

Borough of Jefferson Hills  
Special Meeting of Council  
December 28, 2023

The special meeting of Council was called to order by President Steffey at 6:00 p.m. in the Municipal Center, 925 Old Clairton Road. Following the Pledge of Allegiance, Councilwoman Bucy, Vice President Budd, Councilman Lynch, Councilman Montgomery, Councilman Reynolds, and President Steffey answered to roll call. Solicitor Cromer, Engineer/Acting Borough Manager Glistler, and Finance Director Haberstock were also present. Councilwoman Ruscitto, Mayor McCaffrey, Borough Manager Stinner, Public Work Director Volpe, Chief Dziezgowski, and Consulting Engineer Minsterman were absent.

#### CITIZEN/TAXPAYER COMMENTS

President Steffey read a comment from Sharon Adair, 1605 Marion Drive.

“Just a fellow resident. We read the letters about the new County Hauling contract. But, was wondering why they switched. Was Waste Management going to be higher in price than County Hauling? When you first read the letter and see the increase from \$50 to \$86.45 it is a little shocking. Is this due to Bidenomics?”

President Steffey responded this was addressed multiple times in our previous meetings. County Hauling just happened to be the lowest responsible bidder so that was who we chose to contract with. I can email Miss Adair, and respond to that in more depth.

#### AGENDA ITEMS

Mr. Montgomery moved to approve the 2024 Borough of Jefferson Hills budget in its final form, seconded by Mrs. Bucy.

Mr. Reynolds asked are we going to tell the residents how much that we are dipping into the reserves for this?

Solicitor McPeak Cromer responded that was all discussed at the last meeting. Mrs. Bucy gave a very detailed presentation, and it was discussed at length. Now is the time to move to adopt the budget.

Mr. Reynolds asked that the presentation be repeated, so the residents can hear it one more time, because we are officially making the vote right now.

Solicitor McPeak Cromer responded it is inappropriate, and it is procedurally incorrect. There was a motion made and a second.

Mr. Reynolds asked why is it inappropriate to explain to the residents how much we are dipping into their reserve fund to balance this? That reserve fund is there in case anybody forgets, we are Jefferson Hills. Hills do cave in. We have had to pay for road slides, hill slides, and numerous stuff like that. Why can't it be repeated one more time?

Solicitor McPeak Cromer responded I can tell you that your reserve is higher than any municipality that I have ever experienced. Your reserve is still at the recommended 45 or 35 percent. Your reserve was way too high.

Mr. Reynolds stated you are not paid to tell us what our reserves should be or what they should not be. Is there a legal reason why we are not sharing with these residents; one more time.

Solicitor McPeak Cromer stated it was shared.

President Steffey stated it was shared multiple times. It was shared in budget discussions.

Solicitor McPeak Cromer stated every meeting in regard to the budget, this was discussed. The budget was made available per the Borough Code and all of the guidelines. It was available for people to review. It has been out there. A motion was made to adopt the budget, the motion was seconded, it is time for a vote.

The vote was not unanimous, and a roll call vote was taken per Borough Code, which requires that the minutes show the actual votes by name, below are the votes of each Council Member.

Mrs. Bucy	YES
Mrs. Budd	YES
Mr. Lynch	YES
Mr. Montgomery	YES
Mr. Reynolds	NO
Mrs. Ruscitto	ABSENT
Mrs. Steffey	YES

Five members voted yes, and one member voted no, motion carried.

Mr. Reynolds stated the reason why I voted no is because dipping into the reserves here I thought rewarded this council in essentially bailing them out for numerous irresponsible bad decisions that were made with taxpayer money. There is a longstanding history of wasteful spending and dipping into the budget. We had a finance manager that did a financial forecast. Some members here on council criticize me for trying to share with the residents how far that we were going to be operating in a deficit. President Steffey even said that I was trying to spread fear. After Mr. Drager gave that financial forecast, did we at all take any advice or look

at that financial forecast? Did we slow the spending down; no, we did not. We came back with things like spending up to half a million dollars on a dek hockey rink. We made bad decision after bad decision. If this was in a private industry, there would have been a freeze on spending, and you would not have spent any more money until you could balance your budget. In this case here it went full throttle ahead, wasting your money. I think you should start to pay attention a little bit more. When somebody tells you that you are going to be operating in a deficit and nothing has been done. For example, the solicitor sitting over here. We got rid of a solicitor that was doing a fine job for double the fees; double your fees. Go ahead and laugh all you want; it is the truth.

