

**BENSALEM TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday
December 5th, 2022
Budget Meeting**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Joseph Knowles, Council President
Edward Kisselback, Council Vice President
Joseph Pilieri, Council Secretary
Stacey Champion, Council Member
Michelle Benitez, Council Member

SUPPORTING STAFF PRESENT:

Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo
Debora McBreen, Council Clerk/Recording Secretary
John Chaykowski, Finance Manager
William Cmorey, Director of Administration
William McVey, Director of Public Safety
Tim Shultz, Director of Public Works
Chuck McMullin, Director of Parks & Rec
Ken Farrall, Director of Building & Planning
Jim Bogan, Director of Operations, Bensalem Township Country Club

PLEASE NOTE:

The minutes are not verbatim but rather a synopsis of what transpired during the meeting, and while I do my best to attribute remarks and questions to the correct individual, there may be mistakes or omissions because of the “back and forth” dialogue and the lack of the use of their microphone.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Council President Knowles opened the meeting with a moment of silence and/or prayer which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION OF THE PROPOSED 2023 BUDGET:

Council President Knowles invited the **Mayor** to make the Opening Remarks. The Mayor indicated he would like his message to be written into the record. The 2023 Budget being presented this evening has no tax increase, which the Mayor was very proud, working together with Council through the years to make sure they take care of Bensalem!

Council President Knowles indicated the Mayor's Budget Message was well written and it spelled out a lot of the things Council was able to get done. Bensalem is the 10th largest community in Pennsylvania with 1400 acres of open space.

Council President Knowles turned over the meeting to the **Finance Manager, John Chaykowski**. **Mr. Chaykowski** indicated there was one minor change on page 5 to the Police Revenues, the Police Services and the Police Miscellaneous lines were flipped. Police Miscellaneous should read \$57,000 as a budget and Police Services should read \$900,000 as a budget.

Mr. Chaykowski introduced **the Director of Public Safety; Director McVey** who presented the Police and Fire budgets.

Council President Knowles complimented Director McVey in regards to his position and how well of a job he was doing, and asked the Director about his Police Officer staff.

POLICE AND FIRE:

Director McVey indicated the Police Department is currently staffed with 105 Police Officers. The department is 4 Officers short, with an active list. In the Budget presented to Council, 1 Officer has been allocated who will be an additional SRO assigned to one of the schools with funding from the School District.

Council Vice President Kisselback wanted to discuss the Salaries and Benefits and asked the Director to explain the increase.

Director McVey indicated in 2022, as the year wraps up, part of the reason that it is below budget that there were approximately 18 people who were promoted from vacancies that had left the department. Some of those vacancies were Command Sergeants, Corporals and Detectives, so not having some of those positions filled temporarily and not having some of the positions filled at the higher level, the Township saved on salaries in general. The Township also saved on Police overtime, which is a few hundred thousand dollars less than what was budgeted. It is always budgeted high because they don't know the unknown. But in the event there is a homicide or two, the Police Department will have enough money budgeted.

Director McVey indicated, being in the new position, he has put a lot of scrutiny into the Budget and reallocated some things and made it a priority to limit their expenses as much as possible, which Director McVey is hoping to continue for the rest of the year and to be under budget.

Council Vice President Kisselback inquired about raises and health insurance.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated for Health Insurance the Township budgets for a higher percentage at the time the Budget is presented. The actual Health Insurance renewal is much lower than what was budgeted by roughly 4%. At the beginning of 2023 there will be a reduction.

Council Vice President Kisselback inquired about the Operating Expenses for Fire in regards to vehicle purchase.

Director McVey indicated this was an unanticipated cost due to an accident in July, the Township firetruck was hit head on and totaled.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated firetrucks take about 6 months to a year to come in and back in July the Township received a quote for a firetruck to be built. The anticipated delivery is April or May of 2023. The Township received \$700,000 back in insurance money, so the payout for the new firetruck will be \$120,000. The firetruck being purchased is \$820,000.

