

**APRIL 14, 2020
BUDGET MEETING**

The Budget Meeting of the Hope Township Committee convened at 4:00 P.M. at the Hope Township Municipal Building with the following members present: Mayor Timothy McDonough (via Zoom), Committeeman Christopher John Kruk (via Zoom) and Deputy Mayor Terry Urfer (municipal building). Also present were Kathleen Reinalda, CFO; Anthony Ardito (Auditor); Robin Keggan, RMC; Deputy Clerk, Zondra Belstra and Brielle Walsh, Events Coordinator/Sports Director.

Under the provisions of the “Open Public Meetings Act”, adequate notice of the meeting had been provided by publishing notice in The Star Gazette and The New Jersey Herald and by posting notices in the Hope Post Office and on the Township bulletin boards.

Roll call: Mr. Urfer- present

Mr. Kruk – present

Mayor McDonough- present

RESOLUTIONS:

RESOLUTION NO. 2020-28

**HOPE TOWNSHIP, COUNTY OF WARREN
RESOLUTION REQUESTING THE STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS TO
IMMEDIATELY ALLOCATE CRITICALLY NEEDED EMERGENCY AND ECONOMIC
FUNDING TO THE COUNTY OF WARREN FOR THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

WHEREAS, in response to the deadly COVID-19 (Corona Virus) pandemic the Federal Government recently enacted several pieces of legislation aimed at reducing the economic impact and protecting public health; and,

WHEREAS, the Corona Virus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (the ‘CARES Act’) is the largest emergency aid package in United States history and provides for over two trillion dollars (\$2,000,000,000,000) in emergency and economic aid and allocates billions of dollars of relief to individuals, businesses, the health care system and state, county and local governments; and,

WHEREAS, on April 2, 2020, the United States Senators for the State of New Jersey, Robert Menendez and Cory Booker, announced the release of the first wave of Federal funding pursuant to the CARES Act under which New Jersey would receive a combined total in excess of eighty-two million dollars (\$82,000,000) in State and local funding and of which fifteen million seven-hundred thousand dollars (\$15,700,000) in discretionary funding was allocated directly to the State government; and,

WHEREAS, notwithstanding that Northern New Jersey has one of the highest concentrations of confirmed cases in the entire world and is currently considered to be at the epicenter of the national and global emergency caused by the deadly Corona Virus, the County of Warren is only one (1) of four (4) New Jersey counties not to receive any Federal funding; and,

WHEREAS, while several other counties within the State with significantly less Corona Virus cases received Federal aid, the taxpayers and residents of Warren County and a few other counties have been marginalized, ignored and left to carry the heavy burden and cost of responding to the most significant national emergency that has faced this Country since World War 2 alone and without the benefit of critically needed Federal and State assistance; and,

WHEREAS, unlike the other parts of the State where testing centers have been opened with the help of State and Federal assistance, Warren County, with the assistance of St. Luke’s Hospital and local municipalities, took action to open a testing center on its own initiative and funded solely by the County.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Hope Township Committee, County of Warren, State of New Jersey, imploring Federal and State Government to take notice of the significant impact on residents and taxpayers of Warren County caused by the Corona Virus epidemic and to take immediate action to correct and address the inequities caused by the current allocation of State and Federal aid and provide the necessary funding and resources to the County Warren and municipalities within the County to protect the health and safety of the public.

Motion: Mr. Urfer

Second: Mr. Kruk

Roll Call: Mr. Kruk – yes

Mr. Urfer – yes

Mayor McDonough - yes

RESOLUTION NO. 2020-29

**HOPE TOWNSHIP, COUNTY OF WARREN
RESOLUTION IMPLORING THE GOVERNORS OF NEW JERSEY AND PENNSYLVANIA,
AS WELL AS THE BOARDS OF TRUSTEES OF ST. LUKE’S UNIVERSITY HEALTH
NETWORK AND THE LEHIGH VALLEY HEALTH NETWORK, TO PROMULGATE
UPDATED PROTOCOLS REGARDING OBSTETRICAL LABOR, DELIVERY AND
VISITATION**

WHEREAS, to witness the birth of a child is our best opportunity “to experience the meaning of the word miracle” (Paul Carvel); and

WHEREAS, one of the greatest joys experienced by a spouse is being able to participate in the birth of and have that initial bonding with a new baby; and

WHEREAS, many Warren County couples have brought it to the attention of the Board of Chosen Freeholders that St. Luke’s University Health Network and Lehigh Valley Health Network have imposed a ban on New Jersey visitors, including for maternity visits; and

