

FEbruary 23, 2011

The South Harrison Township Committee held a special meeting on Wednesday, February 23, 2011 at 7:00 pm in the South Harrison Township Municipal Building.

Mayor James McCall called the meeting to order and was followed by the flag salute.

Requirements of the "Open Public Meetings Act" were met. Notice of this meeting was given by: (1) sending sufficient notice herewith to the Today's Sunbeam of Salem and the Gloucester County Times of Woodbury; and (2) posting notice on the public bulletin board at the South Harrison Township Municipal Building.

Roll Call: Robert Diaz – present, Robert Gaines – absent, Mary Howard – present, James McCall – present, Gary Spinner – present, Christie Ehret, CFO – present, Chuck Owens, Auditor – present, Brian Lozuke, Solicitor - absent, Celeste Keen, Deputy Clerk – present

Budget Work Session:

The Township Committee continued budget discussions from last budget meeting held on February 16, 2011. Mayor McCall advised that one of the reasons that the Township is in the condition that it is in is due to the fact that the local purpose taxes had not been raised in the past few years. The Committee is no longer in a position to deplete the surplus which makes it necessary to cut budget line items. Many line items have been cut over the past couple of years and the Committee is now at a point where the options are to reduce the police budget. In an attempt to avoid these cuts, which would mean losing officers, the committee is intent on putting out to referendum raising the local purpose tax. The State dictates that the budget must be introduced by March 7, 2011 in order to be able to go out on referendum. Additionally trash services, recreation services and committee salaries would have to be looked into. The idea of merging with another municipality was introduced as a possibility at the previous meeting. That however is not a viable option as South Harrison Township has a tax rate of .09 cents vs. Harrison Township which has a tax rate of .27 cents. South Harrison Township has the lowest municipal tax rate in Gloucester County; Harrison Township is ranked second. South Harrison Township is also one of the few municipalities with no debt service.

Gary Spinner discussed the levy CAP imposed by the state. He advised that this referendum would assuage the issue for years to come.

Mayor McCall noted that the Chief of Police has retired and the Committee has not hired another Chief. Sergeant Priore has been named Office-In-Charge and has taken on the duties. Trash collection in the Township is in jeopardy. The budget must be introduced by March 7th and the referendum will be held on the same day as the school budget which is April 27, 2011.

Chuck Owens, since the last meeting, has gone through the budget and amended as per the Committee's discussion. Mr. Owens explained that the State removes automatically the line items that are proposed in the referendum, so the referendum is approved or denied by the voters as proposed.

\$218,332 is the dollar amount that must be decided upon by the Committee which will be included in the referendum. The committee reviewed possible items to be cut from 2011 budget.

Gary Spinner referenced a handout from Christie Ehret of possible cuts to be made. Gary Spinner advised the residents in attendance that \$185,000 in cuts have been made already in previous budget meetings and these cuts will be in addition to those.

If the referendum passes it would mean that the local purpose tax would be \$250.00 on an average home, which in South Harrison Township is a home valued at \$350,000.

The \$218,332 to be put out for referendum would be found in the following budget line items:

\$12,500	Executive - Salaries/Wages
\$12,500	Recreation - Operating Expenses
\$62,300	Trash - service to be eliminated
\$42,000	Landfill - service to be eliminated
\$33,064	Reduction in 1 st police officer
\$36,645	Reduction in 2 nd police officer
\$3,067	Police Department Health - Operating Expenses
\$2,256	Police Department - Operating Expenses
\$5,000	Fire Department - contribution reduction
\$5,000	Legal - Operating Expenses
\$4,000	Chipping - service to be eliminated

The Committee regrets that the trash service costs will have to be incurred by the residents for private trash hauling. This brings the total 2011 budget cuts to \$400,000 which includes the cuts referenced above as well as previous cuts made at prior meetings.

Open Meeting to the Public:

Motion to open the meeting to the public was made by Gary Spinner, second by Mary Howard. Motion carried.

Jim Elchek of 11 Fox Haven Lane inquired as to what the budget was prior to the cuts made. Christie Ehret advised that it was initially \$1.6 million. Mr. Elchek stated that the Committee needs to do a better job in explaining the importance of passing this referendum. It is not a lot of money for the services that are provided.

Nicholas Priore OIC, recognized the effort of the Committee and noted his appreciation for the support of the PBA and residents.

Mel Robertson of 103 Foxford Lane supports the Police Department and feels that the department is somewhat of an insurance policy. In towns that have municipal water service the resident's homeowners insurance is lower. The insurance companies may raise rates based on the fact that police coverage is unavailable.

Debbie Cunningham of 648 Monroeville Road voiced her support for the Police Department. While she supports the referendum, she appealed to the Committee not to undermine the school budget in the process of attempting to pass the referendum.

Colleen Campbell of 15 Raccoon Creek Court stated that in a small community no one wants to pay more taxes but to increase local purpose is beyond reasonable. She noted that former discussions regarding police merger talks did not appear to be a viable option. She appreciates the fact that the South Harrison Police Officers show a presence in the community. The Public Works Department has done a commendable job especially now that they are down to two (2) employees.

Tim O'Donnell of the Local PBA 122 – thanked the community and Township Committee in supporting the South Harrison Police Department. He appreciated and was encouraged by the open dialog between the Police Department and Township Committee.

Mayor McCall, in regard to a Police Department merger, advised that the cost ranged from \$700K – \$1M to merge with another police department. The police budget is approximately \$500K to run ourselves.

Mel Robertson of 103 Foxford Lane encouraged the Committee to educate the residents that a shared services police department is not a viable option.

Mike Finnan of 8 Gazelle Court asked about the portion of revenue that comes from taxes from the residents. He was advised that \$400K of the revenue comes from the residents. Mayor McCall also noted that ratables do not automatically equate to a lower local purpose tax. Some municipalities with a large percentage of ratables have much high local purpose tax. For instance Deptford and Woodbury which are at 1.116 and 2.324 respectively have a great many of ratables.

Close Meeting to the Public:

Motion to close the meeting to the public was made by Robert Diaz, second by Gary Spinner. Motion carried

The introduction of the referendum resolution is scheduled for March 7, 2011 at 5:30 pm and the public hearing is scheduled for April 6, 2011 at 6:00 pm.

Mary Howard asked Sergeant Priore how effective the South Harrison Police Department could be if two (2) officers were omitted. Sergeant Priore advised that with three (3) officers a schedule can be presented but when you factor in the administrative work, sick time, vacations and education the police department would be ineffectual. The D.A.R.E. program would also have to be eliminated.

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn was made by Robert Diaz, second by Gary Spinner. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Celeste Keen, RMC
Deputy Clerk