

**COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – March 6, 2023**

The meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Lower, County of Cape May, State of New Jersey was held on March 6, 2023 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 – via telephone  
 Councilmember Roland Roy, Jr.  
 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. #2023-103 – Introduction of 2023 Budget

Manager Laffey introduced the 2023 Budget Message with a proposed tax rate increase of 2.5 cents. He highlighted several mitigating factors including insurance, utilities and pension. The Budget summary will be published in the Cape May Star & Wave, available on the Township website and in the Clerk’s Office at Township Hall. The public hearing is scheduled for May 1, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. The Manager’s Budget Message is attached.

Lauren Read, CFO, introduced Carol Ross, Auditor with Ford, Scott and Associates, sitting in for Leon Costello. Carol Ross apologized on behalf of Leon for his absence and justified the Township’s proposed increase compared to other towns.

Mayor Sippel thanked Lauren Read and Manager Laffey for their work on the budget and assured the Township’s diligence in keeping taxes at a minimum.

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

**Consent Agenda**

Approval of Minutes – February 22, 2023

Res. #2023-104 Authorization for the payment of vouchers \$ 583,041.70

Res. #2023-105 Authorizing the Sale of Township of Lower Surplus No Longer Needed for Public Use on Govdeals Online Auction Website

Res. #2023-106 Authorization for the Refund of Taxes

Res. #2023-107 Authorization for the Payout of Accumulated Sick Time (M.Plenn \$19,969.53)

Res. #2023-108 A Resolution Authorizing the Annual Escape the Cape Triathlon Scheduled for June 11, 2023

Res. #2023-109 Approval of Change Order #2 to Asphalt Paving Systems Inc for As-Built Adjustments and Contract Reduction for the Reconstruction of Sheriff Taylor Boulevard & Roadway Striping Program

Res. #2023-110 Bid Acceptance and Award of Landscaping Services for Various Locations – 2023, the Final Year, to Bayshore Landscaping (\$53,214.25)

Res #2023-111 Bid Acceptance and Award for 2023 Fertilizing Services for Various Locations with Additional Service for Clem Mulligan Field

Res. #2023-112 Approval for Run the Vineyards – Down the Shore 5K Run

Res. #2023-113 Approval for Various Events Hosted by the Lower Township Recreation Department

Res. #2023-114 Issuance of 2023 Limousine Operator Licenses

Res. #2023-115 Appointment to the Municipal Utilities Authority Board

On the Consent:

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

**Regular Agenda**

**Ordinance #2023-02** An Ordinance Amending Chapter 106, Recreation Advisory Board, Subsection 2, Membership; Organization; Terms; Alternates; Vacancies, In Order to Increase the Total Number of Board Members Appointed to the Recreation Advisory Board. This is the second reading and public hearing of this Ordinance. This Ordinance has been posted, published and made available to the public.

Deputy Mayor Perry thanked Manager Laffey for revitalizing the Recreation Advisory Board.  
Mayor Sippel agreed.

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

**Call to the Public**

John Kahil, 7 Elwood Rd., addressed Council regarding the beach access paths and thanked Manager Laffey for the progress with the Property Owners Association (POA). He also asked about a timeline for the work to be completed. Manager Laffey gave an update on the status of the project. Discussion ensued.  
Deputy Mayor Perry commented on the lengthy process.  
Mayor Sippel reiterated the need for a signed agreement prior to the project moving forward.

James Rose, 103 Townbank Rd., thanked the Township for getting the beach access project moving and proposed an alternate method to pile drivers. Discussion ensued.  
Deputy Mayor Perry reminded of the delay in the DEP permit due to changes.  
Mayor Sippel thanked Mr. Rose for the suggestion.

Bill Greenfield, Villas, asked if the Villas is included in the above referenced permit.  
Manager Laffey replied that the entire beachfront is included in the permit.

**Council Comments**

Councilmember Conrad pointed out the work involved in preparing the Budget and keeping taxes at a minimum.

Councilmember Coombs reiterated Councilmember Conrad's comments.

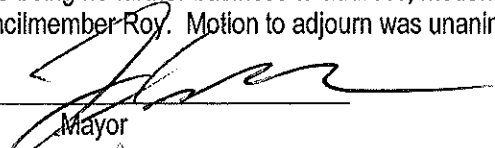
Councilmember Roy echoed the above comments.

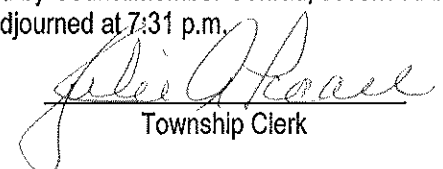
Deputy Mayor Perry voiced anticipation for work to begin on the beachfront.

Mayor Sippel voiced confidence that Manager Laffey will work to reduce the budget if possible.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business to address, motion to adjourn moved by Councilmember Conrad, seconded by Councilmember Roy. Motion to adjourn was unanimous. Meeting adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

  
Mayor

  
Township Clerk

Approved: *March 20, 2023*

**MANAGER'S ANNUAL BUDGET MESSAGE  
2023 BUDGET INTRODUCTION – MARCH 6, 2023**

Mayor and Council have received copies of the proposed municipal budget for 2023 and due to several mitigating factors, the local tax rate has an increase of 2.5 cents. The 2023 tax levy is \$23,134,276 compared to last years \$22,019,630, an increase of \$1,114,646.

The major contributors to this increase were insurance, utilities and pension. These lines increased by over \$1.3M combined.

The Township completed 2022 with a surplus of \$8,422,356. Of that balance \$4,250,000 is being applied to this year's budget with \$1,065,000 being used to pay down unfunded capital debt. These totals fall well within the parameters of our fund balance policy and projections show that surplus will be replenished at year-end.

The tax collection rate for 2022 was 99.25%, one of our highest to date. This collection rated added almost \$1.6M to the surplus. This year's budget anticipates a new revenue line for occupancy taxes which is estimated to bring in at least \$514,000.

The total assessed value of real property is \$3,722,771,400, an increase from last year of over \$22M. Once cent on the tax rate equals \$372,277. This budget uses a 97.41% rate to compute the reserve for uncollected taxes.

The public hearing is scheduled for May 1st at 5:00 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.