

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – March 1, 2021

The meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Lower, County of Cape May, State of New Jersey was held on March 1, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. in the meeting room of the Township Hall, 2600 Bayshore Road, Villas, New Jersey.

The Clerk announced that the meeting was being held in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act and that adequate notice of the meeting had been provided according to law.

The following members of Council were present for roll call taken by the Clerk:

Councilmember Thomas Conrad
 Councilmember Kevin Coombs
 Councilmember Roland Roy, Jr. via telephone
 Deputy Mayor David Perry
 Mayor Frank Sippel

Also present: Michael Laffey, Township Manager, David Stefankiewicz, Township Solicitor and Karen Fournier, Deputy Township Clerk

Work Session

Res. # 2021-92 Introduction of 2021 Budget

Manager Laffey presented the budget message, introducing the proposed 2021 Municipal Budget. Due to several factors, the proposed budget includes a 1.99 cent tax increase. See Budget Message attached.

The budget hearing will be held on April 5 and copies of the budget will be available in the clerk's office and on the Township website.

Mayor Sippel thanked Manager Laffey, CFO Lauren Read and Auditor Leon Costello for their work on the budget. He pointed out the increase in several other components of the tax bill, including county, school and fire tax. He also shared news that Lower Township ranks 19 in 565 municipalities in NJ for having the lowest tax bill. He challenged the manager and staff to apply for more grants to help offset the budget for next year.

Deputy Mayor Perry acknowledged the great work of everyone involved in the budget process and commented on the timing and factors of the increase.

Councilmember Conrad complimented Lauren Read for her hard work and long hours on the budget. He commented on the need for the increase and pointed out the Township's exceptional tax collection rate.

Councilmember Coombs thanked the financial team.

Leon Costello stated that the Township is under the allowable spending limit by \$1.6 million and stated that many municipalities are introducing increases of 2 cents or more. The public hearing is scheduled for April 5th.

	MOTION	SECOND	AYE	NAY	RECUSE	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
CONRAD	X		X				
COOMBS			X				
ROY			X				
PERRY		X	X				
SIPPEL			X				

Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes – February 17, 2021

Res. #2021-93 Authorization for the payment of vouchers \$442,124.23

Res. #2021-94 Authorization for the Refund of Taxes

Res. #2021-95 Approval of Change Order #2 to South State for 2019 Road Program; Phase 2 Section 1, for Arizona Avenue, Capital Lane, Republic Lane, Union Lane and Federal Lane (reduction \$71,253.55)

Res. #2021-96 Approval of Change Order #1 for DeBlasio & Associates for the Construction Phase of the Resurfacing of Miami

Res. #2021-97 Bid Acceptance and Award for Landscaping Services for Various Locations 2021 and 2022; Option for 2023 (Bayshore Landscaping \$53,214.25)

- Res. #2021-98 Bid Acceptance and Award for Fertilizing Services for Various Locations 2021 and 2022; Option for 2023 (Spring Green \$25,650)
- Res. #2021-99 Approval of 2021 Rotary Towing Licenses
- Res. #2021-100 Issuance of Ice Cream Peddling and Ice Cream Salesman License for the Year 2021
- Res. #2021-101 A Resolution Approving an Agreement between the Township of Lower and William Priole, Lower Township Chief of Police
- Res. #2021-102 Authorizing the Pay Out of Terminal Leave (E. Rundall \$1,258.22)
- Res. #2021-103 Issuance of 2021 Limousine and Operator Licenses

	MOTION	SECOND	AYE	NAY	RECUSE	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
CONRAD		X	X				
COOMBS			X				
ROY			X				
PERRY			X				
SIPPEL	X		X				

Regular Agenda

Administrative Reports

Monthly Reports – Finance

Call to the Public

Bill Greenfield, Villas, congratulated the Township on the tax collection rate. He inquired about beach access paths and voiced concern about New Jersey and Pennsylvania Avenues. He also questioned the agenda order.

Jesse Rinkewicz, 249 Ludlam Lane, addressed Council regarding the Ordinance regulating chickens. He voiced disfavor with the fairness and reasoning of the ordinance and requested Council consider revisiting the issue. Solicitor Stefankiewicz agreed to review the Ordinance.

