

TOWN OF CHATHAM
488 Rte. 295, Chatham, NY 12037
Special Town Board Meeting
2016 Budget
November 10, 2015 6:00 PM

PRESENT: Supervisor Jesse DeGroot, Councilman Maria Lull, Councilman Bob Balcom, Councilman Jean Rohde, Town Clerk Beth Anne Rippel, Assessor Clerk Julia Horst

Others Present: David Levow, Landra Haber, Karen Murphy and others

Supervisor DeGroot called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and lead the pledge to the flag.

Supervisor DeGroot informed the Board that Mayor Tom Curran would like \$1,750.00/month for rental of the court space at the Tracy. **Lull** asked if the rent was increased last year. **DeGroot** said no, they wanted \$2,000.00 which the Board wouldn't agree to. There hasn't been an increase since 2001. **Swartz** said that none of the problems with the building have been addressed. **DeGroot** said that the Court is now using a small office space on the first floor so the court clerk doesn't have to climb the stairs. **Swartz** said that since we are using more space the increase is not unreasonable. **Lull** asked if the utilities were included, **DeGroot** stated that utilities have always been included. it always has. If we add another 3K to the budget for rent we need to cut 10K or increase revenue. Swartz stated that there were no positives to that so it's not an option.

DeGroot raised the part time court salary topic. While the full time clerk was out we brought the part time court clerk up to the same rate because she would be taking on the duties of the full time court clerk. Since the full time clerk is back to work why is the part time court clerk being paid \$6,502.00 over what the position paid last year? **Swartz** stated that he thought they were voting on the part time court clerk getting the increased rate while she was doing the work of the full time court clerk while she was out. When that job was up so was the pay raise. DeGroot thought that that was the spirit of it but somehow that changed.

Balcom recalls a discussion on whether they were doing the same work, has her work changed.

DeGroot said No her work has not changed. We're talking about \$6, 502.00 increase in one year and last year at budget time we had a discussion on raising the comptroller who thoroughly deserved it and they came up short on that. There are big discrepancies, we're not applying increases equitably; it's a system of pick and choose and he is not a fan.

Swartz clarified; the part time court clerk assumed the duties of the full time court clerk and was paid the salary of the full time court clerk. And now that the full time court clerk is back to work the part time court clerk has assumed her regular part time hours but is still being paid the full time court clerk wage. DeGroot said that nothing changed going from part time to full time she only assumed the full time duties while the full time court clerk was out.

Lull now she's back to part time but she's still doing the same work? DeGroot said that she was doing the same work before the only thing to change was the hours worked. Lull said that she is also a backup

person. **DeGroodt** said that to raise someone \$5.20/ hour on that basis is wrong.

Lull to try to raise \$10,000 off of one person is not the right thing to do either.

Balcom We're stuck in the position of fixing this. It's wrong to go backwards now. We could phase it in. We could her half of the raise over the next year and then the following year the reset. What can we do to get to the correct spot

Lull so we're going to take it away then give it back?

Balcom he's spoken to one of the judges and it's good right now and he doesn't want to see the salary change. It would cause friction if its changed back

Lull We have a good employee whose doing equal work, she's a backup person and the judges like her, she does a good job and Lull doesn't think this is something we should mess around with.

DeGroodt If Lull wants to use that logic then we should take Tammy and give her the same rate we were paying the comptroller and the deputy town clerk as well. DeGroodt will vote against the budget unless we do something about this. We have to do something, as Bob said phase it in, he could live with half then go from there.

Balcom in working with the unions in this type of situation they would reduce by half then the other half would come half way through the year to the proper level. None of this is a good way

Lull the judges won't be happy, the court is our main revenue other than taxes, this is an important function (court clerk).

Swartz We've done this but what's the fair way to change it. We'll have to bring the deputy town clerk up to Beth Anne's salary then.

