

THE SMITHFIELD TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BUDGET MEETING
OCTOBER 18, 2023

A Budget Meeting of the Smithfield Township Board of Supervisors was held on October 18, 2023, at the Smithfield Township Municipal Center at 1155 Red Fox Rd, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301, and via Zoom.

Present are Supervisors Jacob Pride, Robert Lovenheim, Brian Barrett (joins via Zoom at 10:11AM), Treasurer Frank Cefali, Budget & Finance Manager Lucas DeBartolo, and Township Manager Julia Heilakka.

Also present is Pam Barrett.

1. Chair Jacob Pride calls the meeting to order at 10:00AM. A quorum is present.
2. The Pledge of Allegiance is recited.
3. Announcements – none.
4. Minutes – none.
5. Reports – none.
6. New Business
 - a. [Item c] Discuss: Budget Meeting Dates. The budget meetings on the schedule are today and November 1st. After discussion, the Board decides to schedule additional budget meetings for October 25, 2023 and November 8, 2023 at 10AM.
 - b. [Item a] Discuss: 2024 General Fund Budget. Lucas DeBartolo discusses this year's budget to actual report. The Board originally scheduled no interest income because rates were so low, but the township shopped around and got better rates. Insurance was higher than expected. The 2024 proposed budget reflects 4% increases everywhere to account for inflation. The bond payment is not a part of this budget draft because it will be paid with fund balance. Included in this budget is \$175,000 for capital expenses each year. Frank Cefali confirms the \$175,000 would shift to a capital reserve account. Brian Barrett joins via Zoom at 10:11AM. Lucas DeBartolo replies yes, and all grants will shift to a grants fund for 2024. The draft budget for the general fund reflects a millage of 1.71.
 - c. [Item b] Discuss: 2024 Highway Fund Budget. Lucas DeBartolo discusses the budget to actuals for 2023 Highway Fund and the 2024 budget. The DPW Director wants to bring all paving in-house next year in cooperation with Middle Smithfield Township, which will save tens of thousands of dollars per mile paved.

- d. [Return to Item a] The capital expenditure sheet has all items under consideration in the budget. The Board discusses capital expenses related to Sweetwater Dam, a capital improvement plan, a comprehensive plan, and Waterfront Park house. The loader, bucket truck, and mower payments reflect three items the DPW Director feels the Township desperately needs. Brian Barrett states he is unsure if the Township needs any of this equipment; the Township has no debt, and he is uncomfortable with taking out loans. Brian Barrett states the raises are ludicrous. Lucas DeBartolo replies raises have not been discussed by the Board. Lucas DeBartolo replies that financially, it makes sense to do a loan; if the Township had set aside money for the last 15 years, this wouldn't be necessary. Lucas DeBartolo states ESYA and FC Pocono have requested reseeded and aerating for the fields, and both are trying to chip in to lower the expense. Julia Heilakka states the cabin in Waterfront Park needs rethinking. Robert Lovenheim asks if the Township could pursue a historic grant for the cabin. Pam Barrett states the cabin is not historic. Robert Lovenheim would like the cabin to be used in some way. The Board discusses the possibility of a volleyball court. Julia Heilakka states development at Waterfront Park is paused until the NPDES permit is issued.

The Board discusses bringing line painting in-house with COG, additional picnic tables and grills at Waterfront Park, AEDs, and speed signs. Robert Lovenheim states the current sign on River Rd is working: people are slowing down. The Board decides that requests from the fire companies will be covered by the implementation of a fire tax, and discusses a new document management system. Lucas DeBartolo states the Board cut \$114,756 so far, and will need to cut an additional \$27,000 or raise the draft millage by .045. The Board will discuss additional cuts at the next session.

Lucas DeBartolo discusses additional staffing requests, specifically one new mechanic for DPW and a new admin staff. The Board discusses that a mechanic will bring repairs in house, but it is difficult to quantify how much that will save. The Board discusses a possible new admin staff, who would work on applying for more grants and manage open space in the Township. The Board discusses a position approved by the Board related to zoning, permit management, and reception. Robert Lovenheim wants the Township to work harder to protect water quality and environmental health in the Township. The meeting pauses at 10:50AM and resumes at 10:51AM.

Lucas DeBartolo states the Township has been paying \$11,160 a month in emergency payments to keep Bushkill EMS operational, and the fire companies have requested a fire tax. The JLN study is lagging and still pending, but the Township needs to move forward. He reviewed budgets and capital improvement plans for the fire companies; no one has set aside enough money to replace their assets, and the situation is a timebomb. By implementing a tax, the Township has the chance to avoid EMS services imploding. The fire tax is not necessarily sufficient, but the Township will have more information once JLN releases their study. The Township must sustain volunteer fire services as long as possible; paid departments are drastically more expensive.

Lucas DeBartolo states Suburban EMS sustained a \$307,000 loss this year and is expected to sustain a \$500,000 loss in 2024. Jacob Pride states Price and Middle Smithfield Townships are discussing an EMS tax. Lucas DeBartolo suggests full audits for all companies slated to receive funds. Jacob Pride states all EMS services will need funds to complete capital improvements and volunteerism has plummeted in recent years. Pike County lost emergency services at one point, and the Township must take steps to prevent that. Julia Heilakka states the next budget session for Middle Smithfield Township is October 19th at 10AM. Lucas DeBartolo states the fire companies asked for one full mill of tax, but it does not seem possible at this time.

Lucas DeBartolo states the cable franchise fee is a 5% tax on cable subscribers that collects \$112,000. Removing the cable tax increases the millage by .18 mills. After discussion, the Board will keep the cable franchise tax. Lucas DeBartolo states the draft budget, including the fire and EMS taxes, places the draft millage at 2.997, and discusses other township's millage rates from 2023. This increase would place the Township in 6th place when comparing to 2023 rates. Pam Barrett states it should go by population; boroughs are bigger. Jacob Pride states Ross Township has no real estate tax but a similar population. Tobyhanna Township is at 1.846 mills and has approximately 8,000 people. Lucas DeBartolo states all townships have different miles of roads, so you can't compare townships with less or more roads.

Lucas DeBartolo discusses other townships' fire tax amounts, and that a fire tax will set the fire companies up to succeed, even though they are on the brink of failure now. Price and Middle Smithfield Townships will probably need to create fire and EMS taxes, and he has not spoken to other townships. Robert Lovenheim confirms the county contributes nothing to emergency services, perhaps the Township could ask the county for assistance.

Brian Barrett states he just lost power in his house and his phone is about to die.

7. Board of Supervisors' Report - none.
8. Bills – none.
9. Public Comment – none.
10. Robert Lovenheim motions to adjourn, Jacob Pride seconds; meeting adjourned at 11:18AM.

Minutes recorded by Julia Heilakka

Respectfully submitted:



Julia Heilakka, Assistant Secretary