

Budget Hearing for the Board of Trustees/Village of Brockport for the Fiscal Year 2004-2005 held in the Conference Room, Municipal Building, 49 State Street, Brockport, New York, Wednesday, April 7, 2004 at 7:00 P.M.

PRESENT: Mayor Josephine C. Matela, Trustees James E. Whipple, Norman J. Knapp, Morton Wexler; Village Attorney Edward W. Riley; Police Chief Daniel P. Varrenti; Superintendent of Public Works Bradley B. Upson; Treasurer Scott D. Rightmyer, Treasurer Ian M. Coyle.

EXCUSED: Trustee Peter C. DeToy, Building-Zoning Officer Scott C. Zarnstorff, Village Clerk Leslie Ann Morelli.

Also Present: Carol Hannan, Fred Montag, Inga Songbird, M Beaney, John Lessord, Joan Hamlin, James Hamlin, Raymond Morris, Jackie Morris, Jack Wahl, Bob Connors, Carrie Maziarz, Charlene Whipple, Colleen Noble, Norm Giancursio, Pete Maziarz, Leisa Strabel, Art Appleby, Ute Duncan, Linda Borrayo, Francisco Borrayo, Tom Ferris, Arden Campbell, Glenn Emerson, Tony Lamonica, Dianne Lamonica, Laura Emerson

Meeting called to order by Mayor Matela, who led the meeting in the Pledge to the Flag

Treasurer Rightmyer read affidavit of publication of legal notice for the Public Hearing to be held to hear comments on the Tentative Budget for the Fiscal Year 2004-2005.

Mayor Matela read the following:

This budget is not set in stone and the Public Hearing has been called to gauge citizen support or opposition of expenditure allocations.

We are not here to defend Option A versus Option B. This is a public forum for citizen input on and involvement in, the Tentative Budget. All measures, allocations and tentative decisions are not formalities.

This is not a debate. This hearing should be a cordial, congenial sharing of ideas and concerns in the democratic way. The Trustees and I will not be on the defensive, answering questions as to the whys, but will most certainly be on the receptive, fielding opinions and outlooks from concerned citizens and trying to get a feel for what the public wants and perhaps more importantly what the public does not want.

In the end, it is up to the Board of Trustees and the Mayor to develop and vote on a budget that best meets the service needs of the Village of Brockport residents in the most cost-efficient manner.

Tonight, it is my hope, and the hope of the Trustees, that we are able to have a positive discussion on the issues that face the Village of Brockport, especially from a financial perspective.

With that in mind, I open the Public Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2004-2005 Tentative Budget.

Mayor Matela opened the floor for questions.

Carol Hannan, 292 South Main Street, stated that she had already met with the Mayor and gave the Mayor a list of suggestions on how to increase revenues and reduce expenditures and hoped that the Board would consider them. Mrs. Hannan then made a statement relative to the negative press that the Village has received lately. Mrs. Hannan stated that she believes that there is a serious problem with the Board of Trustees, and that the Mayor, Trustee DeToy, and Police Chief Varrenti have publicly expressed frustration and anger with the other members of the Board. She then named the three subject Trustees and commented that she did not know Trustee Whipple, did know Trustee Wexler, and knew Trustee Knapp, although she doubted that Trustee Knapp knew her. Mrs. Hannan addressed Trustee Wexler and commented on his negative attitude toward the Police Department, and stated that while there are some people in the Village that agree with Trustee Wexler, there are probably fifty people in the Village who disagree with him for every person who does agree with him. Mr. Hannan called for fiscal responsibility, reiterating that her background is Scottish and that there is no person who stretches a dollar more that she does. She doubted that there is fiscal responsibility in the Village, as indicated by not listening to the Police Chief's recommendation to hire one additional full-time office and one additional part-time officer at a savings of \$20,000, which she felt was a LOT of money, and that even the Treasurer

said it was a considerable savings to the Village. She asked why the Board did not believe its own Treasurer. Mrs. Hannan asked why the Village continues to hire part-time officers at a cost of \$18,000 each. She stated that part-time employees may work for Wal-Mart, but Wal-Mart does not invest \$18,000 in each of its part-time employees. Last year two part-time officers quit, one during the training and one after the training, and now a current part-time officer is looking for a full time position and will be leaving. At a cost of \$54,000 to train those three officers, the Village has not received its monies worth. Part-time officers are a huge waste of taxpayers' money, and the fact that none of the current officers live in the Village should not be an issue at all. She wants the police to be here for her comfort and safety, does not care where they live, and hopes that this will never again be an issue in the Village. She stated that her feeling is that there are three Trustees behaving badly in a calculated, organized and sustained effort to cast the Police Department as being more expensive than it needs to be.