Balcom doesn't agree with that, he's not sure the deputy town clerk is doing the same work as the town clerk. It depends on what the expectations are of the job title. Does a deputy town clerk have the same function as the town clerk? **Rippel** responds that they do have the same responsibilities. They are not elected that makes a difference and even though they may have the same responsibilities do they do the same amount of work? In that situation the clerk has a greater standing then the deputy clerk, the town clerk is elected and has a little bit more responsibility. So everything coming out of the town clerk's office is the responsibility of the town clerk even if the deputy does it, there's oversight. Considering this he has no problem having the town clerk earn more than the deputy town clerk. But the court clerks are doing the same work.

Lull if we had job profiles it would be a guideline but that hasn't happened.

Balcom we have civil service job descriptions but they're generic.

DeGroodt there are job descriptions for elected officials under GML. He proposes we cut the part time court clerk by ½. Otherwise we'll have to raise revenue or stay where we are and add 3K to for the Tracy rent increase. We needed 7K but if we put 3K in there's 10K

Balcom if you're trying to reduce the tax levy for the Town, the Village is in good shape, the 3 grand has to go into A. **DeGroodt** if you wanted to raise revenue you could do it anywhere.

Balcom not raise revenue, how do we get below 2%, adding the 3 grand to

DeGroodt add 3K brings it up to 2.58%

Swartz asked for a motion at add 3K? DeGroodt said all they need to do is agree to put it in the budget.

Lull asked when the lease was up, **DeGroodt** said November, December

Balcom asked about the “reserve fund” if there had been any headway in finding where and why it was created. DeGrootd said there had not been but that doesn’t affect this. If the 126K is free we can use it for something useful, it could go to the park. **Balcom** it might as well not exist. **DeGrootd** it’s not really part of this discussion.

Swartz said “yes or no” on the 3K?

Lull considering we haven’t had a rent increase in 12 years it’s not unreasonable.

DeGrootd said we needed the extra space downstairs because the second floor is still not handicapped accessible. **Swartz** provisions were made but we still have to pay for what we use so he says yes to the rent increase.

Rohde said she would also agree to the rent increase. Balcom is in agreement with the increase also.

DeGrootd then we’ll add the 3K into the budget. Now back to the salary discussion.....

Lull asked why we’re still discussing the part time court clerk salary at this late date?

DeGrootd because it needs to be discussed at some point and it was brought up several time before, we’re still looking at it. DeGrootd proposes to cut the \$5.20/hr. increase in half to \$2.60/hour.

Swartz will it bring us to 2%? DeGrootd said it would bring us back to where we were.

Swartz everyone wants to get this budget under 2% and there are only certain places to do it.

Lull were giving another employee a 1% raise and here we’re taking away from someone who is doing the same work and she doesn’t feel right about it.

Balcom would rather reduce the value we pay all the Boards to make up the 3 thousand. The Town Board, Zoning Board and Planning Board.

Swartz if there’s any cut in pay for the Planning or Zoning Boards he’ll vote no on the budget.

DeGrootd then we’ll go from one unhappy employee to 15 unhappy employees.

Balcom then let’s talk commensurate positions. When you compare our Boards to the rest of the County we’re ridiculously high. So asking them to give up 100 dollars isn’t a lot.

Swartz so you’re asking 15 people to give up their pay for one person, you’ll cut 15 people to make one person happy?

Rohde said that we can’t ask people to cut their salaries because it was something the Board brought on.

Balcom our Boards are well paid. **Swartz** they’re worth everything they’re given.

Swartz said the only option we haven’t talked about is to leave it alone.

Balcom this is the problem with budgeting, we’re stuck throwing darts to make cuts. We carry a 14% fund balance same as last year so he’s not confident in that number.

Lull there has to be someplace to cut from the budget requests that came in without taking from salaries. We should be working together with department heads to make some cuts.

Swartz asked **Lull** if she talked to the department heads. She said that it was not her job to do that, it is the budget officers’ responsibility.

Swartz said that the entire Board is part of the budget process. Do not put blame on one or two people. It’s not one person’s job, it’s the job of everyone on the Board. Stop pointing fingers. If you have something to cut or an idea, speak up.