Mrs. Bucy stated I would be more than happy to show you those individual presentations that I gave before. It is true that we are 1.5 million in the red. This has been discussed numerous times. When I gave the presentation, there were many different options. When people sit up here on Council for the next four years or two years, there are multiple approaches that they can have. You can take money out of reserve, you can increase taxes, you can decrease spending, you can apply for grant money that would be considered free money, or you can consolidate services to become more efficient. There is a multi-approach to balancing a budget. I would like to make sure that everybody knows that, as was pointed out in the presentation. That is why I voted yes.

Mr. Reynolds stated I do not remember you explaining consolidate forces to be more efficient.

Mrs. Bucy stated some of the public works was done in house, as opposed to having it outsourced.

Mr. Reynolds stated that is not really consolidating. Consolidating would be bringing the public works and the police department together.

Mrs. Bucy stated excuse my terminology then, a redistribution of the finances.

Cindy Caulkett, 1424 High Road, asked is that posted on the Borough website? Could it be if it is not?

President Steffey responded the budget itself, and every single minute to each of our meetings are posted. The minutes only get posted after our next month's meeting because we have to approve the previous month's meeting, so they're a lagged month behind typically.

Vice President Budd moved to adopt Resolution 39-2023 establishing the base Real Estate Tax rate for the year 2024 at 5.66 mills (General 5.226 mills; Fire 0.355 mills; and Ambulance 0.079 mills), seconded by Mr. Lynch. The vote was not unanimous, and a roll call vote was taken per Borough Code, which requires that the minutes show the actual votes by name, below are the votes of each Council Member.

Mrs. Bucy	YES
Mrs. Budd	YES
Mr. Lynch	YES
Mr. Montgomery	YES
Mr. Reynolds	NO
Mrs. Ruscitto	ABSENT
Mrs. Steffey	YES

Five members voted yes, and one member voted no, motion carried.

Mrs. Bucy stated the budget has to be at zero. We are not the federal government; we do not carry a deficit over. The budget will be at zero. This resolution does not raise taxes. This is the same amount that it has been for many previous years. This is why you need a multi-approach to this budget. We have had inflation, and things cost more money. So as a result, there is going to be, with the new council, a serious budgetary evaluation as to where money is spent also. I just want people to understand that this is not an increase. According to municipal code, when the new people who were newly elected by the people of Jefferson Hills, by a majority of vote in a democracy that we live in, they have the opportunity to open that budget up again in January. It has to be decided upon by February 15th. At that time, if they feel that there needs to be a tax increase, it will be posted on an agenda for all the residents to view and to consider. Then, they will vote on that. That is something that would be coming in the future as a part of parliamentary procedure.

Mr. Reynolds stated I was opposed to keeping the tax rate the same, simply because you are affected by an increase every year, everything from school taxes, now you've got a garbage increase. You are getting a lot of increases here. It would have been the best interest of our residents, even though we have more residents coming in here daily, for us to take a look and see what was wasteful spending and what was not, and to actually give you a little bit of relief on some of the money that you need to lay out. This was the time where instead of spending your money, looking for more money and trying to press forward, the people need the help the most. We should have considered that, and we should have sat there and helped the residents out. There are a lot of residents that are on fixed income in this Borough. It is \$30.00 increase on the new trash, that was by far the cheapest of the two. When you add that up, that hits their pocketbook. We had an opportunity to cut some of the wasteful spending, and we did not do it. We could have been offering you something back, and we chose not to. That is why I am opposed to it.

President Steffey stated it is absolutely precious that Councilman Reynolds is very concerned with wasteful spending. As he is completing his four-year term here he is walking out the door with a couple thousand dollars in payment that he did not attend conferences that your taxpayer money paid for.

ADJOURNMENT

President Steffey adjourned the meeting at 6:16 p.m. on a motion by Vice President Budd, seconded by Mr. Lynch, and carried unanimously.

Michael Glister, PE  
Acting Secretary/Borough Manager