Ray Flickinger, Washington Blvd, addressed Council with safety concerns about erosion on the beach access paths. Mayor Sippel directed Manager Laffey to have someone inspect the areas of concern.

James Sanford, Diamond Beach, addressed Council regarding a moratorium he proposed for Diamond Beach. Solicitor Stefankiewicz responded to Mr. Sanford's concern about services to Diamond Beach. Discussion ensued. Mayor Sippel explained the process and assured Mr. Sanford that the matter is under consideration. Mr. Sanford provided the clerk with a resolution requesting Council return to virtual meetings. He also suggested having LT Rescue give monthly reports at council meetings.

Council Comments

Mayor Sippel spoke about building up our youth programs in response to Governor Murphy's recently signed legislation, legalizing and decriminalizing marijuana. He also announced new legislation allowing qualified students to attend New Jersey community colleges without tuition or educational fees, and he gave an update on vaccinations.

Deputy Mayor Perry gave an update on the timeline of County infrastructure projects, particularly Bayshore Road, and commented on addressing drainage issues.

Councilmember Conrad addressed concern regarding flooding issues in areas of the Villas. He suggested we consult with zoning regarding the time-frame to act on the marijuana legislation, and gave an update on the Foster House.

Councilmember Coombs – no comments

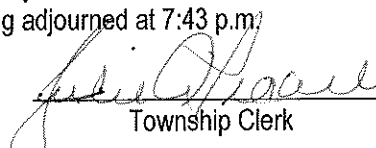
Councilmember Roy voiced confidence in the progress made by the financial team and looks forward to getting back to normal with regard to Covid-19.

Adjournment

There being no further business to address, motion to adjourn moved by Councilmember Conrad, seconded by Councilmember Coombs. Motion to adjourn was unanimous. Meeting adjourned at 7:43 p.m.



 Mayor



 Township Clerk

Approved: 3/15/2021

**MANAGER'S ANNUAL BUDGET MESSAGE
2021 BUDGET INTRODUCTION – March 1, 2021**

Council has received a copy of the proposed municipal budget for the year 2021. Due to several factors, there is a 1.99 cent tax increase. The tax levy is \$22,190,956 compared to last years \$21,335,186, an increase of \$855,770.

The amount of surplus supporting this year's budget decreased from 2020 by \$186,359 or 4.45%. The Township follows a policy of utilizing only as much surplus as can be replenished during the budget year. This year, fund balance is being used to pay down \$1.5M in unfunded debt which lowers our outstanding unfunded liability from \$7,280,000 to \$5,780,000. We fully anticipate replenishing the \$2.5M balance to fund balance at year-end 2021.

Anticipated revenues for recreation and court fees have been decreased from last year, due to a reduction in collections as a result of the Covid pandemic. State aid was reduced based on notification that the increase anticipated in 2020 would not be realized and State Aid would revert to 2019 levels. Our 2020 tax collection rate was 98.99%, resulting in lower delinquent taxes, prompting a reduction in that budget line.

The local tax rate for the year 2021 is 60.4 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

The municipal purpose tax will be \$604 for every \$100,000 of assessed value. An average assessed residence valued at \$232,900 will see an annual increase of \$56 (\$14.07 per quarter).

The total assessed value of real property upon which the tax rate is based is \$3,674,308,700 compared to \$3,655,712,129 in 2020, an increase of \$18,596,571. This reflects increases in new property and construction valuations, lowered by successful tax appeals, adjustments in value made by the Tax Assessor and any lands transferred to public domain. Every \$367,431 of the amount to be raised by taxation for the 2021 budget equals one cent on the tax rate.

The Township completed 2020 with a surplus of \$7,507,801.46. Of that balance \$4M is being used to support this year's budget, leaving a balance of \$3,507,801.

The tax collection rate for 2020 was 98.99% compared with 98.98% in 2019. This budget uses 97.15% rate to compute the reserve for uncollected taxes in 2021.

The public hearing is scheduled for April 5th at 7:00 p.m. A budget summary will be published in the Cape May Star & Wave. Copies will be available on the Township website as well as in the Clerk's office at Townhall.