Councilwoman Champion inquired about the budget regarding Police vehicles.

Director McVey indicated he was evaluating the environment and noticed an increase of 24% for 2023. The Police Department looked to secure 3 vehicles this year at the reduced rate. The Police Department was able to work out a transaction with their Dealer, Chapman, to get the vehicles this year. Two hybrid vehicles and an undercover vehicle were purchased.

Council Secretary Pilieri complimented Director McVey on his Police force and the wonderful job they are doing.

Director McVey thanked the Mayor, Council and the Administration for the support they give to the Police and Fire Departments.

Mr. Chaykowski introduced Director of the Public Works Department, Tim Shultz.

PUBLIC WORKS AND LIQUID FUELS:

Director Shultz thanked the Mayor and Council and proceeded with questions from Council.

Council Vice President Kisselback inquired about the salaries.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated there were turnovers in the Public Works Department with drivers leaving and being replaced later in the year, as well as the department being without a Deputy Director; and indicated that is the cost savings, and Mr. Schultz is doing a phenomenal job with both positions.

Council Secretary Pilieri complimented Director Shultz and his crew for the wonderful job they were doing.

Council President Knowles inquired about the salt bin.

Director Schultz indicated there is more salt in this Township then there has ever been and has recently rented a salt stacker to get more salt in the domes. There is an additional salt bin at Firefighters Field that will hold another 200 plus tons of salt for emergency backup.

Council Vice President Kisselback inquired about the Operating Expenses and the Building Repairs and Maintenance.

Director Schultz indicated he would like to insulate and heat the Poll Barn due to storing equipment with water in it.

Councilwoman Champion inquired about the Snow Removal.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated one of the allowable expenses from the Liquid Fuels/State Aid is snow removal. This money is used to pay the contractors who remove the snow from the cul-de-sacs, as well as the purchase of salt. There is a Winter Maintenance line for snow removal which those funds are used first. The General Fund line for Public Works is used for anything over and above what has been spent.

Mr. William Cmorey, Director of Administration, indicated Director Schultz took the initiative to strategically place bulk salt throughout the Township so that the Public Works Crews would not have to run all the way back to the Township to reload for salt. This keeps the crews up in the area and saves time and makes for a smoother operation.

The Mayor indicated Director Schultz has taken the initiative for cutting down trees with a new piece of equipment purchased last year, which has drastically cut the use of private companies cutting down the trees.

Director Schultz indicated he used a private contractor for a half day service due to safety reasons which involved electrical wires. Director Schultz indicated his crew really works hard, they make him look good, and the Township look good. They do the job safely, effectively and efficiently.

Council Vice President Kisselback asked if the Public Works crew does any of the pruning at the Bensalem Township County Club.

Director Schultz indicated his crew does the pruning on the golf course grounds.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated the Public Works crew was recently at First Responders Field pruning back all of the overgrown trees on the upper field. It saves the Township a lot of money to have the Public Works crew maintaining the fields instead of the use of outside contractors.

Mr. Chaykowski introduced the Director of Parks and Rec., Chuck McMullin.

PARKS AND RECREATION:

Director McMullen thanked the Mayor and Council and proceeded with questions from Council.

Council Vice President Kisselback inquired about the Recreation Program Fees line item.

Director McMullin indicated Parks and Rec. is offering more programs, along with the fees for the hiring of the concert bands is also included in that line item.

Councilwoman Benitez inquired about the programs the Parks and Rec. Department was offering.

Director McMullin indicated the programs included the Summer Rec. Program, Tennis Program and Soccer Program.

Councilwoman Champion asked if the Summer Rec. Program was going to be fully staffed for a full program.

Director McMullin indicated it has been very hard to hire staff to run their programs. This problem of staffing the Summer Programs has been felt throughout the County. A lot of it has to do with how much they will be getting paid. Teenagers are making a lot more money doing other things.

