

**MINUTES
OF
THE TOWN OF RENSSELAERVILLE TOWN BOARD
PUBLIC HEARING
PRELIMINARY BUDGET
7:00 PM**

The Town Board of the Town of Rensselaerville held a Public Hearing on the 5th day of November 2015 at 7:00 in the evening at the Rensselaerville Town Hall, 87 Barger Road, Medusa, NY. The meeting was convened by Deputy Supervisor Cooke and the roll was called with the following results:

PRESENT WERE: Deputy Supervisor Marion Cooke
Councilman Robert Bolte
Councilwoman Margaret Sedlmeir
Councilman Gerald Wood
Town Clerk Victoria H. Kraker

ABSENT WAS: Supervisor Valerie Lounsbury

Also present were three interested citizens and Kim Graff from the Rensselaerville Library.

The purpose of the Public Hearing was to hear public comments on the 2016 Preliminary Budget.

A motion was made by Councilman Bolte to open the Public Hearing at 7:00 PM; 2nd by Councilwoman Sedlmeir.

Motion carried: Ayes (4) Cooke, Bolte, Sedlmeir, and Wood; Nays (0)

Deputy Supervisor Cooke read written comments submitted by Diana Hinchcliff as follows:

I will be out of town of Thursday, November 5 and unable to attend the hearing on the 2016 town budget. I am submitting these comments for the record.

Supervisor Lounsbury and Members of the Town Council,
I have reviewed the 2016 Preliminary Budget line by line and commend you for keeping the total increase under the state tax cap. I realize how difficult it is to make decisions about what to cut and what to increase each year and I appreciate your diligence in creating budgets with reasonable expenditures. As you know well, the tax burden in our town falls almost completely on residential property

owners due to the lack of a commercial tax base. And, as our population ages and becomes eligible for enhanced STAR exemptions, tax revenue will be affected. This makes it more difficult to balance revenue and expenditures. Your action to keep the 2016 budget under the tax cap will most definitely help those residents in our town who must live on a fixed or low income as well as others who struggle to pay their bills. Your attention to the critically important task of budgeting is appreciated.

Sincerely,
Diana Hinchcliff

End Letter

Marie Dermody read a letter she had prepared for the Hearing as follows:

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to address the Town Board with regards to the 2016 preliminary budget. I commend this Town Board for drafting a budget with relatively minimal overall increase. Because this is not an easy task, it is an effort that deserves to be recognized.

With this being said, I do have comments and observations to share regarding the 2016 preliminary budget. And I will preface the following comments with the notice that these comments have nothing to do with the persons holding certain positions in Town government; my comments are strictly addressing the positions themselves.

The preliminary budget proposes increases for certain Town personnel. I'm personally okay with 1.45% for the Town Clerk and 1.5% for the recycling coordinator simply because they are reasonable. What I'm not okay with are certain other salary increases that are proposed in this budget:

1) 9.0% increase for court clerks

They are the only clerks in Town government that are salaried instead of hourly so we really don't know how many hours they work during the course of a week or a month or a year. However, in the past, the clerks attended court every other Monday and on DA night. And we can deduct all those Mondays that are legal holidays and court is not in session.

It is a little known fact that the Supervisor has sought the assistance of someone from outside Town government (at additional taxpayer expense) to help correct the justice accounts that are so incredibly out of order. Is this what we reward with a 9% salary increase?

2) 9.1% raise for zoning/planning board clerk, deputy town clerk, highway clerk - The Town Board proposes to raise these clerk salaries from \$11 to \$12 per hour. And although the total line amount for these salaries does not change, the fact of the matter is that the pay is increased by this percentage. (The highway clerk line is proposed to increase by 0.5 %.)

3) 4.7% raise for the highway superintendent

In a very recent budget, the highway superintendent offered to lower his clerk's salary in exchange for a modest increase in his salary and that he would take on some of the clerk duties. This request was granted with the result that the Town Supervisor now assumes many of the clerk duties. And for 2016, another proposal is placed before us for a slight increase in the clerk's line and a significant increase in the superintendent's salary line.

In the past, certain Town Board members have cited the fact that employees in the highway department sometimes earn more than the superintendent when you factor in overtime pay. News flash – this is true in many cases of salaried managers who are exempt from overtime, even in the private sector. And a highway superintendent should be well aware of this situation when contemplating a decision to run for public office.

The Town Board contributes to this situation by consistently approving Collective Bargaining Agreements that carry multi-year pay raises along with a benefits package that many can just dream about (e.g. up to \$5,000 & \$10,000 in co-pay reimbursement along with a lower insurance premium); generous vacation leave; and additional “floating holiday” in addition to other questionable paid days off (e.g. Election Day). Until the town Board does a better job of getting this issue under control, you will always have this situation with which to contend.

Yes, the highway department and its superintendent serve this town well. But that is their job, after all. And it is the expectation we should have of all our employees.

4) 0.5% increase in highway clerk line

As mentioned previously, the Town Board proposes an increase from \$11 to \$12/hour to begin with. Now an increase of ½% for the line (from \$4576 to \$4600) is proposed. How can this be justified when, in September, less than \$800 had been spent?

5) 4.3% increase for assessor's clerk

This Town Board advertised for an assessor's clerk at \$12/hour for 15 hours/week. However, you hired someone at \$15/hour for 15 hours per week. When calculated, 15 hours x \$15 x 52 weeks, you get \$11,700. Why is it necessary to “pad” an extra \$300 onto this line?

None of these increases, when viewed individually, seem to amount to very much at all. But when taken together as a group, they become more significant.

And yes, there are budget increases in many other places in the budget that could be questioned. But I can only tilt at so many windmills.

It is important to keep in mind that our senior citizens will not be receiving a cost of living adjustment in their social security income for 2016. So any increase in expenditures will have a negative impact on the one segment of our community that can least afford any increase in their tax bills. Will you explain to them why certain people deserve 4-9% wage increases when the seniors are getting 0%? I truly hope the Town Board will seriously consider the comments contained herein and act accordingly.

Respectfully,
Marie Dermody

End Letter

Jeff Pine wished to make a correction to Diana Hinchcliff's letter stating that the Senior Star exemption does not affect the Town taxes.

Kim Graff expressed her sincere gratitude for bringing the Library back up to \$25,000.

Deputy Supervisor Cooke announced that the Board will vote on the budget on November 12, 2015 at the Regular meeting.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Sedlmeir to close the Public Hearing at 7:15 PM; 2nd by Councilman Bolte.

Motion carried: Ayes (4) Cooke, Bolte, Sedlmeir, and Wood; Nays (0)

A motion was made by Councilman Bolte to adjourn the Public Hearing at 7:15 PM; 2nd by Councilwoman Sedlmeir.

Motion carried: Ayes (4) Cooke, Bolte, Sedlmeir, and Wood; Nays (0)

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED;

Victoria H. Kraker
Town Clerk