Trustee Whipple offered an objection to her line of comments, stating he felt that they were not relevant to the budget topic.

Mrs. Hannan said that she disagreed with Trustee Whipple because the Board's decision have undermined the Police Department, and are financial in nature.

Trustee Whipple stated that that was matter for the audience to decide; Mrs. Hannan said that it certainly is.

Mrs. Hannan said the problem is that the Board is not spending its money, but the taxpayer's money. No body should put personal agendas above the interest of Village residents. Mrs. Hannan stated she believes that is exactly what is happening, that other people believe it, but that if she is the only one to say, so be it. As a retired teacher, she said she used to tell her students who handed in shoddy work that it was not their best work, to take it back and make it better. This budget is not the Board's best work, they should take it back and make it better.

Fred Montag, 133 Park Avenue, read a letter for Tony Perry, a Village taxpayer, who could not be in attendance at the hearing because he was visiting his father who is undergoing heart surgery in the hospital in Florida. The first part of Mr. Perry's letter was directed to Deputy Treasurer Ian Coyle, who Mr. Perry hoped would realize, even after his short tenure with the Village, that irresponsible spending over the years has created the situation that the Village is in today. This spending was started by the previous administration, but continues today. Mr. Perry's opinion of this Tentative Budget was that it was deceptive and misleading to the Village taxpayers.

The second part was directed at the Village Board, and stated that what the Village taxpayers deserve is a fair and honest Tentative Budget that accurately reflects what is needed to actually balance the budget. Mr. Perry went on to state that the 9.88% tax increase is not an accurate percentage. The borrowing of \$413,000 from one of the capital reserves is like "robbing Peter to pay Paul" with a finance charge attached. The NYS Retirement system warned municipalities of the forthcoming increase, the payment of which should have been part of the tax rate last year and this year. The borrowing of the money is an attempt to keep the tax rate below 10%. Further, the low law and engineering expenditures are another flagrant attempt to keep the tax rate under 10%, as if 10% is even acceptable. What is the reason for budgeting less than half of the amount of legal expenses for last year and 300% less than what is forecast for the current year expenditures? Why is the budget amount for engineering fees for next year 600% less than what is estimated for the current year? Mr. Perry wondered what other line items have been "fudged" to keep the tax increase under 10%. When taking into consideration the borrowing for next year, the line item overruns, and the amounts borrowed from the Water Fund over the last three years, it is more likely that the tax rate for next year should be closer to 40%. The Village Board needs to take the Tentative Budget back to the "drawing board".

Mr. Montag expressed his own dismay at the idea of a 22% tax increase, and at the idea of using a sewer fund to charge "sewer rent". He said he had never heard of renting sewers. Water consumption is not an accurate way of charging for sewer usage because of swimming pools, lawn and garden watering, and car washing. Mr. Montag did not think it was right; the sewers have been in place for a 100 years and have always been funded out of the General Fund (DPW) and there have not been any problems. Mr. Montag also stated that the members of the Board know how he feels about the Police Department.

John Lessord, 56 Lyman Street, stated that he stood in the same place last year and questioned the \$1,000's of dollars spent on environmental issues and asked why they were not budgeted; the

same applies to the \$200,000 that will be spent on environmental issues this year. He also asked where the \$200,000 came from for this year, and wondered if it was taken from some other fund. Mr. Lessord said he felt the whole budget process was nothing more than "smoke and mirrors".

Bob Connors, 281 West Avenue, stated that he read in the budget that the projected fund balance at the end of this fiscal year will be about \$562,000, and asked when the last time the fund balance was under \$600,000? Treasurer Rightmyer stated that the lowest amount prior to this year was in 1983-1984 when the balance was \$705,431. Mr. Connors said that this years fund balance will be the lowest in 21 years. Mr. Connors stated that the General Fund Balance in 2001-2002 was \$2.3 million, but was now down to \$562,000; what happened to the \$1.8 million. Mr. Connors likewise questioned the Water Fund Balance, which was \$3.1 million in 2000-2001, but now down to \$20,000; what happened to the \$3.0 million? Treasurer Rightmyer stated that a very large portion of that fund balance, attributed to capital reserves funded by the sale of the Water Treatment plant, was transferred to the General Fund to simplify bookkeeping and explanations to questions asked by various people, including Board members.

