

STEUBEN COUNTY FINANCE COMMITTEE

Budget Workshop

Monday, October 23, 2023

12:30 p.m.

*Legislative Chambers, 3rd Floor, Annex Building
Bath, New York*

****MINUTES****

COMMITTEE: Gary D. Swackhamer, Chair Kelly H. Fitzpatrick, Vice Chair Jeffrey P. Horton
John V. Malter Brian C. Schu

STAFF: Jack K. Wheeler Christopher Brewer Brenda Scotchmer
Tammy Hurd-Harvey Mitch Alger

LEGISLATORS: Scott J. Van Etten K. Michael Hanna James Kuhl
Hilda T. Lando Wendy Lozo Steven P. Maio
Aaron I. Mullen Robert V. Nichols Nicholas D. Pelham
Frederick G. Potter

OTHERS: Mary Perham

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Swackhamer called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.

II. GENERAL BUSINESS

A. **Budget Review** – Mr. Wheeler stated we have incorporated the changes that you made at your last meeting. He noted Mr. Alger did a tax cap calculation and you could increase taxes about 3.5 – 4 percent with the carryover, however, he is not recommending that. His recommendation would be to increase the anticipated sales tax revenue and appropriate fund balance.

Mr. Swackhamer commented he would not want to go much over a 1 percent tax increase as we have a great fund balance. Mr. Wheeler stated a 1 percent tax increase is achievable. Mr. Van Etten asked what did funding all of the vacancies at 100 percent amount to? Mr. Wheeler commented funding all of the vacancies at 100 percent equates to about \$1.8 - \$2 million. Mr. Van Etten clarified we are funding the vacancies at the full amount and we will not be filling all of them.

Mr. Malter commented he would not like to go back and fund the vacancies at 60 percent. What we are doing is conservatively budgeting sales tax revenue. It makes no difference to me one way or the other. Mr. Wheeler stated to Mr. Malter's point, there is no perfect way to do this. This year we are appropriating more revenue to close the gap. This is conservative enough that we will not be growing the fund balance in the way that we have in previous years.

Ms. Fitzpatrick asked how many vacancies did we fund? Mr. Wheeler replied we have approximately 128 vacant positions as of the end of September. We are actively recruiting for about one-third of those. Ms. Fitzpatrick asked does this budget include the additional money for EMS? Mr. Wheeler replied we increased the County's cost for EMS from \$500,000 to \$1.2 million. Ms. Fitzpatrick asked with the EMS budget is there the potential for more revenue? Mr. Wheeler replied yes there is a potential for more revenue than what we have accounted for in billings and potentially less cost as well. We do not know if this will be fully staffed as of January 1st.

Mr. Swackhamer commented in his opinion the highway budget is quite generous, so we could remove money from there. Mr. Wheeler stated you are essentially funding \$1 million more in equipment than in normal years.

Mr. Wheeler stated a 1 percent tax levy increase would drop your average tax rate, for the twelfth or thirteenth year in a row, from \$7.35 per thousand to \$6.79 per thousand. Mr. Swackhamer stated this is what he would recommend. Mr. Malter asked what would the tax rate be if we did 2 percent? Mr. Wheeler replied the average tax rate would be a difference of \$0.07; \$6.86 per thousand. He stated his recommendation, if you want to be at a 1 percent tax increase, is to increase the anticipated sales tax revenue by \$3 million and increase the General Fund appropriation by \$2,156,732.

MOTION: AUTHORIZING A TAX LEVY INCREASE OF 1 PERCENT AND THE APPROPRIATION OF AN ADDITIONAL \$3 MILLION IN ANTICIPATED SALES TAX REVENUE AND THE APPROPRIATION OF AN ADDITIONAL \$2,156,732 FROM THE GENERAL FUND BALANCE MADE BY MR. HORTON. SECONDED BY MR. MALTER.

Mr. Kuhl asked does this include the additional tax revenue from short-term rentals? Mr. Wheeler replied that is separate and does not impact the tax levy as it is restricted. We have collected \$25,000 in short-term rental revenue. Granicus had a late start as they had overestimated how quickly they could get the integration ready.

Mr. Swackhamer asked what about other income from the opioid and gaming settlements? Mr. Wheeler replied we did budget some of the opioid settlement revenue into the Mental Health budget. Those are the recurring revenue funds to help fund some of the positions, the Steuben Prevention Coalition and the contract with Pretaa. The remaining funds we will handle off budget. The RFP's from the opioid settlement; we will handle those on a year by year basis because we do not know exactly what we are going to receive.

Ms. Fitzpatrick asked what percentage of the fund balance are we allocating and saving toward the tax levy? Mr. Wheeler replied about \$10 million. Mr. Nichols asked how much did our expenses increase in this budget? Mr. Wheeler replied expenses increased about 10 percent to \$18 million. However, our revenues also increased, so expenses actually increased about 8.3 percent.

