft billing. Lieutenant Fary said they are about 80 percent along the way to getting their license from the State. Mr. Krumpfer stated that last year the Committee heard the same thing from Blue Ridge regarding the status of the soft billing license and they assured the Committee that it would be happening this year, but this is another year in a row that it is not complete. Mr. Krumpfer asked if there is something that is holding the licensing up. Lieutenant Fary stated that Covid held up their progress big time, they have also lost members, and they run into a problem with financing. If they were to take more calls as a paid Squad than they do as a volunteer then they would lose their 501-3C Status and they would then be asking for even more money. The Squad representative then discussed numerous other circumstances and issues they run into when moving towards this soft billing and simply not having the manpower. The Committee thanked the members of the Squad and stated that they will take into consideration their request.

Mayor Zitone also invited the representative from the Montague Volunteer Fire Department, Keith Lamberson, and Ryan Riegel to come forward and speak on their 2023 Fire Department Donation request. Keith Lamberson, Montague Fire Department Treasurer, asked that the 2023 Donation to the Fire Department remain at \$90,000. The Committee and the Fire Department representatives then discussed various items within the Fire Department budget and a few future planning items. Ryan Riegel added that the Fire Department also plans on holding more fundraisers in the upcoming year. The Committee also thanked the members of the Montague Volunteer Fire Department for their time and will consider their 2023 budget request.

The Committee discussed some of the numerous budget requests received from the various departments/organizations. They then discussed some “wish list” items that were requested and items that they can cut if need be. The Committee then went through each line item within the budget and discussed each including Vital Statistics O&E; O&E, Codification, Elections, Publications, Postage, Seminars and Meetings, Dues, Supplies, Service Contracts, and Payroll.

The Committee then took a moment to discuss salary increases for Municipal Employees for the budget year 2023. Mr. Krumpfer stated that inflation is currently at 6.5% and he is a firm believer in taking care of the people that take care of you. Mr. LeDonne added that he is in favor of a 4% increase, and Mr. Krumpfer agreed. Not only has inflation been tremendous this year, but the health benefits have also increased by 22%. The Committee then had a brief discussion on what kind of raises they would like to see. Mr. Krumpfer then made a motion to approve salary increases of 4% for all Municipal Employees. Mr. LeDonne then seconded and the motion carried with a unanimous roll call vote. Mr. Merusi made a motion to also include the Mayor and Committee get a 4% increase in their salaries. Mr. LeDonne seconded and the motion carried with Mr. Innella, Mr. Krumpfer, Mr. LeDonne, and Mr. Merusi all voting yes and Mayor Zitone voting no.

The Township Committee then continued the discussion of: Vital Statistics Salary and Wages Financial Administration- Salary and Wages, O&E; Audit Services; Municipal Clerk- Salary and Wages Computer Service and Office Equipment; Collection of Taxes- Salary and Wages, O&E, Grant Writer; Tax Title Liens; Assessment of Taxes- Salary and Wages and O&E; Legal Services & Costs; Engineering Services and Costs; Land Use Board- O&E and S&W; COAH; Fire Sub Code Official Salary and Wages; Code Enforcement Salary and Wages and O&E; General Liability and Workers Compensation; Group Insurance for Employees; Health Benefit Waivers; Unemployment Compensation Insurance; Constable Salary and Wages; Public Safety O&E (Sheriff’s Patrol); 9-1-1 System O&E; Emergency Management and Flood Mitigation Salary and Wages and O&E; First Aid Organization Contribution; Uniform Fire Safety Act Inspections, Salary and Wages, and O&E; Fire Prevention O&E; Public Safety O&E; Streets and Roads Salary and Wages, O&E, Repairs, Uniforms, Supplies, Parts and Supplies, and Various Roads; Snow Removal Salary and Wages; Snow Removal O&E; Grit and Salt; Recycling Salary and Wages; Garbage and Trash Removal; Public Buildings and Grounds Salary and Wages and O&E; Fire Hydrant Service; Board of Health Salary and Wages; Dog Regulation O&E; Recreation & Education O&E; Senior Citizens Donation; Historical Society; Celebration O&E; Electricity; Telephone; Fuel Oil; Gasoline; Contingent; Public Employee’s Retirement System; Social Security; Small Cities Grant; Clean Communities Grant; Recycling Tonnage Grant; Municipal Court O&E. Also, Capital Improvement Funds including Improvements to Roads, which included the FY-2023 NJDOT Trust Fund Grant for the Resurfacing of Weider Road; Purchase of Road Equipment; Purchase of Salt Shed; Construction of Fire House; Office Equipment; Loan Repayments for Principal & Interest; and Resolution for Uncollected Taxes. The CFO will contact the Municipal Account/Auditor, Heidi Wohlleb with the draft budget figures the Committee came up with to see where it stands and then the Committee will review at the next budget meeting.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Innella motioned to open to the public. Mr. Merusi seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

There being no comments from the public, Mr. Krumpfer motioned to close to the public. Mr. Merusi seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

ADJOURN

Mr. Krumpfer made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:43 p.m. Mr. Merusi seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted:

Dana Klinger, RMC
Deputy Municipal Clerk