Mr. Connors also questioned the use of such low numbers for law and engineering. Mr. Connors sighted the fact that legal expenses for 2002-2003 were budgeted at \$58,500, while actual expenses were \$149,000; for 2004-2004 were budgeted at \$93,000, while estimates are calling for actual expenses to be \$166,000. Why would you use \$50,000 for the 2004-2005 budget. The Engineering budget for 2004-2005 represents the same situation, expenses budgeted for at \$13,500 and \$20,000, while actual or estimated cost were \$71,000 and \$148,000. Why budget only \$25,000 for 2004-2005. Mr. Connors felt that surely the funding would be short for those two items.

While he said that others will be addressing the Sewer Fund, Mr. Connors questioned the allocation of two full-time DPW employees to the Sewer Fund, when the costs for that line item over the last four years has never been higher than \$16,000. Mr. Connors said he had no objection to raising capital for sewer projects, but he doubted that the labor booked to that line items would ever reach two full employees.

Mr. Connors further questioned the retirement system payments for last year when the budget called for \$272,000, while the actual payments amounted to only \$94,000. What happened to the \$178,000 that was not spent, and that should not have been touched. His further concerns centered around the borrowing of \$413,000 from capital reserves (Proj.43), knowing that the Comptroller's Office frowns on it. Treasurer Coyle assured him that the Village does have legal authority to borrow (\$300,000) from capital reserves to meet debt obligations, and to transfer funds (\$113,000) between capital reserves.

Finally, Mr. Connors stated that with the 22% tax increase (9.88% plus sewer rent), the 8% increase last year and the 18% the year before that, the increase over the last three years is 48%. Treasurer Rightmyer pointed out that the 18% increase in 2001-2002 was due in very large part (13%) to a \$22 million dollar loss in assessment value. Only 5% was due to actual rate increase.

Carrie Maziarz, 42 Adams Street, voiced her strong opinion against the elimination of the A shift in the Police Department. She stated that the Police Department make up only 25% of the budget, why not look at the other 75% for reductions. Mrs. Maziarz stated that public safety should be the number 1 priority for the Village Board. Trustee Wexler asked Treasurer Coyle what percentage of the budget was made up by the Police Department when benefits were added. Treasurer Coyle reported that the Police account for 34% of the budget when benefits are included.

Norman Giancursio, 51 college Street, stated that if you add the 9.88% tax increase to the sewer tax, the resulting 22% increase would be the largest tax increase ever in the Village of Brockport. And, if you were to add in the \$300,000 that we are borrowing from ourselves, the tax rate increase would be in excess of 40%. Mr. Giancursio said that there are a large number of taxpayers living on fixed income, who cannot afford this backbreaking increase. How can we make our village attractive to new people to move into or have our current residents stay with runaway taxes. Mr. Giancursio further stated that the community the Village Officials were elected to serve deserves better. Mr. Giancursio asked the Board not to squander the trust placed in their hands, but to reject this budget, and go back to the drawing board and make the hard decisions that they were elected to make. He said he was sure that this Board would not want to be remembered as the one that burdened the community with the largest tax increase ever.

Pete Maziarz, 42 Adams Street, stated that he was against elimination of the A shift in the Police Department, especially with the great diversity that we have in the Village population. Mr. Maziarz said people should step back and look at what is being done in the Village such as construction of the Visitor Center that will enable the Village to take advantage of the increased tourism that could result from the fast ferry. Brockport is "the" Victorian Village on the Canal, and we should take advantage by promoting it. He stated that he is not against paying slightly more in taxes, if there is something to show for it, such as the Visitors Center.

Linda Borraro, 155 Utica Street, said the only thing discussed at last week's workshop, concerning lowering of the tax rate, was to eliminate snow plowing the sidewalks and arm everyone with shovels; and to eliminate spring pick-up. These are the conveniences that taxpayers have left. She suggested eliminating two of the three positions of building inspector, and the position of Economic Development Coordinator, generating a savings of \$31,000. Mrs. Borraro said that instead of speculating what the Sheriff's Office could do for the Village, invite Sheriff O'Flynn out to discuss the matter in person. What harm could be done by getting the facts before an idea is killed that could produce sizable savings. The Board cannot afford to make Budget decisions with blinders on. Mrs. Borraro urged the Board to reject this budget and make the necessary cuts.