Mr. Van Etten stated that he would like to discuss the appropriation to the United Way for the Dolly Parton Imagination library. Mr. Wheeler did email more detailed information about this program that he received from the United Way. Mr. Horton stated he liked the feedback about how those funds are being used for that program. He originally seconded the motion to reduce the appropriation to \$10,000, however, he has no problem putting that allocation back to \$20,000.

Ms. Fitzpatrick stated United Way has multiple ways to raise revenue and they do blackouts on everybody else doing fundraising. I am not against them or the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, but if we have extra money, I would like to look at other opportunities for youth programs that we could use that \$10,000 for. They have the \$10,000 and have the opportunity to get funding from other sources. Perhaps we should be looking at some other opportunities for things that we can do to help those other organizations that maybe do not have the same opportunity as the United Way to go out and fundraise.

MOTION: TO WITHDRAW THE PREVIOUS MOTION MADE BY MR. MALTER. SECONDED BY MR. HORTON. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 5-0.

Mr. Swackhamer stated the discussion now is on the line item allocation to the United Way; the recommendation is \$20,000.

Mrs. Lando stated we should get recognition for whatever funds we do contribute. Dolly Parton is not contributing funds to this program. Can you split the difference and go with \$15,000? Ms. Fitzpatrick stated \$10,000 is what we appropriated to them last year. Mr. Wheeler stated they have requested an appropriation of \$20,000 for 2024.

Mr. Kuhl stated I think we should increase it. This is a program for people that cannot get to the library, or those that do not take advantage of the library system. These are books that are delivered directly to kids. There is no better determination of a child's success than reading. This is a program that I benefited from. I don't think we need credit for this as this is just money that goes toward making our communities better. Although I don't have a vote on this committee, I would be supportive of increasing the funding.

Ms. Fitzpatrick stated I think they did a great job with the \$10,000 they were appropriated last year and I would rather look at exploring other options because kids everywhere need opportunities and not every kid likes to read. Mr. Malter stated I think you make a good point, but anything forthcoming is not going to happen until 2024 or 2025, so you could put the feelers out to see what types of programs you are looking to do, but you need feedback from that.

MOTION: APPROPRIATING \$20,000 IN THE 2024 BUDGET TO THE UNITED WAY FOR THE DOLLY PARTON IMAGINATION LIBRARY MADE BY MR. MALTER. SECONDED BY MR. SCHU. MOTION CARRIES 4-2 WITH MR. VAN ETTEN VOTING. (MR. SWACKHAMER AND MS. FITZPATRICK OPPOSED)

Mr. Van Etten stated he had asked Mr. Wheeler a few months ago about creating a fund to start removing the dead ash trees along County highways; not just in the right of way. He would like to have a program where a landowner can sign off and allow us to go back five or ten feet and get the trees out that will break off and cross our highways anyway. He stated Mr. Wheeler had Mr. Rose check with all of the highway supervisors and they drove around and determined that there are about 3,000 trees that could be taken down. Mr. Van Etten stated he would like to propose creating a fund for this purpose with \$200,000 to start out with for next year. We could either look at doing it internally or bidding it out.

Mr. Wheeler stated this would likely be a combination of doing it internally and bidding it out. There are some areas where there are dense pockets of dead ash trees and we would want to bid those out and try to get a good price. Mr. Malter commented we could let the towns remove the trees for the County, similar to what we are doing with mowing and pay the towns.

Mr. Potter asked why limit it to dead ash trees? We also have maples and oaks that are dying. Mr. Van Etten stated you would not have to. The towns are normally very good about removing trees. Mr. Horton stated I think it is a good idea to let our staff do it as overtime or to let the towns take the trees down.

Mr. Swackhamer asked will you be creating a line item for this? Mr. Wheeler stated he would recommend doing this off budget to start. In December or January we will be bringing in a request to take unassigned general fund balance and appropriate to create two capital projects for health insurance and roof replacement. We could use unassigned fund balance to do this at that time. Next year if we have an idea of an annual cost, then we can build that in. Mr. Malter commented I think it is a good idea to start applying some of the unassigned fund balance to various capital projects.

MOTION: AUTHORIZING A TAX LEVY INCREASE OF 1 PERCENT AND THE APPROPRIATION OF AN ADDITIONAL \$3 MILLION IN ANTICIPATED SALES TAX REVENUE AND THE APPROPRIATION OF AN ADDITIONAL \$2,166,632 FROM THE GENERAL FUND BALANCE MADE BY MR. HORTON. SECONDED BY MR. MALTER. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 5-0.

MOTION: TO ADJOURN MADE BY MR. MALTER. SECONDED BY MR. HORTON. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted by

Amanda L. Chapman
Deputy Clerk
Steuben County Legislature