Councilwoman Benitez inquired about the increase in the rate and asked if the change in the scheduling was due to a poor turnout, which was feedback she received in the last year or two.

Director McMullin indicated scheduling pretty much stayed the same.

Councilwoman Benitez indicated the schools were not utilized in the last two years.

Director McMullin indicated the schools were not utilized and said the schools run their own program. The schools have a Base Program which is run through the summer.

Councilwoman Benitez indicated the Base Program costs thousands compared to the program the Township runs. The Bensalem Summer Rec. Program is much more affordable for the families in Bensalem. Some of the feedback the Councilwoman received was the location, the schedule, and there was a price increase but it was better than anything else they could participate in. The Councilwoman does look forward to seeing the Township's Rec. Program come back to life.

Director McMullin indicated in the last two years the Rec. Program had about 300 children participate. Basically, the problem is trying to find employees.

Council President Knowles inquired about the hockey rink located at the Community Park, Richlieu and Galloway Roads the "Spray Park" and inquired about the Soccer Fields located at First Responders Field along with the lighting.

Director McMullin indicated the hockey rink has been resurfaced and open for use. The "Spray Park" will be located at the Community Park and the Soccer Fields, the Township is looking into artificial turf for First Responders Field, and the lighting has been contracted out.

Councilwoman Champion inquired when First Responders Field will be open.

Director McMullin indicated if a turf field is not installed, the field will be open in the Spring of 2023.

Mr. Chaykowski introduced the Director of Building and Planning, Ken Farrall.

BUILDING AND PLANNING:

Director Farrall thanked the Mayor and Council and proceeded with questions from Council.

Council President Knowles inquired about the Use and Occupancy Permits and if the Director was working with a full staff.

Director Farrall indicated the Use and Occupancy Permit requests have been steady. The department is down one employee and they are in the process of interviewing; and there is another clerk retiring and they promoted one of the clerks to Office Manager, and her position will need to be filled at some point. Hopefully, by the beginning of 2023, the department will be fully staffed.

Council President Knowles asked if the Building and Planning department still outsourced some of their work.

Director Farrall indicated they outsource the Residential Permit and they outsource the Commercial Building Inspection and the Electrical Inspection. The department uses the same company, there has been no changes regarding those outsources.

Council Vice President Kisselback asked Director Farrall to elaborate on Parx Casino.

Director Farrall indicated Parx is in the process of going through the Development process with the Township to put the hotel on their property. Parx has been through Zoning and received their approvals and have been to Planning to get their approvals. Parx is in the process of making changes to the plan and will probably be in front of Council in January 2023. Parx is trying to get all of their plans together for when it does come before Council. Assuming Council acts favorably upon it, they wanted to get started with the foundation work while they are finishing the designs and submitting for permits. The Fire Marshal, Mr. Robert Sponheimer and Mr. Farrall are meeting with Parx on Monday to start reviewing and looking over the architectural plans to make sure it is what the Township is looking for.

Councilwoman Champion indicated Permit time has increased in terms of turnover and gotten better as compared to the time during the Pandemic. Not sure if there are any efficiencies the Township is looking to do in the future, either system-wide or other.

Director Farrall indicated, before his employ, the Township had changed systems. Once the department is fully staffed it will be a big help along with the promotion of Noemi Scott as the Office Manager. Ms. Scott has been with the Township for 4 years and does know the system and is able to interact with all of the other clerks. Two young ladies with Traffic and Planning have been helping out in the interim.

Councilwoman Benitez indicated it is her understanding when somebody goes in for a permit, it is processed, but if something needs to be corrected, the Township gets it back and the process starts all over again.

Director Farrall indicated it only touches the same hands, if for example, Zoning is approved, it doesn't touch that hand again. It only touches those hands that gave them the denial for a re-review. The process to re-submit or re-approve or get the final approval is much quicker because it doesn't have to touch everybody's hand.