Lull said that the Board is not working with these figures all year long, DeGrootd is.

Swartz again its pointing fingers. Every one of us has the same responsibility.

Balcom we all have the responsibility of fiscal oversight but the administrator has the responsibility of

being the administrator of the different departments. When the Board receive a budget they expect the administrator to have done due diligence in preparing a budget, that didn't happen this year.

DeGroot said he was happy with the submissions from the departments; there was nothing strange about what's going on.

Balcom asked if DeGroot was happy with the 7% increase in the tentative budget.

DeGroot responded "of course not". **Balcom** wanted to know why the budget even came to the Board with those numbers in it.

Balcom shouted that prior to giving the Board that budget DeGroot should have done some damn work and he didn't.

Rohde asked Balcom to stop the politicking.

Balcom said that this was the first year they had gotten the budget requests from the department heads. **Swartz** said that that was not true, they received them last year, and **Rodhe** concurred. **Balcom** again said that he did not get them. Balcom said that they went through them but he didn't get them, the whole Board should receive them.

Balcom said that before the Board receives the budget requests the administrator should have been doing some work with them and not rely on other people to do that job. The night we got the tentative budget it should have been Jesse's best attempt at what he thought the budget should be but we had to sit here and fill in the numbers and that was wrong.

DeGroot said that he found it odd that Balcom has been "barking for years" about participating in the budget process. DeGroot gave them all the information, put it in the budget and on the first night said this is what we have to work on and every time it was pushed back to him.

Balcom said so what DeGroot was saying was that when the budget requests came in he talks to the department heads and they say that this is the best they can do. DeGroot said he didn't see anything out of the ordinary or unusual.

Rohde said that as Board members if we think that something is not getting done we can study it ourselves and go back to Jesse and ask questions. We don't wait until one person does all the work then say that it's wrong.

DeGroot went back to salaries. Last year we talked about doing something about salaries and he hasn't seen a thing. There was going to be a salary analysis done for this year's budget and we haven't seen any of it.

Swartz asked what changes can be made to this year's budget to move it forward. We've had these sheets for over a month.

Balcom said that we end up throwing darts at things, do we know that's the right thing to cut. Cut half a percent across the board.

Lull then each department would have to work with it.

Swartz asked if that's what we want to do, cut each department ½ percent.

Rohde said that the department heads are aware of what it costs and this is the best they can come up with.

DeGroot said that the end of the year there is not a lot left in the budget.

Lull asked why, in the Town Clerk's budget, there's \$10,500.00 for a deputy and we don't have one. Lull asked the Clerk why she doesn't have one. If you don't plan to have one why is it in the budget?

Rippel responded that she has no plans to cut that money from the budget, she needs a deputy. It's

difficult to find someone for \$12.00/hour. She stated that she has a deputy for tax time and they have to be paid. She would like to have a deputy for 15 hours/week hopes to be able to hire someone to the regular part time position.

Lull said that for the majority of this year the Clerk hasn't had a deputy. So is there somewhere to cut in that \$10,500.

Rippel said no. Someone coming into this job should be getting \$15.00/hour.

Lull said that we haven't had a deputy for a year or 2 but we have been allocating that salary for that position.

Rippel said that if she were to cut the position she would have no backup. If she's able to find someone to work the deputy clerk schedule she wants the money in the budget to pay them.

Lull asked what happens to the money from that budget line which wasn't spent.

DeGroodt said that money not spent accumulates over time and allows for things like the purchase of something without having to borrow. We can't plan on the Clerk not hiring someone. That's her prerogative

Rippel said that she would always budget for a deputy.

Rohde said that there's no crystal ball.

Lull understands that. The Board had a conversation with Joe and Shari and we're down to bare bones.

They were able to find something in their budget to cut. **Rippel** responded that that is bare bones.

Balcom asked about the hours for the deputy town clerk and how did Rippel come up with 875 hours/year.