WHEREAS, this ban is particularly discriminatory against Warren County couples, as neither hospital in Warren County offers maternity services, leaving expectant parents no choice but to use medical facilities located outside of the County; and

WHEREAS, Warren County’s number of COVID-19 infections is far fewer than the amount reported in Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley, where St. Luke’s University Health Network and Lehigh Valley Health Network maternity facilities are located, so a ban on family members assisting in the birth of a baby is an unnecessary and heavy-handed approach not supported by the facts; and

WHEREAS, the New York Department of Health has updated specific guidelines for obstetrical and pediatric settings providing for familial support in labor and delivery as well as the immediate postpartum period if the patient so desires; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli has issued an order to hospitals requiring them to allow one designated support person to be with the expectant mother, deeming such support as essential to patient care throughout labor, delivery, and the immediate postpartum period; and

WHEREAS, the Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders shares the sentiment that a child’s birth is a special moment and should be celebrated; and

WHEREAS, the delivery of a baby without a spouse or any family members present creates additional stress and anxiety, which could impact delivery; and

WHEREAS, an amended order on visitation, being cognizant of symptoms of COVID-19 and protocols addressing the health, safety and welfare of all patients and staff, should be implemented to ensure a practical, prudent, and reasonable policy.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Hope Township Committee, County of Warren, State of New Jersey requests that Governor Phil Murphy of the State of New Jersey and Gov. Tom Wolf of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as well as the respective boards of trustees of St. Luke's University Health Network and Lehigh Valley Health Network, modify the polices for labor and delivery for the birth of a child to permit participation by designated family; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a certified copy of this resolution be sent to Gov. Murphy, Gov. Wolf and to respective boards of trustees of St. Luke's University Hospital Network and the Lehigh Valley Health Network.

Motion: Mr. Kruk

Second: Mr. Urfer

Roll Call: Mr. Kruk – yes Mr. Urfer – yes Mayor McDonough - yes

RESOLUTION NO. 2020-30

**HOPE TOWNSHIP, COUNTY OF WARREN
RESOLUTION REFUNDING TAX SALE CERTIFICATE 2020-005
THAT WAS REDEEMED**

WHEREAS, the property owned by Leonard L Mancuso known as Block 3200, Lot 2100 located at 30 Ridgeway Avenue had unpaid 2019 property taxes and was sold at a Tax Sale held on 30 January 2020 by the Hope Township Tax Collector; and

WHEREAS, Bala Partners, LLC of 17 West Cliff Street located in Somerville, NJ 08876 was the successful bidder of the above stated property. The amount of the Tax Sale consisted of unpaid 2019 property taxes, interest, and other costs, and totaled \$2,462.59 and is represented by Tax Sale Certificate 2020-005; and

WHEREAS, Leonard L. Mancuso, the supposed owner of the property, paid \$4,739.42 on 26 March 2020 to the Hope Township Tax Collector to satisfy the outstanding Tax Sale Certificate and subsequent taxes.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and Township Committee of the Township of Hope on this 14th day of April 2020 that the Chief Financial Officer be authorized to draw a check payable to Bala Partners, LLC in the amount of \$15,739.42 for the redemption of Tax Sale Certificate 2020-005 which includes the Tax Sale Certificate of \$4,739.42 and the return of a Tax Sale Premium of \$11,000.00.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the satisfied executed Tax Sale Certificate 2020-005 be returned to Leonard L Mancuso of 30 Ridgeway Avenue in Blairstown, NJ 07825

Motion: Mr. Urfer

Second: Mr. Kruk

Roll Call: Mr. Kruk – yes Mr. Urfer – yes Mayor McDonough - yes

General discussion took place regarding the budget for 2020. Due to the pandemic, the State has pushed back their budget to September 2020. Hope Township has decided to be proactive and try to get as much of the municipal budget work accomplished as they can put in place ahead of the adoption of the State budget with the understanding that changes may become necessary to the municipal budget after receiving the State budget.

Ms. Reinalda noted that per the budget worksheet received from Mr. Ardito, there is a 2.95 cent increase in tax rate. \$88 annual tax increase on average assessment. Capital improvement line stands at \$111,000.00 (proposed fire truck purchase being the driving force in the tax rate increase). Ms. Reinalda also added that she allotted for a 2% salary/wage increase which can be backed out/alterd if necessary. O/E was pretty much kept flat and in line with last year.