Mr. Chaykowski introduced the Director of Operations for the Bensalem Township Country Club, Mr. James Bogan.

BENSALEM TOWNSHIP COUNTRY CLUB/BANQUET FACILITIES:

Mr. Bogan presented the 2023 Budget for the Bensalem Township Country Club.

Council President Knowles indicated in general, that it seems as though the golf course is doing good so far. The amount of business and the amount of people in the local community that are taking advantage seems to be fairly good.

Mr. Bogan indicated they have a reasonable rate and a very active club. They are adding some new improvements which can be discussed with Mr. Chaykowski.

Council President Knowles inquired about the new improvements.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated 4 bridges at the Country Club need repair. They are slated for construction late Winter, early Spring. Hole 11 will be moved to tie in with the drainage project.

Councilwoman Champion inquired if there are younger people coming out to play golf.

Mr. Bogan indicated there are younger people playing golf and COVID was actually good for golf. The Country Club runs multiple Youth Leagues and may be starting a few clinics.

Mr. Bogan thanked his new Superintendent, Mr. Roger Smith, and his crew. The crew has the supervision of Mr. Jim Starring overseeing for the time. The golf course really held up this year over trying circumstances.

Mr. Bogan thanked the Mayor, Council and the people of the town for supporting the Bensalem Township Country Club.

Mr. Bogan indicated they will be instituting some new ideas for the Banquet area and looks forward to see it do well.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated, regarding the Banquet Budget, the Township is in the process of looking for a Banquet Manager to bring it back in-house. Currently, the Township has a Management Company that hires a Banquet Manager to run the facility. All of the employees are the Township's employees except for the Banquet Manager.

Council Secretary Pilieri was happy the Township is bringing the Banquet Manger back in-house because he had received calls regarding service being bad, and the food wasn't great.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT:

Mr. Chaykowski indicated he would be open for discussion on the rest of the proposed Budget.

In regards to the Capital Improvement Budget line, the Township has a large project load for 2023. Proposed is a loan from Capital Trust in the amount of \$5,000,000 to fund a majority of these projects. Those projects include the Public Safety Apparatus Facility and if the Township gets awarded the Grant for the turf field for First Responders Field, there is Township costs with that, it is not 100% covered by the Grant. The Spray Park is also included in the Capital

Improvement Fund, that too is not 100% covered by the Grant. As is done every other year, there is a Road Repaving Project for 2023 which is a much smaller and compact Paving Project, estimated around \$2,000,000.

As part of the Budget, there would be a transfer of the loan from Capital Trust to the Capital Improvement Fund, should Council approve it.

A discussion ensued regarding the payment schedule of the loan.

Council President Knowles inquired if the Township anticipated the Trust Fund making any money next year.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated the one portfolio, next year, 95% of it matures. The Township has a lot of lower interest securities that are going to mature. The investors are obviously looking for much higher rates, with the economy the way it is right now, to lock into. The interest should start gaining back to the higher rates.

Council President Knowles inquired about the debt the Township serviced over the years and indicated the Township had re-financed and took advantage of the low interest rates.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated 2 3/4%, or in that ballpark, with the Township debt, it is locked into a fixed rate. There are no adjustable rate loans. The Township has the second highest rating Moody's offers and the Township is in great financial shape.

Council Vice President Kisselback inquired about the Stormwater Restoration.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated a few years back the government instituted the American Recuse Plan where they allocated funds to Municipalities for infrastructure improvements. There is a very strict regulation as to what you can use those funds on. The Township doesn't have wastewater treatment plants so the main thing the Township can use it for is stormwater infrastructure. \$9.4 million is what the Township received from the Federal Government, \$8.9 million has been budgeted for next year because the Township has already completed projects, or the Township has projects that are in construction or slated to be finished in the beginning half of 2023. In the Public Improvements section of the Expenses, a lot of the stormwater improvements the Township is doing or have done are listed there, and will be doing the first part of 2023.

