

WALWORTH COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING
OCTOBER 28, 2004

The Walworth County Board of Supervisors meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairperson Lohrmann at the Walworth County Courthouse, 100 W. Walworth St., Elkhorn, Wisconsin. Roll call was read with all Supervisors present except Supervisors Arnold, Hawkins, Hilbelink, Morrison, Polyock, Schaefer, and Stacey. A quorum was established.

Supervisor Nancy Russell delivered the invocation.

On motion by Supervisor Goebel, seconded by Supervisor Russell, the agenda was approved as presented.

Public Comment

There was no Public Comment at this time.

Motion to Convene as “Committee of the Whole”

On motion by Supervisor Ketchpaw, seconded by Supervisor Waelti, the Board convened as a “Committee of the Whole.” Chairperson Lohrmann turned the chair over to Supervisor Nancy Russell, Chair of the Finance Committee.

Supervisor Russell asked County Administrator Bretl to give a presentation of the Executive Summary. Bretl welcomed members of the public, department heads and employees to the Preliminary Budget Hearing. Bretl said that tonight is a preliminary budget hearing. It is an opportunity for the public to understand the budget and to have input into the budget process. The budget will be adopted at the November 9, 2004 County Board meeting. Bretl gave an overview of the budget process, which starts as early as February for some departments.

Bretl said that in past budgets, significant items were included such as the combining of the public works and highway and the administration office. In this budget we have made significant steps in reducing the rise in taxes. Bretl said that creating adequate reserves is a component of building a strong foundation for the budget. One of the goals we have had is to create adequate insurance reserves for our self-funded program and this budget accomplishes that. Retirement health insurance coverage is available at employee cost to virtually all workers. In the past we had a “pay as you go” attitude for health insurance. In the 2005 budget, action is being taken now to create a lock box for that obligation. Bretl said that another first step is in creating a nursing home reserve in the 2005 budget.

Bretl said that the second component of building a strong foundation in this budget is to improve our tax base. In terms of sales tax and property tax, we have increased the

funding for the tourism convention bureau and economic development has been incorporated into the budget. This budget is the first to adopt a “TABOR like” formula but the question is, can we sustain that and make sure we can replicate the reduced tax levy in 2006.

Bretl turned the meeting over to Nicki Andersen, Finance Director, and the finance staff. Andersen addressed the Board. Andersen said that the power point presentation for tonight will explain to the public and the board members what makes up the legal portion of the budget, how we get from the point of adopting a budget to setting the levy, and actually issuing a tax bill.

Peggy Watson, Budget Manager, presented a Power Point presentation. Watson said that the presentation will show how we put the budget together, the process we follow, show how your County tax is calculated on your tax bill, and how it impacts the taxpayer. Watson said that the budget is a legal document and is used for planning and fiscal control. Watson said that in March the Finance Committee set a 2005 budget goal. That goal was that the growth on the levy could be no more than a 4.7% increase over the current year. Watson said that the Finance Committee based their goal on an index cap based on the change in the consumer price index and the increase of new construction within the County.

Watson explained that the budget is broken up into three components governed by State statutes: debt, library, and other operating. Watson outlined the components of the 2005 budget expenditures as follows: wages and benefits 48%; purchased services 19%; other operating 24%; and capital 9%. She explained each of these categories. Watson said that the revenue side of the 2005 budget is composed of the following: tax levy 35%; taxes 7%; Federal/State aid 20%; program income 29%; and other financing 9%. Watson explained each of these categories. She said that the budget has to be balanced between revenues and expenditures, and the tax levy is the difference between revenues and expenditures, or the amount needed to balance the budget.

Watson said that 35% of the 2005 proposed budget is financed by the tax levy. The tax levy is comprised of the following components: operating levy, debt levy, and library levy. Watson said that the proposed levy increase over 2004 is 4.68%, just under the 4.7% levy set by the Finance Committee. The County levy is apportioned using equalized values less Tax Increment Districts. Equalized value is based on the property assessment by the local assessor. Watson said that the fair market value on your tax bill would be your equalized value.

Watson explained the difference between a tax levy and a mill rate. She said that the tax levy in conjunction with equalized values establishes a mill rate. The mill rate is the tax charged per \$1,000 of equalized value, expressed in dollars and cents. Watson said the operating mill rate proposed for 2005 is \$4.026210. Watson distributed an example of a tax bill and demonstrated how the taxes are calculated. Watson said that the only line that we are talking about tonight is the “County of Walworth” line on the tax bill.

Watson said that the 2005 Preliminary Budget is available for review in the County Clerk's and Finance offices.