Rob Trimble, 168 Lyman Street, stated that as a real estate broker, high taxes hurt the first time homebuyer and the elderly. He stated that cuts could be made by eliminating duplications of services, such as the Brockport Police Department in favor of the Sheriff's Department, which we also pay for. He also suggested that the Village of Brockport be dissolved and merged with the Town of Sweden.

John Reed, 98 Frazier Street, stated that this is not the 90's anymore, it is the 2000's, and things are tough around the entire country. He said he realizes that all of the Village employees make a good wage, have good benefits, and good retirements, but that the rising costs have to stop somewhere, because the older people are suffering. Mr. Reed stated that he is retired, on a fixed income, and cannot afford medical insurance for his wife. Something must be done.

John Bush, 157 Barry Street, stated that he has been coming to budget hearings for 12-15 years, back in Mayor Thorpe's era, and that he has been asking the Board if its was looking down the road to make cuts so that the Village would not end up in a predicament like it is in now. He said that he was assured by the Board at that time that they were, but it is obvious now that they were not because we are in the predicament now. Mr. Bush said that he has taken a look at the budget, and sees two items that stick out - medical and dental insurance adding up to about \$400,000. With the good wage that Village employees make, it might be time to address these areas for cuts. Taxpayers cannot afford these costs anymore.

Doug Reddick, Erie Street, stated that he did not get a 10% pay increase and cannot afford a 10% tax increase, not to mention the sewer tax (he called it a tax because he said that is what it is). He said he would love to get a 20% raise in pay, but it is not likely to happen. He stated that food is increasing in cost, as is fuel, and now taxes. He is being cut down to bare bones, and asked what more the Village wants?

Glenn Emerson, 89 Holley Street, stated that while others have spoken about redundancy, no one has asked why, two years after switching to 911, are we still paying \$200,000 for the operation of our own dispatch. This year's projection is 15% above what was spent the year before. He also questioned why we have three fire stations. Years ago when fire equipment was less efficient than today, it might have been necessary to have three stations, but not today. He said he assumed that a \$275,000 fire truck comes with an engine. Mr. Emerson suggested making a museum out of the Capen Hose Building, and putting West Avenue back on the tax roll as a commercial building. Mr. Emerson said that he has not heard anyone suggest any of these ideas. He said that before cutting emergency service, look at items like these. He also asked why the Village continues to budget less for the dispatching than it obviously will cost - it exceeded budget the last two years.

Trustee Wexler stated that the Board appreciated the people coming to the hearing and expressing their opinions. Trustee Wexler reminded the Mayor that within twelve days the Board will need to vote on the Budget. If there are three members who are in favor of adopting the budget, there will not be a need to have any other meetings; however, if there are not three members who are in favor of the budget, there will be a need to sit down and discuss what needs to be done. Trustee Wexler requested that the Mayor poll the individual Board members to see

where the Board stands, for or against, and provide each Trustee with that information prior to April 19, 2004. That way it would be possible for the Board to meet and discuss the Budget further prior to the 19th.

Mayor Matela thanked all for coming and stated that the Board will consider all inputs. The Mayor said that there will not be a vote taken tonight or even tomorrow. The Mayor said that the Board members will be discussing the input between each other, and that the Board will come up with the best possible budget.

One gentleman asked if the Board could make a statement as to a tax increase being a last resort.

Mayor Matela reminded the gentleman that the Village has two unions, one of which has already settled with the Village, and the wage increases agreed to must come from somewhere. Additionally, the Village has other commitments, and just like for any other business, the cost of doing business has gone up. The idea for the Board is to come up with the best budget without cutting services. Mayor Matela stated that when the 19th comes, the Board will either approve the budget or have a revised budget.

Glenn Emerson stated that another option for the Village to eliminate some tax burden on its residents is to ask the County Legislature for approval to form the Town of Brockport. This would eliminate the Village residents from paying Town taxes, for which we get few services.

Mayor Matela adjourned the Public Hearing at 7:47 PM.

Scott D. Rightmyer, Village Treasurer / Deputy Clerk