Councilwoman Champion inquired if there is a time-frame the Township has to spend the funds.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated everything has to be allocated by the year 2026 and the projects need to be completed by the year 2028.

Council President Knowles inquired about the curbs and sewer grates in the Eddington/Cornwells section to help the flooding in that area.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated Phase I has been completed and are evaluating what has to be finished in that area.

Council President Knowles inquired about the \$300 rebate that was mentioned in the Mayor's Budget Letter.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated, as stated in the Mayor's Budget Letter, the \$300 rebate will be distributed in 2023.

Councilwoman Benitez thanked Mr. Chaykowski for his assistance helping her maneuver through the Budget. Thanked all of the Directors for their presentation.

Council President Knowles thanked Mr. Chaykowski for explaining things in layman's terms and thanked the Directors for taking Council's calls regarding the complaints they receive.

Council Vice President Kisselback indicated the Council and Mayor are very aware of the problem that there is of rectifying the stormwater management system of Bensalem Township. It is something they, have been discussing and will be very proactive in that respect, based on the Administrations directions and working together.

Council president Knowles asked if there was anyone in the audience who would like to speak for or against the 2023 Budget. Seeing no one come forward, the Public Comment portion was closed.

Council Vice President Kisselback motioned to approve the Mayor's Budget for 2023, **Councilwoman Benitez** seconded and the motion carried 5-0.

3. **CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING FEES FOR CERTAIN SERVICES PERFORMED BY THE BENSALEM TOWNSHIP TREASURER:**

Council President Knowles indicated these are fees that Council has to approve that are collected by the Tax Collector/Treasurer, and they tend to be fees he is charging banks and other mortgage companies for services he is providing.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated the Municipal Code states that the Tax Collector's fees are regulated by the Township. However, they are all fees that go directly to the Tax Collector for tax certifications, duplicate bills and any overdraft fees.

The Tax Collector has put together the request for the fees as referenced in the Resolution.

Council Vice President Kisselback asked what was the purpose for the tax certification fees.

Council President Knowles indicated the Tax Collector has to certify someone's taxes are paid in order for them to get a refund back on taxes, if they are transferring property.

Mr. Chaykowski indicated there is an increase to the fee than what was being charged by the previous Tax Collector. The fees that are being prepared are very similar to a few of the other municipalities being collected by the Tax Collector.

Councilwoman Benítez indicated overdraft fees really should be identified as non-sufficient funds fees because the check writer will be charged with the non-sufficient funds regarding the

bounced check. Technically it is not an overdraft, and asked the verbiage be updated to clearly identify that because they are two separate things.

Councilwoman Champion motioned to approve as corrected, **Councilwoman Benitez** seconded and the motion carried 5-0.

4. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Council President Knowles asked if there was anyone in the audience who would like to make a comment regarding the 2023 Budget. Seeing no one come forward, the Public Comment portion was closed.

5. **OTHER BUSINESS:**

The Mayor thanked Council and all of the Directors, the Administration Staff and announced the Christmas Tree Lighting is December 10th. Wished everyone a wonderful holiday season, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and to all of my Jewish friends, Happy Hanukkah.

Councilwoman Benitez thanked all of the Directors and indicated they make Council look good with all of their hard work.

Councilwoman Champion thanked all of the Directors for an amazing job.

Council Vice President Kisselback thanked all of the Directors for a job well done and the Solicitor, Mr. Joseph Pizzo. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy New Year.

Council President Knowles indicated Bensalem has the best Department Heads. All of the people implemented into the Mayor's Administration, they run like a well-oiled machine.

6. **ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no other business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.

The Bensalem Township Budget Council Meeting of December 5th, 2022 can be viewed in its entirety at the following websites:

www.bensalempa.gov or www.youtube.com

Respectfully Submitted,

Debora F. McBreen
Recording Secretary