

February 15, 2022

A workshop meeting of the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Victory Gardens held on February 15, 2022.

Mayor Holeman called the meeting to order and declared a quorum present.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of Our Country.  
Please remain standing for a moment of silence for our military.

This meeting has been advertised in one newspaper, The Daily record, in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act.

ATTENDANCE: Councilwoman Cheatham, Councilman Glass, Councilman Hale, Councilman Lorenzo, Councilwoman Garcia Montes.

ABSENT: Councilwoman Hedgepath.

Tonights meeting is for discussion on the 2022 budget.

Motion to accept the minutes of February 1, 2022 as received by Councilwoman Montes, seconded by Councilman Lorenzo and approved on verbal vote. None opposed.

\*\*\* At this time Mayor Holeman turned the meeting over to the CFO.

Joe said we got a little closer to figures for the budget from the last meeting. We had 5 things that we were waiting on from the last discussion. We now know 3 of the 5.

We know what the pension bill will be. It was \$36,011 and it is going up to \$37,357. Nothing we can do about these costs. It is what the State gives us and we have to pay.

We have the letter from the RVRSA. There is a slight decrease in the fees this year. We are moving money out of the RVRSA line item and putting it into garbage. The garbage bid you received at the last Council meeting, will chew up the savings from the RVRSA. With the new garbage contract being about \$1,000 a month more, that will be covered under the decrease in the RVRSA. They will wash each other out.

Our other 2 items are the Engineering and the Attorney. We talked about this at the last budget meeting. Everyone, if they have a question for these 2 professionals should go through Deb at town hall. This eliminates all of you asking the same questions. The school board issues that we talked about at the last meeting, you really have to come to a decision on that. Ask the attorney if it is worth moving on with it. I made my decision on this last meeting. No matter what, we will owe Dover money. Dover can come back to us and tell us since we haven't paid them any money that they want interest. That will kill us. We all understand that Dover needs to give us information. But in the end, we still owe them. I think with holding onto these checks, it will cost us in the long run. I would rather chase Dover than have them after us. This is a discussion that you have to have with your Attorney. Have your conversation with him and then I will know if we have to change legal.

In regards to Leon, I don't know what types of grants we are getting this year. We have one small award with CDBG for about \$27,000. I don't know about DOT.

I had a request from Councilwoman Montes to put in raises for 3½% and for 5%. I did that. You have 2 different budgets in front of you tonight. One with the 3.5% raise and the other with a 5% raise for the employees. Councilman Glass asked if this is a 3.5% raise on the entire budget or just for raises? Just the Raises. All other changes in the other line items were minor. The places where we are spending money are Legal and Engineering.

The money from the prior years budget that we haven't expended lapses back to the current year. Example: 2021 budget becomes our reserve from what we didn't spend in 2020. The ending balance from the 2020 budget is about \$160,000. Because of the transfers we had to do that money is now down to \$110,000. That amount is left in our 2021 budget. I have not cleared all of last years bills yet. Off the bat you are \$50,000 down of what will be returned to surplus.

Councilwoman Montes said that the Attorney once said that we do not have to give everyone a raise. You have 2 types of professionals that work for the town. One will bill you a flat fee like the Auditors. The other ones will bill you hourly, Councilwoman Montes said we can say no one will get a raise except the Mayor and Council. We didn't get a raise last year. The Clerk said neither did any of the employees. Joe said that the Mayor and Council are included in employees. You are part of the payroll system.

You are employees. You can decide to give all the employees in town a raise, including yourselves. You don't have to give the professionals anything. You have given your professionals a raise every year - even when no one else got a raise. Hopefully they will continue to work for us.

Councilwoman Montes asked if the professionals don't get a raise and only the employees get a raise, what will that do to the budget? Well, that is what you have in front of you now. Would we be hurting the town? Joe said he can make this budget work with the way it is now. I can make it with either the 3.5% or the 5%. Councilman Glass asked about the codification of the ordinances. Will that be covered in this budget? Deb and I talked about it. There is enough money in her line item where this will be covered. Is the Attorney involved in that? No. We were charged like \$3,000 for an ordinance. The Clerk said that is because you as the Council keep changing it. How many times have I said that if you go over it and there is something that needs to be changed to do it all at one time. Everytime the attorney has to rewrite something it costs us.

Councilwoman Montes asked if it will hurt the town if we give raises? The budget will be going up 3.5% either with raises or without them Joe said. Joe said that the impact of a 3.5% raise is \$12,377. a 5% raise is \$18,000. A tax point for the Borough is about \$8,000.

Our new Assessor has increased our ratable base a little bit. New ratables in town came to about \$3,800. There were a few added assessments. Good for our new Assessor. We are using less fund balance than we used last year. I will be hard pressed, to put money back in fund balance at the end of 2022.

Councilwoman Montes asked if we will get any of the money back we lost in interest? Joe said we are looking at the American Rescue Plan money. We may take that money and put it in Capital so it is there moving forward. If we decide that we will use some of that money for revenue replacement then I would lower the appropriation. We will use some of that money for the air filters and whatever covid related stuff we can use it for. Joe said that raising the sewer rates helped out alot. Too bad we didn't do it sooner.

Joe said if the RVRSA fees went down why are we suing them? The Clerk said we are not suing the RVRSA. It is a lawsuit that RVRSA and all the towns that belong to it are suing Jersey City. Jersey City wants to pull out. In the past they have tried to do that and they haven't been able to. They have started this all over again. as a member of the RVRSA all the towns were told that their attorneys have to be present so that all members are represented. If you tell RVRSA that their attorney should be fighting for all the towns, why is our Attorney there? Why can't RVRSA report back to all towns? Councilman Lorenzo said we should start paying Dover something. The Mayor suggested that we put all the money into escrow so at least it is in an account and we aren't just holding the checks in a drawer.

Council said no raises for professionals. Councilman Glass said 3.5% for employees. Councilwoman Montes said 5% for employees. Councilwoman Cheatham said a 3/5% and Councilman Lorenzo said a 4%.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Montes for a 4% raise for employees and a 0% raise for professionals. Motion seconded by Councilman Lorenzo and approved on roll call:

Councilwoman Cheatham	Yes
Councilman Glass	No
Councilman Hale	Yes
Councilman Lorenzo	Yes
Councilwoman Garcia Montes	Yes

Councilman Glass asked how much that would bring the budget up? Approximately \$16,000.

Joe said he will put this information together and get it over to Man at Nisivoccia. She will look it over and see if there is anything we missed. Man will be with me for the next budget meeting and we should have more information on the American Recovery Act.

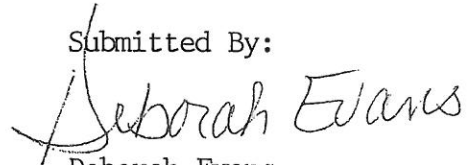
Motion to open the meeting to the public by Councilwoman Montes, seconded by Councilwoman Cheatham and approved on verbal vote. None opposed.

No Public Present.

Motion to close the meeting to the public by Councilwoman Montes, seconded by Councilwoman Cheatham and approved on verbal vote. None opposed.

Motion to adjourn the meeting by Councilwoman Montes, seconded by Councilman Hale and approved on verbal vote. None opposed.

Submitted By:

  
Deborah Evans  
Borough Clerk