The Township Committee's goal is to keep the tax rate flat if possible. Mr. Kruk noted that the fire truck balance due between the \$69,000 in capital set aside last year for the purchase and the purchase amount of the fire truck (approx. \$180,000) could possibly be taken out of surplus in order to make the purchase while not raising the tax rate for it. Tax rate would be a little more than a penny if the fire truck purchase was paid for using surplus. This would amount to an average tax increase for the homeowner of \$31 per year. Mayor McDonough asked that the Township Committee put some more thought into ways to purchase a new fire truck. Mr. Kruk asked Ms. Reinalda to write the specs up for the bids that will need to be advertised for in order to purchase the fire truck. She will try to have them done in time for the April 22 meeting. If approved by the Committee, advertisement will run and prospective bidders will have 10 days in which to submit their bids. After such time, the purchase can be wrapped up and approved at the June business meeting.

Mr. Ardito noted that there is \$846,000 in surplus and that \$166,000 was being taken out to fund the budget (same amount as last year). Surplus for the coming year is an unknown due to the financial difficulties arising out of the pandemic. Payment of property taxes may be a hardship for people which will affect the cashflow. That would make surplus regeneration an issue.

Mr. Urfer spoke about the DPW budget that Mr. Whitmore provided. He will be meeting with Don to go over numbers and projects. He discussed cancelling the Fishing Derby this year due to the pandemic (usually held in May) and taking that \$800 expense out of the line item of Celebrations and Public Events. To be re-visited further into the year.

Mr. Urfer also asked about the funds that the Township will be receiving for the cell tower and how they might be able to help offset our budget this year. Ms. Reinalda noted that if those funds were not realized in last year's budget they cannot be realized in this year's budget. It will help to offset next year's surplus.

Mr. Urfer also noted that he'd like to give thought to salary adjustments for the Planning Board and Zoning Board secretary positions due to the inactivity of both Boards for the past months. Mayor McDonough noted that it may be time to again look into combining both Boards to make a Land Use Board. It was noted that perhaps a joint meeting between the Zoning Board and Planning Boards would be necessary to get a feel for doing so.

Mr. Urfer made note that he wanted a print-out of the overtime expenses paid out in 2019. With 2 DPW employees he feels that it should be helping to offset the outside costs of landscape management/snowplowing. Ms. Reinalda was asked to provide details of what was paid out to Drake's Landscaping last year (approximately \$35,000 paid out). Discussion took place about cutting of ball fields since no sports will be played this spring (perhaps cut every other week).

Mr. Urfer asked that \$5,000 be put into the budget for an independent traffic study for Hope Township. (Perhaps take out of surplus.) He also made note that his money may not be sent, but it would be smart to have in place should the need arise.

Open Space Tax was discussed. There is currently \$169,631 in that account. Discussed several projects that the Township would like to undertake with the Open Space Tax money (community center grant and taking down of house across from the community center). Mr. Urfer asked the clerk to reach out to Bob May for his input on the Open Space Tax.

Land Conservancy Agreement was discussed. The Township Committee would like to align their yearly agreement to match that of White Township's (\$100 per hour instead of a flat yearly rate).

The \$14,000 bill for Fred Stephens (water lines in center of town) was discussed. That bill is to be paid out of capital so more money will need to be put into that line item. Ordinance will need to be done. The \$14,000 will come out of surplus for the addition to the capital expenditures line.

Ms. Reinalda explained the process by which Clean Communities monies are added into the budget later in the year – done by a Ch. 159.

Tax Collector was given permission to order necessary supplies to do estimated tax bills for 2020 as the county will not strike their tax rate until late in the year with the State budget being introduced so late.

Mayor McDonough asked Ms. Reinalda to provide a run-down of Celebration of Public Events expenses. He also noted that the paving project in the center of town is on hold right now for various reasons.

Mr. Kruk noted that several families are in need of help with food donations. The school has been handling the disbursement of these items/funds thus far.

Public Session comments were taken by Ann Rhinesmith who commended the Committee for their hard work to keep expenditures down. Christine Rusin also commented on the phone bill audit that resulted in 5 lines being closed out at a savings of approximately \$200 per month and gave her thanks to the office staff for jumping on the project so quickly.

Seeing there was no other business for tonight, this meeting of the Hope Township Committee was adjourned at 4:55 p.m. on a motion made by Mr. Urfer, seconded by Mr. Kruk. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin L. Keggan, RMC
Municipal Clerk