Rippel said its 2 days per week (15 hours) and at tax time it's full time (32 + hours/week.) Full time(4 days/week) from the last week in December through the second week in February and it goes to 2 days per week. She has been able to find someone who is very competent at tax time and it's been a huge relief..

Balcom said that the 875 hours cannot be reduced it sounds like that's at the bottom.

Rippel said that she can't even stay competitive at \$10.00/hour. The last person was paid \$12.00/hour but she had to cut the hours just so she could pay them more. So that's what's happening, you cut the hours to give them more money. It can not get any more compact or whittled down, it is what it is.

Those are the actual needs but it's not 100% since it doesn't cover time off. If she takes time off she has to close the office.

Balcom asked so the money we spent on the loader comes out of the fund balance? So we adjust the fund balance?

DeGroodt we don't have to adjust the fund balance since its money ,over time, which comes from extra sales tax or mortgage tax, it's the kind of thing that when you budget to what you might guess to be a good revenue and you wind up with more. It happens when you base your revenues conservatively. We've used that kind of money before to outright buy a piece of equipment. It is not something you can count on.

Balcom so we're not reducing any fund balance. **DeGroodt** said no there's no need to.

DeGroodt asked what the uproar is with this budget; we're not talking about huge amount of money. If you knock the budget down by 2% it would save someone with a \$200,000.00 about \$4.00. That's nice but you still have to be able to function in spite of what people might think.

Balcom said they haven't seen any actuals in months. **DeGroodt** said that we haven't had a comptroller.

Balcom said it was hard to make decisions.

Balcom brought up salaries. DeGroodt proposed to cut it in half and whatever happens happens.

Rohde so we have 2 court clerks and one couldn't work so we increased the salary of the part time clerk so she could do all the work of the 2 clerks.

DeGroodt the spirit of the thing was that we would drop the salary down when Sandy came back and she did. Joan is back to part time and Sandy is back to full time.

Rohde said that the part time clerk is back to part time but at a higher rate per hour then she was before. **DeGroodt** said that's why he proposed cutting it in half.

Rohde said so she'd back to where she started DeGroodt said she was at \$14.33/hour before and now she makes \$19.54/hour so DeGroodt said put it back to \$16.70/hour.

Swartz asked if anyone had any thoughts.

Rohde if it happens in the future we need to be more specific.

Lull said she said what she needed to say several time about the salary. Swartz said to Lull then what you're saying is to leave it alone. Lull responded that's tight. She's a valuable employee and the judges asked for the increase, she's doing the same amount of work and she would not feel right changing that. Nothing was explained to her and now all of a sudden we're cutting her salary after all these months and it's not right.

Swartz it's wrong what we're doing . We made a mistake and he doesn't see how we can go back on a mistake. **Lull** doesn't take responsibility for that. Swartz said it was his mistake. He thought it was a temporary situation and it was not, so that's his mistake for not. He thought she would gt paid while she was doing the job. **Balcom** said he would call it a misunderstanding. Swartz hates the thought of taking it away from her since we've already given it to her. **Lull** she didn't understand what the basis was.

Swartz is not willing to not pass the budget just because of this. We all voted in the affirmative, a misunderstanding or not it's done. Lull we spend 126,000.00 on a truck why are we talking about \$3,000.00 for this poor woman. **DeGroodt** said it's the principle. **Swartz** said that he knows we'll have other employees who are not happy with this action but we made a mistake we gave it to the lady and he can't see taking it away. He doesn't like what they did but they did it. Leave it alone.

DeGroodt we can't vote on the budget tonight it still has to go to final form. Add the \$3,000. For the court the fire contracts, the there has to be a public hearing to override the tax cap which we'll do at the regular town board meeting. **Brian** has the official copy so he can make the changes.

Balcom so now as far a process we'll have to decide at the next town board meeting, it's due by Friday.

Motion made by Councilman Swartz and seconded by Councilman Rohde to adjourn at 6:55 PM.
Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted by,

Beth Anne Rippel, Town Clerk