Supervisor Russell said that this is a time for the Supervisors to listen and it is important that we hear the public comments at this time. The last opportunity for Supervisors to submit budget amendments is tomorrow, October 29. The Finance Department will help Supervisors prepare budget amendments.

The Walworth County Budget Appropriation Summary 2005 Preliminary Budget was distributed to the Supervisors. Supervisor Russell read the name of each County department and the percent of change in each department's budget from 2004.

The following public comments were received on components of the budget:

Dell Gigante, N7791 Bell School Road, Burlington, asked about the \$160,000 in the Clerk of Court's budget for inmate television. Bretl said that a significant use of that would be to prevent a transfer of inmates from State facilities. As it stands right now, if an inmate has a motion hearing, two Deputies would transport inmates from other facilities to our facility.

Dell Gigante asked if the \$10 fee for septic tank notification is still included in the budget. Michael Cotter, Director of LURM, addressed the Board. The fee for \$10 covers a state mandate in regard to septic tank maintenance. Although it covers only part of the expenses, we did not increase the fee for 2005. Mr. Gigante said the budget includes expenses and does not think a fee should be charged as he believes it is a tax on tax.

Bret Strong, N9159 Maple Street, East Troy, addressed the Board regarding the Sheriff's budget. Mr. Strong said again that Washington County budget is \$6 million less than our budget and that county has a larger population. He also felt that Walworth County's Sheriff Department budget should be much less.

Mariette Nowak, N9053 Swift Lake Drive, East Troy, addressed the Board. Ms. Nowak said she is a member of the Park Advisory Board. Ms. Nowak said she is disappointed that there is no money included in this budget for parks. Ms. Nowak said that there have been surveys conducted and the citizens of the County have indicated that they want the natural environment protected. Ms. Nowak urged the Supervisors to aggressively pursue the protection of parks and open space.

Dan Kilkenny, N3616 Elm Ridge Road, Delavan, addressed the Board. Mr. Kilkenny said he resides in the Town of Darien. Mr. Kilkenny said that he attended a Land Conservation Committee meeting and an issue came up on parkland acquisition. He said that there was a chart discussed at that meeting that showed the parkland ratio in Walworth County and it was relatively low. Mr. Kilkenny said he agrees with the individuals who completed the surveys in support of parkland funding for Walworth County. It is important for the County to participate instead of relying on the townships.

Mr. Kilkenny said that the County might be able to utilize grants to help with this program. He said he knows budgets are tight and he would prefer that money be put aside for parkland instead of new furniture in the common areas for the Lakeland Health Care Center facility. Mr. Kilkenny said he would be willing to have taxes increased for that purpose. He said that setting aside money for parkland is something that should be done now because land development in the County is rapidly increasing.

The Board then heard general comments from the public.

Dell Gigante addressed the Board. Mr. Gigante said that there would not be a problem with the budget going up 4.7% if retirement income would go up 4.7%. The retirees' income does not go up. Mr. Gigante said that there are thousands of families in Walworth County living from paycheck to paycheck. He said we are allowing the employees to keep their health insurance while many citizens in the county cannot afford their own health insurance. Mr. Gigante said he commends the drop in the levy but thinks it should be lower.

Bret Strong, Walworth County Chairman of Citizens for Responsible Government, addressed the Board. Strong said he has seen much of our agricultural lands disappear and we should watch our green space. Strong also spoke about Citizens for Responsible Government. He also commended the Board for keeping the levy at 4.7%. Mr. Strong said he would like the Supervisors to go out and investigate counties similar to ours. He said that we are deeply in debt compared to other counties with the same size population as us. Strong said he is for Lakeland School but he thinks things are moving too fast for such a large project. The Board should make decisions that benefit the school as well as the taxpayers and they should be considered carefully. The Citizens for Responsible Government is directly involved in the tax freeze movement. Mr. Strong said that the Citizens for Responsible Government group is for TABOR and he firmly believes the tax freeze will happen.

Supervisor Russell asked three times if there were any other citizens wishing to speak on the budget. There were none.

On motion by Supervisor Grant, seconded by Supervisor Weber, the Committee of the Whole was dissolved, the Public Budget Hearing was closed, and the Committee returned to a Board.

Chairperson's Report

Chairperson Lohrmann reminded the Supervisors that the meeting to deliberate and approve the budget would be held Tuesday, November 9, 2004, at 6:00 p.m.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m. on motion by Supervisor Ketchpaw, seconded by Supervisor Grant.

Kimberly S. Bushey
County Clerk

STATE OF WISCONSIN)

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COUNTY OF WALWORTH)

I, Kimberly S. Bushey, County Clerk in and for the County aforesaid do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the proceedings of the County Board of Supervisors for the October 28, 2004 Public Budget Hearing.