

**SOUTH STRABANE TOWNSHIP
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS BUDGET MEETING**

October 2, 2023

APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

The October 2, 2023 Budget Meeting of the South Strabane Township Board of Supervisors (“Board”) came to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Meeting Room of the Municipal Building (550 Washington Road, Washington, PA 15301).

The following were present:

Board of Supervisors	Bracken Burns, Chair; Mark Murphy, Vice Chair; Russ Grego, Richard Luketich, and Bob Weber.
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Absent	None
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Also Present	Township Manager Jeff Ziegler, Finance Director Marie Coffman, Fire Chief/Acting Assistant Manager Jordan Cramer and Building Official Scott Heckman.
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2. PUBLIC COMMENT

The Board allocates a period of time during this item for those individuals who would like the opportunity to address the Board on any agenda item. Each person addressing the Board of Supervisors is asked to limit their comments to a maximum of three (3) minutes.

Mr. Jeff Bull, resident of Main St., stated that people are just now receiving their fire tax bills when they are receiving their mortgage bills. He asked how the township has a fire hydrant tax and also collect the fire tax. The response was provided that the township does not assess a fire hydrant tax.

3. REVIEW OF PROPOSED 2024 DEPARTMENT EXPENDITURES
Building Department/Code Enforcement

Building Official Scott Heckman presented an overview of the proposed expenditures for the Building Department. Reviewing the Supplies line item, he noted that the request went down from last year due to not needing additional code books. Mr. Murphy asked why there is such a significant increase in Professional Services CEPZ. Mr. Heckman stated that of late the township has consulted the zoning hearing board attorney on a couple of land use issues/questions and expects to use him more next year.

Mr. Heckman also noted that due to the age and condition of the three vehicles assigned to the Building Department he is recommending an increase to Vehicle Maintenance to anticipate possible repair and maintenance needs. Discussion followed on the vehicles currently assigned to

the department. It was noted that the Ford Escape, which is a relatively newer vehicle and was a more recent purchase, had a significant repair bill shortly after its purchase. There was discussion on keeping the vehicle versus replacing it before more repairs may be needed. It was also stated that the other two vehicles were former police vehicles that had been retired from the police fleet. Discussion ensued on why three vehicles are needed for the department.

Mr. Weber asked Mr. Heckman why he did not propose the building permit, code enforcement and customer service tracking software that he requested last year. Mr. Heckman responded to keep costs down he is not requesting it this year. Mr. Weber asked him if he still thought it would be useful and Mr. Heckman stated that it is something that he would like to move forward with in the future. Discussion ensued on the software referenced as well the possibly using the fire department software, which may have many of the desired features. Mr. Weber stated it seemed like a good idea and asked that Mr. Heckman keep it in his mind and explore options.

Fire Department

Chief Cramer reviewed the Fire Department 2024 proposed budget. He commented that much of the increase in the budget is due to personnel costs, which is a contractual obligation.

Chief Cramer reviewed the proposed increase in Prof Serv related to the cost of the fire software. He also pointed out the increase in the Fire Hydrant line items, which is for fire hydrant maintenance. Discussion ensued about the rising cost in this service and the quality of the service the township is getting from PA American Water, who does the maintenance. It was noted that township staff have attempted to work with them to get improvement in this area, but without success. Mr. Murphy suggested it may be time to ask our State Representative to intervene.

Chief Cramer talked about his fuel request for next year. Discussion ensued about where fire vehicles are currently being fueled and what other options may be available. There was discussion about installing an above ground tank at the fire station and/or at the municipal building. A discussion then followed regarding the rise in vehicle maintenance costs over the past couple of years. Chief Cramer reported that a couple of expensive repairs have taken their toll on the Vehicle Maintenance budget.

In other comments, Chief Cramer stated that he is requesting some money under Minor Equipment to cover the cost of an ID maker. He stated that the plan is for all employees to have a township ID card that is embedded with technology so that it can also serve as a key card to replace the existing key fob system. He also noted that he hopes to solicit donations for a cardiac monitor, which led to a discussion as to when the department gets reimbursed for medical supplies used on calls.

Chief Cramer provided the Board of Supervisors with a four-page Budget Proposal, which provided a brief overview and narrative about the 2024 budget. In addition to the summary, the proposal also draws attention to the importance of an MOU that was approved by the BOS with the Fire Union regarding overtime pay. Without this MOU, Chief Cramer stated, overtime costs for 2023 would have been significantly higher and not kept within budget. The Budget Proposal also includes a listing of Fire Revenue.

Administration Department

Ms. Coffman reviewed the line items for the 2024 Administration Budget. It was noted that cost for General Liability Insurance continues to increase. Mr. Murphy asked if this could be bid out and suggested that staff get B&W to get additional proposals from larger carriers to see if we can get better rates. Ms. Coffman noted that \$2,500 was put being proposed for Risk Management to cover the cost of insurance deductibles should there be a claim. It was suggested that this amount be increased to provide a little cushion in case of an unanticipated emergency. Discussion ensued on this as well as possibly bidding out auditing services in the future. Ms. Coffman asked the Board for direction on what to plan for in terms of legal for next year. Discussion ensued among the Board regarding a cap that Dennis Makel put on his services as opposed to another interpretation that the cap was only to stop billing at \$40,000 temporarily until township cash flow improved. It was noted that there will be a meeting scheduled in the near future to discuss legal bills with Solicitor Makel.

Mr. Ziegler noted that there is a slight increase being proposed for the Minor Equipment budget for furniture and a fireproof filing cabinet to house personnel records and vehicle titles. He also called the Boards attention to a small increase in the Communications budget to account for the cost of sending out a community newsletter in 2024. The Board also had a discussion about increasing the amount in the grant writing line item to increase the use of a grant writer to help secure grant funds for township priorities. Mr. Ziegler noted that for Prof Services - Other, under engineering an allocation of \$10,000 is proposed as a match for the LSA grant being submitted for Berry Road. Discussion took place about looking at a more cost-effective alternative to the township's current IT vendor.

Ms. Coffman stated that at the October 4th budget meeting we would be reviewing the 2024 department expenditures for Police and Public Works.

4. ADJOURNMENT

As no further business came before the Board, Mr. Burns adjourned the meeting to executive session at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey L. Ziegler
Township Manager